

Timed Transcript for IMLS Office of Museum Services Webinar: FY2023 Museums Empowered Applicant Information Session

0:01

Hello, and welcome to the Institute of Museum and Library Services webinar, IMLS Museums Empowered Fiscal Year 2023 Information Session.

0:11

My name is Mark Isaksen and I'm one of the program staff in the Office of Museum Services.

0:16

And speaking on behalf of the rest of the staff, we're glad that you're interested in preparing an application for the Museums Empowered grant program.

0:28

Here are the topics we're going to cover in today's webinar.

0:31

Where to find information.

0:34

Overview of the program, discussion of IMLS funding eligibility criteria, review of the grant program goals, project activities, Allowable and unallowable costs, application components, review criteria, where to learn more, and application tips.

0:59

This is one of a series of webinars designed to help you find the information you need to create and competitive application for IMLS museum funding.

1:09

Choosing a Funding Opportunity for 2023 is available as a video and as a PDF on our website at the link identified here.

1:17

In that webinar, we cover the IMLS Vision, Mission, and Strategic Plan.

1:22

We also address institutional eligibility for applicants.

1:25

We provide a quick overview of all our funding opportunities and show you how to find information online focused on our website.

1:34

In addition to this webinar, about Museums and Power, are making available on demand webinars for our museum grant programs on our website.

1:45

The IMLS website is an important place to find information. When you go to the website, you will see a drop-down menu for grants on our homepage. Click on that section titled Apply for a Grant. This section of our website is for you.

2:00

Each grant program has a landing page on the website, and here you'll find a brief overview of the grant program, along with contact information for the IMLS staff assigned to the program.

2:12

Our contact information includes a link you can use to directly schedule on our calendar as a 30 minute counseling call with program staff.

2:22

Counseling calls are an important opportunity for you to discuss your project ideas, and raise any questions you have about the application process.

2:31

We encourage you to use this link to schedule the time to talk with one of us.

2:36

We know that applying for a federal grant can be a complex and time consuming process.

2:41

We want you to feel confident in moving forward with an application.

2:46

Also, on the grant program landing page, you will find a link to the PDF of the NOFO.

2:52

The Notice of Funding Opportunity, sometimes referred to as the NOFO, is the official instructions and guidance for how to prepare, complete, and submit an application for funding.

3:02

The text and information I'm using in this webinar, derived from the instructions and guidance found in the NOFO.

3:09

The NOFO is available for each of the grant funding programs.

3:14

Now, let's discuss Museums Empowered in a little more in detail.

3:20

Museums Empowered is a special initiative of the Museums for America grant program.

3:25

It's designed to support projects that use the transformative power of professional development and Training that generates systemic change within museums of all types and sizes.

3:37

Projects are expected to involve multiple levels of staff, leadership, and volunteers, and a set of logical, inter-related activities tied directly to addressing a key need or challenge.

3:51

It should also reflect a thorough understanding of current practice and a knowledge about professional development, and also generate measurable results.

4:03

We're often asked about the numbers of applications in this grant program and the funding success rates.

4:09

So here are the figures for the just completed museums and power grant cycle.

4:15

We made 20 awards for it, total of about four point two million.

4:20

And you can see those numbers and the distribution of applications by the program goals.

4:31

Funding eligibility criteria for the Museums Empowered program are detailed in the NOFO, but I'll try to summarize here.

4:38

All IMLS grant applicants must be either a unit of state or local government or the private non-profit organization.

4:46

In addition, to be eligible for funding in this program as a museum, the organization must use a professional staff, which is defined as having at least one staff member or full-time equivalent.

4:58

Either paid or unpaid, that's engaged in the acquisition, care, and exhibition to the public of objects owned or used by the institution.

5:07

Museums should be organized on a permanent basis for educational or esthetic purposes. Own or use tangible objects.

5:15

Care for those objects, exhibit the objects.

5:18

Conduct those activities in facilities that you own or operate.

5:23

Museums, as defined here, may stand alone as independent organizations.

5:27

May also be a non-profit responsible for the operating museum, are administered by a governing body, such as college, university, or state, local government.

5:39

If you have any questions about eligibility criteria, definitely give us a call.

