

Thank you for your consideration to support children's museums throughout the state. My name is Jessica Sabrowsky and I am the Founder and Executive Chair at Wheel and Cog Children's Museum of Hutchinson located in Hutchinson, MN.

Today I am representing a coalition of children's museums and discovery centers throughout Minnesota. Members of this coalition are located in Bloomington, Brainerd/Baxter, Breckenridge, Duluth, Fergus Falls, Grand Rapids, Hutchinson, St. Cloud, Mankato and Willmar. Together, the coalition museums serve over 500K guests annually capturing visitors from all MN counties.

When the Legacy funding started, there were three such museums and discovery centers. Now there are 13.

While we have all appreciated the funding we have received in the past from the Legacy Funds, together the coalition members are seeking equity in Legacy funding by moving to an annual appropriation for all Children's Museums and eliminating the competitive grant process.

An annual appropriation empowers each Museum to plan our programs, exhibits and access initiatives with greater certainty. Funds are used for new exhibits, upgrades to existing exhibits, programming – in STEM and the arts for example, as well as for access initiatives that support families in need.

When we are no longer competing with other museums for grants, we are able to collaborate fully. Meaning we are able to share knowledge, resources, and exhibits. In addition, for the smaller museums with limited resources, this approach gets much needed funding into their hands to continue to offer high-level, hands-on experiences, access to field trips and support local families with opportunities for hands-on learning through play, big body play and connection with parents different than at home or through school programs.

The programs supported by Legacy Funds are incredibly impactful on the wellbeing of children and families. Play is children's work and is critical to their development. Learning through Play is highly effective and is the goal of all of us running children's museums in MN.

If a child is not done learning how to learn by age three, it is a remedial effort from there. Our key demographic is birth to nine and we serve as an important feeder system for the K-12 educational system. The first critical period of brain development begins around age 2 and concludes around age 7. This provides us a prime opportunity to lay the foundation for a holistic education for children by encouraging a love of learning, paying attention to emotional intelligence, and not treating young children's education as merely a precursor to "real" learning.

Access programs are central to all of our museum's work. For example, Wheel and Cog consistently maintains 30% of our families' access to play so families who are receiving WIC are able to play for free. This offers families facing barriers an annual membership for the Museum at no cost. Many of our access families tell us the Museum is the only safe place their children can play.

Daily in children's museums across the state County and School caseworkers meet at the Museum for supervised visits and assessments. The Museum environment is welcoming and respectful, encouraging families to interact, explore, not sit and wonder what to do next. This kind of interaction is important to all families but is of particular value to those who are rebuilding relationships.

Another important access program is our school group visits. In Hutchinson, we serve mostly rural districts where there is a 50% or higher rate of free and reduced lunches. In 2022, we served school groups from 9 different counties:

(list not to be read out loud)

McLeod	Redwood	Scott
Stearns	Carver	Sibley
Benton	Renville	Meeker

Conversely, for the Children's Discovery Museum in Grand Rapids, they had to eliminate their popular school group visits because they could no longer subsidize the cost given that they received ZERO Legacy funds in the last competitive grant round. That means thousands of children were unable to take in an amazing "learning-through-play" experience.

The reason the competitive grant process has not been working for our museum specifically is that funding is reimbursed. Our experience this past year was that reimbursement took more than 3 months to receive. When a small organization fronts \$50,000 on a project and is not reimbursed for 3 months we were struggling to cover our payroll and monthly expenses.

Finally, remember that Children's museums and discovery centers play a critical role in the early development of children who learn through play and exploration. Our museums are community hubs for both informal and standards-based learning that engages kids and caring adults through exhibits and programs, field trips and special events. Each of our museums offer experiences that are unique to our community--highlighting local history, regional industry, and culture.

Thank you for considering an annual appropriation from Legacy funds to continue this impactful work.