

## Lifting Every Voice Throughout the Nation

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### Establishing IMLS's Grants Program for Museums of African American History and Culture

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**ABSTRACT:** The National Museum of African American History and Culture Act authorized the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) to establish grant programs for museums of African American history and culture. Through its Museum Grants for African American History and Culture program, IMLS helps these museums improve operations, enhance stewardship of collections, engage in professional development, and attract new professionals to the field. The Act has fostered a national ecosystem that leverages the collective resources of the National Museum and African American museums throughout the United States to preserve and share the strength and breadth of the African American experience.

**KEY WORDS:** Institute of Museum and Library Services, National Museum of African American History and Culture, African American museums, IMLS Museum Grant Program for African American History and Culture

#### Introduction

In 2003, Congress enacted the National Museum of African American History and Culture Act (NMAAHC Act), authorizing the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) to establish programs to support African American museums throughout the nation.<sup>1</sup> In passing the law, Congress recognized that “the legacy

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<sup>1</sup> *National Museum of African American History and Culture Act of 2003*, Public Law 108-184, *U.S. Statutes at Large* 117 (2003): 2676, hereinafter NMAAHC Act, provides as follows:

- (i) In General.—In consultation with the Council and the Director of the Museum, the Director of the Institute of Museum and Library services shall establish—
  - (A) a grant program with the purpose of improving operations, care of collections and development of professional management at African American museums;
  - (B) a grant program with the purpose of providing internship and fellowship opportunities at African American museums;
  - (C) a scholarship program with the purpose of assisting individuals who are pursuing careers or carrying out studies in the arts, humanities, and sciences in the study of African American life, art, history, and culture;

of African Americans is rooted in the very fabric of the democracy and freedom of the United States,” but noted the absence of national programs devoted to the documentation of African American life, art, history, and culture encompassing the period of slavery, the era of Reconstruction, the Harlem Renaissance, the Civil Rights Movement, and other periods associated with African American life.”<sup>2</sup> To rectify this situation, Congress established a national museum within the Smithsonian Institution, while at the same time directing IMLS to establish grant programs with “the purpose of improving operations, care of collections, and development of professional management at African American museums.”<sup>3</sup> Although many African American museums are cornerstones of their communities and standing symbols of cultural identity, these institutions often experience a lack of financial support that jeopardizes the ongoing preservation of both national and local history and culture.<sup>4</sup> Since its inception, the IMLS Museum Grants for African American History and Culture program (AAHC grant program) has been helping African American museums build capacity, while leveraging individual and collective resources to inspire and educate, and to preserve and share the strength and breadth of the African American experience.<sup>5</sup>

- (D) in cooperation with other museums, historical societies, and educational institutions, a grant program with the purpose of promoting the understanding of modern day practices of slavery throughout the world; and
  - (E) a grant program under which an African-American museum (including a nonprofit educational organization the primary mission of which is to promote the study of African-American diaspora) may use the funds provided under the grant to increase an endowment fund established by the museum (or organization) as of May 1, 2003, for the purpose of—
    - (i) enhancing educational programming; and
    - (ii) maintaining and operating traveling educational exhibits.
- (2) Authorization of Appropriations.—There are authorized to be appropriated to the Director of the Institute of Museum and Library Services to carry out this subsection—
- A. \$15,000,000 for fiscal year 2004; and
  - B. such sums as are necessary for each fiscal year thereafter”;

Ibid., §7(b).

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., §2.

<sup>3</sup> The NMAAHC Act established a National Museum of African American History and Culture (NMAAHC), a NMAAHC Council (Council), and grant and scholarship programs at IMLS. See: Public Law 108-184, §§ 4, 5, & 7(b).

<sup>4</sup> See, e.g.: Joy Ford Austin, *National Survey of African American Museums: Prepared for the National Museum of African American History and Culture Plan for Action Presidential Commission* (2003); *Profile of Black Museums: A Survey Commissioned by the African American Museums Association* (Washington, DC: African American Museums Association, 1988), xiii-xiv.

<sup>5</sup> See, e.g.: Institute of Museum and Library Services, “Museum Grants for African American History and Culture, Program Update August 2007” (Washington, DC: Institute of Museum and Library Services, 2007); Institute of Museum and Library Services, “Museum Grants for African American History and Culture, Program Update November 2008” (Washington, DC: Institute of Museum and Library Services, 2008); Institute of Museum and Library Services, “Museum Grants for African American History and Culture, Program Update August 2009” (Washington, DC: Institute of Museum and Library Services, 2009); Institute of Museum and Library Services, “Museum Grants

This article explores IMLS support for African American museums—past, present, and future. It describes how IMLS established its AAHC grant program and highlights the ways in which this program builds the capacity of African American museums and strengthens the knowledge and skills of the museum professionals who work within them. In doing so, this article offers historical context on the legislative history of the program and the ways in which IMLS has sought to address the evolving needs of African American museums and the communities they serve.

#### IMLS and Predecessor Agency IMS

IMLS is a small federal agency with a large mission. It is the primary source of federal financial support for the nation's museums and libraries. Within the federal government, the director of IMLS has "primary responsibility for the development and implementation of policy to ensure the availability of museum, library, and information services adequate to meet the essential information, education, research, economic, cultural, and civic needs of the people of the United States."<sup>6</sup> With the assistance of the presidentially appointed National Museum and Library Services Board, the director and agency staff: "(A) advise the President, Congress, and other Federal agencies and offices on museum, library, and information services in order to ensure the creation, preservation, organization, and dissemination of knowledge; (B) engage Federal, State, and local governmental agencies and private entities in assessing the museum, library, and information services needs of the people of the United States; [and] (C) carry out programs of research and development, data collection, and financial assistance to extend and improve the museum, library, and information services."<sup>7</sup>

The federal government has long recognized the public service value of museums and libraries. IMLS was established by the Museum and Library Services Act of 1996, and the agency's programs were reauthorized on September 25, 2003, two months before the passage of the NMAAHC Act.<sup>8</sup> Prior to 1996, however, the Museum Services Act of 1976 established the Institute of Museum Services (IMS), a source of federal grants for museums beginning in 1978.<sup>9</sup> Originally housed in the United States Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, IMS was transferred

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for African American History and Culture, Program Update May 2011" (Washington, DC: Institute of Museum and Library Services, 2011).

6 *Museum and Library Services Act of 2010*, U.S. Code 20 (2003), § 9103.

7 *Ibid.*

8 *Museum and Library Services Act of 1996*, Public Law 104-208, U.S. Statutes at Large 110 (1996): 3009; *Museum and Library Services Act of 2003*, Public Law 108-81, U.S. Statutes at Large 117 (2003): 991; NMAAHC Act, 2676.

