



March 13, 2020

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi  
Speaker of the House  
United States House of Representatives

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy  
Minority Leader  
United States House of Representatives

The Honorable Mitch McConnell  
Majority Leader  
United States Senate

The Honorable Chuck Schumer  
Minority Leader  
United States Senate

Dear Speaker Pelosi, Leader McCarthy, Leader McConnell, and Leader Schumer:

We are writing on behalf of thousands of nonprofit organizations throughout the United States that are involved in engaging the public on issues of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM). Our associations represent organizations in every state and district in America, which together engage hundreds of millions of people per year and employ more than 100,000 full- and part-time staff. These community institutions include science and technology centers and museums, children's museums, natural history museums, nature centers, aquariums, zoos, planetariums, public gardens, and multi-disciplinary museums with major science programming, as well as companies, consultants, and other organizations that share an interest in science education and public engagement in science.

In any emergency funding supplemental provided by Congress to advance the nation's preparedness, response, and recovery in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic, now declared a national emergency, we urgently ask for consideration of our member institutions and similar organizations and the work they do to serve local communities in any legislation relevant to the current COVID-19 coronavirus disease outbreak.

Our members are being deeply impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. A growing number have temporarily closed their doors, either in response to requirements from elected officials or out of immediate concerns for public health and safety, in response to the recommendations of scientists and public-health experts to implement social distancing.<sup>1</sup> Even those institutions that remain open are seeing a dramatic drop in visitors, as well as cancellation of school field trips, teacher professional-development programs, and other hosted events, representing earned revenue losses that cause a significant local economic impact, risking the employment of part-time and full-time staff, and causing the cancellation of contracts and vendor relationships. Some members of our

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<sup>1</sup> A crowdsourced shared document has tracked well over 150 museum closures in the United States as of March 13. We know from our conversations with our members that many more museums will close today and next week. See, for example: <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1LW2hsErFZqdPZLs0TfOOSsmwOnRPhbUyemObIIAgwLU/preview>

networks that have remained open have reported that attendance numbers are down by as much as 90 percent over the past two weeks.

As institutions that depend on earned revenue from attendance to deliver their societal missions to advance public understanding of—and engagement with—science, technology, and our natural world,<sup>2</sup> these closures and dramatic drops in visitors will have severe impacts on our members and their ability to weather the current crisis. Like most nonprofit organizations, many of our members have limited financial reserves and are not able to continue to pay staff if revenue is decreased or eliminated. Personnel expenses generally make up more than half of our institutions' budgets. In addition, as many are place-based institutions that interact with large public audiences where many full- and part-time staff are not in a position to telework and will likely have to be furloughed.

The COVID-19 outbreak comes at an especially inopportune time, as spring and summer tend to be the most active time for many members of our community and a time of year that they rely upon to build up cash reserves to carry through the slower periods of the year.

Organizations like science and technology centers and museums, children's museums, zoos and aquariums, natural history museums, public and botanic gardens, and many other multi-disciplinary museums with major science programming play a leading role in educating the public about science and are among the nation's most trusted institutions. Indeed, our members are rising to the occasion by engaging their communities, educating them about COVID-19, convening conversations between the public and experts, and increasingly serving the public online.

The New York Hall of Science, for example, developed a pop-up display on coronavirus in a matter of days that they have made freely available to other institutions; in less than two weeks since it was released, this exhibition is already in use by several dozen museums around the world. The Museum of Science, Boston, partnered with WGBH to host a free, community-wide town-hall forum on the COVID-19 coronavirus, which was available both in person and online, to discuss the issues associated with this pandemic. Several museums in Washington state, such as KidsQuest in Bellevue and Greentrike in Tacoma, are providing day camps and other educational programming to the children of first responders while school are closed. Despite being forced to close to the public, the Pacific Science Center in Seattle, is hosting a livestream event later in the month. The Lawrence Hall of Science in Berkeley, California will be delivering digital-science learning experiences to youth and families while schools are closed, and many of our other members have online virtual resources, content, lesson plans, and programs in place and in development.

Both the recovery of our nation from this emergency—and longer-term efforts to advance public health and scientific research to prevent and minimize the impact of future similar events—depend upon a public that is engaged with scientific issues and students who are excited about pursuing STEM careers. Our members are critical to this future, and we urge you to ensure that these community-based organizations remain vibrant and able to resume their mission to engage, inspire, and increase public understanding of the science that underpins successful responses to crises such as pandemics.

We respectfully request that you include economic relief for museums and other cultural organizations—including science and technology centers and museums, children's museums, natural history museums, nature centers, aquariums, zoos, planetariums, public and botanic gardens, arboreta, and other museums with major programming in the sciences—in any COVID-19-related

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<sup>2</sup> Results from ASTC's most recent member survey show that 50 percent of revenue for U.S. institutions comes from earned income, which includes admission revenue, education and program fees, memberships, and facilities rental.

economic relief legislation. By ensuring that these nonprofit organizations are eligible to apply for emergency funds, you will enable them to continue being trusted sources for information, innovative education and engagement, now and in the future. In representing our members as nonprofit organizations, public-private partnerships, and businesses that collectively employ more than 100,000 Americans, we request that your legislation include immediate economic relief for individuals who may be furloughed during this time.

We also strongly support the recommendations of the Council of Nonprofits<sup>3</sup> that, to quote:

- any economic stimulus proposals aimed at helping adversely affected industries and geographic areas must recognize the impact of the coronavirus crisis on the nonprofit sector;
- nonprofits must be included expressly in any relief package for small businesses;
- Congress should ensure communities are able to support their local nonprofits during this crisis by enacting a targeted, temporary giving incentive that enables all residents, regardless of whether they claim itemize deductions, to receive a tax incentive for giving to the work of charitable nonprofits responding to, or suffering from, the COVID-19 pandemic; and
- any employment-focused relief or stimulus legislation must apply expressly to employment at tax-exempt organizations by making tax credits and deductions applicable not just to income taxes, but to the taxes nonprofit pay, such as unrelated business income taxes and payroll taxes.

Sincerely,

Laura Lott  
President and CEO  
American Alliance of Museums (AAM)  
[www.aam-us.org](http://www.aam-us.org)

D. Casey Sclar  
Executive Director  
American Public Gardens Association (APGA)  
[www.publicgardens.org](http://www.publicgardens.org)

Christine Anagnos  
Executive Director  
Association of Art Museum Directors (AAMD)  
[www.aamd.org](http://www.aamd.org)

Laura Huerta Migus  
Executive Director  
Association of Children's Museums (ACM)  
[www.childrensmuseums.org](http://www.childrensmuseums.org)

Cristin Dorgelo  
President and CEO  
Association of Science and Technology Centers  
(ASTC)  
[www.astc.org](http://www.astc.org)

Bonnie Styles  
Executive Director  
Association of Science Museum Directors  
(ASMD)  
[www.asmd-us.org](http://www.asmd-us.org)

Dan Ashe  
President and CEO  
Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA)  
[www.aza.org](http://www.aza.org)

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.councilofnonprofits.org/sites/default/files/documents/letter-to-congress-include-nonprofits-in-coronavirus-package-3-11-2020.pdf>