



# IMLS Museums for America Grant Program FY2023 Information Session

August 2022

Welcome to the Institute of Museum and Library Services' webinar, "Museums for America Grant Program Fiscal Year 2023 Information Session."

My name is Mark Feitl and I am pleased that you could join me today and that you are interested in preparing an application for the IMLS Museums for America grant program.

Our goal in this presentation is to provide specific information about the Museums for America grant program and make some recommendations that you may wish to consider when preparing your application. Since this is a pre-recorded webinar and you won't have the opportunity to ask questions, feel free to contact me or any of the other staff in the Office of Museum Services to seek answers to your questions or to discuss a project idea. The staff contact slide is shown later in this webinar.

# Companion Webinar

## IMLS OMS: Choosing a Funding Opportunity for FY2023

*Basic information for all applicants*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7k5xSIFRhVY>



Access recordings and transcripts of our webinars here:

<https://www.imls.gov/webinars-archive>

This is one of a series of pre-recorded webinars designed to help you find the information you need to create a competitive application for IMLS museum funding. “Choosing a Funding Opportunity for FY2023” was pre-recorded and is available as a video, and as a PDF of the slides, plus as a transcript on our website, at the link identified here.

In that webinar, we cover the IMLS vision, mission, and strategic plan with an emphasis on how they influence our grant making. We also address institutional eligibility, provide a quick overview of all our funding opportunities, how to find information online with a focus on our website, and we cover the two places you must be registered in order to apply for an IMLS grant. We strongly recommend that you view this webinar to get the complete picture of preparing and submitting a competitive application to the Museums for America program.

In addition to this Museums for America webinar, we are providing pre-recorded webinars for all of our museum grant programs. You can find links to these on the grant program landing pages on our website.



## FY2022 Museums for America

Project Category	Number of Applications	Number of Awards	Funds Requested	Funds Awarded
Lifelong Learning	134	41	\$24,453,037	\$8,225,681
Community Engagement	60	28	\$11,836,773	\$5,439,809
Collections Stewardship and Access	126	51	\$22,446,470	\$9,171,422
TOTAL	320	120	\$58,736,280	\$22,836,912

Before we jump into the details, we are often asked about numbers of applications and funding success rates, so here are the figures for the just completed FY2022 Museums for America grant cycle. As you can see, with just under \$23 million available, we were able to fund over 37% of the applications we received.

# Overview

- MFA Program Goals
  - Characteristics of Successful Projects
  - Eligibility Requirements for Museums
  - Important Dates and Times
  - How Much and How Many?
  - Project Categories
  - Allowable/Unallowable Costs
- Application Components
  - Application Tips
  - Review Process
  - Contacts



[Image: Nick Youngson - <http://nyphotographic.com/>]

In this presentation, we'll be addressing the following topics:

- MFA Program Goals
- Characteristics of Successful MFA Projects
- Eligibility Requirements for Museums
- Important Dates and Times
- The questions of How much and How Many?
- Project Categories
- Allowable and Unallowable Costs—what you can and cannot include in your project
- Application Components
- Application Tips
- The Review Process
- IMLS Staff Contact Information

## MFA Program Goals

MFA supports projects that strengthen the ability of an **individual** museum to serve **its** public.

Activities might reflect museums as:

- active resources for learning and literacy
- institutions important in improving the well-being of their communities
- good stewards of the nation's collections

**Emphasis is on local impact.**



Museums for America, or MFA, is our largest grant program, receiving the largest number of applications each year and the one through which we make the largest number of awards. The overall goal of the program is to support activities that strengthen the abilities of individual museums to serve their publics. This might be through activities that reflect museums as active resources for lifelong learning, as institutions important in improving the well-being of their communities, or as good stewards of the nation's collections.

MFA is all about what **your** museum needs in order to better serve **your** public. It may well be exactly the same as what the museum across town or in a neighboring state needs, and that's ok. The important thing here is that our support should help you make a local impact.

Top : Photo courtesy of New York Botanical Garden;

Bottom: Photo courtesy of New Bedford Whaling Museum



## Characteristics of Successful MFA Applications

- ***Institutional Impact:*** The project addresses a key goal identified in the institution's strategic plan.
- ***In-depth knowledge:*** The project design reflects a thorough understanding of current practice and knowledge about the subject matter.
- ***Project-based design:*** The work plan consists of a set of logical, interrelated activities tied directly to addressing the key need or challenge.
- ***Demonstrable results:*** The project generates measurable results that tie directly to the need or challenge it was designed to address.