9 *Museum Services Act*, Public Law 94-462, U.S. Statutes at Large 90 (1976): 1971; Institute of Museum and Library Services, "Application for Grants" (Washington, D.C.: Institute of Museum and Library Services, 1978); Theodore Sky "The Institute of Museum Services and the Conservation of America's Heritage," *Dickinson Law Review* 93, no. 4 (1989): 662-663.

to the United States Department of Education when that department formed in 1980.<sup>10</sup> In 1982, IMS was relocated to the National Foundation on the Arts and the Humanities, where it joined the National Endowments for the Arts and the Humanities, although all three agencies have independent status.<sup>11</sup> In 1996, federal library programs housed within the Department of Education merged with IMS to create the new agency.<sup>12</sup> In establishing IMLS, Congress recognized the benefits of “uniting the forces of libraries and museums in local communities” and the enhanced stature and stability achieved by combining the Federal museum and library programs in one agency.<sup>13</sup>

Both IMS and IMLS have offered a wide range of programs to support museums of all types and sizes. Because of its mission to develop and build the capacity of museums to meet the needs of the public, IMLS has long offered two types of programs: those that help museums assess and prioritize specific organizational needs, such as conservation, collections care, governance, and community engagement; and those that provide support for larger projects and initiatives. With regard to conservation of collections, for example, IMLS supports the Collections Assessment for Preservation (CAP) program, in partnership with the Foundation of the American Institute for Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works, to help small and mid-size museums assess their collections, buildings, and building systems, as well as policies and procedures relating to collections care.<sup>14</sup> Participants who complete the program receive an assessment report with prioritized recommendations to improve collections care.<sup>15</sup> Similarly, IMLS, in partnership with the American Alliance of Museums, supports the Museum Assessment Program (MAP), which has helped over five thousand small and mid-sized museums of all types strengthen operations, plan for the future, and meet standards since its inception in 1981.<sup>16</sup> These programs can help museums identify and prioritize needs that then inform other projects and proposals.

<sup>10</sup> *Museum Services Act*, Public Law 94-462, *U.S. Statutes at Large* 90 (1976): 1971; *Department of Education Organization Act*, Public Law 96-88, *U.S. Statutes at Large* 93 (1979): 668.

<sup>11</sup> *A bill making appropriations for the Department of the Interior and related agencies for the fiscal year ending September 30, 1982, and for other purposes*, Public Law 97-100, *U.S. Statutes at Large* 95 (1981): 1391.

<sup>12</sup> *Museum and Library Services Act of 1996*, Public Law 104-208, *U.S. Statutes at Large* 110 (1996): 3009.

<sup>13</sup> U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee on Labor and Human Resources, Arts, Humanities, and Museums Amendments of 1995: Report Together with Minority Views (to Accompany S. 856), 104th Cong., 1st sess., 1995, S. Rep. 104-135, 19-20.

<sup>14</sup> “Collections Assessment for Preservation (CAP) Program,” *American Institute for Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works*, accessed May 28, 2018 <http://www.conservation-us.org/grants/cap>.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.* In the past, IMLS carried out this program with Heritage Preservation and the National Institute for the Conservation of Cultural Property.

<sup>16</sup> “Museum Assessment Program,” American Alliance of Museums, accessed May 28, 2018, <https://www.aam-us.org/programs/accreditation-excellence-programs/museum-assessment-program-map/>.

In the past, IMLS provided general operating support for museums, making awards based on overall institutional excellence.<sup>17</sup> Since 2003, the agency has transitioned to project-specific grants with outcomes that are more amenable to quantitative and qualitative evaluation, with key findings shared with other institutions.<sup>18</sup> Although IMS and IMLS have funded individual African American museums since 1978, having a program specifically dedicated to serving such museums has significantly extended the reach of IMLS's grant programs, both increasing the capacity of the African Americans museums to serve the public and attracting museum professionals to the field.

#### Establishment of the AAHC Program

IMLS had been the source of support for the National Museum of African American History and Culture (NMAAHC) Plan for Action Presidential Commission, with funding from Congress, and thus had been engaged with the work of the commission and recent efforts to recognize the national role of African American museums.<sup>19</sup> But the authorization of the new grant programs—the first ever at the federal level to focus on the unique needs of African American museums—required the agency to delve more deeply into the needs of the African American museum community. To do this, IMLS considered the legislative history of the new program, evaluated historical surveys of the needs of African American museums and the ways in which the museums have sought federal support, and convened leaders within the African American museum community and the NMAAHC leadership to discuss current needs.

##### *a. Efforts to Establish a Trust for African American Museums*

The roots of IMLS's statutory AAHC programs are linked closely to the establishment of the NMAAHC. From the very start, a national "monument" (later museum) was envisioned as a learning center, and subsequent efforts to establish a national presence recognized the importance of developing an ecosystem that leveraged the ways in which a national museum and African American museums throughout the nation would interact with and complement one another. For example, when Senator John Glenn of Ohio introduced a proposal for a National Center for African American History and Culture in Wilberforce, Ohio, the president of Wilberforce University, Charles E. Taylor, testified that, "[t]here are already smaller, very fine Black museums that exist elsewhere in the country . . . they look

<sup>17</sup> Institute of Museum and Library Services, "2002 General Operating Support Grant Application and Guidelines," (Washington, D.C.: Institute of Museum and Library Services, 2002), 1.10; Theodore Sky, "The Institute of Museum Services."

<sup>18</sup> IMLS museum grant programs include "National Leadership Grants for Museums," "Museums for America," "Native American/Native Hawaiian Museum Services," as well as the AAHC Program. All funding categories are described at [www.imls.gov](http://www.imls.gov).

<sup>19</sup> *Departments of Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act, 2002*, Public Law 107-116, *U.S. Statutes at Large* 115 (2002): Title IV.

forward to the establishment of [a national center] because they do not see it as replacing them; they see it as supporting them, that somehow we develop a national network of which the National Center will be the focal point.”<sup>20</sup>

Securing dedicated federal funding for African American museums throughout the nation was a goal of the African American Museum Association, now known as the Association of African American Museums (AAAM), and a survey the organization conducted significantly advanced legislative efforts. The AAAM was established in 1978 “to support African and African American focused museums nationally and internationally, as well as the professionals who protect, preserve and interpret African and African American art, history and culture.”<sup>21</sup> AAAM soon recognized the need for a comprehensive survey of African American museums to create a more accurate picture of the state of the museums and garner support. “Profile of Black Museums,” a 1988 survey commissioned by the AAAM, concluded that most African American museums (approximately one hundred at the time) were largely operating on a subsistence budget and thus lacked funding to develop new programs such as education for museum staff, care for collections, and the acquisition of new materials.<sup>22</sup> The AAAM determined that African American cultural heritage was, consequently, being sorely neglected.

