



# Transforming Communities

Institute of Museum and Library Services  
Strategic Plan 2018–2022

## Cover Photo Credits

A staff member points out one of the hundreds of free-flying tropical butterflies in the Tropical Butterfly House. Photo courtesy of Pacific Science Center, Seattle, WA.

Girl helps a carpenter at Conner Prairie. Photo courtesy of Conner Prairie Interactive History Park, Fishers, IN.

Father and daughter explore a library. Photo by Ronnie Kaufman, Fotosearch.

Visitors explore Dino Quest, an interactive exhibit that features life-size dinosaurs. Photo courtesy of Discovery Cube, Santa Ana, CA.

A family gets creative at a workshop. Photo courtesy of the Columbia Museum of Art, Columbia, SC.

A staff member presents a photograph to a school group. Photo courtesy of the Japanese American National Museum, Los Angeles, CA.

## Spotlight Photo Credits

Page 3: Through IMLS grants, the Denver Museum of Nature & Science purchased closed cabinets to properly house collections and promote access for staff, researchers, volunteers, and students. Photo courtesy of the Denver Museum of Nature & Science, Denver, CO.

Page 5: Boy participates in an afterschool program developed as part of the Carson City Library's digital learning project. Photo courtesy of Carson City Library, Carson City, NV.

Page 7: A young visitor reads a guide to the artworks in the collection galleries of the Barnes. Photo by Ryan Donnell courtesy of the Barnes Foundation, Philadelphia, PA.

Page 9: Officials from the New Jersey State Library Talking Book and Braille Center and Vineland Veterans Memorial Home explore the Outspoken Library. Photo Courtesy of the New Jersey State Library, Trenton, NJ.

Page 11: Multicultural Service Coordinator Bassem Gayed helps a U.S. military service member in the library business center. Photo Courtesy of Otis Library, Norwich, CT.

## Citations for Facts & Figures

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IMLS will provide an audio recording of the publication upon request.

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IMLS thanks the staff, partners, and stakeholders who contributed their knowledge, time, and expertise in the shaping of this strategic plan.



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Institute of Museum and Library Services  
955 L'Enfant Plaza North, SW, Suite 4000  
Washington, DC 20024-2135  
202-653-IMLS (4357)

[www.ims.gov](http://www.ims.gov)

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# Transforming Communities

## Vision

A nation where museums and libraries work together to transform the lives of individuals and communities.

## Mission

The mission of IMLS is to advance, support, and empower America's museums, libraries, and related organizations through grantmaking, research, and policy development.

## Museums and libraries across America are central to the communities they serve.

From the northernmost reaches of Alaska to the southern coasts of Florida, libraries and museums weave together the communities that form the vibrant fabric of American society.

The U.S. is a very different nation than it was even five years ago. We now have access to a dazzling array of new technologies, information, and ideas.

As a result, in today's modern economy, libraries and museums face many challenges, as well as a new world of opportunities. Now more than ever, they are helping us define who we are, learn about where we've been, and think about where we can go.

Success in our society requires information literacy, self-reliance, and the ability to collaborate, communicate effectively, and solve problems. Museums and libraries help inspire the pursuit of new information, encourage a spirit of inquiry, and build collective knowledge for our nation.

Fundamentally, the many thousands of museums and libraries across America provide critical resources that people and communities need to thrive in the 21st century.

Without libraries and museums, it would be more difficult and potentially impossible for many to pursue an education, seek employment, find sources of trusted information, and be fully engaged in community life. They provide Americans of all backgrounds with access to vital opportunities.

When IMLS was established by the Museum and Library Services Act of 1996, bringing together federal programs dating back to 1956, lawmakers recognized that U.S. libraries and museums are powerful national assets. They saw “great potential in an Institute that is focused on the combined roles that libraries and museums play in our community life.” The law charges IMLS with advising policymakers on library, museum, and information services and supporting a wide range of programs that improve the lives of millions.

We carry forth this charge as we adapt to meet the changing needs of our nation’s museums and libraries and their communities. IMLS’s role—to advance, support, and empower America’s museums and libraries through our grantmaking, research, data collection, and policy development—is essential to helping these institutions navigate change and continue to improve their services.

