



# Panel Reviewer Handbook

National Leadership Grants for Museums

---

Office of Museum Services  
Fiscal Year 2024

## Table of Contents

Welcome!.....	3
National Leadership Grants for Museums Overview .....	4
Introduction .....	4
National Leadership Grants for Museums Goals and Objectives .....	4
Project Types and Funding Amounts .....	5
Step-by-Step Instructions for Reviewers.....	6
Step 1: Sign in to eGMS Reach and Create Password .....	6
Step 2. Consider Panel Review Criteria and Read Applications .....	6
Panel Review Criteria for National Leadership Grants for Museums .....	6
Step 3. Draft Comments.....	7
Characteristics of effective and poor reviewer comments:.....	8
What should not be considered in your reviews .....	8
Bias in the Review Process .....	8
Step 4: Assign Scores .....	9
Scoring Definitions.....	10
Step 5: Review Your Work .....	10
Step 6: Enter Scores and Comments by the Evaluation Due Date .....	10
Step 7: Manage Your Copies .....	11
Appendix A: Confidentiality and Application and Review Process .....	12
<i>Confidentiality</i> .....	12
<i>Application and Review Process</i> .....	12
Appendix B: Complying with Ethical Obligations and Avoiding Conflicts of Interest .....	13
Appendix C: Guidance for Research Applications .....	16
Appendix D: Example Peer Reviewer Comments .....	19

## Welcome!

Thank you for agreeing to serve as a peer reviewer for this year's National Leadership Grants for Museums program. We hope you find this to be a rewarding experience and draw satisfaction from identifying projects that address critical needs of the museum field and that have the potential to advance practice in the profession to strengthen museum services for the American public. Your contribution of time and expertise will be invaluable to IMLS and to the applicants who will receive your comments.

In this handbook, you will find the information you need to carry out panel review, including information about the program, tips for writing effective comments, and four appendices with important reference material. Instructions for using eGMS Reach, IMLS's grants management system, are accessible in the [How to Review Applications in eGMS Reach](#) job aid.

If you have any questions about this material or the processes described, please do not hesitate to contact your panel chair at any time.

Once again, thank you for the service you are about to render to museums and communities throughout the nation.

# National Leadership Grants for Museums Overview

## Introduction

National Leadership Grants for Museums (NLG-M) supports projects that address critical needs of the museum field and that have the potential to advance practice in the profession so that museums can improve services for the American public.

Projects are expected to:

- generate results such as models, new tools, research findings, services, practices, and/or alliances that can be widely used, adapted, scaled, or replicated to extend the benefits of federal investment;
- reflect a thorough understanding of current practice and knowledge about the subject matter and an awareness of and support for current strategic priorities in the field;
- use collaboration to demonstrate broad need, field-wide buy-in and input, and access to appropriate expertise;
- articulate intentional impact across one or more disciplines within the museum field; and
- employ novel approaches to the project area, as may be appropriate.

## National Leadership Grants for Museums Goals and Objectives

NLG-M has three program goals and four objectives associated with each goal. Each applicant should align their proposed project with one of these three goals and one or more of the associated objectives. Program goal and objective choices should be identified clearly in the Narrative ([see Section D2c of the Notice of Funding Opportunity](#)).

### **Goal 1: Advance the museum field's ability to empower people of all ages and backgrounds through experiential and cross-disciplinary learning and discovery.**

- Objective 1.1: Support the development, implementation, and dissemination of model programs that facilitate adoption by museums across the field.
- Objective 1.2: Support training and professional development programs, tools, or resources that build the knowledge, skills, and abilities of museum staff and/or volunteers in multiple institutions.
- Objective 1.3: Support research focusing on the role of museums in engaging learners of all types.
- Objective 1.4: Support forums that convene experts and stakeholders, including those from adjacent fields as appropriate, to explore current and emerging issues and inform the field.

### **Goal 2: Advance the museum field's ability to maximize the use of museum resources to address community needs through partnerships and collaborations.**

- Objective 2.1: Support the development of new and innovative methods for addressing community challenges through partnerships, services, processes, or practices for use across the museum field.
- Objective 2.2: Support the development and implementation of training and professional development programs, tools, or resources that build the knowledge, skills, and abilities of museum staff and/or volunteers to meet the needs of their communities.

- Objective 2.3: Support research focusing on museums’ roles in engaging diverse audiences and fostering civic discourse.
- Objective 2.4: Support forums that convene experts and stakeholders, including those from adjacent fields as appropriate, to explore current and emerging issues and inform the field.

