

**Testimony in Support of the FY 2016 Operating Budget Grant Request
For the Maryland African American Museum Corporation**

Before the House Education & Economic Development Subcommittee
Education and Education Development Subcommittee Chair: Delegate Adrienne Jones
February 18, 2015

Before the Senate Education & Economic Development Subcommittee
Education, Business, and Administration Subcommittee Chair: Senator Nancy J. King
February 19, 2015



REGINALD F. LEWIS MUSEUM
of Maryland African American
History & Culture

www.RFLewisMuseum.org

Overview

On June 25, 2015, the Reginald F. Lewis Museum of Maryland African American History and Culture will celebrate its tenth anniversary. It has been a hard won anniversary. Although excellent exhibitions were a stable feature of the museum, the economic downturn that soon followed had a severe impact on an institution that was, and still is, in its infancy as the age of cultural institutions is reckoned. The museum has learned several lessons in its first decade. It is now ready to begin a period of sustained growth by putting those lessons into practice.

Strategic Plan Status

In the spring of 2014, business school graduate students of Virginia State University and their faculty advisor produced a pre-strategic planning study for the museum. The study was based upon a full day visit to our site during which the students divided themselves into fact-finding teams and interviewed staff extensively. The insight from their pre-planning study, along with the museum's own "Forging Forward" emergency plan and, the organizational audit of the museum done in fiscal year 2013 by the DeVos Institute of Arts at The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, formed the base of the staff discussion concerning the strategic planning process with the Board of Directors.

In June of 2014, the Maryland African American Museum Corporation (MAAMC) Board of Directors approved up to \$10,000 in the FY 2015 operating budget to produce the 2015–2020 strategic plan. In December 2014, the museum held an all-day retreat with all members of the management team to focus on developing the strategic plan. The MAAMC full Board of Directors then held an all-day retreat in January, 2015 to review and discuss the management's recommendations on a revised mission statement and goals of the plan. Pursuant to the information and feedback provided by the board, management is currently engaged in refreshing the museum's mission and goals and formulating the supporting objectives. The museum expects to have a plan for board approval by fall, 2015.

Attendance Trends

Page 9 of the analyst's report depicts the decline in the attendance after 2008. That decline is most evident in 2013, which dramatically shows the impact of more than two years of absence of marketing and development leadership functions in the museum. In effect, the museum was virtually invisible to the public. In contrast to that situation, the significant improvement in attendance in 2014 reflects the presence of a stellar traveling exhibition and vigorous marketing activity coupled with the resources derived from collaboration with a private sector partner who also is a member of the board of directors. The past three months of aggressive growth from new

development leadership and outreach to businesses and other organizations are showing promising results for sustained growth in attendance. Supporting growth in museum attendance now is a recognized component of programmatic planning across every department of the organization, including special events and facility rentals.

Museum Audience Insight noted in September, 2013 that "Museums are losing attendance on both measures of audience share and size." *The Survey for Public Participation in the Arts* (SPPA) clarified that insight by saying that it did not imply dying participation at art and history museums, but a lessening of relevance. Relevance has become a key criterion for deciding the potential of an event or program to attract an audience. In addition to attracting visitors through vigorous marketing and development and engaging visitors with relevant programming we will:

- continue to diversify and broaden our social media outreach to attract a broader and more diverse range of visitors;
- build and maintain collaboration with other arts and cultural institutions and organizations;
- be a stronger presence across the regions of the state, beyond the city and metropolitan area;
- increase our outreach and activities with both public schools and the various non-public schools (i.e., private, charter, and parochial);
- identify relevance as a condition of sustaining excellence in all programs, including in-person events, lectures, music, children and family events, and films;
- establish the museum as a hub for serious cultural discussions and deliberation of those issues that impede the mutual understanding and progress towards unity of Americans;
- continue to promote the museum as an ideal space for professional meetings and social functions.

Fundraising Trends

Thanks to a new, strong presence with a Marketing Director since the fall of 2013, and an aggressive Development Director since the fall of 2014, the museum has begun to grow in ways it never could when these positions were vacant. We are establishing an open dialogue with community and national foundations, corporate philanthropists, the private business sector, and individual donors to bring them up to date on the mission and current state of the Reginald F. Lewis Museum, where we are headed, and how they can help us to grow financially. This is being done through in-person meetings and on-site meetings at the museum.

*Maryland African American Museum Corporation
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We are writing grants to populate our grants pipeline with financial submissions. Between November 2014 and January 2015, we have applied for 8 grants totaling 500,000 dollars, with 35 more grant applications to be submitted by the end of this June, 2015. These grants, if won, will assist the museum's operational, capital, programming and acquisitions needs as well as enhance our ability to reach out to underserved audiences, including schools, which have difficulty making museum field trips because of the cost of renting school buses. The museum will be in a stronger position to tell the stories of African American Marylanders in building the shared mission for heritage tourism.

We have developed successful marketing and online sales materials along with establishing a contact management program for client contact and follow up.

We are currently looking at in-house collections which have not been explored to date for their potential to attract sponsorship and thereby add new visibility and interest to the museum. The museum's Hecht Collection is a wonderful example of this. The collection was donated by the Hecht family and is composed of 3,000 jazz recordings and memorabilia dating back to 1929. It has the untapped potential of being a centerpiece among our collections and of bringing new attention, new members and recognition to the museum.

We are also looking forward to working with the new administration on an area of critical importance. There are several vacancies on the board for the Reginald F. Lewis Museum. A dedicated, diverse contributing board inclusive of a business, cultural, and philanthropic presence is the essential starting point of a successful nonprofit historical and cultural institution. The museum cannot move forward with the board in its current state. Current regulations allow up to 37 gubernatorial appointments to the board. Over the years 25 have been named; however, 17 of that 25 are now serving through expired terms and need re-appointment and, in some instances, replacement. We are hopeful to have these seats filled as soon as possible with contributing members of the business and cultural communities that are suitable for a 501(c) 3 organization.

Potential impact of 2.0% expense reduction on fundraising

The 2% reduction will retard the museum's ability to fully staff development and marketing functions. A membership position in the development department and a position in the marketing department are funded for another 18 months from an anonymous donor. In addition, a grants writer is currently supported in the operating budget for FY 2015 and FY 2016. At this time, we anticipate cutting 2.0% of our operating expenses in other areas as noted in our expense reduction plan.