

Science Museum of Minnesota
Legacy fund progress report
Submitted to the Legislative Reference Library
February 25, 2010

In September 2009, The Science Museum of Minnesota (SMM) expressed its gratitude for the appropriation of \$900,000 of Legacy funds for the 2010-2011 biennium and outlined its plans for using this money. We were excited about new opportunities to improve our collection of artifacts representing Minnesota's cultural heritage, create deeper and broader connections about our work with residents throughout the state, and inspire even more enthusiasm in Minnesota for science and its social and cultural impact in the past, present and future.

Over the past months project planning and development has started and our excitement is growing. Our three projects; enhancing our collection of American Indian artifacts, the creation of one or more new forms of public programming reaching population centers outside the Twin Cities metro area, and assessing an investment in videoconferencing equipment to extend our ability to share our objects virtually with a statewide audience, are all off to a great start. More details about each of these programs and their progress to date follows.

Enhancing our collection of American Indian artifacts

Tasks achieved and planned – We successfully closed on the purchase of a 191-piece collection of American Indian artifacts from 1830 – 1910 on January 28, 2010. This collection consists primarily of items from regional Dakota and Ojibwe tribes. The objects in the newly purchased collection represent historical markers which aid in contextualizing the experience of American Indians locally, regionally and nationally. With the purchase finalized, planning is getting started at the museum for exhibits and other programming involving these artifacts.

Measurable outcomes – While some of these pieces are individually rare and of high scholarly value, the true importance of this collection is that it remains intact and in Minnesota. Due to the museum's ability, with Legacy funds, to purchase this collection privately, it avoided the fate of being bid out at public auction which would have almost certainly resulted in the collection being broken up and sold individually to buyers from outside Minnesota.

Creation of new forms of public outreach

Tasks achieved and planned – Planning is well underway for a new museum project, tentatively titled "Suitcase Science." This project will consist of traveling public programs with exhibit vitrines and multi-media kiosks including object – based community developed exhibitions. The project will identify and establish relationships with community based organizations in the metro area and within the five most populated communities outside the metro. The communities include; Duluth, St.Cloud, Rochester, Mankato, and Moorhead. We will identify "bridge" individuals that will connect us with key people and organizations who wish to collaborate. Once collaborative partners have

been identified we will work with community members to explore site- specific culturally meaningful ways to connect culture, science and community using objects and stories. Museum staff will work with members of these communities to produce “Science in a Suitcase,” a thought-provoking theater piece that will highlight objects identified as scientifically and culturally significant by the communities. Actors presenting the theater piece will work with the Public Programs manger, a contracted director and the community through workshops to craft the script, pulling together the individual stories and objects and creating the final product that will represent the diversity of Minnesota cultures.

Measurable outcomes – Five part-time staff have had 10 additional hours of work per week since January as a result of this project. An artistic director has been contracted through June 2011 and charged with specific deliverables due throughout the course of the contract. This team, along with two co-project leaders at the museum commenced project planning and partner outreach with the goal of opening a pilot production in June 2010 at the museum’s Saint Paul facility. The pilot and subsequent projects will be evaluated by the Science Museum’s Department of Evaluation and Research. The evaluation will examine the workshop structure, attendance at programs and visitor use of exhibition components.

Assessing an investment in videoconferencing equipment

Tasks achieved and planned – We brought in Julia Heighway, a national expert on videoconferencing in museums and other informal education sites, to provide insight on what makes a good videoconferencing program from both program and technical perspectives. We then coupled Ms. Heighway’s analysis with our in-house pedagogical expertise to devise a plan for acquiring and installing the most efficient and effective equipment along with a realistic outline for producing one videoconference by the end of the 2009-2010 school year. The program will focus on the MN Department of Education’s new standards addressing American Indians and science. The primary audience for this program will be students in greater Minnesota who are unable for geographic and/or financial reasons to visit the museum for a field trip. To help inform our planning we are conducting audience surveys to identify specific program topics, timing, and grade range that best meet educators’ and students’ needs. We are also convening an advisory committee of teachers, principals, and school district technology coordinators to ensure ongoing relevance and value of programming. This expectation is this program will provide the next best alternative to actually being at the museum and effectively extend our reach to students throughout the state. Our next step is to formally present this plan to museum senior management for approval and comment.

Measurable outcomes – Best practices and barriers to success have been studied and a plan has been created that maximizes our opportunity to provide more science-based educational outreach across Minnesota. As part of this process, we have also created our own contact list of statewide educators who are interested in using our program once it’s established. We are also considering hiring another staff person for 20 hours per week to allow for steady and timely progress.