

FY2025 NLG Informational Video Transcript

0:06

Hello, I'm Helen Wechsler, and I want to welcome you to the Institute of Museum and Library Services, Office of Museum Services,

0:15

informational video about the National Leadership Grants for Museums.

0:32

The goal of this video is to provide an overview of our National Leadership Grants for Museums program, which we call "NLG-M" for short, and the process of preparing an application for funding.

0:48

This video is organized into five chapters.

0:51

First, we will discuss the purpose and design of the NLG-M grant program.

0:57

Then we'll talk about the types of projects that can be funded in NLG-M and the amount of funds that can be requested.

1:05

Chapter 3 describes the types of documents that are needed to create an NLG-M grant application, and Chapter 4 provides guidance on drafting the narrative part of the application.

1:19

Note that there will be a separate video on preparing a budget and budget justification.

1:25

Finally, in the concluding chapter, I'll provide a few tips and next steps. To get the most out of this video,

1:36

we recommend that you watch it in its entirety.

1:40

This will give you an understanding of the NLG-M grant program, the types of projects that can be funded, and the necessary application components.

1:50

You may also want to review the NLG-M Notice of Funding Opportunity before, during, and after you watch the video.

1:58

Notices of Funding Opportunity, also known as NOFOs, are documents that detail the requirements of each of our grant programs.

2:08

All of our Fiscal Year 25 NOFOs can be found at imls.gov/grants.

2:16

As you navigate the application process, you can use this video as a reference tool.

2:23

If you'd like to skip to a specific section, please use the time bar below or the links in the description box to navigate the chapters.

2:35

In this section, we will answer the question "What is NLGM?" providing information on the purpose and intent of this grant program and who it is designed to serve.

2:50

National Leadership Grants for Museums support projects that address critical needs in the museum field and that have the potential to advance practice in the profession so that museums can improve services for the American public.

3:06

NLG-M is all about addressing the challenges of the museum field, our institutions, and our professionals.

3:14

We invest in institutions and partnerships that understand the challenges and opportunities facing the field and devise plans to move the field forward through the development of resources and tools for use by multiple institutions and/or groups of museum professionals.

3:35

Let's talk about institutional eligibility for a moment.

3:39

First, you must be located in one of the United States'

3:43

50 states, its territories, or the District of Columbia. And your organization must be a unit of state, local or tribal government or a private nonprofit organization with tax exempt status.

3:58

You can be one of three types of organizations to be eligible to apply to NLG-M.

4:04

To be eligible for funding as a museum, your organization must have at least one full time or equivalent professional staff person, either paid or unpaid, have a physical location that it owns or operates,

4:21

have been open to the public for at least 120 days in the year prior to November 15th, the deadline this year, and own or use tangible objects, including living collections.

4:36

Museums may be stand-alone organizations, or they may be part of a larger institution such as a college or university, tribe, or state or local government.

4:46

You can also be eligible for NLG-M if you are an organization or association that engages in activities designed to advance the well-being of museums and the museum profession, or if you are a college or university.

5:05

When we talk about museums, we include a broad range of institution types.

5:10

Here's a list of some of the types of museums that our grant programs support.

5:20

In this section, we will discuss the types of projects that the program funds, its goals and objectives, and I'll provide some data on the number and type of NLG-M projects that were funded in recent years.

5:39

Making sure your concept shares the characteristics of successful NLG projects is an important first step to preparing an application.

5:49

We are looking for projects that are designed intentionally to produce results that can be used by the field to advance and improve practice.

5:58

We're looking for tangible results such as models, tools, curriculum resources, research findings, or new services that can be widely used, adapted, scaled, or replicated to extend the benefit of the federal investment across the field or segment of the field.

6:17

Projects should reflect a thorough understanding of current practice, knowledge about the subject matter, deep familiarity with previous work on the project topic, and an awareness of and support for current strategic priorities in the field.

6:34

We encourage collaboration as it demonstrates broad need, field wide buy-in and input, and access to appropriate expertise.

6:51

Your project should align with one of these three project goals.

6:55

As you can see here, you should be seeking to advance the museum field's work in either Lifelong Learning, Community Engagement, or Collections Stewardship and Access.

7:09

So let's take a look at what kinds of project activities might fit within these goals.

7:15

In this and the two next slides, the numbered objectives provide some of the types of projects that fit within the goal.

7:24

A project in Lifelong Learning might include, but is not limited to, developing models with tools for scaling and adapting by other museums, research on museum-based learning, and forums that bring together experts to explore current and emerging issues in the field.

7:46

A Community Engagement project will need to focus on producing resources that help museums better meet community needs and be welcoming places for everyone.