As the agency enters its third decade, we bring a new and heightened understanding of IMLS’s great responsibility. We recognize that America’s museums, libraries, and their communities challenge IMLS to lead, and there has never been a better opportunity for our agency and the institutions we serve to achieve positive change together.

The result is *Transforming Communities*, the IMLS Strategic Plan 2018-2022. This plan, developed with input from our stakeholders, frames how we envision meeting the essential information, education, research, economic, cultural, and civic needs of the American public over the next five years.

It is our hope that this vision will spark new conversations, inspire meaningful collaboration, address the challenges of the future, and empower libraries and museums to transform communities across the nation.



## Values

### Integrity

We uphold the public trust.

### Community

We make a difference for museums, libraries, and all the communities we serve.

### One Team

We commit to collaboration, accountability, and mutual respect in our work together.

### Excellence

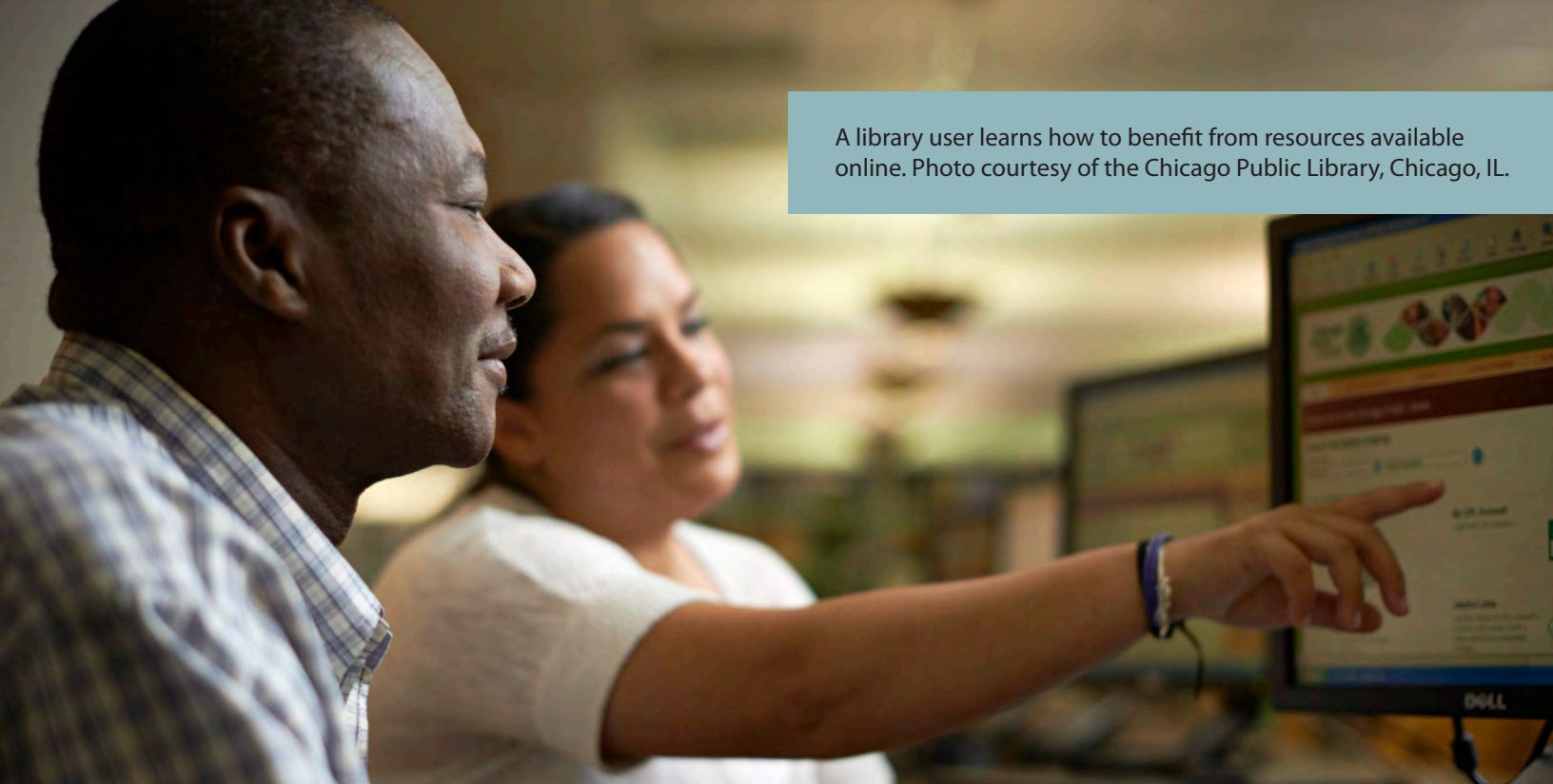
We strive for exceptional results in our work to empower museums and libraries.

