INSTITUTE of Museum and Library SERVICES

Institute of Museum and Library Services

# Creating a Nation of Learners

Strategic Plan 2012–2016

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**Cover Photos**
*Left:* "Info Pro" Marie Bleus-Francois welcomes patrons to the Champaign Public Library in Champaign, IL. Photo by Elizabeth Otto.
*Middle:* Visitors enter the New York Botanical Garden in Bronx, NY.
*Right:* At the Hill Museum & Manuscript Library at Saint John's University in Collegeville, MN, students peruse collection materials with a visiting faculty member.

**Publication Design**
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# Creating a Nation of Learners

Above: Students on a classroom tour of the Brooklyn Museum study *Bouquet,* a work of art by JoAnne Carson. Photo by Adam Husted.

**U.S. museums and libraries are at the forefront in the movement to create a nation of learners. As stewards of cultural heritage with rich, authentic content they provide learning experiences for everyone.**

With built infrastructure in nearly every community in the nation, robust online networks, and dedicated, knowledgeable staff, they connect people to one another and to the full spectrum of human experience. The nation's 17,500 museum sand 123,000 libraries are trusted in their communities, inspire people throughout their lifetimes and contribute to the civic life of our nation.

Rapid changes in the economy, demographic shifts, and new technologies are creating demands for new library and museum services. IMLS's strategic plan creates a roadmap for carrying out our federal mandate to help America create 21st century institutions that provide the essential educational and cultural opportunities that we need for a competitive future.

# Creating a Nation of Learners

A democratic society in the knowledge age demands that its citizens learn continually, adapt to change readily, and evaluate information critically.

Right: Visitors to the Indianapolis Museum of Art check out the museum's online offerings in The Davis LAB.

Economic strains are causing reductions in all sources of public (state and local) and private (corporate, foundation, and individual) funding for libraries and museums. At the same time, public demand for library and museum services is increasing. As stressed public agencies cut back on services, communities are more fully leveraging the assets of libraries and museums and calling on them to fill the gaps by providing workforce services, afterschool programming, teacher training and broadband access.

Museums and libraries help to level the playing field and provide opportunities that some individuals might not otherwise be able to access. Without libraries and museums it would be more difficult and potentially impossible for many people to pursue their education, seek employment, and lead healthier lives. Libraries and museums are fundamental to supporting the civic life and wellbeing of our nation.

We are living at a time when the strategic use of resources could not be more important and IMLS's role, to provide leadership, funding, data and policy analysis, is essential to help libraries and museums navigate change and continue to evolve their services.

In 2010, Congress passed and the President signed the reauthorization of the Museum and Library Services Act, giving IMLS unique federal responsibilities 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."

The law charges IMLS with advising the President and Congress on library, museum, and information services and for supporting a wide range of programming that impacts the lives of millions of Americans. It recognizes that U.S. libraries and museums are powerful national assets with capacity that must be developed and fully used to enhance economic development and lifelong learning. The law recognizes IMLS's role as a partner with other federal agencies to enlist libraries and museums in achieving important policy outcomes in education, cultural preservation, early learning and workforce development.

Using the reauthorized Museum and Library Services Act as a guide, IMLS director, Susan Hildreth, launched IMLS's strategic planning process in June 2011 with the National Museum and Library Services Board. The process engaged a wide range of stakeholders including more than 1,400 participants in a robust online forum about the future of IMLS services.

The result is a new strategic is plan that envisions a democratic society where communities and individuals thrive with broad public access to

169 million people in the U.S. over the age of 14 (69% of the population) are library users.

148 million people in the U.S over the age of 18 visit a museum a year.

Left: Guests visit the Lewis Ginter Botanical Garden in Richmond, VA.

knowledge, cultural heritage and lifelong learning. It identifies the mission of IMLS to inspire libraries and museums to advance innovation, learning, and cultural and civic engagement by providing leadership through research, policy development and grant-making. The new plan builds on IMLS's solid foundation and targets five strategic goals focused on positive public outcomes for communities and individuals. The goals support the unique role of museums and libraries in preserving and providing access to collections and content, and promoting library, museum and information service policies that ensure access to information for all Americans.