Building on the research compiled by the AAAM, Representative John Lewis of Georgia introduced H.R. 1570—an earlier version of the NMAAHC Act—in 1989.<sup>23</sup> He incorporated a provision calling for the establishment of a National Trust for African-American Museums: “The purpose of the Trust shall be to collect and acquire items relating to African-American History and Culture, *develop programs to enhance the care and management of collections of the Trust and other museums, train and develop professionals and paraprofessionals for African-American museums, and provide information and education for the public regarding the contributions of African-Americans to the history of the United States* [italics added].”<sup>24</sup> In support of the bill, AAAM president Edmond Barry Gaither testified before the Subcommittee on Libraries and Memorials in 1989 that the purpose of the AAAM survey was to “lay a basis for a legislative initiative that would be based on an actual survey of needs as they existed.”<sup>25</sup> Along with the survey, the AAAM submitted to the subcommittee a draft for a “National Trust for Black Museums.”<sup>26</sup> Gaither’s testimony

<sup>20</sup> U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee on Governmental Affairs, *National Center of Afro-American History and Culture Center: Hearing before the Committee on Governmental Affairs*. 96th Cong., 2nd sess., 1980, 54.

<sup>21</sup> Mission and History,” *Association of African American Museums*, accessed May 28, 2018, <https://aaam.wildapricot.org/missionandhistory>.

<sup>22</sup> *Profile of Black Museums*, African American Museums Association, xiii-xiv.

<sup>23</sup> *National African-American Heritage Memorial Museum Act*, H.R.1570, 101st Cong. (1989).

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, § 4(b).

<sup>25</sup> U.S. Congress, House, Subcommittee on Libraries and Memorials of the Committee on House Administration, *Establishment of an African-American Heritage Memorial Museum: Hearing before the Subcommittee on Libraries and Memorials of the Committee on House Administration*. 101st Cong., 1st sess., 1989.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

on the proposed legislation articulated the AAAM's position that such a trust should be "part of or complementary to the National African-American Museum."<sup>27</sup> Howard Dodson, director of the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, supported the opportunity a National Trust presented "to develop a comprehensive approach initially to ensure that the records of our achievements during the twentieth century are adequately preserved. The availability of such support would also lead to more efficient uses of the scarce resources currently at our disposal."<sup>28</sup> Although no action was taken on the bill, interest in a trust remained, and Representative Lewis introduced a similar bill in 1991.<sup>29</sup> This renewed bill, and its Senate counterpart, originally proposed placement of the National Trust within the National Museum, but Senator Paul Simon of Illinois called for the program to be placed within IMS, the source of federal funding for museums throughout the nation.<sup>30</sup>

*b. Authorization for the IMLS Program*

Dedicated funding for African American museums throughout the nation remained part of the efforts that culminated in the NMAAHC Act. In 2001, a bipartisan coalition, led by Representative Lewis, proposed legislation that included IMLS grant programs for African American museums.<sup>31</sup> That year, Congress also appropriated funds to IMLS for the Presidential Commission, described above, to develop a "Plan for Action" for building the NMAAHC.<sup>32</sup> Building on the earlier AAAM efforts, the commission conducted a national survey to gain a comprehensive overview of the African American museum field, and also assessed the impact of a national museum on this community.<sup>33</sup> The commission published its findings in "The Time Has Come: Report to the President and to the Congress."<sup>34</sup> On

<sup>27</sup> Indeed, in reflecting on the role of a federally supported national African American museum, Gaither observed that any national museum "should have a meaningful relationship to the existing community of black museums," "directly strengthen and serve existing black museums all over the country," and work closely with this community "in identifying needs and issues and in shaping appropriate responses to them." U.S. Congress, House, Subcommittee on Libraries and Memorials of the Committee on House Administration, *Establishment of an African-American Heritage Memorial Museum: Hearing before the Subcommittee on Libraries and Memorials of the Committee on House Administration*. 101st Cong., 1st sess., 1989.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> National African-American Museum Act, H.R. 1246, 102nd Cong. (1991).

<sup>30</sup> U.S. Congress, House, Subcommittee on Libraries and Memorials of the Committee on House Administration, *Hearing on Smithsonian Institution, H.R. 1246, National African-American Museum: Hearing before the Subcommittee on Libraries and Memorials of the Committee on House Administration*, 102nd Cong., 2nd sess., 1992.

<sup>31</sup> National Museum of African American History and Culture Act of 2001, H.R. 1718, 107th Cong. (2001).

<sup>32</sup> *Departments of Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act, 2002*, Public Law 107-116, *U.S. Statutes at Large* 115 (2002): Title IV.

<sup>33</sup> Joy Ford Austin, *National Survey of African American Museums*, 1.

<sup>34</sup> National Museum of African American History and Culture Plan for Action Presidential Commission, *The Time Has Come: Report to the President and to the Congress* (April 2, 2003).

December 16, 2003, the NMAAHC Act was signed into law, recognizing the importance of and authorizing *both* the NMAAHC and IMLS's AAHC grant program.<sup>35</sup>

#### IMLS'S AAHC Grant Program

After passage of the NMAAHC Act, IMLS wanted to ensure the AAHC grant program would be developed in a way that would best serve the African American museum community's current needs and challenges. Then-director of IMLS Robert M. Martin convened a daylong forum on July 16, 2004,<sup>36</sup> with leaders from the African American museum community, the NMAAHC, the National Museum and Library Services Board,<sup>37</sup> and the museum community at large.<sup>38</sup> Dr. Martin described the forum as a "critical listening opportunity," where IMLS staff could explore "the evolving role of African American museums, their contributions, and their challenges."<sup>39</sup>

As IMLS wanted its program to help alleviate obstacles and address the most immediate challenges, these issues were explored at length. In reviewing IMLS administrative data and prior surveys, the agency realized that while a few African American museums had applied to IMS and IMLS for support, many were unaware of the grant opportunities at the agency or were hesitant to engage in the federal grant process. Enhanced stakeholder engagement would be important.

Many forum participants focused their comments on the unique history of African American museums. As Harry Robinson Jr., president and chief executive officer of the African American Museum, Dallas, and former president of the AAAM, recounted, and as reflected in the proceedings, the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s inspired a new generation of Black cultural leaders that founded museums to celebrate Black history, instill Black pride, and convey the African American story to the American population.<sup>40</sup> These museums were sometimes formed by civil rights activists, cultural entrepreneurs, and visionaries who had never worked in museums and did not initially develop a museum infrastructure for their institutions. Moreover, as participants observed, most African American museums—like many other museums—evolved out of the strong personality

<sup>35</sup> NMAAHC Act, 2676.

<sup>36</sup> Forum Facilitator/Writer: Giving Works, Washington, DC, <https://www.givingworks.com>. The author was a participant in the July 16, 2004 forum.

<sup>37</sup> Edwin J. Rigaud, President of the National Underground Railroad Freedom Center, and Harry Robinson, Jr. President/CEO of the Dallas African American Museum, both served on the National Museum and Library Services Board at that time. Lawrence J. Pijaux, Jr., then President/CEO of the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute and a former President of the AAAM, was also present. Dr. Pijaux was later appointed to the NMLS Board.