### Innovation

We foster an attitude of discovery, driving new and practical solutions.

### Stewardship

We care for and enhance the resources and knowledge entrusted to us.



A library user learns how to benefit from resources available online. Photo courtesy of the Chicago Public Library, Chicago, IL.

## Goal 1: Promote Lifelong Learning

Children who visited a museum during kindergarten had higher achievement scores in reading, mathematics, and science in third grade than children who did not.

### **IMLS supports learning and literacy for people of all ages through museums and libraries.**

Learning isn't limited to a classroom or to school-aged children. It's a lifelong endeavor, and America's museums and libraries provide rich learning experiences to individuals of all ages, backgrounds, and circumstances.

Museums and libraries encourage exploration, analysis, and questioning. They foster among visitors an attitude of discovery, helping cultivate critical thinking, creativity, communication, and collaboration.

With their varied collections and trained educators and staff, libraries and museums help people gain the literacies and life skills they need for employment in today's economy.

To meet the needs of school-age learners, museums and libraries partner with early learning centers, schools, colleges, universities, and extension programs to extend valuable learning experiences beyond the classroom. They enable hands-on and self-directed learning by providing spaces where families can learn and grow together.

Over the next five years, IMLS will build on its 20-year history of supporting the work of museum and library leaders. The agency will aim to help institutions address the learning needs of their communities and leverage the many new digital learning resources available today.

The agency will explore the body of research on dynamic learning environments and inquiry-based methods of learning. IMLS will initiate new conversations with nonprofits, foundations, institutions of higher education, and other organizations.

## Objectives

1. Enhance library and museum resources that foster early, digital, information, health, financial, media, civic, and other types of literacies.
2. Support cross-disciplinary and inquiry-based methods of learning within museums and libraries.
3. Invest in library and museum programs that focus on continuous learning for families and individuals of diverse cultural and socio-economic backgrounds and needs.
4. Leverage the distinct role of museums and libraries as trusted sources of information.



## Spotlight

IMLS is investing in several projects through its special initiatives and discretionary grants that advance digital inclusion, as well as early and family learning.

Through the agency's STEMeX grants initiative, for example, family learning in museums and libraries is being strengthened by STEM experts drawn from the local community. With an IMLS grant, Loyola University of Chicago has partnered with the Chicago Children's Museum and the Evanston Public Library. The partners are examining different approaches for engineering experts to incorporate artifacts and personal stories into STEM programs centered on families.

**Museums receive more than 55 million visits each year from student groups.**

Young visitors take part in a hands-on activity at a discovery cart. Photo courtesy of the Pacific Science Center, Seattle, WA.



## Goal 2: Build Capacity

Museums pump more than \$50 billion into the U.S. economy annually, support more than 726,000 American jobs, generate \$12 billion in tax revenue, and spur tourism from around the world.

### **IMLS strengthens the capacity of museums and libraries to improve the well-being of their communities.**

Museums and libraries can play central roles in achieving positive change. However, to help transform their communities, museums and libraries need staff training and support for implementing new approaches and exploring methods of community collaboration.

Now more than ever, libraries and museums are building new partnerships with public and private organizations to strengthen connections to their communities. They are uniquely valued as trusted spaces that bring people and organizations together to tackle local challenges.