The strategic plan establishes a clear framework for performance improvement that emphasizes evidence-based program development and evaluation and includes identifying and sharing best practices; aligning grant-making to best practices and research results; networking to build capacity; and assessing progress.

The complete IMLS Strategic Plan is available at www.imls.gov/plan.

A staff member from the Humboldt County, CA Library teaches a member of the public to use an e-book reader. Photo by Josh Jackson, *Eureka Times Standard.*

## Vision

**A democratic society where communities and individuals thrive with broad public access to knowledge, cultural heritage, and lifelong learning.**

## Mission

**The mission of IMLS is to inspire libraries and museums to advance innovation, lifelong learning, and cultural and civic engagement. We provide leadership through research, policy development, and grant making.**

## Goals

1. **IMLS places the learner at the center and supports engaging experiences in libraries and museums that prepare people to be full participants in their local communities and our global society.**
2. **IMLS promotes museums and libraries as strong community anchors that enhance civic engagement, cultural opportunities, and economic vitality.**
3. **IMLS supports exemplary stewardship of museum and library collections and promotes the use of technology to facilitate discovery of knowledge and cultural heritage.**
4. **IMLS advises the President and Congress on plans, policies, and activities to sustain and increase public access to information and ideas.**
5. **IMLS achieves excellence in public management and performs as a model organization through strategic alignment of IMLS resources and prioritization of programmatic activities, maximizing value for the American public.**

# Goal 1: Learning

Above: Hands-on activities at the 2011 Maker Faire at New York Hall of Science in Queens. Photo by Andrew Kelly.

**IMLS places the learner at the center and supports engaging experiences in libraries and museums that prepare people to be full participants in their local communities and our global society.**

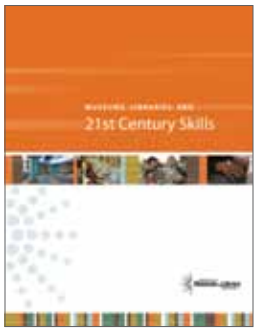
To succeed in our rapidly changing society and economy, individuals must keep informed of relevant events and trends, develop perspective and judgment, learn new knowledge to maintain currency in their occupation, and continually update their skills. Everyone is welcome at our nation's libraries and museums, giving these institutions the unique capacity to reach marginalized and underserved audiences and to develop learning experiences in every discipline, including science, engineering, business, and basic digital, health, and financial literacies.

Through their collections, exhibits, programs (onsite, offsite, and online), and partnerships, these institutions serve as essential and trusted components of the nation's learning ecosystem, providing opportunities for lifelong, "life-wide" learning. They help satisfy a critical need for pre-K, out-of-school, after-school, summer, and adult learning.

99.3% of public libraries offer free access to the Internet.

Over 64% are the only source of free Internet access in their communities.

### Highlight: Museums, Libraries, and 21st Century Skills




The *Museums, Libraries, and 21st Century Skills* initiative emphasizes the critical roles of museums and libraries in reaching underserved communities and helping citizens build their 21st century skill set. These critical skills include information, communications and technology literacy, critical thinking, problem solving, creativity, civic literacy, and global awareness. By providing online tools; convening local library and museum leaders, public officials, social service agencies, and educators in communities across the nation; and highlighting important investments, IMLS is engaging libraries and museums in an important national dialogue about learning in the 21st century.

### Highlight: Learning Labs in Libraries and Museums

IMLS and the MacArthur Foundation have collaborated to respond to the President's call to "Educate to Innovate" and improve outcomes in STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) learning in the U.S. Together, IMLS and the MacArthur Foundation will support the design and development of up to 30 learning labs in libraries and museums throughout the country. The labs are intended to engage middle- and high-school youth in mentor-led, interest-based, youth-centered, collaborative learning using digital and traditional media.

Results of a recent study demonstrate both the value of libraries and what is at risk when our commitment flags. One hundred sixty-nine million people used a public library last year and 77 million of them used library computers. They found jobs, continued their education, and got answers to critical health questions.