**Goal 3: Advance the museums field’s ability to identify new solutions that address high priority and widespread collections care or conservation issues.**

- Objective 3.1: Support the development, implementation, and dissemination of new tools or services that facilitate access, management, preservation, sharing, and use of museum collections.
- Objective 3.2: Support the development and implementation of training and professional development programs, tools, or resources that impact the ability of museum staff and/or volunteers in multiple institutions to improve the stewardship of collections.
- Objective 3.3: Support research focusing on any broadly relevant aspect of the management, conservation, and preservation of collections.
- Objective 3.4: Support forums that convene experts and stakeholders, including those from adjacent fields as appropriate, to explore current and emerging issues and inform the field.

## Project Types and Funding Amounts

Applicants must select one of two project types for each application they submit.

Project Type	Period of Performance	Award Amount	Cost Share Requirement
Non-research	1 to 3 years	\$50,000-\$750,000	1:1 cost share required
Research	1 to 3 years	\$50,000-\$750,000	No cost share required

*Non-research projects* address critical needs of the museum field and have the potential to advance practice in the profession so that museums can improve services for the American public. These may test scalability or expand and enhance existing products or initiatives.

*Research projects* investigate key questions important to museum practice and result in findings that have the potential to advance the profession so that museums can improve services for the American public. Proposals should include clearly articulated research questions and feature appropriate methods, including relevant theoretical or conceptual approaches, data collection, and analysis. See Appendix C: Guidance for Research Applications in this document for information provided to organizations applying with research projects.

# Step-by-Step Instructions for Reviewers

At this stage, IMLS has screened applications only for institutional eligibility and application completeness. Field reviewers have assessed the proposals based on the review criteria in the [FY 2024 Notice of Funding Opportunity](#). We are counting on you to determine how good a job each applicant does in:

- meeting the goals of the National Leadership Grants for Museums program, and
- presenting a clear justification for the project, detailing the project workplan, and articulating the project results.

## Step 1: Sign in to eGMS Reach and Create Password

eGMS Reach is IMLS's platform that you will use to access and review applications. To access eGMS Reach, users are required to have an account through Login.gov to securely access information. You will receive an email with the subject line "eGMS Reach Account Information," that includes a link to the reviewer portal. If you do not receive such an email, please check your junk folder. If you still do not see the email, contact [imls-museumreviewers@imls.gov](mailto:imls-museumreviewers@imls.gov).

Once you have the email, please visit <https://grants.imls.gov/Reach/> and follow the instructions located in the [How to Use Login.gov to Access eGMS Reach](#) Job Aid to create a Login.gov account or link your email to an existing Login.gov account.

Instructions for navigating eGMS Reach are available in the [How to Review Applications in eGMS Reach Job Aid](#), which is accessible on the IMLS website here: <https://imls.gov/grants/peer-review/reviewer-resources/museum-reviewer-resources>

## Step 2. Consider Panel Review Criteria and Read Applications

We recommend that you begin by reviewing the National Leadership Grants for Museums [FY 2024 Notice of Funding Opportunity](#), which guided applicants in creating their applications. This document is also available in the "Shared Files for all Panel Participants" section of the Files and Forms tab in eGMS Reach. Then read the applications, keeping in mind the panel review criteria listed below. You do not need to reference each bullet point in your comments, but these questions should guide your thinking about the strengths and weaknesses of each application.

### Panel Review Criteria for National Leadership Grants for Museums

#### Goals

The National Leadership Grants for Museums (NLG-M) supports projects that address critical needs of the museum field and that have the potential to advance practice in the profession so that museums can improve services for the American public. The distinguishing features of NLG-M projects are broad impact, innovation, thorough understanding of current practice, collaboration, and results that can be used, adapted, scaled or replicated in the museum field.

Does the project meet one of the goals of NLG-M?

- Goal 1: Advance the museum field's ability to empower people of all ages and backgrounds through experiential and cross-disciplinary learning and discovery.
- Goal 2: Advance the museum field's ability to maximize the use of museum resources to address community needs through partnerships and collaborations.

- Goal 3: Advance the museums field's ability to identify new solutions that address high priority and widespread collections care or conservation issues.

Projects must also align with the project type: non-research or research. Research projects must respond to the Guidance for Research Applications (available in Appendix C of this document.)

### Implementation

Is the project poised for successful implementation?

- Demonstrates thorough understanding of relevant issues and current practices
- Addresses an identified need
- Allocates resources for the successful completion of the project
- Connects goals and objectives to appropriate activities and intended outcomes

### Results

If funded, will the project achieve its intended results?

- Tracks, measures, and adapts in order to achieve desired outcomes
- Generates continuing benefits for the museum field

## Step 3. Draft Comments

For each application you review, we ask you to write a constructive and substantive comment for each of the panel review criteria: **Goals**, **Implementation**, and **Results**. All three areas have equal weight and are equally important in identifying the overall strengths and weaknesses of an application.

