Berkshire Museum selected to participate in Building a National Network of Museums and Libraries for School Readiness Project

[Pittsfield, MA] – As part of a Cooperative Agreement with the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) awarded to Boston Children’s Museum to expand its existing School Readiness through Partnerships program to three new states, the Berkshire Museum in Pittsfield, Massachusetts has been selected to engage in the Building a National Network of Museums and Libraries for School Readiness project. The Berkshire Museum served as the Hub Leader organization for Western Massachusetts as part of an IMLS National Leadership Grant-funded School Readiness through Partnerships project from 2016 to 2018. Through their work they strengthened local partnerships with community organizations in their region to foster family engagement and built professional capacity to provide high quality learning experiences for children and families. Their role as part of the larger network of nine regions across the state served as a foundation for expanding this partnership model beyond Massachusetts.

This is a national effort over a 3-year timeline that advances state work on behalf of young children, families, and communities. Together with participating museums and libraries, Boston Children’s Museum has launched new grassroots museum and library networks in Iowa, Mississippi, and New Mexico; and will develop methods for network sustainability within and among states. Education Development Center Inc. (EDC) will serve as the third-party evaluator for the project, documenting the progress and testing the effectiveness of the model in building institutional readiness to serve all families in their regions.

Boston Children’s Museum will work with the Berkshire Museum through site visits, conference calls, webinars, and an annual leadership institute to bring states together to learn from and share with each other. Individual institutions will strengthen their knowledge and skills for reaching out to and
serving families, including low-income and hard-to-reach families. The networks will develop and integrate systems and policies within their institutions to support this work going forward.

The Berkshire Museum looks forward to bringing their unique methods of family learning and cohort building to regions throughout the country. The museum’s programming during the project will focus on developing and testing object-based mobile museum units in non-traditional, community settings. This experimental phase will provide participating regions with examples of how they may engage their own local cultural institutions and resources including historical and contemporary objects to support child and family development in new ways.

Education has been at the core of the Berkshire Museum’s mission from its founding in 1903. The community museum, which provides over 30,000 student experiences each year both in museum galleries and in classrooms throughout the region, turned its focus to early education in 2012 with the introduction of its WeeMuse series. WeeMuse programming engages and supports families with children from birth to grade two, providing age-appropriate lessons drawn from the museum’s collections as well as encouraging the development of key social and motor skills. Highlights include weekly parent/child programs, free community events, meetings for local nursing-mother support groups, free visits for early education providers, and the publication and state-wide distribution of In Kindergarten – an interactive book that prepares children and families for the transition to kindergarten.

The goal of Building a National Network of Museums and Libraries for School Readiness is to amplify the strength of organizations serving children and families by forming coalitions that ensure all children in their regions, regardless of socio-economic or linguistic background, have the skills needed to enter school prepared for success. Strongly aligned with the Institute of Museum and Library Services goal to build capacity for museums and libraries, the Building a National Network of Museums and Libraries for School Readiness project will engage more states and institutions nationwide in harnessing the power of museums and libraries to support school readiness.

About the Institute of Museum and Library Services

The Institute of Museum and Library Services is the primary source of federal support for the nation’s libraries and museums. We advance, support, and empower America’s museums, libraries, and related organizations through grantmaking, research, and policy development. Our vision is a nation where
museums and libraries work together to transform the lives of individuals and communities. To learn more, visit www.imls.gov and follow us on Facebook and Twitter.

**About the Berkshire Museum**

Located in downtown Pittsfield, Massachusetts, the Berkshire Museum combines art, science, and history to create thought-provoking experiences for visitors of all ages through interactive programs, interdisciplinary exhibitions, and engaging online series that bring to life its broad collection of more than 40,000 objects. To learn more, visit www.berkshiremuseum.org, explore the museum online at www.explore.berkshiremuseum.org, and follow us on Facebook and Instagram.