7:57

Projects may help museums be more inclusive of all segments and parts of their communities, improve access and remove barriers to participation, better engage with community organizations and leaders for planning and civic engagement, or support forums that bring together experts to explore current and emerging issues for the field as they relate to community engagement.

8:29

Under the Collections Stewardship and Access goal, projects can develop tools that help museums facilitate access, management, preservation, sharing, and use of museum collections.

8:40

Projects can undertake research on management, conservation, and preservation issues.

8:46

And like the other two goals, projects can bring together experts to explore issues and inform the field of collection topics.

8:58

NLG-M projects can request anywhere from \$50,000 to \$750,000.

9:05

Full projects that result in robust results for the field require a one-to-one cost share.

9:12

Cost share may be in the form of cash, staff or volunteer time, other grantee-contributed costs, or third party or partner contributions.

9:23

It may not be funds from another federal source.

9:26

Scale your budget request to the needs of your project.

9:29

Your budget should include the costs of the activities needed to accomplish the results.

9:34

It's important that the amount of funds requested match the scope and scale of your project.

9:41

Research projects from \$50,000 to \$750,000 do not require a cost share.

9:47

We'll talk more about research projects a little later.

9:53

The number of applications received and the amount of awards made can vary from year to year.

9:59

Here's a snapshot of our last two award cycles.

10:03

In FY24 we made 18 awards totaling \$9.41 million and in FY23 we made 19 awards with a total of just over \$8.44 million.

10:17

In FY24, we received 54 applications and in FY23 we received 48.

10:25

Averaging the two years, about 36% of applications were funded.

10:30

You can also see from the pie charts that the percentages of awards by program goal can differ greatly from one year to the next.

10:40

We do not have funding set aside for each goal, nor any quotas.

10:44

Instead, we look we are looking for the strongest projects poised to provide the most benefit to the museum field.

10:56

On the IMLS website, you can use the Search Awarded Grants function to explore an archive of grants that we have awarded in the past years.

11:06

All of the FY24 NLG-M awards announced in August are listed here, along with those from prior years.

11:14

You can search the database using a variety of criteria such as institution name, location, keyword.

11:23

Your search will retrieve basic information about each award, including the amount of federal funds awarded and a brief description of the proposed activities and expected results for each project.

11:38

In this section, we'll introduce the components of an NLG-M grant application and provide an overview about the required, conditionally required, and supporting documents.

11:52

The NLG-M Notice of Funding Opportunity includes a complete list of all the application components.

12:00

The table of application components in the NOFO lists which application components are required as well as those that are conditionally required, meaning their inclusion depends on the type of applicant, or the type of project.

12:16

Aside from the SF-424S and the IMLS Museum Program Information Form, which are both web-based forms completed in the grants.gov Workspace, all application components must be submitted as PDF documents.

12:39

These are the required documents.

12:41

All applications must include the documents listed here.

12:45

Omission of even just one might result in your application's rejection.

12:50

Also note that there is a 10-page limit for the narrative.

12:54

If you exceed the page limit specified in the NOFO, we must remove the extra pages before your application goes out for review.

13:03

That means your reviewers may have to stop reading in mid-sentence, which is never good.

13:08

Other docs have suggested page lengths. So, make sure your content fits into the page limits specified and make sure the number of pages holds when you convert your document to PDF.

13:27

The second category of application components is that of conditionally required documents.

13:32

Some applications must include one, two, or even all four of these, and it's your job to figure out which are required for your application.

13:43

If you are applying as a nonprofit, then you must include your proof of nonprofit, which is a letter from the Internal Revenue Service.

13:57

We will not accept a letter of State sales tax exemption as proof of nonprofit status.

14:04

If you are using a federally negotiated indirect cost rate in your budget, then you must include a copy of your final rate agreement.

14:13

If you will create digital products during the course of your project, then you must complete and submit a Digital Product Plan.

14:21

If you are proposing a research project, then you must submit a Data Management and Sharing Plan.

14:28

Just like the required documents,

14:30

omission of even one might result in your application's rejection.

14:35

Please note that the term "digital product" includes digitized and born-digital content, digital resources or assets, and software.

14:46

If you're creating any of these types of materials, you must include the form with your application.

14:58

The third group of application components is Supporting Documents, and here is a partial list of examples.

15:04

Supporting Documents are optional.

15:07

You may submit one or none.

15:09

Include only those items that will supplement your proposal.

15:13

This is not the place to introduce brand new information.

15:17

Rather, as the name suggests, they should lend support to your project justification, work plan and intended results that you've already spelled out in your application narrative.