<sup>38</sup> Institute of Museum and Library Services, *African American History & Culture in Museums: Strategic Crossroads and New Opportunities*, (Washington, DC: Institute of Museum and Library Services, 2005), 2.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 1–2

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

and commitment of a single founder.<sup>41</sup> Many of these museums are still in the process of making the difficult transition from founder-dependent to board-led organizations. Transitioning from a founding museum director to new leadership is a critical moment that determines success or failure for many African American museums. Forum participants observed that the area of institutional governance is infrequently discussed, but is an enormously important challenge facing many African American museums.<sup>42</sup>

Forum participants further agreed that improvement of museum operations was critical to maintaining institutional quality, particularly in three areas: (1) collections and facilities, where demand is growing, but museums lack the storage and infrastructure to support growth;<sup>43</sup> (2) professional development, which has been hindered by both lack of awareness of the field by potential recruits and competition for limited highly qualified candidates;<sup>44</sup> and (3) the use of technology, which in the increasingly digital age requires high upfront costs and the need for specialized skills not widely available in museums.<sup>45</sup> Participants also identified fundraising as a key challenge, both with respect to cultivating relationship-based individual support and the establishment of endowments.<sup>46</sup> Marketing and outreach, acknowledged as vital for both developing new and supporting existing audiences, also were recognized as crucially in need of improvement, particularly for small and mid-sized museums.<sup>47</sup>

IMLS incorporated the information from African American museum professionals, historians, and thought leaders gathered at the forum, as well as from further consultations with Smithsonian professionals, to develop grant program guidelines and eligibility criteria to establish the very first Museum Grants for African American History and Culture program in 2006. Although the original legislation authorized up to \$15 million for this program, the FY 2006 appropriation from Congress was \$842,000 for the first year of grants.<sup>48</sup> Thus, “scoping” the program, in terms of both eligibility and project support, would be critical.

To ensure the grant program fulfilled its statutory purpose of “improving operations, care of collections, and development of professional management at African American museums,” it was necessary for IMLS to consider eligibility criteria.<sup>49</sup> The agency had to determine whether an individual museum had to focus specifically on AAHC, as defined in the statute, or whether maintaining an exhibit or museum

41 Ibid., 10.

42 Ibid.

43 Ibid., 8.

44 Ibid.

45 Ibid., 9.

46 Ibid., 4–6.

47 Ibid., 6–7.

48 Institute of Museum and Library Services, “Museum Grants for African American History and Culture: Grant Program Guidelines and Application Forms,” (Washington: DC: Institute of Museum and Library Services, 2006), CFDA 45.309, 3.

49 NMAAHC Act, 2676, §7(b)(1)(A).

wing devoted to this purpose would be sufficient to apply for a grant. With limited resources, and a desire to achieve the statutory goals of the NMAAHC Act, IMLS chose to focus on the development of museums and organizations dedicated specifically to AAHC. After considering the language of the NMAAHC Act, as well as input from the museum community, the eligibility criteria for the AAHC grant program focused on museums whose primary purpose, as reflected in their own museum mission statements, was African American life, history, and culture.

The agency recognized three types of organizations eligible for funding in the AAHC grant program, including:

- (1) a museum “whose primary purpose, as reflected in its mission, is African American life, art, history, and/or culture encompassing the period of slavery, the era of Reconstruction, the Harlem renaissance, the Civil Rights Movement, and other periods of African American Diaspora;”<sup>50</sup>
- (2) “a museum service organization or association whose primary purpose is supporting museums that fall under the first category;”<sup>51</sup> and
- (3) “Historically Black Colleges and Universities” (HBCUs), which it deemed eligible to meet the needs of the program.<sup>52</sup>

Guided by the insights from the 2004 forum, IMLS built its new program around professional development—an area that would have both the greatest immediate and long-term impact on African American museums.<sup>53</sup> The focus on professional development would support transitions in governance, train new professionals, and enhance museum expertise. The AAHC grant program, launched in 2006, focused on three primary goals: (1) developing and/or strengthening knowledge, skills, and other expertise of current staff at African American museums; (2) attracting and retaining professionals with the skills needed to strengthen African American museums; and (3) attracting new staff to the African American museum practice and providing them with the expertise needed to sustain them in the museum field.<sup>54</sup>

Originally, grants ranged from \$5,000 to \$150,000, had a one-to-one “match” or “cost share” requirement, and supported projects could be carried out for a period of up to two years.<sup>55</sup> In 2006, the first year AAHC grants were awarded, some African American museums used funding to increase their in-house staff. The Weeksville Heritage Center in Brooklyn, New York, for example, created a part-time position for a “Collections Manager” to professionalize its collections

50 Institute of Museum and Library Services, “Museum Grants for African American History and Culture: Grant Program Guidelines and Application Forms,” CFDA 45.309.

51 *Ibid.*

52 *Ibid.*

53 “Institute of Museum and Library Services, Museum Grants for African American History and Culture, Program Update August 2007”.

54 *Ibid.*, 2.

55 *Ibid.*, 6.

practices.<sup>56</sup> The Penn Center in St. Helena Island, South Carolina, created two new positions, “Curator of Collections and Interpretation” and “Volunteer Coordinator,” and also facilitated professional development opportunities for current staff at its York W. Bailey Museum.<sup>57</sup>

Other grants were used to host management training programs for a broader impact on the field. The Birmingham Civil Rights Institute (BCRI) hosted a management training program for fifteen targeted museums. Participants received training on institutional capacity-building and developed implementation plans for their own museums, which were supported by on-site consultations and electronic networking resources coordinated by BCRI.<sup>58</sup> The Hampton University Museum created a series of web seminars, workshops, and publications to train museum professionals on the “Three C’s: Collecting, Conservation, and Collaboration.”<sup>59</sup>

IMLS also awarded funding to enhance national and regional networks. AAAM, for example, used an IMLS grant to produce an updated “National Profile of African American Museums,” which included a new survey of African American museums, a directory, and a membership management database.<sup>60</sup> The John Gilmore Riley Center and Museum for African American History created the Florida African American Museum Exchange (FAAME) project, described below, and the Legacy Museum of African American History created a network of African American museums in central Virginia.<sup>61</sup>

From the outset, IMLS was committed to using a variety of tools to enhance engagement and the grant experience of the African American museum community, according to founding senior program officer Christopher Reich. The purpose of the AAHC grant program is to promote professional development, and the program provides applicants and grantees with more than just financial support. For example, program staff offer grant writing workshops—some presented at AAAM conferences—to acquaint museums with the application process. IMLS staff offer counseling and guidance about the application process via phone calls and webinars, and in person at conferences. Museum professionals and subject-matter

56 Institute of Museum and Library Services, *Society for the Preservation of Weeksville and Bedford-Stuyvesant History*, (Washington, D.C.: Institute of Museum and Library Services 2006), MH-00-06-0023-06, <https://www.imls.gov/grants/awarded/mh-00-06-0023-06>.

57 *Penn Center* (Washington, DC: Institute of Museum and Library Services, 2006), MH-00-06-0020-06, <https://www.imls.gov/grants/awarded/mh-00-06-0020-06>.

