



**Institute of Museum and Library Services:  
Identification and Analysis of Library and Museum Partnerships  
Executive Summary**

*Prepared for:*

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## **Background**

In September 1998, the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) began awarding grants under the National Leadership Grants (NLG) program. NLG is intended to enhance education, training, research, demonstration, preservation and digitization in museums and libraries. One component of the NLG program is to promote collaboration between museums and libraries. In October 1998, IMLS contracted Aeffect, Inc. to research and report on the nature, range, and scope of library/museum partnerships in the United States.

IMLS expands the benefit of museums and libraries by encouraging cooperation and collaboration among all types of community learning resources. IMLS research shows that working together libraries and museums can:

- Increase access to information in their communities
- Enhance education
- Attract new audiences
- Expand the reach of their programs

## **Highlights of Findings**

- Seventy-seven percent of libraries have partnered with other organizations in the past two years; but 16 percent of libraries report those partnerships were with museums.
- When they do partner with one another, museums and libraries tend to work well together given that they share similar missions.
- Almost half of the libraries surveyed would consider museums as future collaborators.
- Libraries and museums tend to partner with institutions from the same city or state.
- Partnerships evolve from informal discussion between library and museum decision-makers and from specific requests made by funding agencies.
- Museums and libraries can experience a variety of benefits from collaborative projects, including access to new audiences and opportunities to share expertise and create unique public programs.
- Partnerships allow museums and libraries to establish long-term relationships that provide a basis for future collaborations.
- As libraries more often partner with historic museums or historic houses, collaborating with a wider variety of museum types represents a new opportunity if the resources exist to support such partnerships.
- While quantitative findings indicate that many partnership projects are intended to serve the general public in several ways, in-depth discussion reveals that partnerships are most frequently instituted to attract and sustain underserved audience segments.
- Many library/museum partnerships require only one staff member at each institution who devotes 50 percent or less of their time to the project, as well as part-time staff and volunteers.
- Sufficient funding is vital to the success of the partnership. However, not all partnership projects require large awards and some only need a few thousand dollars to accomplish their goals.
- Many partnership projects are small-scaled and have budgets under \$5,000.

- Recognizing institutional differences and audience needs is critical in establishing and maintaining partnerships.
- Despite small staff size and budgets, many partners say they are able to accomplish the goals they outlined at the onset of their partnerships.
- Most partners plan to evaluate their projects either formally or informally.
- Many of the barriers to initiating library/museum partnerships can be ameliorated by library and museum staff simply interacting with each other and establishing a dialogue.

### **Recommendations**

- Given that most who participate in partnership projects are satisfied with their experience, IMLS should consider communicating the benefits of library/museum partnerships. This can potentially help partnership projects
- Increase attendance and help reach new audiences
- Encourage small-scale projects
- Foster interest in forming projects despite perceptions of inadequate staff support
- Current NLG recipients can serve as mentors to those who are considering such partnerships. As such, IMLS could provide incentives for NLG recipients to . . .
- Host a library/museum conference at their respective institutions
- Submit articles to museum/library journals, newsletters that discuss effective project processes and potential pitfalls
- Present "process" and "pitfall" issues at museum and library conferences
- Develop a mentor or resource list of library/museum partners who are willing to provide guidance to others considering collaborations.
- IMLS should continue to publicize NLG as libraries generally are not familiar with IMLS and are interested in receiving information about funding.
- In addition to considering larger awards provided by IMLS, libraries and museums could consider seeking resources to support small-scale library/museum partnerships or to enable partners to implement a pilot study prior to developing larger-scale projects.
- IMLS could serve as a communication link between libraries and museums. More specifically, IMLS could:
  - Disseminate project ideas or information about current projects via Web site, conferences, newsletters, and direct mail
  - Disseminate information about other agencies that fund library/museum partnerships, such as the Pew Charitable Trusts.
- IMLS or professional organizations could sponsor functions/services that allow library and museum staff to interact with each other, including. . .
- Regional and state conferences that would unite library and museum decision-makers
- Forums, such as Internet chat rooms for library and museum staff to discuss relevant topics
- Internet services that link libraries and museums to those who are interested in a partnering relationship

## **Methodology**

To estimate the number of existing library/museum partnerships, Aeffect conducted nationwide telephone interviews with 250 library staff responsible for library relationships with outside organizations. For the purpose of consistency and clarity in the survey, a partnership was defined as any project in which the library "partnered with another organization on programs or activities to accomplish a common goal." Public and academic libraries were included in the study as they represent the largest library types served by IMLS. A sample size of n=250 yields a maximum margin of error +/- 6% at the 95% confidence level. Aeffect conducted 125 surveys with library staff from academic libraries and 125 with staff from public libraries. Participating libraries included those from many areas of the country, including libraries in urban, suburban and rural areas. Libraries were randomly selected from comprehensive lists of public and academic libraries across the country.

Respondents included those who have recently partnered with museums (partners) and those not currently involved in a library/museum partnership (non-partners). All respondents, partners and non-partners, were asked the perceived importance of certain criteria in considering museum partners, such as availability of funding, the type of partner, and public interest. Partners also provided detailed information about their projects, such as type of museum partner, specific project activities and goals, length of partnership, and project budget and funding sources

As a supplement to the telephone surveys, Aeffect conducted 13 one-hour in-depth interviews (IDIs) with library and museum staff who are currently involved in partnership projects. Typically, 10-15 IDIs are necessary before trends or patterns appear in the qualitative data set. For this study, sufficient trends appeared after 13 interviews.

IDIs were designed to illuminate quantitative findings and provide details of specific partnership projects to obtain a better understanding of project goals, benefits and barriers to partnership projects, target audience(s), required resources, such as funding and staff and communication between organizations.

For a copy of the full report, please contact the Institute of Museum and Library Services at (202) 606-8537 or by email at [imlsinfo@imls.gov](mailto:imlsinfo@imls.gov).