You may wish to prepare your comments in a separate document for later copying and pasting into the eGMS Reach evaluation form.

When drafting your comments...

- Take all the review criteria questions for each section into consideration. It is not necessary to restate the review criteria questions in your comments.
- Use your professional knowledge and experience to assess the information objectively.
- Judge the application on its own merits, and do not base your evaluation on any prior knowledge of an institution.
- Make sure your comments justify the scores you provide. A highly complementary comment does not remove the sting of a low score, and a negative comment does not even out a high one. Comments and scores must complement each other and make sense as a whole.
- Review new and resubmitted proposals using the same criteria.

## Characteristics of effective and poor reviewer comments:

Effective comments...	Poor comments...
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• are presented in a constructive manner.</li><li>• are both substantive and easy to read and understand.</li><li>• reflect the resources of the institution.</li><li>• are specific to the individual application.</li><li>• reflect the numeric score assigned.</li><li>• highlight the application's strengths and identify areas for improvement.</li><li>• are directed to applicants—not IMLS or panel reviewers—for their use.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• simply summarize or paraphrase the applicant's own words.</li><li>• make derogatory remarks.</li><li>• penalize an applicant because you feel the institution does not need the money.</li><li>• offer or ask for irrelevant or extraneous information.</li><li>• compare the application to others in the review group.</li><li>• make vague or overly general statements.</li><li>• question an applicant's honesty or integrity.</li></ul>

See Appendix D for examples of effective comments.

### What should not be considered in your reviews

Sometimes reviewers ask about or mention characteristics that are outside the scope of the NLG-M review criteria. This is a list of commonly identified factors that you should NOT consider when reading proposals:

- An institution's financial or staffing needs
- Whether a project is new or a resubmission
- The size or age of an organization
- An institution's indirect cost rate (IMLS honors indirect cost rate agreements that an institution has negotiated with another federal agency, or accepts the 10% rate in the absence of a negotiated agreement)

### Bias in the Review Process

Everyone has biases, which are informed by our own experiences as well as our cultural and social environments. Recognizing this is an important step in mitigating the effects of bias in your reviews. The chart below shows different types of bias that commonly happen in the review process. Think about what may feel familiar as you review applications.



AFFINITY BIAS	CONFIRMATION BIAS	CONFORMITY BIAS	CONTRAST EFFECT
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Favoring those like you</li> <li>Applicants who “speak the lingo” get less scrutiny and higher scores</li> <li>Seen as more believable/trustworthy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Focusing on information that aligns with preconceived notions</li> <li>Rejecting ideas or actions that challenge held notions.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Tendency to be swayed by the majority OR loudest voices</li> <li>Can lead to false consensus and dampening of multiple perspectives</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Evaluating quality and other characteristics relative to its surroundings (e.g., other applications in review group) rather than on its own merits</li> <li>Can result in unfair assessment of risk and capacity</li> </ul>

As you review, pay attention to your preferences—for example, a project may be well conceived and ready to implement even if the narrative is poorly formatted or has spelling errors. We all have biases, but staying aware of your preferences and what makes you feel comfortable can interrupt your bias and help ensure that every application is reviewed fairly.

#### Example Biased Comments

The following comments contain bias	Explanation
"I couldn't figure out what this project was about because the narrative was filled with spelling mistakes that were enormously distracting." Score 2	Comment demonstrates affinity bias.
"While it's important that museums connect with their communities, they should not be the lead for social service projects like a food bank in the museum. That type of work is not mission critical for museums." Score 3	Comment demonstrates confirmation bias.
The project timeline seems ambitious, especially since two key partners aren't identified/confirmed. That said, MUSEUM NAME is one of the top art museums in the US, and I'm sure they'll be able to make this happen. Score 5	Comment demonstrates conformity bias.
"The risks identified in the narrative were not as realistic and robust as those I read in other proposals." Score 4	Comment demonstrates contrast effect bias.

## Step 4: Assign Scores

Assign a single preliminary score for the overall project keeping all three areas of the review criteria in mind. Use a scale of 1 to 5, as described in the Scoring Definitions chart.

## Scoring Definitions

Score	Rank	Description
5	Exceptional	The application is outstanding and provides exceptional support for the proposed project.
4	Very Good	The application provides solid support for the proposed project.
3	Good	The application is adequate but could be strengthened in its support for the proposed project.
2	Some Merit	The application is flawed and does not adequately support the proposed project. The project proposal could be revised and strengthened for a future submission.
1	Poor	The application does not fit the program goals, is inadequate, or provides insufficient information to allow for a confident evaluation.

