American libraries and museums play a critical role in the education of the public in the United States. There are over 122,000 libraries and about 15,000 museums of great variety in the U. S. They preserve our cultural heritage and help to transmit it from one generation to the next. The Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) is the primary source of federal support for these knowledge institutions.

Libraries and museums play a significant role in the development of an educated citizenry. At IMLS we are convinced that the primary characteristic museums and libraries share is that they are social agencies that sustain learning throughout the lifetime.

This paper describes IMLS’s evolving role in supporting United States’ libraries and museums through its grant programs and technical support. Included are examples of projects IMLS has funded demonstrating how making collections accessible through the Internet has transformed how libraries and museums reach out to learners.

Американские библиотеки и музеи играют значимую роль в общественном образовании США. В Америке более 122000 библиотек и около 15000 самых разнообразных музеев. Они сохраняют наше культурное наследие и помогают передавать его из поколения в поколение. Институт Музейных и Библиотечных Услуг (ИМБУ) является основным источником федеральной поддержки этих хранилищ знаний.

Библиотеки и музеи играют важную роль в развитии образованных граждан. Мы убеждены, что общей основной чертой, как музеев, так и библиотек является то, что они являются социальными учреждениями, поддерживающими пожизненное обучение.

Данный доклад раскрывает роль ИМБУ в поддержке библиотек и музеев Соединенных Штатов через программы грантов и технической помощи. Приводятся примеры проектов, профинансированных ИМБУ, и показывающих как Интернет доступ к фондам изменил способ общения библиотек и музеев с посетителями.

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Американські бібліотеки та музеї відіграють надзвичайну роль в громадській освіті. В США понад 122,000 різноманітних бібліотек та близько 15,000 музеїв. Вони зберігають американську культурну спадщину та допомагають передавати її з покоління в покоління. Інститут Музейних та Бібліотечних Послуг (ІМБП) — основне джерело федеральної підтримки цих освітніх установ. Бібліотеки та музеї відіграють особливу роль у подальшій освіті та розвитку громадян. В ІМБП ми впевнені, що основною рисою і музеїв, і бібліотек є те, що вони — соціальні заклади, що підтримують навчання впродовж усього життя.

Ця доповідь описує роль ІМБП у підтримці бібліотек та музеїв Сполучених Штатів завдяки його програмам грантів та технічній підтримці. Наведено приклади таких проектів ІМБП, що демонструють як Інтернет доступ до фондів змінив спосіб спілкування бібліотек та музеїв з відвідувачами.

**Introduction**

Thank you for inviting me here today to talk about supporting and sustaining learners within and among our communities and nations. American libraries and museums play a critical role in the education of the public in the United States of America. There are more than 122,000 libraries in the U.S.; they include public, academic, school, and research libraries, and archives. The country is also home to about...
15,000 museums; they include art, history, and natural history museums, children’s museums, science centers, zoos, and planetariums. America’s libraries and museums preserve our cultural heritage and help to transmit it from one generation to the next. Libraries and museums play a significant role in the development of an educated citizenry and the United States’ Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) is the primary source of Federal support for these knowledge institutions.

I want to begin by telling you about IMLS, the agency I represent, explaining who we are, what we do, some recent developments in our programs, and how we talk about what we do.

**IMLS and Its Programs**

IMLS is an independent Federal grant-making agency. Our grants to museums and libraries build institutional capacity, support core library and museum services, and encourage excellence. Our legislative language provides explicitly for IMLS’s role in developing digital content. It is noteworthy that the leadership and staff at IMLS do not see their role as simply that of being a grant-making institution. In addition to our grant-making function, IMLS supports practice through research, conferences, and publications. We encourage evaluation and the generation of public value. Over the past year we have come to define our purpose as being to «create and sustain a nation of learners by building the capacity of our museums and libraries so that they can better meet the needs of their communities.»

IMLS was created in 1996 by the Museum and Library Services Act (MLSA), which merged the Federal programs for supporting the nation’s museums and the nation’s libraries, transferring the library programs out of the U.S. Department of Education and grafting them onto what had been the U.S. Institute of Museum Services.

This action by Congress was reaffirmed last fall with the enactment of the Museum and Library Services Act (MLSA) of 2003, which reauthorized IMLS while making minor changes in our mandate and structure. The legislation enjoyed strong support from the Administration and broad bipartisan support in Congress. Enactment of the MLSA is a major affirmation of the important role that museums and libraries play in our society, and the significant part that IMLS plays in strengthening museums and libraries. The 2003 Act was signed into law on September 25.