5:48

Now your application to the Museums Empowered grant program should align with one of the four programs, program goals and associated objectives.

5:58

These four Museums Empowered program goals are, go one, provide museums staff with the skills to integrate digital technology into museum operations, goal to support museum staff, and providing inclusive services to people of diverse, geographic, cultural, and economic backgrounds.

6:19

Goal three, strengthen the ability of museum staff to use evaluation as a tool to shape museum programs, and go for, strengthen and support museum staff as an essential part of a resilient organizational culture.

6:37

Let's take a look at each column, a little more detail.

6:40

Goal one supports projects that provide museum staff with the skills to integrate digital technology into museum operations.

6:47

This might involve activities that support staff learning, an integration of digital communication platforms, social media tools, to enhance audience engagement and community outreach, could

also be activities that support staff learning and integration of digital tools and services to enhance access to museum collection.

7:09

The emphasis here is on staff learning, an integration of these new tools, not just the acquisition of tools.

7:19

Goal two focuses on diversity and inclusion, and supports projects that help museum staff and providing inclusive services.

7:26

People have diverse, geographic, cultural, and socioeconomic backgrounds and to individuals with disabilities.

7:33

Now, this might involve activities that create training and learning opportunities that increase cultural competency, museum staff, and enhance relevancy at museum programs.

7:44

Are activities that develop and implement inclusive, fellowship, internship, and mentoring programs to increase support for emerging professionals from diverse communities entering the museum?

7:58

Goal three supports projects that strengthen the ability of museum staff, use evaluation as a tool to shape museum programs and improve outcomes.

8:10

This could involve activities that increase staff knowledge and program evaluation methods in the usefulness and evaluation reports, tools, data, and metrics, or activities that provide museum staff with the tools and strategies to adapt evaluation methods to address that specific audience or institutional need.

8:34

And finally, Goal four is about organizational management, and it's intended to support museum staff as the essential part of a resilient organizational culture.

8:44

This might involve activities that help you develop, implement apprehensive, organizational learning opportunity program of opportunities that addressed one or more emerging priorities facing your museum, or it could be developing activities that help you.

9:05

Implement programs that address specific learning and growth opportunities identified by need assessment.

9:13

So, the needs might come from individuals who have unique needs that you want to address, or they could be a priority, is facing the museum, either now or in the near future, Collectively, the museum is trying to address.

9:30

Sometimes it's tough to achieve the goal, so here are a few strategies to help you select one that aligns best with your project.

9:37

Think carefully about what's in the center of your project, Who are what will benefit from your work, and what will be improved once you've finished your project.

9:47

Decide who you want to review your application.

9:50

What kind of skill set an experience do you want?

9:53

Want them to lists all the activities you plan to carry out an assigned to each to a goal. Which goal gets the most?

10:01

These are just some ideas about how you might decide which goal is best.

10:05

You might wonder why your decision about which goal to choose is so important.

10:09

Well, because it does impact the review process, your application will be reviewed by museum professionals who have expertise, and experience that's aligned with one of these goals, and, in addition, your application will be competing against others who have chosen the same goal.

10:27

Our advice is to choose one program goal, and write your proposal according.

10:32

We recognize that there's some overlap between the goals, but you should pick one, and, like I said, write your proposal accordingly.

10:43

We'll turn now to allowable and unallowable costs for your project.

10:46

Very careful in preparing your proposal and include only allowable costs in both the IMLS grant funds and the cost share part of your budget.

10:54

We'll go through some common expenses that are allowable and unallowable.

10:58

But for details, please do look at the 2 CFR 200, which is the essential federal guidelines.

11:06

Cost principles and these are available online at the link shown here and is highly searchable.

11:16

In the Museums Empowered program, we provide a partial list of the most common examples of allowable costs.

11:23

These costs may be part of what you ask IMLS to pay for or what you'll pay for as part of your cost share.

11:29

The rules about allow ability apply equally to the entire budget.

11:33

In other words, whether a cost item is on the Grant Fund side of the Budget Form or on the Cost Share side of the Budget Form, the same rules of allowability apply to all line items in the budget.

11:45

So, for example, here, you can put under, as an allowable expense, salaries and wages, and fringe benefits, benefits for staff.