## Objectives:

Invest in projects that provide inclusive and accessible learning opportunities to individuals of diverse geographic, cultural, and socioeconomic backgrounds; individuals with special needs; and underserved communities.

Support communities of practice that draw on current research and evaluation literature to develop effective informal and formal learning experiences in museums and libraries.

Facilitate partnerships among museums, libraries, and other education providers to expand learning opportunities for the public.

Support the training and development of museum and library leadership to meet the needs of diverse publics in a rapidly changing environment.

# Goal 2: Community

Above: The Miami-Dade Public Library celebrates the spirit of Colombia with traditional dances during the Art of Storytelling Festival.

## IMLS promotes museums and libraries as strong community anchors that enhance civic engagement, cultural opportunities, and economic vitality.

Healthy, thriving, sustainable communities need institutions that strengthen civic life, understand and respond to community needs, and provide common experiences that knit community members together through common experiences and shared interests. IMLS provides important national leadership to help local libraries and museums advance solutions to our most difficult problems by providing safe places for community gathering, centers for community vitality, a connecting point to community services, and a venue for cultural expression and lifelong learning.

75% of the Museums for America grantees partnered with community-based organizations, such as health or family services.

### Highlight: *Let's Move! Museums & Gardens*

Developed in coordination with national museum and garden leaders and in conjunction with First Lady Michelle Obama's campaign to overcome childhood obesity, *Let's Move! Museums & Gardens* is a coalition of museums and gardens seeking to teach young people to make healthy food choices and be physically active. More than 450 museums and gardens signed on within the first two months of the program.

### Highlight: Partnership with U.S. Department of Labor

Thirty million Americans used a library in 2009 to submit online job applications, search for employment opportunities, and work on their résumés. Many Americans depend on their libraries and visit them on a regular basis. Three-quarters of those asked said they used the library at least once a week.

IMLS and the U.S. Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration (ETA) are building the connection between the workforce investment system and public libraries. IMLS has supported the training of over 1,800 library staff in economically hard-hit communities across the nation. ETA officially encouraged its state and local workforce investment boards, state workforce agencies, and One-Stop Career Centers to partner with public libraries to provide employment information to the public.

### Highlight: Building Digitally Inclusive Communities

Libraries, businesses, hospitals, schools, museums, community technology centers, and local governments are challenged to create and sustain access to broadband technologies to meet national priorities and generate opportunity for difficult-to-reach populations. To help community leaders make strategic decisions about technology investments and in response to the National Broadband Plan, IMLS is working with hundreds of organizations and individuals to create a Framework for Digitally Inclusive Communities.

## Objectives:

Invest in projects that strengthen the role of libraries and museums as core components of the broader community learning and service infrastructure.

Partner with other federal agencies to leverage the resources of libraries and museums in advancing national priorities, including education, health, disaster preparedness, digital literacy, and economic and workforce development.

Ensure that public and private sector leaders have the information they need to make strategic policy and investment decisions that leverage the infrastructure and expertise of museums and libraries.

# Goal 3: Content

Above: The Tennessee Aquarium's *Jellies: Living Art* gallery. Photo by Todd Stailey.

**IMLS supports exemplary stewardship of museum and library collections and promotes the use of technology to facilitate discovery of knowledge and cultural heritage.**

Access to museum and library collections helps to fuel innovation, inspire the development of new knowledge, and boost global understanding. IMLS is a leader in advocating and supporting a comprehensive and logical approach to conservation that begins with assessment, planning, and prioritization and addresses environmental controls and storage conditions as well as treatment. Using the latest technology, institutions are embracing innovations and opportunities to digitize, share their collections, and develop new standards and protocols to preserve and provide access to digitized collections and to "born digital" data and objects.

There are more than 4.5 billion objects held in public trust by museums, libraries, archives, and other collecting institutions in the U.S.