The reason current support is so strong and so sustained is simple. Education is the number one domestic priority of the Administration. And the Administration and Congress understand that, while we need to strengthen our schools, we also know that education does not start at the schoolroom door—and neither does it stop there. The central role museums and libraries can play in achieving our goal to create and sustain a nation of learners is recognized.

Our museum and library programs are in a perpetual state of evolution as we continually strive toward completing the merger begun in 1996. The Office of Library Services and the Office of Museum Services continue to run parallel programs, each serving its own group of customers. Yet we are frequently aware of areas where the interests of the two offices intersect. When and where it is appropriate, we are prepared to redefine and merge those particular programs. For the purposes of this paper I will focus on the Office of Library Services, although some of the leadership grants cited later as examples do come from the Museum program.

The majority of IMLS’s funding for libraries is distributed through our *State Grant Program* in formula grants to the library administrative agency in each state. In the states IMLS funds are used in a variety of important ways: supporting resource sharing, providing training and staff development opportunities, and statewide licensing of digital information services. In past years these funds have been used to support a large and diverse number of programs that enhance library services within communities and across the nation.

IMLS has two other library programs that although they disburse fewer dollars than our program of grants to state libraries, have gotten more publicity in recent years. *Librarians for the 21st Century*, a program initiated last year, was actually inspired by the First Lady, Laura Bush, a librarian herself. It focuses on enhancing the skills of our current librarians as well as educating the next generation of library professionals.

Our other frequently highlighted program is our *National Leadership Grants* (NLG) program, which exists for both libraries and museums. These competitive awards to institutions foster innovation and
creativity and develop best practices. It is in this «laboratory» for cutting edge strategies where we find many projects that best support the concept of sustaining communities of learners across and among nations through the use of digital infrastructure and content.

In 2005 IMLS will be making some changes in the way the NLG program is structured across the agency. Since 1996, when this program began, we have offered leadership grants in four categories in both the Museum and Library grant programs, including a specific category for museum-library collaboration. Within the two offices those categories have been different. As our operations have continued to evolve and our interactions with the museum and library communities have progressed, we have realized that it is time for these programs to evolve as well. In 2005, we will be changing the categories for museum and library grants.

First, there will be a separate professional development/education and training program in each of the two offices, one for libraries and one for museums. And second, we now will be offering leadership grants under three basic categories, which will be the same in both the Museum and Library Offices. The categories will be:

1. Advancing Learning Communities,
2. Building Digital Resources, and
3. Research and Demonstration.

One additional note about IMLS and collaboration: the elimination of a separate category for museum-library collaborations does not mean that IMLS will not continue to foster collaboration between and among museums and libraries. On the contrary, it signals our conviction that collaboration is such a central strategy that it should not be separated out as a single category, but rather integrated into all aspects of our programs. Partnering and collaboration are becoming so much an integral part of what our institutions do that they have become means and not ends in and of themselves. Collaboration is indeed encouraged in all three of the NLG categories, and evaluation of proposals will be based in part on a realistic incorporation of collaboration, where it is appropriate.

**Digital Technology**

Libraries and museums are core resources in our quest to transform knowledge into economic value, meet social needs, and create civic engagement. A vital and state-of-the-art network of libraries and museums is the fuel that supports learning in all its aspects. Everyone who pursues knowledge—from a child learning to read to a scientist pursuing high-level research—benefits from well-provisioned knowledge institutions. I would like to share with you a sampling of some of the ways in which IMLS, using digital technology, fosters leadership, innovation, and a lifetime of learning.

Admittedly, digital technology is just one possible medium for learner support, just as paper is coming to be seen as one such medium. However, digital technology enables the full range of holdings in our museums, libraries, and archives—audio, video, documents, artifacts—to be catalogued, organized, combined in new ways, and made accessible to audiences as never before. The magnificent scientific, historic, aesthetic, and cultural resources in our libraries and museums can be presented—both within and across institutions—within a matrix of interpretive and didactic materials that enriches meaning and increases the audience’s understanding. New telecommunications initiatives allow learners around the world to access more than museum and library collections. They can bring learners «face to face» electronically with curators, scientists, artists, and scholars. Technology-based learning initiatives can also recognize and address individual and localized learning needs through customized programming and presentation.