11:55

Now, it could be a percentage of their time devoted to the project that you're paying for under grant funds.

12:02

It could be a percentage of their time that you're paying for and contributing to the project under cost share.

12:09

Both are allowable.

12:14

We also provide a list of generally unallowable costs. Again, both for the IMLS funds and for cost share.

12:20

These costs may not be part of what you ask and wants to pay for it, nor can they be part of what you'll pay for as part of your cost share.

12:28

Note that unallowable expenses shouldn't be anywhere in your proposal.

12:33

So remember to focus your budget and the cost items you include there on expenses that will occur during the period of performance, during the duration of the grant award, and on expenses that are directly related to the activities in the proposed project.

12:48

And as you prepare your application, it's a good idea to compare your list of proposed expenses against those.

12:54

The list here of allowable and unallowable costs.

12:59

If after that, you have some specific questions, you can feel free to contact us and we'll be happy to help.

13:07

Now that you have a basic framework on the amount of funding and the allowable costs for your project, let's review the multiple parts of the grant application that you will need to prepare.

13:18

The application components are a series of documents you will upload in grants dot gov together, Make up your application.

13:25

These application components fall into three categories.

13:29

The first is that of required documents. All applications must include these.

13:34

The second group, is that a conditionally required documents. Now some applications must include this and it depends on the nature of your institution or perhaps some aspect of your project.

13:46

The third group of application components are supporting documents.

13:49

These are completely optional.

13:56

Your application will consist of a series of individual documents, and it's very important to make sure you prepare and submit everything necessary.

14:03

Let's look at the required documents.

14:06

All applications must include 12 required documents, and they're listed on this slide.

14:11

The documents listed on the left side of this slide are created by you, using a Word document, processing software.

14:19

And then saving that document as a PDF.

14:24

Instructions for all of these required documents are found in the NOFO.

14:28

Many of these have page limits, and if you exceed the page limit specified in the no vote, you must remove the extras before your application goes out for review.

14:37

Make sure your content fits into the page limits specified, and make sure the number of pages holds when you convert your document to a PDF.

14:48

The four required documents on the right side of this slide include the Application for Federal Assistance, the IMLS Supplementary Information Form, and the IMLS Museum Program Information Form.

15:01

These are online forms that you complete in the grants dot gov environment.

15:06

The IMLS Budget Form is a fillable PDF.

15:11

The second category of application components is that of conditionally required documents. Some applications must include one or all of these, and you need to figure out which one is required for you.

15:23

So, for example, if you're applying as a non-profit, then you must include your proof of non-profit status issued by the IRS.

15:32

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

15:41

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

15:48

The term digital product includes digitizing born digital content, software, and research data, so if you're creating any of these, you should include that plan in your application.

16:00

The third group of application components is supporting documents, and some documents are completely, supporting supporting documents are completely optional.

16:09

This is not the place to introduce new information.

16:12

Some common items in this section might be letters of support from key stakeholders, or summaries from studies or reports that helped shape design of your project, can bolster the project justification.

16:25

You might just have a bibliography of references and related documents.

16:29

So, for example, an essential supporting document might be a letter of commitment from a consultant that you identified in the project work plan.

16:36

And that letter might include information that further describes their methodology or approach to the proposed project or have a detailed cost estimate that further justifies their associated costs and the budget.

16:50

Another example might be a letter of support from a key project partners.

16:54

That's a community organization or other entity outside of the museum.

16:58

It will be an important part of the project activities, a letter describing their support of the project, and providing background on the relationship between the partner organization and the museum, but help reviewers understand the context in which the project will be.

17:15

We also recommend that you'd be respectful of your reviewers time.

17:18

So include what's important and helpful.

17:21

Let's stop there.

17:27

Now, let's turn to two specific documents that are very important.

17:34

The first is a strategic plan summary.

17:37

IMLS wants to help you achieve your goals, And one of the characteristics of a successful Museums Empowered project is addressing a key need or challenge that faces your museum as identified in your strategic plan.

17:49

So, what we ask for you to provide here, is a summary of your plan, no more than two pages, so that reviewers can understand how your proposed project activities will further your institutional goals and objectives.

18:04

You should also indicate when and by whom the plan was approved.

18:08

Might be your Board of Trustees or some other group with authority to make those sign that document.