Building on extensive knowledge of the museum and library sectors and a high-level view of successful initiatives, IMLS will administer innovative programs that invest in recruitment, training, and professional development opportunities for museums and libraries, and support their ability to implement best practices.

The agency will also build the capacity of museums and libraries to support their community networks by sharing new cross-cutting frameworks, tools, and ways of assessing needs and evaluating impact that can be scaled up and replicated in multiple communities.

## Objectives

1. Support the recruitment, training, and development of library and museum staff, boards, and volunteers, helping to grow a skilled, professional workforce.
2. Encourage library and museum professionals and institutions to share and adopt best practices and innovations.
3. Identify trends in the museum and library fields to help organizations make informed decisions.
4. Promote the ability of museums and libraries to serve as trusted spaces for community engagement and dialogue.



## Spotlight

Launched in 2017, Museums Empowered, a special initiative of the Museums for America grant program, helps institutions of all sizes and disciplines increase their capacity to better respond to their communities through staff professional development opportunities.

The Discovery Center at Murfree Spring in Tennessee is using its IMLS grant to create a culture of evaluation. The project is training staff on how to integrate new methods of multi-pronged evaluation strategically across the institution, gather data, and demonstrate institutional impact.

**Volunteers contribute over a million hours of service to museums each week.**

Campers explore a bookmobile as part of a summer day camp that takes them to the library and five city museums. Photo by Gregg Richards, courtesy of the Brooklyn Public Library, Brooklyn, NY.



## Goal 3: Increase Public Access

81% of people in the U.S. have visited a public library or bookmobile.

**IMLS makes strategic investments that increase access to information, ideas, and networks through libraries and museums.**

Libraries and museums are trusted stewards of our nation's knowledge and collections. They care for, conserve, manage, and provide access to information that represents the cultural, artistic, historical, natural, and scientific foundations of our shared heritage.

Increasingly, museums and libraries are making their resources more accessible for people of all ages, backgrounds, and abilities. This includes widespread programs and services to accommodate the one in six people in America who have a disability.

Through their programs and services, these institutions are building cultural, economic, and geographic connections, helping contribute to a more inclusive and equitable society.

Providing broadband access continues to be a vital service of our nation's public libraries. Access to the internet, as well as related training, helps community members find new jobs, succeed in school, and obtain essential government services.

With IMLS support, museums and libraries are increasingly digitizing their collections, building their online presence, and opening doors for visitors, users, students, and scholars, wherever they may be.

By encouraging shared systems, networks, staff training, and open-source technologies, IMLS will help fulfill a vision of making library and museum resources more accessible for all.

## Objectives

1. Support the stewardship of museum and library collections at institutions of all types and sizes.
2. Invest in tools, technology, and training that enable people of all backgrounds and abilities to discover and use museum and library collections and resources.
3. Invest in policies and partnerships that address barriers to accessing museum and library collections, programs, and information.
4. Increase access to IMLS, museum, library, and community knowledge through effective communications.