15:29

For example, have you identified a partner whose involvement is key in the project's success?

15:35

If so, a letter of support or commitment would go a long way to reassuring reviewers that they are 'on board' and the project will succeed.

15:46

Vendor quotes or equipment specifications show you've done some of the legwork to get appropriate estimates for project costs.

15:55

We recommend that you be respectful of your reviewers' time and avoid the temptation to include hundreds of pages of extraneous material.

16:04

Being judicious really does work to your benefit, as supporting documents can make or break an application.

16:11

Include what is important, helpful, and directly relevant to your project and stop there.

16:21

In this section, we'll go over the questions you will need to answer in your project narrative and offer details on the review criteria associated with each section: Project Justification, Project Work Plan, and Project Results.

16:36

Remember that there is a separate video focusing on crafting your budget and budget justification that I highly recommend watching.

16:48

You have 10 pages to cover 3 very important issues, and the Notice of Funding Opportunity provides lengthy guidance on what the narrative should cover.

16:59

The first section is the Project Justification.

17:03

In it, you're answering which program goal and associate objective of the National Leadership Grant for Museums program your project will address.

17:13

What field wide need, problem, or challenge will your project address, and how was it identified?

17:19

You'll describe the sources you have used to define that need, problem, or challenge.

17:24

Who's the primary audience for your project, and how have they been involved in the planning?

17:30

Primary audiences refer to those who will be most immediately and positively affected by your project. Who are the ultimate beneficiaries of the project? How will the museum field benefit from your project, and how does this proposed project differ from, complement, or build upon existing theory, scholarship, and practice?

17:58

In the Notice of Funding Opportunity under Review Criteria, you will find a list of questions for each section of the narrative that reviewers are asked to consider when they review your proposal.

18:09

It's a good idea to refer to these as you craft your narrative to be certain you're providing reviewers clear, solid information.

18:18

You will see that they correspond fairly directly with the prompts you were given to write your narrative.

18:31

If the Project Justification section is the why, the Project Work Plan section is where you identify the who, what, when and how, who will do what activities, when and using what resources.

18:45

You should explain how you will track your progress towards achieving your intended results and what you'll do if you need to correct course.

18:54

We also ask you to think about risks that are inherent in your particular project and to tell us how you've taken that into account in your planning.

19:06

Again, this is a list of questions that reviewers are asked to consider when they review your proposal, so make sure your narrative is answering these effectively.

19:22

For research projects, reviewers are asked to weigh in on another set of criteria.

19:27

They'll look for appropriate research design and answers to the questions outlined in the Guidance for Research Applications.

19:36

This is a section you will find in the Notice of Funding Opportunity.

19:40

If you find it difficult to answer these questions for your project, you might actually not have a research project at all.

19:52

The third section of your narrative should be devoted to articulating your project's intended results.

19:58

This section is your chance to convince the reviewers that your project will result in something getting better.

20:05

The need or problem you identified in your project justification will be addressed directly.

20:11

The results should relate directly to the need you identified in the museum field.

20:18

We ask you to tell us what data you will collect and report in order to measure your project's success.

20:25

If your project will generate tangible products, and most do, here's the opportunity to describe them and make the case that they will be useful.

20:36

And last but not least, we ask that you tell us how you will sustain the benefit of the project.

20:42

How will this improvement that you propose to make continue once your grant is over?

20:54

Again, here's a list of questions that reviewers are asked to consider when they read and score the Project Results section of your narrative, and you can find these in the Notice of Funding Opportunity.

21:16

So to recap, your narrative has three sections, Project Justification, Project Work Plan, and Project Results, and you have 10 pages for it.

21:26

The sections are all equally important.

21:29

Write clearly, address what we ask you to address, and keep an eye on those Review Criteria.

21:36

They tell you exactly what the reviewers will look for, so make it easy for them to find it and understand it.

21:43

Finally, make sure all sections of the narrative are connected.

21:47

The work plan should describe the activities required to address the field wide need, and the results should provide a solution to the need you identified.

22:01

In this final section of our presentation, we'll offer some application tips and next steps.

22:11

We can only make grants to eligible applicants that submit complete applications, including attachments, on or before the deadline.

22:21

So here are some tips to help you do just that.

22:24

Start early, and you've already done that by listening to this webinar.

22:29

Become familiar with [grants.gov](https://www.grants.gov)'s Workspace.

22:33

It has many good features, including upfront validation which allows you to correct errors prior to submission, and the opportunity to collaborate with others in creating your application.

22:45

Consider starting with the Workspace overview and check out the tutorials.

22:51

Do your background research, make it easy for reviewers to see that you are up to date and know what you're talking about.