18:15

Use a narrative format, for your summary, review risk telos.

18:18

They find a well constructed, thoughtful and written summary is the best way to see the connection between your museum's strategic plan and the proposed project.

18:31

The other document I want to talk about here was, is the performance measurement plan.

18:37

So this is a new requirement from the federal government that agencies now have to measure the performance of awardees.

18:45

Performance measurement tells us how good a job you did as a fellow awardee helps IMLS understand, manage, and improve our grant program.

18:53

It's different than project evaluation.

18:55

Project evaluation, by contrast, is all about your project and your intended results or outcomes.

19:03

Project evaluation will be covered in the narrative part of the application, All the questions we ask them to know about such as what need you're regressing.

19:11

What associated results do you want your project to have?

19:16

But for now, let's turn our focus to performance measurement, and how we'll ask you to plan for it and report on it.

19:23

In the Notice of Funding Opportunity, we provide a sample chart which applicants may use. It is not required, but you can use it. On the left side of the chart, are commonly used measures that IMLS has adopted, or this effort, versus effectiveness extent to which activities contribute to achieving the intended results.

19:44

Next up is efficiency, how well the resources are used.

19:48

Quality refers to how well the activities meet the requirements and expectations of the target group, and timeliness, the extent to which each activity is completed within the timeframe.

20:00

Across the top are the information points we're asking you to use in your statements with examples, such as for data, like percentages, or hours, or things like that.

20:11

You might have qualitative measures, such as observations, or opinions or feelings.

20:17

For each performance measure, we provide a couple of examples addressing issues that might turn up in museum projects.

20:23

The blank space is where we suggest you write your own performance metric.

20:28

We're looking for one statement for each required performance measure, And you may provide more than one if you wish.

20:35

But just keep in mind that this document is limited to two pages, so one statement, per measure, it's quite enough.

20:47

Among the required components of your application, a narrative is the section that reviewers are likely to spend the most time reading.

20:55

So, let's examine that narrative section in the application.

20:59

This grant program, the Narrative, is limited to seven pages and divided into three sections: the Justification, the Work Plan, and the Results.

21:09

And the questions we're going to have to ask you to answer. And the review criteria are all in the NOFO.

21:17

So, for example, in the Project Justification in this first section of the narrative, we ask you to lay out the reasoning for your project in the clearest terms possible, what you propose to do.

21:28

What need, problem, or challenge you're going to address, what or who is going to benefit, how your project will enhance the capacity of your institution and advance your strategic plan.

21:41

We also want to know how you're addressing the goals of the museum's empowered program using professional development to generate systemic change within see it.

21:53

In this section of the narrative, you'll notice a distinction is made between target group and beneficiaries.

21:59

Target Group refers to the most immediately affected by your project.

22:05

Identify the number of individuals in the target group.

22:09

Or in each target group, if you identify more than the ultimate beneficiaries refers to those who are likely to be aided in the long term by a prop, they might be may or may not be the same as your target group.

22:24

So, you want to identify the number of individuals who will benefit in the long term, it might some reliable count, if possible.

22:37

Otherwise, you can describe the characteristics of the beneficiaries You expect to be served, you mentioned by your project, if you're not able to reliably innumerate.

22:47

Them by number.

22:52

Reviewers will evaluate your proposal and the justification part of your proposal on how well you explain your project and how well you've identified that need, problem or challenge you're going to address.

23:04

And how well you've supported it with relevant evidence, and whether you've clearly identified who's going to benefit.

23:11

And if it involves an audience, how and whether they've been involved in the planning.

23:25

Because the need problem or challenge is foundational in your application, Keep these points in mind.

23:30

Federal government wants its investment to result in something getting better.

23:34

So as you define your new problem or challenge, what's going to get better as a result of your projects wanted to find that as precisely as possible?

23:44

Well, someone learn something, develop a skill, or change an attitude.

23:49

Identify why it's important that this particular change happen, and gather and present data that support your problem.

23:59

Project Work Plan is the part of the narrative in which you relay who will do what, when, and using what resources.

24:08

We asked you to identify, and tell us what specific activities you will undertake, who's going to plan and implement and manage your project?