Strive to bring the same approach to all the applications you review. Evaluate each application using the criteria in the guidelines and in the Reviewer Resources—not against other proposals. It is theoretically possible for you to have been assigned all “Exceptional” proposals, or all “Poor” proposals, meaning that you could arrive at all very high scores or very low scores. You do not need to evaluate on a curve of any kind.

### Step 5: Review Your Work

IMLS is one of the few federal agencies that provides reviewers’ comments to applicants, directly and in their entirety without editing. We do this to make sure our process is as transparent as possible, and to provide anonymous feedback to applicants from their peers. If an applicant is unsuccessful, then they may use these comments to improve their proposal for resubmission. If they are successful, they may use the comments to improve their funded projects.

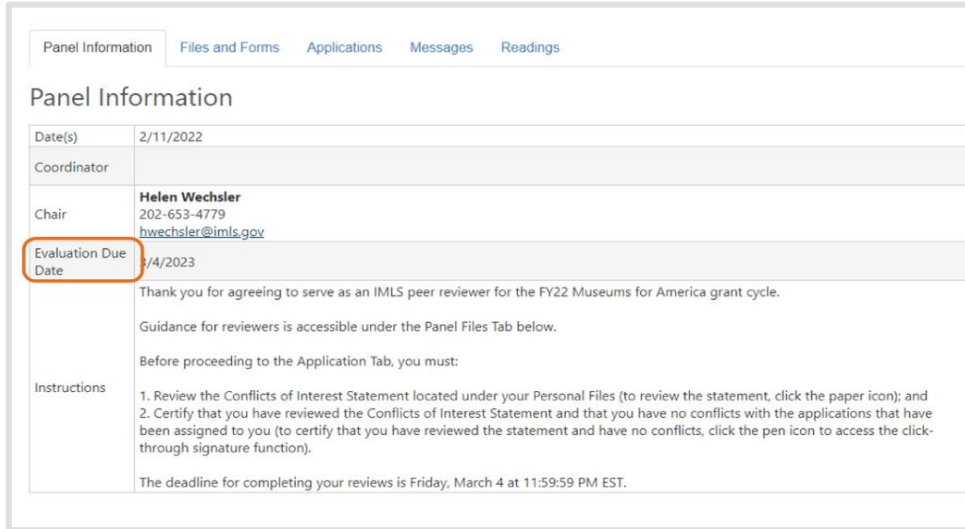
We hear repeatedly that getting your comments is one of the most highly valued things about IMLS museum grant programs, therefore, review your draft comments and preliminary scores. Adjust your scores, if necessary, to reflect your written evaluation more accurately. Scores should support comments, and comments should justify scores.

See Appendix D for examples of effective comments.

### Step 6: Enter Scores and Comments by the Evaluation Due Date

When you are ready to enter your scores and comments, visit <https://grants.ims.gov/Reach/> and sign in with your Login.gov account. Refer to the [How to Review Applications in eGMS Reach Job Aid](#) for instructions on completing comments and selecting scores.

Your reviews must be completed and entered in eGMS Reach by the **Evaluation Due Date** listed in the Panel Information tab in eGMS Reach.



Screenshot: Panel Information tab illustrating where to find the Evaluation Due Date.

## Step 7: Manage Your Copies

Keep your applications and any notes until **August 31, 2024**, in case there are questions from IMLS staff. Continue to maintain confidentiality of all applications that you review by keeping electronic and paper copies in a secure place. After August 31, 2024, delete electronic copies and shred paper copies of the applications and notes.

# Appendix A: Confidentiality and Application and Review Process

## ***Confidentiality***

The information contained in grant applications is strictly confidential. Do not discuss or reveal names, institutions' project activities, or any other information contained in the applications. Because AI generative tools rely upon the submission of substantial information, and because AI users are unable to control where the information they have submitted will be sent, saved, viewed, or used in the future, IMLS explicitly prohibits its peer reviewers from using AI tools to analyze and critique IMLS grant applications.

While funded applications become a matter of record, IMLS does not release information about applications that are not funded through our programs, nor do we share peer reviewers' names or other identifiable information. You may share that you have served as an IMLS peer reviewer, but do not share details about the program in which you're working or the applications you're considering. This applies to communications that are in person, in email, and through all forms of social media.

## ***Application and Review Process***

The success of IMLS grant programs depends upon the quality of its peer review process, through which hundreds of reviewers consider thousands of eligible applications fairly, candidly, and impartially in order to make recommendations for funding each year. Below is a summary of the process from application submission through award announcements.

