

Science Museum of Minnesota
Legacy fund progress report
January 15, 2011

The Science Museum of Minnesota is pleased to submit an updated review of the work we've done with the generous allocation of \$900,000 for FY10 and FY11 from the Water, Land and Legacy amendment passed by voters on November 4th, 2008. As described in our first report for this biennium, the museum is committed to using this money 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.

American Indian collections

The first project we undertook was enhancing our collection of American Indian artifacts. As described in the report submitted on February 25, 2010, we closed on a purchase of 191 pieces of regional American Indian artifacts in January 2010. There is a payment schedule associated with that purchase that runs through December 2011. As we hoped, the museum's ownership of these objects has opened up exciting new opportunities for their use. In June our Curator of Ethnology was awarded a grant from the MN Historical Society's Arts and Cultural Heritage Fund for a partnership project using these objects. This money will further our capacity to generate and disseminate new cultural heritage knowledge from this collection and share that knowledge with Minnesotans in actual and virtual ways while collaborating with MNHS to mutually extend the impact of our respective American Indian collections. Specifically, we will leverage our own legacy appropriation with the MNHS grant funds to digitize these newly acquired objects, do deeper research on the collection, including research with related descendent communities, develop prototype oral history interviews and create an online tool for education and virtual exhibition of the objects. This work began in July 2010 and is planned, at this time, to extend through June 2011.

Two of the items purchased with Legacy funds:



Trade cloth shirt, Ojibwe, circa 1850



Cross, Ojibwe, circa 1890

Suitcase Science

Our second project prioritizes public outreach across the state of Minnesota. The first program manifested by this effort is a traveling theater program called Suitcase Science. Suitcase Science is a multi-disciplinary project that incorporates objects, stories, and live theater. The show is a culmination of workshops to which community members brought objects meaningful to them and worked with museum theater staff to document the stories of both science and cultural heritage from the objects and assemble those stories into a play. An example is a woman who brought in her mother's copy of the Betty Crocker cookbook from the mid-20th century. In the play, the object "tells" a brief story of General Mills and its importance to early Minnesotan agribusiness. The cookbook also shares that its recipe for pork chops in the original edition of the book calls for a cooking time much longer than that used today because, over time, the muscle make-up of pigs has been changed by the use of different feed and supplements. To date, museum staff have created over 300 stories based on community member objects in five Minnesota cities; Duluth, Mankato, Moorhead, Rochester, St. Cloud and in the metro area. A book was created for each community with the photos of the objects and their written stories. Two copies of each book, along with a micro-exhibit of selected object replicas from that community are housed at a local library for long-term use by the community. The live performance piece, weaving stories from all the featured communities, is performed at the Science Museum's flagship location in St. Paul. Since its debut in July 2010, over 6500 museum visitors have viewed this show. The objects profiled in each community feature a variety of scientific disciplines interpreted with a uniquely Minnesotan cultural heritage perspective. Evaluation is a critical tool the museum uses to measure its program effectiveness. Evaluation of the Suitcase Science program reveals that 40% of workshop participants reported the program met their expectations and 60% reported that it exceeded their expectations.

Interactive Video-Conferencing

Lastly, a portion of the appropriation SMM received was used to explore an investment in videoconferencing. The project we considered was two-fold and included both the purchase of state of the art interactive videoconferencing (IVC) equipment and the development of high quality IVC-presented educational programming using our collections to reach school audiences in greater Minnesota. The museum originally allocated \$100,000 of our total legacy appropriation to this project. Between October 2009 and April 2010 museum staff researched and developed an IVC project plan. The plan incorporated current best practices informed by conversations and information from a leading national expert in IVC informal education programs, local and national IVC technical specialists, and teachers and school district representatives from around the state.

This plan was presented to members of the museum's senior leadership team during the spring of 2010. The proposed pilot program and equipment purchase recommendations were thoughtful and comprehensive. However, careful examination of the project's business model and potential for sustainability revealed weaknesses in the plan. High quality programs delivered via IVC are unable to fully fund themselves through the modest fees school districts and other education providers are able to pay. Thus, the museum would need to be prepared to subsidize these programs on an ongoing basis in order to fully commit to the project. The decision was made that such subsidizing is not a wise financial decision, especially in the current economic climate. While future Legacy appropriations could be a potential contributor to the funding this project would require, it wasn't considered prudent to rely on that particular stream for this work.

As a result, we did not invest in any videoconferencing equipment and only spent approximately 15% of the total appropriated to this project. Upon examining our current work, museum staff chose to reallocate the remaining IVC funds to our FY11 American Indian collections project and further development of outreach work in greater Minnesota communities and schools. Receiving the MNHS grant accelerated our timeline for the work we are doing with these collections and the additional funding from the IVC project will further leverage the original appropriation to allow for an even more robust schedule of object acquisition and interpretation. Additionally, we are just beginning to explore ways we can better serve new and existing school audiences in ways that are most mutually effective and efficient. The museum is looking forward to acquiring that information, designing new and better programs, and sharing the results of that work with the state.

It is our pleasure to submit these financial and narrative reports. We're proud of the work we have completed so far with the Legacy amendment funds and are looking forward to continuing these efforts.