

Selecting Venues

It is likely that there is no more important task for a state coordinator than overseeing the selection and confirmation of venues for the exhibition tour. Sample forms and calls for application templates from previous state humanities council participants are available at the MoMS web site.

The ideal Museum on Main Street venue is characterized by organization and enthusiasm among community members. While some towns may lack a museum-quality facility, there is no substitute for the sheer energy demonstrated by local participants. The qualities of community pride, imagination, a willingness to learn, and enthusiasm for “The Smithsonian Coming to Town” are at the heart of any Museum on Main Street success.

Criteria to consider when selecting your venues:

- **POPULATION:** Museum on Main Street is expressly designed to reach rural cultural organizations and the audiences they serve. From the exhibition format to the philosophy behind program development, “rural” is at the core of this project. Unfortunately there is not a uniform definition of “rural” that satisfies every state and every situation. Experience tells us that Museum on Main Street can work very well in towns of fewer than 2,000 (successful venues have been selected in towns with less than 500 residents), and that the project is frequently lost in communities over 20,000. Towns with populations of 4,000-8,000 seem ideal. It all depends on the dedication of the local project team. In larger communities, especially those with cultural organizations of notable size that may offer their own cultural experiences, a MoMS project can be lost in the crowd.

NOTE: There are certain situations that warrant the selection of a venue that is not rural. Some states have concluded their state tours with a showing at a State Fair (featuring the stories and collections of rural towns). In addition, sometimes the exhibition can be used to political or promotional advantage in larger cities or neighborhood museums in urban areas, however these are exceptions to the rule. Museum on Main Street is meant for underserved rural audiences, enabling remote towns to participate in a unique experience not found in more populated communities. State councils wishing to place a MoMS exhibition in a non-rural venue may want to first contact the MoMS office to discuss their request before confirming the venue.

- **HOST ORGANIZATION:** Although small museums constitute the majority of MoMS host venues, libraries and other cultural organizations also make fine host sites. Consider whether or not the applying organization has ever worked with the state council before. If not, this could be an opportunity to develop a new relationship. Does the host organization have special or timely events that could augment the exhibition such as an anniversary year or a facility re-opening? Does the organization have the staff and/or local committee potential to successfully host a MoMS exhibition?

- **FACILITY:** MoMS exhibitions are designed for remote museums or cultural organizations with severe space limitations, especially non-traditional gallery spaces that require compact configurations. For these reasons, they are intentionally designed to be small and portable. Conversely this means that they may not work well in large spaces, where their impact can be lost. Experience has shown that placing a MoMS exhibition in a large venue, such as a conference ballroom or field house does not bring optimal results.
- **GEOGRAPHIC DISTRIBUTION:** State humanities councils often aim for broad geographic distribution when selecting their MoMS venues—looking for “dots on a map.” While this strategy can be highly effective and can make for easier, less conflicted publicity efforts, be sure to take into account cross-state shipping expenses and remember that geography should not be the only factor considered when selecting a MoMS venue. It is also wise to see if towns just outside state boundaries may be hosting the same exhibition through a different state council.
- **POLITICAL IMPLICATIONS:** Selecting a venue solely for political reasons limits the potential of MoMS. While there can be advantages to placing an exhibition in a certain political district, make sure that the host institution and community are fully dedicated to the project and satisfy some of the other criteria listed above.
- **NUMBER OF VENUES:** Just as you have flexibility in which venues to select, you also have flexibility in the number of venues. However, the resources MoMS provides for your state are based on the exhibit going to six venues in a ten-month tour. It is recommended that you keep the number of venues as close to six as possible because it will directly impact the number of weeks the exhibition will be at each venue and the number of publications and PR resources available to each site.
- **SITE VISITS:** Councils often discover that they have more organizations applying to be a host site for a tour than there are spots available. Many state tour coordinators find it helpful to make site visits in order to assess each facility and determine the level of commitment that the organization/community has for the project. This is especially helpful if the site in question is an organization that has never worked with the council.

Confirming and Announcing Your Tour

Once you have determined the sites for your tour, we ask that you discuss your selections with your MoMS liaison before notifying the sites and/or making any public announcements. This allows MoMS time to help you handle any sites that may be atypical or may need special attention.

Scheduling the Tour

• **LENGTH OF EXHIBITION STAY:** Our experience shows that the ideal length of each exhibition showing is no fewer than four weeks and no more than eight weeks. This avoids over-taxing the spare resources of rural museums and helps maintain an enthusiastic momentum for public programs and activities. (Please see the suggested itinerary for guidelines.) Scheduling showings of significantly shorter duration increases unnecessary wear and tear on the exhibition and raises challenges regarding installation and de-installation. It also limits the local programming that is key to a successful MoMS experience. We pride ourselves in each council's ability to extend local ownership of the Smithsonian through rich local exhibits, special events and hands-on activities. Without public programs planned for shorter stops, the public at

such venues may have a shallow experience with the exhibition, which is an unfortunate event since state councils can link venues and the public to rich content.

- **TIME ALLOTTED BETWEEN VENUES:** You should allow for at least one week between opening and closing dates on the itinerary. Timing depends largely on two factors: the preferences of the communities (they often want to accommodate a community festival/holiday or special event) and your shipping arrangements (if you are moving the exhibit with a commercial carrier you should allow a minimum of 10 days between venues).

- **CONFIRMING THE ITINERARY:** Approximately one year before your opening date, please have the venues and dates confirmed in a statewide itinerary and send it to SITES. We will attach the itinerary as an addendum to your exhibition contract and add information on your schedule to our exhibition database. Your venues will also be listed in our exhibition calendar. Confirming your itinerary as early as possible helps in many ways: maximizing your ability to secure statewide sponsorships; boosting local fundraising success; and improving publicity opportunities.

One year before your MoMS tour begins, please forward the following information for each venue to SITES:

- Opening and Closing Dates
- Host Organization Name
- Host Organization Mailing Address (if PO Box please also include shipping address)
- City, State, Zip
- Local Coordinator Name
- Local Coordinator Phone Number
- Local Coordinator Fax Number
- Local Coordinator Email
- Venue/Host Organization URL
- Exhibition Venue (if different from Host)
- Shipping Address (actual street address for deliveries/exhibition shipments)
- Contact information for Exhibition Site
- Public Phone Number for Exhibition Venue and/or Host