**Representative NLG Projects from the Museum and Library Offices**

- The Art Institute of Chicago will launch the pilot phase of Art Explorer, an easy-to-use online educational tool that will enable any K-12 teacher to link interdisciplinary curricula to the museum’s permanent collection. The pilot module will provide a pathway through rich content on the museum’s world-renowned collection of Impressionist and Post-Impressionist art, offering curricular links to subjects such as history and social studies. This user-searchable tool will enable teachers to easily retrieve and organize an extensive body of im-
ages and interpretive information, supporting educators in using the Art Institute as an invaluable resource in their teaching.

- The University of Washington Libraries, working with Olympic Peninsula Tribal Associations, the Clallam County Historical Society, and other partners, will design and carry out a digitization project that will document artifacts, stories, and events of tribal heritage in the Pacific Northwest through photographs, videotape, and oral histories. The community-based curatorial and exhibition project will create Web sites, kiosks for online and physical exhibitions, and workshops developed by West Olympic Council on the Arts; a toolkit for creating a community museum; and curriculum materials developed by the University’s Center for the Study of the Pacific Northwest.

- The Museum of Modern Art in New York City is collaborating with the National Gallery of Art in Washington, DC, and the Munsell Color Science Laboratory of the Rochester (New York) Institute of Technology to develop and build the true-color imaging system. This new digital imaging system will allow institutions to capture the most accurate color images of their collections, thus cutting down on current digital imaging editing time and creating a better conservation tool for conservators to monitor color changes and fading over time.

Infrastructure

In the United States no single plan exists to create digital libraries. While IMLS is the only Federal agency that has the statutory requirement to support digitization of cultural materials, other agencies at the Federal level and within the states and territories are creating digital content and supporting research in digital library issues. Universities, state libraries, and consortia of libraries and educational institutions have created many digital libraries of varying scales. This means there is no formalized common infrastructure. However, some IMLS projects do indeed foster the development of best practices and standards to support an eventual infrastructure.

One such project resulted in the Framework of Guidance for Building Good Digital Collections, which provides a set of high-level principles as a framework for identifying, organizing, and applying existing knowledge and resources to collections of digital resources. The document was originally prepared under the auspices of IMLS and released in 2001. It was intended as a resource for grant applicants to IMLS and other Federal funding agencies. However, since its release it has received wide recognition in the library and museum communities and the endorsement of the Digital Library Federation.

In September 2003, maintenance of the Framework was transferred from IMLS to the National Information Standards Organization (NISO). An expert advisory group from the digital resources community has been appointed by NISO to review the Framework on a regular basis and contribute to its further development.

Another such effort is IMLS Digital Collections and Content, a three-year research project conducted by the Library of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, which using projects funded by IMLS from 1998 through 2005, will create a collection-level registry of digital collections. It will research, design, and implement a prototype item-level metadata repository service based on the Open Archives Initiative (OAI) Metadata Harvesting Protocol. This OAI project is currently being looked at by the Minerva project out of the European Union as a potential tool for inclusion.

Publications

IMLS also has produced a series of publications dealing with current issues and trends. All of these publications are available on our Web site, www.imls.gov, and include such items as surveys, tutorials, and white papers. These documents deal with the status of technology use in libraries and museums, outcome-based evaluation, studies on partnerships between schools and museums, and reflections on the 21st century learner. One of our most recent endeavors has been an online tutorial on project management. Like all of our other Web-based resources, it is freely available to the interested learner.

Partnerships

The potential for bold learning partnerships, rooted in our communities, offers unprecedented challenges and opportunities for libraries, museums, and other partners engaged in building learning networks.
for communities based on locale—as well as communities of interest that span geographic boundaries. Such collaborations are recognition of intersecting nodes of interest, activity, and mission.

IMLS’s Director, Dr. Robert Martin, believes so strongly in this concept that he established an Office of Strategic Partnerships at IMLS. While encouraging partnerships among our constituency groups, he is also deeply committed to IMLS as a partner for others. IMLS’s initial strategic partnership focus was intended to be other government entities, some of whom are our partners already. We have our partner cultural agencies: the National Endowment for Humanities, the National Endowment for the Arts, and the President’s Committee on Arts and Humanities. We have the National Science Foundation and the Corporation for Public Broadcasting. And of course we also have the Library of Congress, with whom a couple of our more recent partnering endeavors are the National Book Festival through their Center for the Book and the International Children’s Digital Library project.

