

GLOBE EDITORIAL

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Bricks and mortar for the Muses

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CALL THE architects and line up the contractors: 62 cultural organizations across Massachusetts have just received \$16.7 million in new state grants to fund repairs and renovations, along with technical assistance and construction feasibility studies.

It's a victory that will help cultural organizations grow and contribute even more to the economy. But for this effort to take root, the Legislature must keep the money coming - even increase it.

This first round of awards goes to well-loved institutions, including the Museum of Science, the Walden Woods Project, and the Berkshire Museum. Because all 62 institutions have to raise dollar-for-dollar matching funds, the grant program will have a \$33 million impact.

The money comes from the Massachusetts Cultural Facilities Fund, which was created in an economic stimulus bill that the Legislature passed in 2006, after a Boston Foundation report pointed out that cultural organizations faced bills for deferred maintenance totaling \$1.1 billion over five years.

Instead of being overwhelmed by the staggering size of the need, the state put two groups in charge, the Massachusetts Cultural Council and MassDevelopment, the state's finance and development authority.

The goal was to fund projects in various cultural disciplines and regions that had local support and that could benefit tourism. If an eligible organization didn't get a grant, it would still walk away with a solid proposal that it could present to other funders.

Despite those benefits, the future funding of the initiative is uncertain. The initial legislative appropriation for the facilities fund was \$13 million. But the fiscal year 2008 amount was only \$5 million, money that was added to the pot to help finance these first grants.

In 2009, legislators should put at least \$13 million into the fund. This money helps large institutions like the Museum of Fine Arts, and it helps smaller organizations take smart steps, deciding whether it makes more sense, for example, to add exhibit space or expand a ticket booth.

The state has to "capitalize on the competitive advantage" created by the fund, explains Dan Hunter, a champion of the fund and the executive director of the Massachusetts Advocates for the Arts, Sciences, and Humanities.

To make the benefits clear, current grant recipients should scrupulously document the impact of their grants, including numbers of jobs created, numbers of additional tickets sold, and any observable increases in hotel and restaurant revenues nearby.

Given this state's rich culture and the tourism competition from other states, Massachusetts has to keep investing in its cultural facilities. Respect and admiration alone won't prevent their decay. ■