1. Organizations submit their applications electronically using [Grants.gov](https://www.grants.gov), the central portal of the United States government for receipt of electronic applications.
2. IMLS receives the applications, and staff members check them for organizational eligibility and application completeness.
3. IMLS staff members identify a pool of available peer reviewers with appropriate expertise. Peer review takes place in one or two tiers, depending on the grant program: field review, panel review, or both. Each complete application submitted by an eligible organization typically receives between three and six reviews.
4. For the applications ranked most highly by peer reviewers, IMLS staff members carefully assess the budgets and past organizational performance.
5. IMLS staff members provide a list of applications recommended for funding to the IMLS Director.
6. The IMLS Director makes all final funding decisions.
7. IMLS notifies all applicants whether they have received an award. With their notifications, all applicants receive anonymous copies of the field and/or panel reviews. IMLS also sends notification of the awards to each participating reviewer.

## Appendix B: Complying with Ethical Obligations and Avoiding Conflicts of Interest

As a Reviewer for IMLS, you perform a vital role in ensuring the integrity of the IMLS's peer review process and must carry out your duties in accordance with government ethics rules. Before you evaluate applications, we ask that you review the following *General Principles of Ethical Conduct* and *Summary of the Conflict of Interest Laws*. You will be asked to certify compliance with the IMLS Reviewer Conflict of Interest Statement and Certification. IMLS allocates up to one hour of your reviewer time for you to consider these materials.

If, at any time in the course of performing your duties at IMLS, you believe you may have a conflict of interest, please contact the IMLS program officer coordinating your review process. Other questions about the ethics rules and responsibilities may be directed to IMLS's Designated Agency Ethics Official at [ethics@imls.gov](mailto:ethics@imls.gov); (202) 653-4787; 955 L'Enfant Plaza North, SW, Suite 4000, Washington, DC 20024-2135.

### General Principles of Ethical Conduct

1. Public service is a public trust, requiring you to place loyalty to the Constitution, the laws, and ethical principles above private gain.
2. You shall not hold financial interests that conflict with the conscientious performance of duty.
3. You shall not engage in financial transactions using nonpublic Government information or allow the improper use of such information to further any private interest.
4. You shall not, except pursuant to such reasonable exceptions as are provided by regulation, solicit or accept any gift or other item of monetary value from any person or entity seeking official action from, doing business with, or conducting activities regulated by IMLS, or whose interests may be substantially affected by the performance or nonperformance of your duties.
5. You shall put forth honest effort in the performance of your duties.
6. You shall make no unauthorized commitments or promises of any kind purporting to bind the Government.
7. You shall not use public office for private gain.
8. You shall act impartially and not give preferential treatment to any private organization or individual.
9. You shall protect and conserve Federal property and shall not use it for other than authorized activities.
10. You shall not engage in outside employment or activities, including seeking or negotiating for employment, that conflict with official Government duties and responsibilities.
11. You shall disclose waste, fraud, abuse, and corruption to appropriate authorities.
12. You shall satisfy in good faith your obligations as citizens, including all just financial obligations, especially those – such as Federal, State, or local taxes – that are imposed by law.
13. You shall adhere to all laws and regulations that provide equal opportunity for all Americans regardless of race, color, religion, sex, national origin, age, or handicap.
14. You shall endeavor to avoid any actions creating the appearance that you are violating the law or the ethical standards.

### **Summary of Conflict of Interest Laws**

**18 U.S.C. § 201** – Prohibits you from acceptance of bribes or gratuities to influence Government actions.

**18 U.S.C. § 203** – Prohibits you from accepting compensation for representational activities involving certain matters in which the United States is a party or has a direct and substantial interest.

**18 U.S.C. § 205** – Prohibits you from certain involvement in claims against the United States or representing another before the Government in matters in which the United States is a party or has a direct and substantial interest.

**18 U.S.C. § 207** – Imposes certain restrictions on you related to your activities after Government service.

**18 U.S.C. § 208** – Prohibits you from participating in certain Government matters affecting your own financial interests or the interests of your spouse, minor child, general partner, or organization in which you are serving as an officer, director, trustee, general partner, or employee.

**18 U.S.C. § 209** – Prohibits you from being paid by someone other than the United States for doing their official Government duties.

### **Sample Reviewer Conflict of Interest Statement**

As a Reviewer or panelist for the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS), you may receive a grant application for review that could present a conflict of interest. Such a conflict could arise if you are involved with the applicant institution, or in the project described in the application, as a paid consultant or through other financial involvement. The same restrictions apply if your spouse or minor child is involved with the applicant institution or if the application is presented on behalf of an institution with which you, your spouse or minor child is negotiating for future employment.

A present financial interest is not the only basis for conflict of interest. Through prior association as an employee or officer, you may have gained knowledge of the applicant that would preclude objective review of its application. Past employment (generally more than five years prior to submission of the application) does not by itself disqualify a Reviewer so long as the circumstances of your association permit you to perform an objective review of the application. If you believe you may have a conflict of interest with any application assigned to you for review, please notify us immediately.

