

UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT

Memorandum

TO : State-Based Program Officers

DATE: March 10, 1977

FROM : Geoffrey Marshall *gm.*

SUBJECT: Revision of Program Focus.

I want to set down my summary of our discussion with John Barcroft and Alex Lacy on March 9 about how a state-based committee should go about seeking Endowment approval for a change in program focus. What follows is designed to speak most directly to the circumstance of a committee that wishes to change the focus of an extant grant, but in general terms the answer would be the same for a committee considering changes for a future grant application.

We agreed, first, that until approval for a change is sought, a committee is authorized only to operate according to the terms and understandings of its present grant. In order to change program focus, a committee will submit a plan which reflects the following process. The format of the plan was not discussed, but I assume it will be a narrative, conveyed to us by means of a cover letter from the committee chairman.

--Process--

1. Possibilities for change.

Either the staff or members of the committee will propose that the committee explore changes in program--perhaps through specific suggestions (e.g., some form of museum grants) or by an investigation of the whole question (e.g., by means of a sub-committee). The proposed avenues for change will be the object of--

2. Consultation.

The committee will use some mechanism to explore the proposed changes with individuals outside the committee. The intent would be to test the proposed changes against the judgments of these individuals and/or to prompt additional ideas for programs. One mechanism mentioned for consultation was the use of the typical annual program evaluation conference.



There are countless ways, on a variety of scales, that consultation might be accomplished.

3. Committee deliberation.

After consultation, the committee would weigh what it has learned through consultation and determine upon: the choices it wishes to make, the impact it hopes these choices will have, the priorities that will be given if more than one focus is selected, and the outline of program development efforts (including the publication of revised guidelines) that the new program focus will require.

4. Submission of proposed plan to the Endowment.

The committee will submit a plan for its new program focus which contains a narrative account of the preceding three steps, though not necessarily in chronological order. The plan is not so much a history of what brought the committee to the present point, but a rationale, an argument for the proposed change. One way, obviously, to give evidence for the committee supposition that the proposed change will serve the adult citizens of the state is to show that the possibility has been considered by a number of such citizens who were enthusiastic about the possibility. (I am not assuming that numbers are the key to the degree of persuasiveness in this argument. It depends. Sometimes the judgment of a selected number of highly qualified commentators may be just as effective.) Other types of argumentation mentioned were: evidence from applications received, found to be of some merit, but nevertheless rejected as outside current guidelines, and information received in the course of staff and committee travel throughout the state.

5. Approval of the plan.

The plan will be considered on the basis, in the first instance, of whether it sets forth an humanities program, and, in the second instance, on the basis of the quality of its rationale. The sorts of questions that we assume will be asked about a proposal are: what is the source of the idea for the proposed change? how has the idea been tested? what sort of argument does the committee provide

for including this additional type of programming and the proposed priority it will receive? is there a plan for implementing the change if it is approved?

6. Publication of new guidelines.

This is, of course, a metaphor for the entire process required of any grant-making body in the implementation of a program, with the special care that is required when public funds are involved as well as extensive eligibility for application. A committee will need to broadcast the new possibilities as widely as it can so as to insure equal access to the competition to all interested groups, organizations, and agencies.

I understood from our conversation, also, that the substance of the plan for programmatic change would no doubt vary according to the seriousness of the change. We were not able to imagine any inconsequential program change, but some changes could be proposed by means of less elaborate plans than others.

Finally, it should be said that this outline is in no significant way different from the procedure required of every state-based committee in establishing its program in the first instance. The first step was-- in the old days--assisted by the Endowment through the creation of a catalyst group of citizens. But, from that point on, something like these steps took place in every case.

At the moment, I am not convinced these steps need to be spelled out in a memorandum or letter from us. Because they are, essentially, familiar from each committee's history, I think the outline can be suggested orally. The key point of emphasis, I think, is that the proposed plan is to be weighed on the basis of the rationale it provides, and, further (though I do not think this point needs to be made to the committees themselves), I would imagine that the plans would not be assessed in terms of whether the conclusions reached seemed correct. That is, if a committee has put a tentative idea before a series of program development conferences and the response was universally enthusiastic, I think the plan will be approved, even if the idea is preposterous from our point of view. The committee in this example did consult, and not superficially.

Please let me know your thoughts on this outline.