### Highlight: Connecting to Collections

*Connecting to Collections* is a call to action in response to the alarming findings of *A Public Trust at Risk: The Heritage Health Index Report on the State of America's Collections,* an IMLS-funded study that for the first time documented the state of the collections that museums and libraries hold in public trust. *Connecting to Collections* prioritizes safe conditions for collections, emergency plans, accountability, and leveraging private and public sector support.

### Highlight: Digital Collections and Content

Working with the nation's top researchers and digital curators, the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign has developed a test bed and portal to collections that have been digitized with the support of IMLS. Examples of digitized collections include original recordings from the Hoagy Carmichael Collection, Chinese calligraphy from Chinese Paintings, celebrations of Donkey Derby Days from the Collaborative Digitization Program's Heritage Colorado, and Walt Whitman reading his own poetry from the Whitman Archive. Project developers are creating innovative applications to increase use and ease of access of these collections.

### Highlight: Digging into Data

IMLS is partnering with seven national and international organizations as sponsors of the *Digging into Data Challenge.* As the world becomes increasingly digital, new techniques are needed to search, analyze, and understand these everyday materials. *Digging into Data* challenges the research community to help create the new research infrastructure for 21st century scholarship.

## Objectives:

Support the care and management of the nation's collections, both material and living, to expand and sustain access for current and future generations.

Develop and implement a nationwide strategy to expand the public's access to the information, meaning, and content found in museum and library collections.

# Goal 4: Access

Above: Adults use computers in the Internet Cafe at the San José Public Library's Cambrian Branch.

## IMLS advises the President and Congress on plans, policies, and activities to sustain and increase public access to information and ideas.

In an economy powered by knowledge, libraries and museums play essential roles in ensuring equitable access to information for everyone. New technologies are changing the ways in which people access and use information. With careful attention to the means by which the U.S. promotes equitable access, economic prospects can be enhanced for all. Giving individuals access to the knowledge and skills they need enables them to equip themselves to take advantage of economic opportunities and advance themselves in their careers and lives.

While use of information technology is increasing in the U.S., we lag behind many other nations. The government and private sectors face difficult decisions about how to create and sustain library, museum, and information access. Tools are needed to ensure the public has access to the knowledge and information they need, so that our democracy and economy can remain vibrant and strong.

67% of libraries offer access to e-books.

86% of public libraries provide free Wi-Fi.

### Highlight: Publishing Research, Data Analysis, and Issue Briefs

To inform policy makers at all levels, IMLS has released analysis in the following areas:

- Impacts of Budget Cuts to State Libraries
- Distribution of Public Access Broadband by Rural, Suburban, and Urban Areas
- Demographics of Public Library Computer Users
- Ten Years of Increasing Public Demand for Library Services and Decreasing Budgets
- Characteristics of Public Funding for Museums in the U.S.

The findings of these analyses have been used by Congress, federal agencies, foundations, and local communities to inform investments in library and museum services.

### Highlight: Opportunity for All: Research and Policy Recommendations to Help Libraries Meet Demand for Public Access Internet

Working with the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, IMLS has published two groundbreaking studies on Internet access in public libraries. The first study examined public library computer users and their information-seeking behaviors. The study estimated that 77 million people used library computers in 2009 and cited education, workforce, and health issues among the most frequent searches. The second report provided policy recommendations for practitioners and highlighted four case studies undertaken to help libraries meet public demand.

### Highlight: Museums Count

IMLS is undertaking a comprehensive census of museums in the U.S. There is currently no accurate inventory, and some experts believe that assumptions vastly underestimate the actual number of U.S. museums. This census data will help public officials and practitioners make informed policy decisions about the future of museum service in the U.S.

## Objectives:

Promote federal policies that improve access to information services for underserved communities and help to remove barriers that prevent individuals from using these services effectively.

Identify trends and provide consistent and reliable data on museum and library services and use to ensure that federal policy makers, public and private sector leaders, and the public are aware of the critical role that libraries and museums provide in our democratic society.

Support and extend a national digital information infrastructure that leverages libraries and museums as key partners and providers of reliable, persistent, and widely available access to digital information and services.

