

March 18, 2020

Museums Must Be Included in COVID - 19 Stimulus Package

Museums of all sizes are experiencing closures. To prevent or slow the spread of Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) on March 16, 2020 Governor Dunleavy ordered all museums, libraries and archives to close initially until March 31, 2020. Until the crisis is under control, longer closers could occur. Each year, more than 1.86 million visitors come to Alaska museums. The museum industry in Alaska directly supports 300 jobs and generates \$280 million financial impact on the economy in Alaska. Right now 116 museums in the State of Alaska are closed. On March 17, Museums Alaska issued a quick survey to museums to determine the economic impacts of COVID-19 on the Alaska museum community. The 34 respondents indicated that there are both immediate, short-term, and long-term impacts to this pandemic. Seven respondents indicated they have immediate needs for cash to make payroll and pay rent at their facilities. The 14 respondents that calculated projected financial losses due to closures estimate that they will lose \$3,392,000 this summer. These are the projected losses for only 14 of the 116 Alaska museums. Front of the house staff are being laid off or furloughed. Programs, tours and events are being cancelled. Revenue generating efforts, such as general admission, store sales, facility rentals, programmatic fees, are all stopped. In fact refunds are being processed. With the decline in oil prices, the suspension of Cruise ship visitors, and the overall fear of travel world wide, Alaska museum are facing a perfect storm of being able to sustain themselves. Additionally, as the stock market continues to falter, donors are reassessing their charitable donations. Any economic stimulus needs to include Museums.

On a positive note, museums are the most trusted source of information in America, rated higher than local papers, nonprofit researchers, the US government, or academic researchers. Museums can take advantage of this high level of public trust to provide education on COVID-19 and fight misinformation about its spread.

What our members are saying

Here are some of the written responses that we received from Alaska museum directors:

“We can only afford to pay staff through the end of the month and are unable to pay rent effective immediately.”

“With no [museum] tours, there will be very little jobs to hire for. This has a major impact on the community of Klukwan, a community of below 90, as we hire about 30 people annually. This economic disruption could affect upward of a third of the community. Annual winter programming relies on summer revenues, so next winter, we will not be able to offer cultural camps, vital to the Tlingit culture.”

“We were already facing an unrelated budget crisis, so COVID-19 has suddenly put us into a battle for survival.”

“We are a designated federal and state repository and the largest of its kind in Alaska. Our collections require ongoing care and maintenance of the facility (for example, liquid nitrogen vats) and we cannot simply close the doors and walk away. In order to preserve these state and federal resources, financial help is required.”

“Since no cruise ships, most likely there will be no income for the year (since almost all income tied to tourism).”

“We would benefit from grants and donations to cover overhead costs until the crisis ends.”

Sincerely,



Della Hall

Executive Director