You may still serve as a Reviewer even if your institution is an applicant in this grant cycle or you were involved in an application submitted in this grant cycle, as long as you do not review any application submitted by your own institution or any application in which you were involved. However, if you believe that these or any other existing circumstances may compromise your objectivity as a Reviewer, please notify us immediately.

If an application presents no conflict of interest at the time you review it, a conflict of interest may still develop later on. Once you have reviewed an application, you should never represent the applicant in dealings with IMLS or another Federal agency concerning the application, or any grant that may result from it.

Pending applications are confidential. It is not appropriate, for your purposes or for the purposes of the institutions or organizations you represent, for you to make specific use of confidential information derived from individual applications that you read while you were serving as an IMLS Reviewer. Accordingly, you must obtain approval from IMLS before sharing any proposal information with anyone, whether for the purpose of obtaining expert advice on technical aspects of an application or for any other reason.

If you have any questions regarding conflict of interest, either in relation to a specific application or in general, please contact the IMLS program officer who is coordinating the review process.

**Certification**

I acknowledge that I have reviewed the ethics training materials and the Conflict of Interest Statement above. To the best of my knowledge, I have no conflict of interest that would preclude my service to the Institute of Museum and Library Services.

Note: Once you have reviewed this document, return to eGMS Reach to affirm that you have approved its contents.

## Appendix C: Guidance for Research Applications

### **Narrative**

A research application should answer the following questions in the project Narrative.

#### **What are your research questions, methods, and theoretical framing?**

List the question(s) that will drive your proposed activities. Research questions should be clear and concise to help reviewers understand what you wish to learn.

Detail the methods you will use to collect and analyze data. Say why they are the most appropriate for addressing the question(s) at hand. Your methods must be replicable and based on current practices.

What are the concepts, assumptions, expectations, beliefs, and/or theories that support and inform your research and guide your approach to data collection and analysis? If you are proposing to conduct research that will build theory, explain why.

#### **What is the relevance of your proposed research for current practice?**

Discuss how your proposed work builds on existing projects or efforts, including those funded by IMLS. Provide information about how your research can lead to improved museum or library practice and demonstrate you are familiar with current scholarship, including empirical work, in your area of interest.

#### **What type of data will you gather for your research (separate from that identified in your Performance Measurement Plan)?**

Describe the type of data you will collect and any measures you will take to ensure its validity and reliability. Detail the methods for collecting information along with any potential privacy or human subjects concerns that may arise. List potential challenges in gathering data and explain how you will address them. As noted above, research and information collection are subject to applicable law, including but not limited to privacy requirements and 45 C.F.R. part 46 (Protection of Human Subjects), see also the [IMLS Assurances and Certifications](#).

#### **How will you collect, analyze, and use the data?**

Describe how you will analyze the results of your research and relate them to your research questions. If applicable, outline an analysis plan that links a set of testable hypotheses to the proposed research question(s). Identify the variables of interest that are key to the investigation and explain how you will deal with alternative explanations for the observed phenomena.

#### **Does your study require Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval? If so, what steps have you taken to secure IRB approval?**

Describe your plan for the IRB approval process. If IRB approval is required, it is not necessary that you secure approval before submitting your application, but you must receive approval prior to initiating your study.

#### **How will you report and disseminate your findings?**

Address how you will communicate the results to a variety of target groups with different levels of expertise, especially practitioners.



## Data Management Plan

Data sharing is an essential component of research and expedites the translation of research results into new knowledge and practices. Applications for projects that involve the collection and analysis of research data must include a Data Management Plan that provides for long-term preservation of and access to the project research data.

IMLS expects awardees to deposit data resulting from IMLS-funded research in a broadly accessible repository that allows the public to use the data without charge no later than the date upon which an awardee submits the final performance report to IMLS. The data should be deposited in a machine-readable, non-proprietary digital format to maximize search, retrieval, and analysis.

Project budgets may include the costs of preparing the data for public release and for making the data publicly available. In their final performance reports, awardees are required to identify where the data has been deposited and can be accessed by the public.

IMLS recognizes that in some cases data sharing may be complicated or limited by institutional policies; local Institutional Review Board (IRB) rules; and local, state, and federal laws and regulations, including those protecting confidentiality and personal privacy. The rights and privacy of people who participate in IMLS-supported research must be protected at all times. Thus, data intended for broader use should be free of anything that could lead to disclosure of the identity of individual participants. Each applicant should identify and explain the reasons for any limitations in their Data Management Plan.