24:16

When and what sequence the activities will occur, and what resources, financial, or personnel are going to be needed to carry out those activities, and how are you going to track progress.

24:28

Reviewers will evaluate your proposal on.

24:31

How well your activities are informed by appropriate theory and practice.

24:35

Whether the goals, assumptions, risks are clearly stated.

24:39

Reviewers wanted to see that the team you've put together has the experience and skills necessary to complete the work successfully.

24:49

And that your schedule is realistic and achievable.

24:53

In this section you want to show how the project team is structured, and is it equitable and mutually beneficial to those involved.

25:03

It's important to see how the project team is organized to support engagement of all participants.

25:11

We'll also be looking at whether the time and personnel and financial resources are appropriate for the scope and scale of the project.

25:18

I want to know if there's a clear methodology for tracking your progress.

25:23

Remember, the review criteria as you sit that you're seeing on the slide are listed in their entirety in the Notice of Funding Opportunity as well.

25:36

So, that's part of the narrative.

25:37

The work plan is really built around the activities that you're going to undertake.

25:43

So it's important to be clear about what an activity is.

25:47

It's certainly something that you do, and it has a beginning and an end, just like projects, and you know when you've finished it, because it doesn't need to be done anymore, it's no longer on your to-do list.

25:59

So, activity, in this part of the section, should not be a goal or result, or an outcome, but it's something you're going to do as part of trying to achieve those goals.

26:10

So, when you're listing your activities in your work plan, aim for a reasonable level of detail in identifying those activities, not too much, not too little.

26:20

Just right.

26:24

The final section of the narrative is your results, and this is where you articulate the impact of your project.

26:31

What specific results do you intend to achieve in order to address the need problem or challenge that you've identified and the justification?

26:40

Some things are going to get better, so tell us what that is. Tell us about the tangible products that are going to result from your project.

26:48

Talk about what's going to happen when the project is over.

26:52

How are you going to sustain the benefits of your project beyond the lifespan of this particular project?

27:00

Reviewers will give us their opinions on how well you've designed a feasible plan for collecting that data.

27:06

How likely it is that those improvements you propose will be realized in more of those tangible products that you're going to create?

27:14

Are they going to be accessible to that target audience, and whether your plan for sustaining the benefits beyond the project period are reasonable and practical.

27:26

So, just another thought here about results is when you think back to the questions we referenced a couple of slides ago about the need, problem, or challenge. You're going to say, well, what's going to get better as a result of this work? So, if you said someone was going to learn something.

27:43

How will you know? If your problem is related to segments of your community getting to work together, how do you know when that's going to be achieved?

27:54

Are your staff working together?

27:57

All your results should tie back to that need, problem, or challenge, right, and have something here in the results.

28:04

The indicates some change has happened.

28:10

We also sometimes suggest using a logic model. It's a useful tool to help explain your intended results and your plan for achieving them.

28:18

If you use a logic model, feel free to include that as a supporting document.

28:24

Many reviewers appreciate seeing one, and if you don't use a logic model where you're using some other method to map out your activities and tools, you can certainly use that, as well.

28:41

So, in summary, and considering all the components of your application, there are four general characteristics.

28:47

In successful Museums Empowered applications that reviewers often see.

28:54

So, as you prepare your application, keep these in mind versus the institutional impact.

28:59

So, again, revisiting the goal of the program, it's about using the transformative power of professional development to generate systemic change.

29:11

Want to see that there's some institutional impact, a change in the culture of your museum, a systemic change within your organization.

29:22

Second is the in-depth knowledge and wants your proposal to reflect a thorough understanding of current practice and knowledge about the subject matter.

29:33

Third, is project based design. As we've talked about, project based design is logical, inter-related activities that are going to address that key need or challenge.

29:43

And with demonstrable results as the fourth item.

29:46

It's really that we want to see something measurable that's going to change at the end.

29:53

An application that has all of these four characteristics will stand out in the review process, and will have the best, the best chance of success for funding.

30:04

So I also want to share with you the places to look for more information such as the IMLS website, where you can find the awarded grant search to learn more about the projects we have funded through the Museums Empowered program.

30:18

This search tool gives you an opportunity to explore our archive of grants that we have awarded in past years, using a variety of criteria, such as institution name, location, or keyword Research will reveal basic information about the award, As well as a brief description of the project.

