

MELSA Legacy Committee White Paper
MELSA Advisory Board
Summer 2009 - Draft

Public libraries are essential institutions to the cultivation and dissemination of human knowledge, culture and art. Because public libraries have a long and successful history of serving the public in almost every community in the State of Minnesota, they are uniquely positioned to enrich the lives of all Minnesotans through the use of the cultural heritage proceeds.

In FY2010, MELSA will receive \$1,362,900.68 in the distribution of the Minnesota arts and Cultural Heritage Fund. During the summer of 2009, the MELSA member library directors met on a weekly basis to discuss the use of these dollars within the regional system.

The group recommends the following goals for this program:

- Highlight the unique role/position of public libraries in the cultural life and heritage of our communities, region and state.
- Develop sustainable partnerships between public libraries and other arts, cultural and educational organizations throughout the state.
- Utilize the local talent within arts and cultural organizations throughout the state.
- Develop innovative and exciting programs that our patrons want and use.
- Create cultural opportunities to serve the diverse demographics of our residents.
- Be good stewards of a limited financial resource.

These goals should be used to determine if programs and activities are appropriate.

In addition, after discussing the potential efforts of the program, the group feels the following recommendations will provide the most successful outcomes for the project in the first year:

- 1) The Regional Library Systems should receive the 2.5% administrative overhead for these programs, as identified in the legislation. These dollars will cover additional management costs, such as accounting and audit expenses, contract management, and evaluation.
- 2) MELSA should hire staff and consultants using RLBSS funds to develop this program.
- 3) MELSA should use strategies to help reduce costs on the local level, such as:
 - Participating in statewide projects
 - Develop region-wide projects
 - Create an on-line, vetted vendor list with ability to highlight best practice and negotiate prices centrally
 - Create electronic tools like electronic calendars and electronic reportingTo accomplish the strategies, it is recommended that the MELSA funds be distributed by: 10% statewide projects, 40% metro-wide projects; 50% for locally-developed programs.
- 4) MELSA should create an online program where patrons, artists and vendors could propose ideas for the use of these funds.

- 5) MELSA should hold a series of meetings in September 2009 to explore the public's goals for the expenditure of these funds.
- 6) MELSA should focus funding in thematic areas to maximize resources and publicity.
- 7) At the end of the first funding cycle, we need to estimate the impact on local costs for the legislature and make recommendations in this area.
- 8) It is appropriate to provide training and publications to build a legacy for library staff in regards to incorporating arts and history into library programming.

Legislative Intent

The group discussed some of the reasons why public libraries were selected to receive portions of this fund:

- Public libraries already host a huge number of cultural activities.
- Public libraries exist in communities around the state.
- The RLBSS formula has already been negotiated and includes both population and geographic distribution.
- The use of libraries does not require building additional administrative infrastructure.
- Libraries can attract matching funds from foundations and corporations.

Legislators have commented that they expect accountability, creativity and sustainability.

Other Questions

The library directors discussed a number of technical questions during their sessions. These discussion notes were passed along to the Council of Regional Public Library System Administrators and the State Librarian to be considered when the application process was being developed. (See attached document.) A brief summary of the MELSA-related questions follow:

What is administrative and what is allowable/ not allowable?

Allowable examples:

- PR/publications
- Supplies
- Books and media directly related to programs

Not Allowable examples:

- offset for library staff salaries
- subsidies for current collection needs
- payment for programs and activities that are currently underway utilizing government funding

Are storytimes cultural heritage?

Yes. Consider storytimes with a hook (e.g. Somali storytimes).

Could we buy expensive equipment, e.g. video equipment for a film contest?

Maybe – consider cost against outcome. (See statewide document concerning 5% rule.)

Can MELSA fund a position to coordinate this from other funds?

MELSA should consider supplementing the 2.5% using RLBSS funds. Not all regional systems can afford to do this. MELSA will have the largest pot of funds. There will be some significant start-up/development costs. The program needs to be successful in the Twin Cities area.

Can we pass through administration to other groups? e.g. MN book awards?

Yes, we can CONTRACT for project management with other groups and libraries. The accounting, evaluation, etc. responsibilities will stay with MELSA. If desired, MELSA can subgrant to other arts and cultural institutions. It can not subgrant to member libraries or their affiliates.

How can we leverage this so all (large and small systems) can participate?

This is a big issue. Small libraries have less success generating numbers at traditional programs. Need to be innovative and think differently. Are there opportunities in the virtual world? They also have less staff availability for support.

Should we focus the opportunities to certain topic areas?

Yes, for many reasons. It will help us focus our thinking. It will reduce costs. It will be a great way to market MELSA regionally. We could narrow by target audience or subject.

Do we include an educational component to the activities?

This is important and we should strive to include it in most projects.

How do we demonstrate that libraries are a "value-added" component to the Legacy Amendment appropriations?

We need to carve out areas that are not covered by the arts board and historical society, for example, a "people's university" or life long learning concept. We should try to tie a "literary" or "literacy" component into each project.

Do programs need to occur within a library?

Smaller libraries may need to hold events elsewhere in order to utilize funds. Yet, we need to demonstrate why libraries should be receiving these funds versus other organizations.

Conclusion: events should occur in a Library unless there are strong reasons that it should occur elsewhere.