58 Institute of Museum and Library Services, *Birmingham Civil Rights Institute* (Washington, DC: Institute of Museum and Library Services, 2006), MH-00-06-0005-06, <https://www.imls.gov/grants/awarded/mh-00-06-0005-06>.

59 Institute of Museum and Library Services, *Hampton University Museum* (Washington, DC: Institute of Museum and Library Services, 2006), MH-00-06-0030-06, <https://www.imls.gov/grants/awarded/mh-00-06-0030-06>.

60 Institute of Museum and Library Services, *Association of African American Museums, Inc.*, (Washington, D.C.: Institute of Museum and Library Services, 2006), MH-00-06-0042-06, <https://www.imls.gov/grants/awarded/mh-00-06-0042-06>.

61 Institute of Museum and Library Services, *Legacy Project, Inc.*, (Washington, DC: Institute of Museum and Library Services, 2006), MH-00-06-0010-06, <https://www.imls.gov/grants/awarded/mh-00-06-0010-06>.

experts from African American museums, HBCUs, and the museum sector at large, serve as peer reviewers for grant applications. Peer reviewers not only provide an important service to the field, but also gain knowledge, experience, and enhanced professional connections with their peers. All AAHC grant applicants receive peer reviewer comments about their application, enhancing their understanding of the review process, helping to gain insight on how to write more competitive applications for funding, and ultimately building the capacity of their institution. Between 2006 and 2017, IMLS recruited for 173 openings for peer reviewers to serve in the AAHC grant program.<sup>62</sup>

Underscoring its focus on supporting and nurturing museum professionals, IMLS has regularly convened current AAHC grant program recipients to provide technical assistance and training, and enable grantees to learn from one another's experiences. The first gathering was held in April 2007, when IMLS hosted the 2006 grantees, along with the staff of the future NMAAHC.<sup>63</sup> These convenings provide grantees with the opportunity to share information about their programs, including the successes and challenges that they have experienced with their grant awards.<sup>64</sup> Reflecting on her participation at the first AAHC convening, Shay Wafer of the August Wilson Center for African American Culture in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, observed, "[a]s someone new to the museum world, it was extremely valuable to be among colleagues from the field. Being able to hear about like organizations and their unique projects was thought provoking and inspirational. It's always encouraging when you realize that a seemingly unfamiliar path has been traveled by many before you and with you."<sup>65</sup> IMLS's 2016 convening brought together forty museum professionals, representing twenty-seven institutions, and eighteen states.<sup>66</sup> These convenings help to build networks and communities of practice among museum professionals working in African American museums and HBCUs around the country, and also foster ongoing connections among these individuals, their institutions, and IMLS.

### Reflections on the Program

Although IMLS and its predecessor agency, IMS, have historically supported African American museums through the agency's discretionary grant programs, the effect of the NMAAHC Act and IMLS's AAHC grant program has been to significantly expand outreach to and increase the federal investment in African American

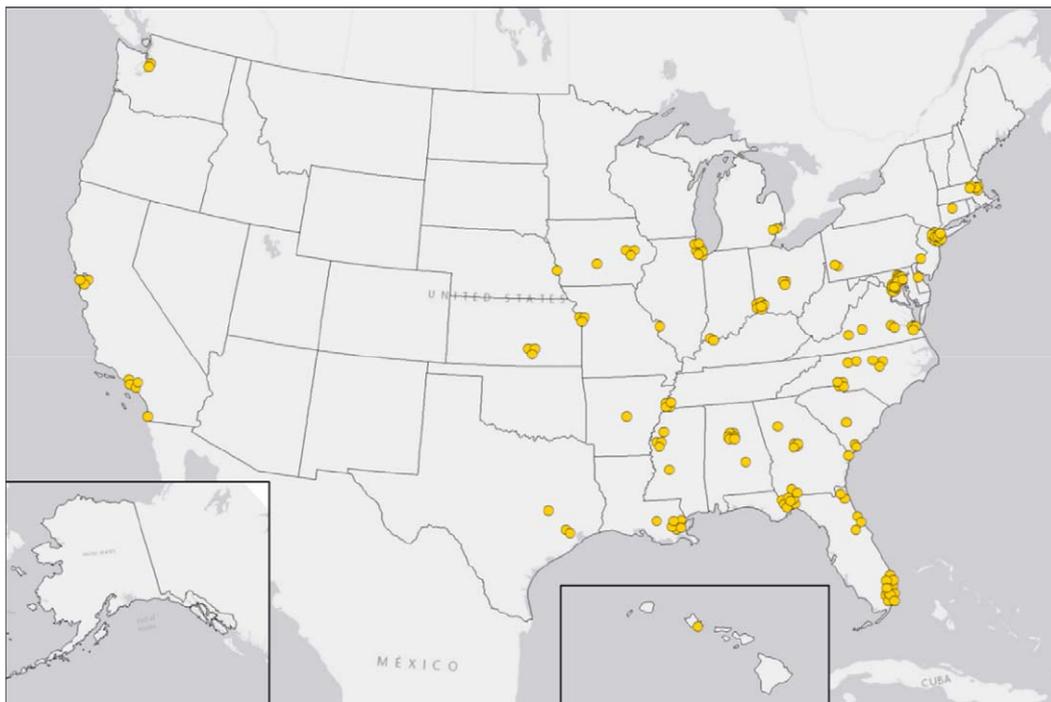
62 "Administrative Discretionary Grants (FY1978–2017) Data File," IMLS Data Catalog, Institute of Museum and Library Services, accessed May 28, 2018, <https://data.ims.gov>.

63 Institute of Museum and Library Services, "Museum Grants for African American History and Culture, Program Update August 2008" (Washington, DC: Institute of Museum and Library Services, 2008).

64 Ibid.

65 Ibid.

66 Institute of Museum and Library Services, "Museum Grants for African American History and Culture Overview 2017" (Washington, D.C.: Institute of Museum and Library Services, 2017).



Geographic distribution of IMLS AAHC grants, FY 2006 to 2017. (Institute of Museum and Library Services website, <https://data.imls.gov>)

museums. Prior to the creation of the AAHC grant program—during the period from 1978 to 2005—54 African American museums applied to IMS and IMLS for grants.<sup>67</sup> Since the inception of the AAHC grant program, and with a dedicated focus on reaching African American museums, IMLS has seen a nearly four-fold increase in the number of African American museums applying for grant funding. During the period from 2006 to 2017, the AAHC grant program received 441 applications from 206 unique institutions, and IMLS has made 153 awards to 87 institutions across the nation, spanning from the southernmost tip of Florida to northern Washington State.