### **Explain how you will manage, share, preserve, document, and enable reuse of the data you will collect or generate during the project by addressing the following.**

- Identify the type(s) and estimated amount of data you plan to collect or generate, and the purpose or intended use(s) to which you expect them to be put. Describe the method(s) you will use, the proposed scope and scale, and the approximate dates or intervals at which you will collect or generate data.
- Will you collect any sensitive information? This may include personally identifiable information (PII), confidential information (e.g., trade secrets), or proprietary information. If so, detail the specific steps you will take to protect the information while you prepare it for public release (e.g., anonymizing individual identifiers, data aggregation). If the data will not be released publicly, explain why the data cannot be shared due to the protection of privacy, confidentiality, security, intellectual property, and other rights or requirements.
- What technical (hardware and/or software) requirements or dependencies would be necessary for understanding retrieving, displaying, processing, or otherwise reusing the data? How can these tools be accessed (e.g., open-source and freely available, commercially available, available from your research team)?
- What documentation (e.g., consent agreements, data documentation, codebooks, metadata, and analytical and procedural information) will you capture or create along with the data? Where will the documentation be stored and in what format(s)? How will you permanently associate and manage the documentation with the data it describes to enable future reuse?
- What is your plan for managing, disseminating, and preserving data after the completion of the award-funded project? If relevant, identify the repository where you will deposit your data. When and for how long will data be made available to other users?
- When and how frequently will you review your Data Management Plan? How will the implementation be monitored?

A valid Data Management Plan may include only the statement that no detailed plan is needed if the statement is accompanied by a clear justification.

Note: For the purposes of this section, “data” is defined consistent with OMB guidance (see 2 C.F.R. § 200.315). IMLS reserves a royalty-free, nonexclusive, and irrevocable right to: (1) obtain, reproduce, publish, or otherwise use the data first produced under a grant; and (2) authorize others to receive, reproduce, publish, or otherwise use such data for federal purposes.

## Appendix D: Example Peer Reviewer Comments

The following samples are the anonymized comments made available to both successful and unsuccessful applicants after funding decisions are announced.

**Sample 1: Panel Peer Reviewer Evaluation**  
**Program: National Leadership Grants for Museums**

**MG-123456-OMS - Name of Applicant Museum**

**Panel Reviewer 1**

**Goals:**

The applicant, in collaboration with various partners proposes a participatory design research project to identify and reinvent educational practices that hinder minoritized visitors and staff's sense of belonging. Applicants argue that current museum education is perpetuating societal inequities by privileging the needs of dominant (white, able-bodied, etc.) learners and making unwelcoming environments for many minoritized learners. They aim to correct this through research [at two museum sites] to build generalizable knowledge about activities that support the creation of learning practices, how learning practices contribute to a sense of belonging for visitors and museum educators, and how the participatory design process influences museum professionals' awareness, confidence, and motivation for equity work. The project will sequentially feature an equity audit, collaborative design experiments engaging researchers, educators, and young people (with each museum site developing its own set of learning practices), and the development and sharing of a toolkit of research activities other sites can use to develop their own equitable learning practices. The project's focus on museum educators—approximately 20 of whom will take part in the research—is both notable and worthwhile, providing one example of how applicants have taken care to minimize the abstract features that sometimes filter into (and undermine) multi-site research projects. Strong grounding in the literature of practice provides another.

**Implementation:**

I believe that the point of the project and its process is sufficiently clear to conclude that this work is both important and doable. Reassuringly, the applicants have committed to work with a university's highly professional Institutional Review Board (IRB) to secure all needed coverage and maintain appropriate practices. This is, after all, a research project involving children (more than 100 visitors—invited based on audiences the museums have identified that they are underserving—will take part in the research) and indeed studying how they learn. Applicants append a statement to the proposal about their commitment to carry out policies and procedures that protect the privacy rights of the people participating in our research as well as their confidentiality.

**Results:**

The applicants have built this project on their previous research success, on intellectually rigorous analysis and preparation, and on an institutional commitment to prompting equity. These together make success in this project likely. While there are no guarantees, it is also worth noting that the highly credentialed and accomplished project leadership at each location is undertaking work central to their professional identities, exercising what strikes me as extraordinary care to oversee the project's various elements. Applicants provide a reasonable dissemination strategy: A website that will house all of the available resources from the project. These resources will be free to download by the public as many times as an individual wishes. The applicant and partner will maintain the web site after the term of the grant. The partner has success maintaining project web sites and has a dedicated team to assist in this process. The applicant has created sites in the past for projects.