30:39

This can be extremely helpful as you put ideas together for your own project.

30:46

We've also posted the Narrative and Schedule of Completion for six successful applications from 2022.

30:56

To find these examples, go to the sample applications on the IMLS website and scroll down the page to find the museum's empowered examples.

31:09

Each PDF contains a copy of the seven page Narrative and also the Schedule of Completion.

31:15

Many of the samples were identified by our peer reviewers as good examples of well written applications that provided all the essential information necessary for them to review the application.

31:27

Looking at these proposals might help clarify your thinking about hearing.

31:34

This is the general schedule of events.

31:36

Just to show what happens to your application once we receive it.

31:41

IMLS staff will review it for completeness and eligibility.

31:45

And you'll hear from us via e-mail if there are any problems.

31:49

From February through June, you're experienced and knowledgeable appears will provide scores and comments based on the criteria outlined in the LFL.

31:58

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

32:05

We then prepare materials for the IMLS Deputy Director, as well as the IMLS Director.

32:12

That person, the IMLS Director, is charged by law with the authority and responsibility to make final award decision.

32:21

This happens in early July.

32:26

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

32:33

And on September 1, 2023, your funded project begins.

32:44

In conclusion, I wanted to just share a few tips that we collected from our experience and working with applicants each year.

32:51

First, is to register early, you must have an active sam dot gov registration, you're registered with grants dot gov, and you must have a functional grants dot gov registration, do an order to submit an application to IMLS.

33:09

Now, there's no cost to register on these sites, but it can take from several days to several weeks to get your registration established and validated.

33:18

So pay attention to this requirement, particularly if this is your first time applying for a federal grant, or if your sam registration has expired, or if you've had a change in your point of contact for sam.

33:30

Start that registration process or renewal process as early as possible.

33:36

Your sam dot gov registration expires each year, and you must renew it.

33:41

And you can login to sam dot gov at anytime and find out your status, and I would recommend doing that today.

33:49

Both sam dot gov and grants dot gov have their own helpdesk to assist you with resolving issues for tracking problems that might arise with your registration process.

34:02

Now, here are some application tips to make sure you meet that deadline.

34:07

Read the NOFO. We know it's a long document, but it contains essential information on how to prepare your application.

34:16

Schedule a counseling call with one of our staff.

34:19

We're available to answer your questions, and these often come at the start of the process. General questions might be a group called with several folks out in your organization.

34:27

And, later, you might have a specific question or detailed question about a particular component, and feel free to e-mail or call to ask those questions.

34:36

Describe your museum well and vividly and use recent and relevant data to make your point.

34:42

So, reviewers are going to look at the application to try to understand your museum. So, be sure to give them a good description of how it operates.

34:51

Follow the narrative outlined in the Notice of Funding Opportunity.

34:55

Consider using the same headings to make it easy for reviewers to read and find the information they need.

35:02

Avoid generalities and jargon.

35:05

The people who will review your application are experts, but they may not be totally familiar with your particular shorthand, so make it easy for them to understand what you mean.

35:17

Ask a colleague to read the seven page narrative with fresh shots. Ask them to act like a reviewer who's seeing this for the first time and do it well in advance of the submission deadline.

35:28

Do you have adequate time to edit the narrative, if necessary?

35:33

Be sure your application is complete. Check it against the table of application components to be sure you're not missing any required documents.

35:40

And submit to grants dot gov early, so you can correct any errors before the deadline.

35:48

So, let's recap.

35:53

If you haven't already been doing it while listening to this webinar, be sure to go to IMLS dot gov and read the Notice of Funding Opportunity carefully.

36:02

Check your organization's registrations with both sam dot gov and grants dot gov.

36:09

Reach out to a program staff member and schedule a counseling call.

36:15

Prepare your application and make sure it's complete.

36:20

Then submit before the deadline November 15, 2022, 11 59 PM, Eastern Time.

36:31

So, in closing our presentation today, I want to make sure that you have our phone number and e-mail address for the program staff assigned to work on Museums Empowered.

36:43

Don't hesitate to contact either of us with questions or concerns.

36:48

Thank you, and best of luck.

36:51

I look forward to hearing from you.