Moreover, since the launch of the program, \$15,320,735 in federal funds have been matched with \$18,592,974 in non-federal funds, yielding an investment of nearly \$34 million to support African American museums around the country.<sup>68</sup> This is a significant increase from the period prior to enactment of the NMAAHC Act. For example, in the three-year period from 1994 to 1996, IMS awarded eighteen grants to African American museums, for a total amount of \$526,179, and from 2000 to 2002, IMLS awarded thirteen such grants, for a total amount of \$966,948.<sup>69</sup> Whereas in the most recent three-year period, from 2015 to 2017, the agency

<sup>67</sup> “Administrative Discretionary Grants (FY1978–2017) Data File,” Institute of Museum and Library Services.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*

awarded fifty grants, totaling \$4,373,955, to African American museums through the AAHC program alone.<sup>70</sup> Annual congressional appropriations for the AAHC grant program increased in the first few years, remained relatively steady between 2010 and 2017, and just saw a recent increase up to its current level.<sup>71</sup>

IMLS's AAHC grant program has been modified over the years to address the evolving needs of African American museums. Although the program initially focused on capacity-building through professional development, for example, IMLS has now expanded the program to address additional areas authorized by the NMAAHC Act, including collections care and improvement of operations.<sup>72</sup> Considering the AAHC grants awarded from FY 2011 through FY 2017, the largest number—37 percent—have focused primarily on expanding capacity in public programs, exhibitions, and K-12 education; 35 percent of awarded grants have supported museum professional development, planning, and evaluation; and 29 percent have supported collections care, digitization of collections, and collection management.<sup>73</sup> Through its convenings and other interaction with stakeholders, IMLS continues to gather feedback and tailor the AAHC grant program to meet the needs of the African American museum community.

With IMLS grants and support, African American museums are able to prioritize and address their most critical needs. The following are examples of how grant recipients have used the AAHC grant program to build the capacity of their institutions and how innovative museums have embraced the flexible categories of support to address their own organizational needs.

*a. Education, Public Programs, and Exhibitions*

The AAHC grant program supports projects that help African American museums build their capacity to engage with their communities through public programs, exhibitions, and activities focused on the K-12 audience. Adding new professional staff, creating new public programs, and developing content for new exhibitions are examples of some of the grant-supported activities over the past few years.

The Tubman African American Museum in Macon, Georgia, for example, has used AAHC grants to expand its educational programs despite funding cuts for school field trips.<sup>74</sup> With a 2007 grant, the Tubman Museum launched both its Arts & History Outreach program, which uses traveling exhibits, a cabinet of curiosities, and outreach teachers to reach students, and its John Oliver Killens student workshops, which use non-traditional classroom experiences to help at-risk students

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> "Budget Tables," Institute of Museum and Library Services, [www.ims.gov](http://www.ims.gov).

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> "February 2012: Tubman African American Museum Takes Exhibits Beyond Museum Walls," Institute of Museum and Library Services, February 1, 2012, <https://www.ims.gov/news-events/news-releases/february-2012-tubman-african-american-museum-takes-exhibits-beyond-museum>.

improve their comprehension and test scores in math and reading. By 2012, over two hundred students had participated in the workshops, and the students displayed significantly improved math and reading test scores. The museum expanded its Art & History Outreach program with a 2010 grant, developing video presentations and downloadable lesson plans on African American art, history, and culture to “reach those locations and students that are more remote and that may not have any nearby museum facilities or resources,” as Andy Ambrose, the Tubman Museum’s executive director, explained.<sup>75</sup> The Tubman most recently used an AAHC grant to expand its educational offerings and tours<sup>76</sup> after the museum moved into a much larger facility.<sup>77</sup>

The Museum of the African Diaspora in San Francisco, California, hired a consultant to assess its educational programs, train staff, and produce a comprehensive evaluation plan to define outcomes and areas of potential growth. Grant funds enabled the museum to hire an outreach coordinator, create new resources for students, and build staff capacity to measure and communicate the impact of its programs to teachers, parents, and the community.<sup>78</sup> The African American Civil War Memorial Museum in Washington, DC used AAHC grant funds to develop a docent training manual, and worked with a consultant to form a team of volunteer docents to greatly expand visitors’ understanding of the exhibits interpreting African American Civil War soldier history.<sup>79</sup> These projects at the Tubman African American Museum, Museum of the African Diaspora, and the African American Civil War Memorial Museum represent the core educational function of museums and the important role these museums have as a resource in K-12 education.

#### *b. Supporting the Development of Museum Professionals*

IMLS’s grants also have contributed to the growth and education of a cadre of African American museum professionals. With well-trained professional staff and leadership teams, African American museums are better equipped to serve their communities and share knowledge across the museum field. The AAHC grant program supports the development of museum professionals at all levels of expe-

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> “February 2012: Tubman African American Museum Takes Exhibits Beyond Museum Walls,” Institute of Museum and Library Services, February 1, 2012, <https://www.imls.gov/news-events/news-releases/february-2012-tubman-african-american-museum-takes-exhibits-beyond-museum>.

<sup>77</sup> Stanley Dunlap, “Tubman Museum a ‘success’ in first year in new building,” *The Telegraph* (Macon, GA), May 13, 2016, <http://www.macon.com/news/local/article77535212.html>.

<sup>78</sup> Institute of Museum and Library Services, *Museum of the African Diaspora*, (Washington, DC: Institute of Museum and Library Services, 2015), MH-00-15-0029-15, <https://www.imls.gov/grants/awarded/mh-00-15-0029-15>.

<sup>79</sup> Institute of Museum and Library Services, *African American Civil War Memorial Freedom Foundation*, (Washington, DC: Institute of Museum and Library Services, 2010), MH-00-10-0015-10, <https://www.imls.gov/grants/awarded/mh-00-10-0015-10>.

rience, from emerging professionals about to start on their museum careers, to volunteers transitioning into professional roles, up to and including museum professionals ready to pass on their legacies.

Development of museum executives continues to be essential to succession planning for African American museums. As noted in the 2004 forum, one of the immediate challenges that many African American museums experience is the transition from founding museum directors to new leadership.<sup>80</sup> It is essential these museums are able to transfer the passion and vision of their founding directors to new leadership that is also able to contribute new and innovative ideas. Through the AAHC grant program, institutions have been able to develop succession plans and implement programs that have facilitated smooth transitions at the very top. For example, the National Underground Railroad Freedom Center in Cincinnati, Ohio, applied for an AAHC grant to develop a succession plan in 2012.<sup>81</sup> The timing could not have been better, as the then-executive director retired in 2013, earlier than expected. Additional support from IMLS enabled the Freedom Center to develop new leaders within its current staff to respond to the museum's evolving needs.

The Studio Museum in Harlem, New York, has used AAHC grant funding to support its Building Blocks program, a staff development initiative designed to strengthen the museum's institutional capacity and impact.<sup>82</sup> Professional development programs have enabled the museum to train, support, and build specific skill sets for its middle management team. The Spelman College Museum of Fine Art in Atlanta, Georgia, created a staff development and organizational planning project that included three interconnected components: (1) leadership coaching for the director of the museum; (2) strategic planning; and (3) professional development for the museum staff.<sup>83</sup> The AAHC grant strengthened the staff's ability to think strategically, plan methodically for future growth, and identify essential tools to improve the museum's operations. It also enhanced the museum's capacity to serve as an academic and cultural resource—all while delivering comprehensive art experiences for its growing audiences.