# Goal 5: Model Public Agency

Above: Children look at the Declaration of Independence at the Nashville Public Library. Photo by Gary Layda.

**IMLS achieves excellence in public management and performs as a model organization through strategic alignment of resources and prioritization of programmatic activities, maximizing value for the American public.**

IMLS continues its commitment to improving administrative efficiencies, focusing on high-quality stewardship of public funds and outstanding public service.

Combining our role as a hub of ideas *for and from* museums and libraries with our research capacity, we have created an organization driven by knowledge.

### Highlight: Focus on Monitoring and Results

IMLS has increased its capacity to carry out formal collections of nonpartisan, evidence-based data to inform grant-making priorities. One example is new work with Grants to State Libraries, IMLS's largest grant program. This effort is engaging library staff in every state and developing new metrics to measure success that will help determine future resource allocations. Another example is the recently completed independent evaluation of Museums for America, IMLS's largest museum grant program. Findings from this study have been used to reshape the agency's museum investments.

### Highlight: Citizen Engagement Strategies – Open Government

The agency uses social media and strategies to enhance public participation in the development of agency programs and encourage collaboration. IMLS recently launched an enhanced Web site, giving the public access to information about agency investments in community institutions as well as data and policy briefs associated with a variety of issue areas such as early learning, health, workforce, STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) learning, and broadband.

IMLS used IdeaScale, a social media platform, to engage citizens in the development of its five-year strategic plan. More than 1,400 users participated by voting for their favorite ideas, adding new ideas, and commenting on ideas. UpNext, the IMLS blog (http://blog.imls.gov), promotes public participation and encourages dialogue about what works in library, museum, and information service.

## Objectives:

Develop an exemplary model of efficient federal grants management.

Cultivate a culture of planning, evaluation, and evidence-based practice to maximize the impact of public investments.

Promote greater transparency and accountability of IMLS operations.

Encourage and promote an engaged and energized IMLS workforce.

# About Us

## Brief Legislative History

**2010:** On December 22, 2010, President Obama signed into law the Museum and Library Services Act of 2010. The law added responsibility for advising the President and Congress on library, museum, and information services policy and enhanced the agency's federal partnership role. In addition, the law underscored the role of libraries and museums in meeting the essential information, education, research, economic, cultural, and civic needs of the people of the United States.

**2003:** On September 25, 2003, President Bush signed into law the Museum and Library Services Act of 2003. The law added authorization to identify national needs and analyze impacts of library, museum, and information services.

In December 2003, President Bush signed the National Museum of African American History and Culture Act, which provided new authority to support African American museums.

**1996:** On September 30, 1996, President Clinton signed the Museum and Library Services Act of 1996, establishing the Institute of Museum and Library Services. The new agency combined the Institute of Museum Services, which had been in existence since 1976, and the Library Programs Office, which had been part of the Department of Education since 1956.

## National Museum and Library Services Board

The National Museum and Library Services Board is a twenty-four-member advisory body that includes Presidentially appointed and Senate-confirmed individuals with expertise in, or commitment to, library, museum and information services. Informed by its collectively vast experience and knowledge, the Board advises the Institute's director of general policy and practices, selections for the National Awards for Museum and Library Service, and coordination with other federal agencies and offices.

## IMLS Executive Leadership Team

Susan Hildreth, Director
Mary L. Chute, Deputy Director for Libraries
Claudia French, Deputy Director for Museums
Mamie Bittner, Director of Communications and Government Affairs
Stephanie Burwell, Acting Chief Information Officer
Antoine Dotson, Acting Director of Human Resources
Carlos A. Manjarrez, Director of Planning, Research and Evaluation
Madeleine C. McCain, Director of Operations
Marsha L. Semmel, Director of Strategic Partnerships
Nancy E. Weiss, General Counsel

To receive more information, learn about funding opportunities and best practices, and participate in dialogue about the future of library, museum, and information service please visit:

**www.imls.gov**

Left: A mother and daughter share a learning opportunity at Michigan's West Bloomfield Township Public Library.

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