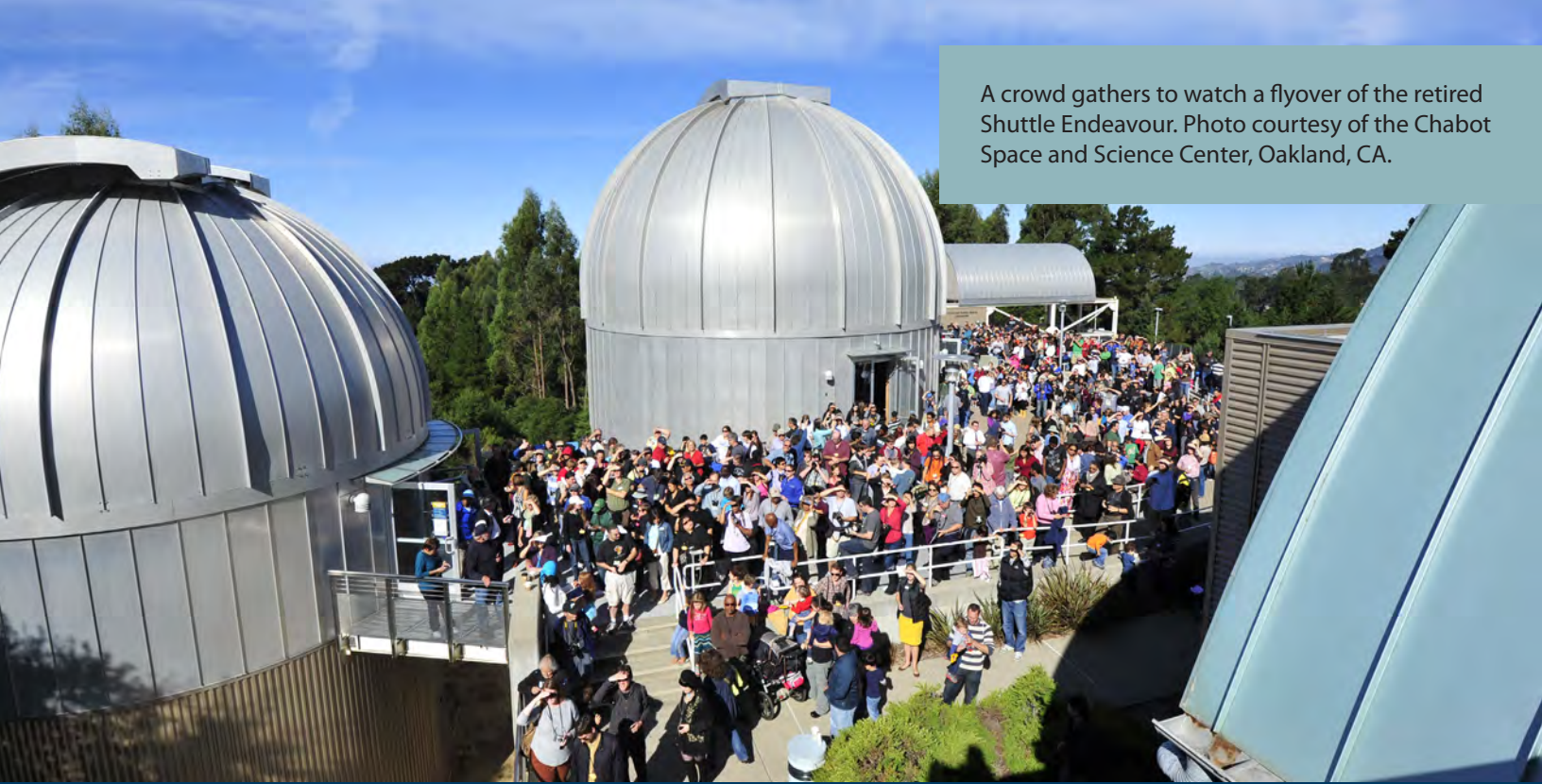


## Spotlight

Over the past two decades, IMLS has focused on developing, providing access to, and improving digital library tools, content, services, and infrastructures through competitive grants and its Grants to States program.

A component of the Library Services Technology Act, IMLS Grants to States annually provides population-based grants to each state's library administrative agency. From 2002 to 2011, the Grants to States program supplied \$980 million to support increased access to digital information, including \$67 million toward the digitization of local history and special collections.

**People visited America's public libraries more than 1.3 billion times in 2015.**



A crowd gathers to watch a flyover of the retired Shuttle Endeavour. Photo courtesy of the Chabot Space and Science Center, Oakland, CA.

## Goal 4: **Achieve Excellence**

**Over 99%  
of public  
libraries  
offer free  
access to  
the Internet.**

### **IMLS strategically aligns its resources and relationships to support libraries and museums nationwide.**

IMLS recognizes the enduring importance of its statutory mission: to serve the people of America through museum, library, and information services.

As a federal grantmaker, IMLS will seek new ways to increase the impact of its investments for the benefit of museums, libraries, and the American public.

Over the next five years, IMLS will seek public feedback and identify needs and trends to help inform the development of new federal grant programs and initiatives. The agency will engage with stakeholders through face-to-face meetings, site visits, and regular interaction at events across the nation.