Federal support through IMLS also has provided opportunities for young professionals to develop their skills in museum services. In an earlier volume of *The Public Historian*, Margaret Burroughs, a founder of the DuSable Museum of African American History in Chicago, Illinois, reflected on the impact of federal support for

80 Institute of Museum and Library Services, *Strategic Crossroads and New Opportunities*.

81 David Howard, "Succession Plan Plays Key Role in Museum Merger," *Up Next: AAHC Forum*, blog, May 9, 2013, <https://www.imls.gov/news-events/upnext-blog/2013/05/aahc-forum-succession-plan-plays-key-role-museum-merger>.

82 Institute of Museum and Library Services, *Studio Museum in Harlem* (Washington, DC: Institute of Museum and Library Services, 2013), MH-00-13-0034-13, <https://www.imls.gov/grants/awarded/mh-00-13-0034-13>.

83 Institute of Museum and Library Services, *Spelman College Museum of Fine Art* (Washington, DC: Institute of Museum and Library Services, 2014), MH-00-14-0029-14, <https://www.imls.gov/grants/awarded/mh-00-14-0029-14>.

an internship at the Field Museum early in her career. Burroughs was the first African American to “ascend” to the Field museum’s curatorial department, and the internship was instrumental in developing her skills.<sup>84</sup> The AAHC grant program has continued this practice of federal support for the development of museum professionals. In 2009, the Northwest African American Museum in Seattle, Washington, used an AAHC grant to establish an annual nine-month curatorial internship, strengthening the museum’s relationship with the University of Washington museology program. The first curatorial intern in this program became a curatorial assistant at the Northwest African American Museum after she graduated. She continues to mentor incoming curatorial interns in the program, helping to ensure that the interns develop the skills necessary for success as museum professionals.<sup>85</sup>

Florida A&M University in Tallahassee, Florida, received a grant in 2011 to develop its Inspiring Authorities in Museum Management (IAMM) program, which provided opportunities for graduate students in a variety of disciplines to develop skills in museum practices.<sup>86</sup> The IAMM program’s 2013 cohort included an MBA student, a National Board-certified educator, a high school history teacher, and a graduate student studying social work. The interns leveraged their own expertise, while developing skills in specific areas, such as marketing and economic vitality, archives, and visitor and curatorial services.<sup>87</sup> In reflecting on the program, E. Murell Dawson described how it allowed the university to “more diligently address the national shortage of minorities practicing in the museum field.”<sup>88</sup>

In 2009, South Carolina State University’s Stanback Museum and Planetarium in Orangeburg, South Carolina, received funding to expand its existing internship program. The grant enabled the Stanback to offer paid internships to undergraduate students of all majors.<sup>89</sup> The internship program provided opportunities for students to learn about areas in the museum field where they could combine their chosen field of study and museum practice.

The Northwest African American Museum, Florida A&M University, and the Stanback Museum and Planetarium are examples of AAHC grantees working in

84 John E. Fleming and Margaret T. Burroughs, “Dr. Margaret T. Burroughs: Artist, Teacher, Administrator, Writer, Political Activist, and Museum Founder,” *The Public Historian* 21, no. 1 (Winter 1999): 44–45. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3379110>.

85 Chieko Phillips, “An Eight-Month Internship Commitment Turned into Three Years of Excellent Experience,” *Up Next: AAHC Forum*, blog, December 6, 2012, <https://www.ims.gov/news-events/upnext-blog/2012/12/aahc-forum-eight-month-internship-commitment-turned-three-years>.

86 Institute of Museum and Library Services, *Florida A&M University* (Washington, DC: Institute of Museum and Library Services, 2011), MH-00-11-0018-11, <https://www.ims.gov/grants/awarded/mh-00-11-0018-11>.

87 E. Murell Dawson, “Recruiting, Training and Mentoring Future Generations of Museum Professionals,” *Up Next: AAHC Forum*, blog, January 24, 2013, <https://www.ims.gov/news-events/upnext-blog/2013/01/aahc-forum-recruiting-training-and-mentoring-future-generations>.

88 Ibid.

89 Institute of Museum and Library Services, *South Carolina State University*, (Washington, DC: Institute of Museum and Library Services, 2009), MH-00-09-0028-09, <https://www.ims.gov/grants/awarded/mh-00-09-0028-09>.

association with local educational institutions. Establishing these relationships benefits both the students, who gain hands-on experience, and the museums, which gain additional help, fresh insights, and a pool of future applicants to call upon when positions arise.

*c. Collection Management and Digital Access*

From community-based archives and local history collections to historic items of national significance, African American museums care for all types of collections. The AAHC grant program provides support for museums in managing their collections and providing access to researchers and the general public. Museums have used IMLS funding to expand digital access and ensure the long-term preservation of their collections.

For example, in 2007, the Charles H. Wright Museum of African American History in Detroit, Michigan, was awarded a grant to launch its Archives Professional Capacity Project.<sup>90</sup> Prior to 2007, the Wright Museum did not have a professional archivist, and although the museum held a collection of over thirty thousand artifacts, it lacked a definitive method for determining what was in its collection and where each item was located. With an AAHC grant, the Wright Museum was able to hire three consultants and an archivist. The grant also provided funding for additional education for the new archivist's assistants and for two interns from nearby Wayne State University. The relationship between the Wright Museum and the university has continued, and many of the students now practice collections processing at the museum. The program eventually led to the launch of the Wright Museum's Virtual Archives and Exhibitions website in 2009. Where previously the Wright Museum relied heavily on rented exhibits, the Archives Project has also enabled the Wright Museum to develop its own original exhibits. Further, the museum has seen an increase in researchers using its collections, and has found that donors are more willing to contribute to their institution. The AAHC grant made it possible for the museum to address its own needs, while also achieving IMLS's objective of growing and carrying out programs of research and development to improve the museum, library, and information services as a whole.

Several HBCUs have used AAHC grants to preserve and digitize archival materials of prominent African American figures. In many cases, these projects have also included training opportunities for students. Texas Southern University in Houston, Texas, received a grant in 2010 for the University Museum to hire an experienced archivist to work with the registrar and other staff members to improve the management of a variety of collections, including its Barbara Jordan Collection.<sup>91</sup>

<sup>90</sup> "February 2010: Newly Reorganized Archives Benefits Museum, Community," Institute of Museum and Library Services, February 1, 2010, <https://www.imls.gov/news-events/project-profiles/february-2010-newly-reorganized-archives-benefits-museum-community>.

<sup>91</sup> Institute of Museum and Library Services, *Texas Southern University* (Washington, DC: Institute of Museum and Library Services, 2010), MH-00-10-0021-10, <https://www.imls.gov/grants/awarded/mh-00-10-0021-10>.