In the arena of international partnerships, over the past year IMLS has been engaged in several high-profile initiatives. Dr. Martin was a member of the U.S. UNESCO delegation. He was a contributor to the Declaration of Principles and Action Plan at the first World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS I) in Geneva. He also was a key speaker at the recent meeting of the Digital Cultural Content Forum in Banff, Canada.

**Convening**

In the spirit of sharing information and access, IMLS regularly holds training for its constituents. Annually we hold a *Fall Conference for the State Grant Program Coordinators*, which provides opportunities for growth and technical support. IMLS offers assistance to all of its grantees in planning and evaluation. This year IMLS conducted twelve two-day evaluation workshops for grantees and provided introductory programs for constituents at state, national, and local professional meetings. Fifty-two of fifty-six state program grantees have participated in intensive workshops. And over the past two years, six states have participated in IMLS on-site training and technical assistance to facilitate adoption of outcomes measures. Currently we are seeking to translate this material into an online course.

In this same spirit, IMLS has acted as a convener to ensure sharing of information about advances in digital technology among cultural heritage organizations at both the expert and practitioner levels. In 2003, it convened workshops on *Digital Resources for Cultural Heritage* and on *Research Opportunities on the Creation, Management, Preservation, and Use of Digital Content*.

In addition, in collaboration with the National Science Foundation’s *Digital Libraries Initiatives* and the *National Science Digital Library* programs, IMLS co-sponsored a working meeting of principal investigators engaged in digital library research and development. More than 100 principal investigators and project staff shared their work in progress and discussed common challenges and opportunities.

This past spring, IMLS co-hosted its fifth annual *Web-Wise Conference on Libraries and Museums in the Digital World*, which drew an audience of more than 300 participants from across the nation. This year’s partner agency was the University of Illinois at Chicago and the conference was held in Chicago, Illinois. The proceedings of this conference are to be available via Webcast. The *Web-Wise Conference* is a forum in which many IMLS National Leadership Grants are highlighted. *Web-Wise* always seems to be a gathering place for great and innovative minds to share their insights into how to best meet the needs of the learner.

**The Learner**

And ultimately, aren’t our endeavors always about meeting the learning needs of the individual—the learner? Our vision of the needs of the learner of this new century inspires much of our work. Learning today is changing. What we know about learning—where, when, and how it happens—is changing. Over the past twenty years, there has been an explosion of neuro-scientific research. We now know more than ever about how the human brain learns, from infancy throughout the senior years. We now know that, although there are intense periods of rapid brain development in early childhood, our brains continue to develop and form new connections throughout our entire lives. We know that children are never too young to learn, and we know that lifelong learning extends the quantity and quality of life. Studies demonstrate that the capacity to learn increases at age 50 and extends well into the senior years.
We envision an ideal in which library and museum resources are used routinely by a learner who is self directed, motivated by individual needs and interests, familiar with technology, unconstrained by time and place, and pursuing learning throughout his or her lifetime. It is important to note that the users of these digital collections do not care, and may well not even be aware, that the originals of the digital surrogates that they use are in a museum, a library, an archive, or some other kind of institution. They really don’t care how you define your institution—they just want access to the material. Our work is also guided by a belief that our prosperity and individual achievement depend on the ability to learn continually, to adapt to change readily, and to evaluate information critically.

The responsibility for learning is not the sole preserve of formal educational institutions, schools, colleges, and universities. It must be rooted as well in communities and in everyday living. Ultimately we see that the role of IMLS is to build the capacity of museums and libraries—individually, together, and with others—to serve their communities—communities of interest, not only those joined by geography and national boundaries.

As museum professionals, archivists, and librarians, we are preservers of our cultural history. Over the centuries the artifacts of that history have been catalogued and classified, and then segregated and housed in our separate institutions. Today, through the marvels of our evolving technologies, these artifacts can be reunited and recombined in ways that not only preserve our community memories, but tell our stories to today’s learners and foster new communities of interest.

Through its grant-making, research, partnership, and leadership activities, IMLS encourages new models of leadership and governance that are attuned to broader social, technological, political, educational, and community realities. In each grant program and through our planning and evaluation activities we go beyond asking, «Are we building strong libraries and museums?» and ask, «Are our museums and libraries creating public value? Are they helping to build stronger communities?»