**Overall Score**

**5**

**Sample 2: Panel Peer Reviewer Evaluation**  
**Program: National Leadership Grants for Museums**

**MG-123457-OMS - Name of Applicant Museum**

**Panel Reviewer 2**

**Goals:**

This study builds on prior work done in libraries so there is documentation of success. The proposal has a lofty goal that is well grounded in the IMLS goal of increasing public access. The proposed work poses valuable questions that museums are asking and provides a means that could possibly help museums reach into communities that have here-to-for been distant and often non-existent. The theoretical base is solid, and although why the three models of community dialogue were selected as models is not defended, the process does not limit the partner museums from using another dialogue model assuming they have access or resources to know what other models exist. While the theoretical grounding for the community dialogues is strong, the theoretical grounding for the research is extremely weak. I wanted to know more about the theoretical organization of the research, how the various components are held together, and what theories were being tested. As this is a research proposal, I needed a firmer grounding in the studies being proposed versus the programmatic theory - which is important but needs to be balanced as the funding is for the research and the critical review is of the research and how that supports the programmatic benefits emerging from the research itself.

**Implementation:**

As this is building on prior work, a richer discussion of what the dialogue framework presents and how it varies from institution to institution may reveal further how this work will lead to the desired outcomes. The initial landscape study has tremendous potential to be of great value to the field. Allowing the museums and communities to collaboratively come to insights requires a flexible process, which seems to be offered. The 'role model' museums and the partner museums is a strong model and provides grounding for one variable in the research (the dialogue approach). There is some discrepancy in narrative between this is for small museums, and the claim that indicators of success will be identified across different museum staff sizes, locations, and community demographics. Further, this is contextualized with a project limited to twelve case studies. Finding twelve cases that capture the breadth and variety of museums is questionable, even if limited to small museums. Finding barriers that cut across the cases (viewing this as a comparative case study) and using consistent metrics and measures would make the very small sample more compelling. There is a bias training, but no information as to the credentials of the individual leading the training nor how it ties to the specific community with whom the institution is engaging. While the landscape study is potentially powerful, but there are no details into the methods used for the study: there are no overarching questions for the study, sample, instrumentation, analysis, or dissemination plans. The case studies are not methodologically grounded in how the case is to be defined and the study framed.

**Results:**

The project team has a track record in doing this work, and that is a very strong predictor it will achieve its intended results. The project leads have clearly considered many details in implementation suggested through the intricate interactions of the program elements. There is no evaluation aspect (e.g., research oversight or review; external process evaluation) that will document conditions to explain, for example, if the project could not meet its intended results. It still may have been a very rigorous and thoughtful study and approach - meaning it did not fail, just entry assumptions were incorrect, and it is worth funding evaluation to learn that. This is a worthwhile project and grows out of successful prior work in this area in libraries. The team assembled has strong credentials, but the overall research structure was not nearly as well explained or defended as the programmatic need and benefit.

**Overall Score**

**3**

**Sample 3: Panel Peer Reviewer Evaluation**  
**Program: National Leadership Grants for Museums**

**MG-123458-OMS - Name of Applicant Museum**

**Panel Reviewer 3**

**Goals:**

Your articulation of your proposed project's goals is clear, compelling, and valuable to your institution and the communities you serve. Unfortunately, as it is focused explicitly upon exploring lessons learned from the development of a single exhibition in service to one particular museum rather than addressing field-wide needs and contributing to a body of knowledge and resources to advance the museum field as a whole, this project is a significantly stronger fit for other IMLS grant programs, likely either the Museums for America—Community Engagement program or the Museums Empowered—Diversity and Inclusion program. I have reviewed the full proposal after identifying this mismatch and absolutely feel that the goals, outcomes, and outputs are meaningful and important; I strongly encourage you to take a look at the Museums Empowered program and consider resubmitting your proposal to one of the two programs noted above, recognizing that the lower budget caps and accompanying cost-share requirements may necessitate adjustments to project design. Alternately, you may consider revising this proposal to shift your focus from supporting a single institution to advancing the museum field's understanding of and fluency in culturally responsive and sustaining engagement practices with First American communities and Knowledge Keepers.

**Implementation:**

In general, your work plan appears thoughtful, sound, and well-grounded in an understanding of your institution's needs and opportunities to more fully represent, learn from, and support the communities you serve. Any more detailed feedback I might provide will likely not be particularly helpful given that this proposal is a stronger fit for other IMLS grant programs, each with their own sets of review criteria. Again, I encourage you to acquaint yourself with the details of these other grant programs and consider how your proposal could be modified to align with the program of your choice.

**Results:**

Again, any detailed feedback I could provide with regard to project outcomes, outputs, disseminations approaches, and efforts to sustain impacts beyond the grant funding period would likely miss some of the nuance necessary to support a resubmission to a different IMLS grant program. I will note that a more detailed and comprehensive articulation of these project components than is currently included in your proposal will be valuable in setting yourself up for success in a resubmission if desired. Your focus on community-driven dissemination rather than a sole emphasis on the more typical professional conferences, white papers, journal manuscripts, etc., is entirely appropriate to the nature, framing, and purpose of your study, and I would not want to see that focus lost.

**Overall Score**

**1**