The project increased the knowledge and skills of existing staff members and initiated a collections digitization process. Hampton University Museum in Hampton, Virginia, used an AAHC grant to digitize a unique photograph collection as well as a collection of rare documents, including original letters and speeches by Booker T. Washington.<sup>92</sup>

The AAHC grants program continues to support digitization of collections. For example, a 2017 grant to the Withers Collection and Gallery in Memphis, Tennessee, will preserve original negatives from the work of Ernest C. Withers, a renowned photojournalist and personal photographer of Martin Luther King Jr., who captured many of the most iconic images of the Civil Rights Movement.<sup>93</sup> Another 2017 AAHC grant is supporting the National Jazz Museum in Harlem, New York, in creating a customized digital asset management system and web interface design for managing the museum's digital resources and sharing its curated digital content.<sup>94</sup>

#### *d. Building Community, Leveraging Resources*

Perhaps most importantly, the AAHC grant program has continued to strengthen the African American museum community as a whole. Among the first awards made through the AAHC grant program in 2006 were those for network-building projects, supporting the work of AAAM in creating a stronger national network of African American museums, and also state networks, including the efforts underway in Florida by the John G. Riley Center and Museum of African American History.<sup>95</sup> Subsequent AAHC grants have supported the development of

92 Institute of Museum and Library Services, *Hampton University* (Washington, DC: Institute of Museum and Library Services, 2011), MH-00-11-0014-11 <https://www.ims.gov/grants/awarded/mh-00-11-0014-11>.

93 Institute of Museum and Library Services, *Withers Collection Museum and Gallery* (Washington, DC: Institute of Museum and Library Services, 2017), MH-00-17-0032-17, <https://www.ims.gov/grants/awarded/mh-00-17-0032-17>.

94 Institute of Museum and Library Services, *The National Jazz Museum in Harlem* (Washington, DC: Institute of Museum and Library Services, 2017), MH-00-17-0016-17, <https://www.ims.gov/grants/awarded/mh-00-17-0016-17>.

95 "September 2008: Florida African American Museum Exchange Builds Alliance to Preserve History," Institute of Museum and Library Services, September 1, 2008, <https://www.ims.gov/news-events/project-profiles/september-2008-florida-african-american-museum-exchange-builds-alliance>. The Riley Center and Museum of African American History used its 2006 grant to develop the Florida African American Museum Exchange (FAAME). The Exchange consisted of a mentoring program called "each one-teach one," in which ten museum directors participated in three four-day training sessions in different parts of Florida. The sessions provided training in grant writing, website development, partnership building, site upgrading and presence, and strategies to enhance cultural events and exhibitions. The directors who attended the sessions then returned home and shared what they learned with one other. The program was further expanded in 2008, when the Riley Center received a second AAHC grant to provide intensive training to museum directors on collections management and preservation, with the end goal of creating a central database of collection holdings and a virtual museum. The FAAME has created a long-lasting professional network of museum directors and has increased the visibility and credibility of AAHC museums in Florida.

shared practices and business models for state level networks of African American museums in Georgia, Virginia, and North Carolina. Developing a museum network creates a support group of individuals within a community, and helps to attract and retain professionals—which ultimately strengthens the museum field.

IMLS provided support to AAAM in 2006, and again in 2015, to carry out recurring field-wide needs assessments in the African American museum community. An early AAHC grant to AAAM supported a new survey of African American museums and associated databases.<sup>96</sup> The resulting “Assessment of the Field” provided new insights into African American museum governance, programs, and collections.<sup>97</sup> Subsequently in 2015, AAAM, with IMLS support, conducted a new needs assessment of the African American museum field and updated the directory it had created with the 2006 grant.<sup>98</sup> New insights and opportunities come with each survey, helping IMLS to identify new ways to support and strengthen African American museums through the AAHC grant program, and helping to identify and address needs throughout the field.

In reflecting on the impact of the grants awarded to date, IMLS Deputy Director for Museum Services, Paula Gangopadhyay, observes, “[T]he AAHC grant program has enabled African American museums across the nation to convey the power of their stories and irreplaceable assets through programming and community engagement.”<sup>99</sup>

#### Future of the AAHC Program

IMLS is committed to supporting African American museums through all of its grant programs, technical assessment programs, and special initiatives. With the AAHC grant program, however, the agency has its most direct connection to the community of African American museums. While the parameters of the AAHC grant program reflect annual appropriations from Congress, the breadth of IMLS activities authorized in the NMAAHC Act suggest a wide range of possibilities for future directions. In addition to the existing grant programs discussed above, the NMAAHC Act authorizes IMLS to carry out scholarship programs for future AAHC museum professionals, a grant program to promote education on the modern-day practices of slavery around the world, and a grant program to assist AAHC museums in establishing endowments.<sup>100</sup>

<sup>96</sup> Institute of Museum and Library Services, *Association of African American Museums, Inc.*

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*; Jeff Hayward and Brian Werner, *Assessment of the Field: African American Cultural Organizations* (Northampton: Association of African American Museums, 2008). AAAM received 159 survey results from African American museums for this assessment. The responding organizations were then included in the directory and online database of African American Institutions.

<sup>98</sup> Institute of Museum and Library Services, *Association of African American Museums*, (Washington, DC: Institute of Museum and Library Services, 2015), MG-00-15-0038-15, <https://www.imls.gov/grants/awarded/mg-00-15-0038-15>.

<sup>99</sup> Paula Gangopadhyay, email message to Nancy E. Weiss, May 27, 2018.

<sup>100</sup> NMAAHC Act § 7(b)(1).

The recent opening of the NMAAHC has provided even greater opportunities to recognize and strengthen the nationwide network of African American museums. As NMAAHC founding director Lonnie G. Bunch III recently observed, “the national museum stands on the shoulders of pioneering institutions such as the DuSable Museum and the Charles Wright Museum, and we are humbled that [the NMAAHC Act] contributes to the support and growth of institutions that enrich our nation by exploring and presenting African American history and culture.”<sup>101</sup> Our national museum benefits from the work of museums throughout the nation, and, by having a national presence, regional and local museums can delve more deeply into both national and local narratives and history.

AAAM past-president Gaither testified amid the early efforts to establish both funding for African American museums and the NMAAHC that the “noblest sentiment about African-American heritage is made through the aggregation of its relevant institutions.”<sup>102</sup> It is in this spirit that African American museums throughout the United States, with the support of both IMLS and the NMAAHC, are realizing the vision of the NMAAHC Act—weaving together and reflecting, together, our nation’s African American history and culture.

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<sup>101</sup> Lonnie G. Bunch III, email message to the author, March 20, 2018.

<sup>102</sup> U.S. Congress, House, Subcommittee on Libraries and Memorials of the Committee on House Administration, *Establishment of an African-American Heritage Memorial Museum: Hearing before the Subcommittee on Libraries and Memorials of the Committee on House Administration*. 101st Cong., 1st sess., 1989.