To maximize its public value, IMLS will also explore a wide range of partnerships, including those that focus on underserved populations, advance broadband accessibility and digital literacy, and support early learning.

IMLS will help museums and libraries build sustainable programs and services by encouraging grantees to collaborate and engage with community partners. To accomplish this, IMLS funding will aim to stimulate additional local investment and community commitment.

IMLS will continue to act as an effective steward of government resources and as a responsive, model federal agency with a strong understanding of the needs of museum and library stakeholders and their communities.

## Objectives

1. Attract, develop, and engage an effective and dedicated workforce, fostering innovation, collaboration, and learning.
2. Adapt to the changing needs of the museum and library fields by incorporating proven approaches as well as new ideas into IMLS programs and services.
3. Design IMLS grants and awards to encourage communities to invest resources, funding, and other support for museums and libraries.
4. Seek effective partnerships with federal leadership and nonprofit and private organizations to promote the public value of museums and libraries.



## Spotlight

The IMLS Community Catalyst initiative explores the readiness of museums and libraries to adopt collaborative models in order to create positive community change.

Responding to momentum within the museum and library professions, this initiative builds upon the practices and expertise of the philanthropic, research, and public sectors. The result is a special grant opportunity focusing on collective impact, helping museums and libraries explore and incorporate new methods of partnering with their communities.

**More than 171 million people in America have library cards.**

## About Us

The Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) is an independent grantmaking agency and the primary source of federal support for the nation's libraries and museums. IMLS helps ensure that all Americans have access to museum, library, and information services.

The agency supports innovation, lifelong learning, and cultural and civic engagement, enabling museums and libraries from geographically and economically diverse areas to deliver essential services that make it possible for individuals and communities to thrive.

IMLS was created with the passage of the Museum and Library Services Act of 1996. The agency is authorized to award financial assistance, collect data, form strategic partnerships, and advise policymakers and other federal agencies on museum, library, and information services. The agency consolidated federal library programs dating back to 1956, and museum programs dating back to 1976.

Today, IMLS responds to the needs and opportunities expressed by communities through their libraries and museums, bringing innovative approaches to help ensure that people across the nation have access to essential information.

The agency has an expansive reach across the country and through a large variety of institutions. IMLS's discretionary grants are selected through a highly respected and competitive peer review process, drawing on professionals located across the nation. IMLS builds capacity within the museum and library fields to enable better service to communities and to enhance community decision-making by sharing trends and data.

IMLS is led by a director who is a presidential appointee confirmed by the Senate and advised by the National Museum and Library Services Board. The board, a 23-member advisory body that includes the IMLS director, the deputy director for libraries, the deputy director for museums, and 20 presidentially appointed individuals, advises on general policy and practices and helps with the selections for the National Medals for Museum and Library Service.

# Legislative History

**2010:** On December 22, 2010, the Museum and Library Services Act of 2010 was signed. The new law emphasized the critical role of libraries and museums in meeting the essential information, education, research, economic, cultural, and civic needs of the people of the United States. In addition to codifying the Laura Bush Librarians for the 21st Century program, the law also provided IMLS with responsibility for advising the President and Congress on library, museum, and information services policy and enhanced the agency's federal partnership role.

**2007:** On December 26, 2007, IMLS was given the responsibility for library data collections formerly handled by the U.S. Department of Education, as well as carrying out the mission of the former National Commission on Libraries and Information Science.

**2003:** On September 25, 2003, the Museum and Library Services Act of 2003 was signed into law. It established the National Museum and Library Services Board and added new authority to identify national needs and analyze the impact of library, museum, and information services in serving the needs of the public.

On December 16, 2003, the National Museum of African American History and Culture Act was enacted, which provided the IMLS director with authority to support museums of African American history and culture.

**1996:** On September 30, 1996, the Museum and Library Services Act of 1996 was signed, establishing the Institute of Museum and Library Services. The law brought together federal museum programs dating back to 1976, carried out by the Institute of Museum Services, and federal library programs established in 1956.



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