



Gretchen Jennings
Editor

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Dear Readers,

A year ago, when we began thinking about Green and Lean as an issue, it seemed like a timely topic and a good thing to do, but not particularly urgent. As the year has unfolded the theme has taken on an immediacy that we did not anticipate. Even in the early fall when I talked with museum folks about the economic downturn, many were optimistic: "It hasn't hit us yet." What a difference a few months can make.

I'm writing this amid reports that New York and other states have slashed their funding for zoos and botanical gardens, and cultural institutions of all kinds are reporting losses in endowments, private contributions, and government support. I am hearing a new phrase, "recession planning," from museum colleagues; layoffs and hiring freezes abound. The "lean" part of the title seems more and more apt—thanks go to NAME President Eric Siegel who suggested it.

On a brighter note, the economic stimulus package proposed by newly elected President Obama promises more funding for the National Science Foundation, and there has been discussion of a cabinet position for the arts. And certainly green is "in" in a way that we have not seen before. Its importance for our future and that of the planet is finally getting the recognition it deserves from the new administration, and this is percolating through many aspects of the culture.

Museums have an unprecedented opportunity take the lead in educating the public about environmental concerns. As a number of the articles in this issue emphasize, however, museums cannot create exhibitions about the environment without looking at their own practices in terms of sustainability and energy use. Even in art or history museums, which might not produce shows with a specifically green focus, there is much that can be done to develop and travel exhibitions in a less wasteful manner; to use more sustainable practices in restrooms and cafeterias; and to let visitors in on the green initiatives. All of our authors agree that green exhibitions need a green institutional context to have maximum educational impact. A number of articles are frank about the initial costs of going green, but you will also find suggestions for long-term planning, for downsizing, and for doing more with less.

As always, we welcome your comments and questions. Check out the "How to Contribute" section to see upcoming themes we are considering. Write me if you have ideas on these topics or others you'd like to see us cover.

Sincerely,

Gretchen Jennings

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