22:59

Be sure your application is complete.

23:02

Check it against the table of application components in the Notice of Funding Opportunity.

23:08

Make sure all application components are in the proper format and follow the correct naming convention.

23:15

Submit to grants.gov early so you can correct any errors and avoid any trauma created by technology challenges.

23:28

It's important to get your application submitted online through grants.gov before the deadline.

23:34

IMLS does not accept applications by mail or e-mail.

23:38

In order to register with grants.gov, you must have an active sam.gov registration and unique entity identifier number.

23:47

So make sure your registration for both of these sites are complete, your accounts are active, and that any necessary passwords are current.

23:56

These registrations expire periodically, so you don't want to wait until it's time to hit submit button to check them.

24:04

You should coordinate with any other staff members, such as your authorized organization representative, who may hold the accounts and passwords you'll need to submit.

24:15

Also, carefully review your institution sam.gov record to ensure that there are no federal debts or proceedings or problems reported by other federal agencies.

24:26

These will need to be cleared up prior to IMLS making an award to your institution.

24:32

Both the sam.gov and grants.gov websites have robust help features and FAQs.

24:39

If you run into technical issues with either of these sites, you should reach out to their help desks and request a tracking case or ticket number in order to document your issue and attempts at resolving it.

24:52

Failure to have active sam.gov or grants.gov registrations by the application deadline is not an excuse for submitting a late application, so again, start early.

25:09

There are many components to the application and the narrative is an essential and critical part of the package.

25:16

Peer reviewers, museum professionals from all types of museums, will be selected by IMLS to read each application and provide constructive and critical comments on the strengths and weaknesses of the proposed project.

25:30

They base their reviews only on the information contained in the application, so don't assume that a reviewer or IMLS will know something about your museum or your proposed project.

25:42

To help make sure your narrative is clear and complete as possible, revisit the NLG-M Notice of Funding Opportunity and follow the narrative outline it provides.

25:54

Be sure to consider the review criteria associated with each section of the narrative.

26:00

Use headings and subheadings to make it easy for reviewers to read.

26:05

Avoid generalities, acronyms, and jargon because the people who will review your applications are museum professionals, but they may not all be totally familiar with your particular field's shorthand.

26:17

Make it easy for them to understand what you mean.

26:21

An advantage of starting your application early is that you can ask a colleague, friend, or family member to review everything with fresh eyes before you submit.

26:30

Ask them to act like a reviewer who's seeing this for the first time.

26:40

IMLS offers a few ways to find examples of funded projects.

26:44

We already talked about the Search Awarded Grants function on our website.

26:48

You can see the filters I've selected on the left the last three years at the top and National Leadership Grants for Museums at the bottom.

26:57

We've also posted the abstract, narrative and schedule of completion for a cross section of successful NLG-M applications.

27:06

The proposals posted present a variety of project types, meet the overarching goal of NLG-M program, and were considered to be clear and well written by reviewers.

27:19

Looking at these exemplary proposals might help clarify your thinking about your own application.

27:26

The image on the right shows the sample application page.

27:30

You will Scroll down to find NLG-M examples.

27:38

Here are a few important dates related to NLG-M applications.

27:43

Applications must be received through grants.gov by 11:59 PM Eastern Time on November 15th, 2024.

27:54

The time stamp is auto generated by grants.gov and we have no ability to override it.

28:00

So again, submit your application early if at all possible.

28:05

That way, if you encounter a difficulty of any kind, you'll have some time to resolve the problem and resubmit. After the application deadline,

28:13

IMLS staff will review your application for completeness and eligibility, and you will hear from us via e-mail if there are any problems.

28:23

Next, we will select experienced and knowledgeable peer reviewers to read your application and provide scores and comments based on the criteria outlined in the Notice of Funding Opportunity.

28:36

IMLS staff will examine your budget, your financials, and your track record with past and current grants.

28:43

We then prepare materials for the IMLS Director, who by law, has the authority and responsibility to make final award decisions.

28:52

This typically happens in July.

28:55

In early August 2025, we will notify you by e-mail of the award decisions and provide the scores and comments created by the reviewers.

29:05

NLG-M projects must be scheduled to start on the first day of September 2025.

29:16

As you read through the NOFO and prepare your application, additional questions may arise before the application deadline.

29:23

We can answer questions about our grant programs, address specific concerns with the various application components, or help you understand the review process.

29:33

You may schedule a counseling call to talk directly with program staff.

29:37

Use the links found on the grant program landing page to find an available time slot on your calendar.

29:44

You will then receive an e-mail with a calendar invite and a Microsoft Teams meeting link.

29:50

Thank you for listening and best of luck.