With this focus on supporting the individual museum, what are the characteristics of successful Museums for America applications? There are four, and successful projects exemplify all of them well. As you prepare your application, then, you should keep these characteristics in mind.

It has been our experience that an unfunded application is one that has failed to deliver convincingly on one or more of these, so it is wise to think about how to structure your application to show how your project will be strong in each.

- **Institutional Impact:** The project addresses a key goal identified in the institution's strategic plan.
- **In-depth knowledge:** The project design reflects a thorough understanding of current practice and knowledge about the subject matter.
- **Project-based design:** The work plan consists of a set of logical, interrelated activities tied directly to addressing the key need or challenge.
- **Demonstrable results:** The project generates measurable results that tie directly to the need or challenge it was designed to address.



## Eligibility Requirements for Museums

To qualify as a “museum,” an organization must:

- be a unit of State or local government or be a private, nonprofit organization;
- be located within the United States and its territories;
- use a professional staff;
- be organized on a permanent basis for essentially educational or aesthetic purposes;
- own or use tangible objects, either animate or inanimate;
- care for these objects; AND
- exhibit these objects to the general public on a regular basis through facilities that it owns or operates.

Let's talk about eligibility requirements for museums.

To be eligible to apply, museums must:

- Be either a unit of State or local government or be a private, nonprofit organization that has tax-exempt status under the Internal Revenue Code;
- Be located in one of the 50 States of the United States of America, or affiliated territories
- use a professional staff (and, by that, we need at least one fulltime professional or the equivalent level of effort from part-time staff);
- be organized on a permanent basis for essentially educational or aesthetic purposes;
- own or use tangible objects, either animate or inanimate;
- care for these objects; and
- exhibit these objects to the general public on a regular basis through facilities that it owns or operates.

Please note that our statute requires a museum to be open to the public at least 120 days a year in order to be eligible for funding.

For more details on each of these points, please take a look at the eligibility information in the Museums for America Notice of Funding Opportunity.

## Important Dates and Times



Applications are due by 11:59 pm  
EST on November 15, 2022.

- Awards will be announced in August 2023.
- Projects must start September 1, 2023.

Here are important dates relating to MFA applications. Applications must be received through Grants.gov by 11:59 pm Eastern Time on November 15, 2022. The date is non-negotiable. The time stamp is auto-generated by the Grants.gov system, and we have no ability to override it. We will say this over and over again, but start early and submit your application early. That way, if you encounter a difficulty of any kind when submitting your proposal, you'll have some time to resolve the problem and resubmit.

MFA awards will be announced in August 2023, and MFA projects must be scheduled to start on the first day of September, 2023.

Please make sure that everyone involved in preparing your grant application is aware of these dates.



## How much and how many?



### HOW MUCH?

\$5,000-\$250,000 (total request)  
with **1:1** cost share required

### HOW MANY?

There is no limit on the number of applications your museum may submit to MFA under the FY2023 announcement.

Regarding how much money you may request, there is only one option in MFA. All requests must be between \$5,000 and \$250,000, including both direct and indirect costs. If you ask for less than \$5,000 or more than \$250,000, your application will most likely be rejected and not reviewed.

Requests to Museums for America must have at least a 1:1 non-federal cost share. Cost share can take a number of forms—among them are cash, staff time, volunteer time, third-party contributions, grants from foundations, and support from state or local government. Cost share cannot come from other federal sources.

In terms of how many applications you may submit, there is no limit to the number of applications you can file in response to the FY2023 funding announcement for Museums for America. However, as you consider the option to submit more than one application, we urge you to think about the capacity of your organization to manage multiple federal awards at once.

## What is a “project”?

A temporary endeavor undertaken to create a unique product, service, or result.



- A project is **temporary** in that it has a defined beginning and end in time, and therefore defined scope and resources.
- And a project is **unique** in that it is not a routine operation, but a specific set of operations designed to accomplish a singular goal.

We have made reference several times to “projects” here, and so let’s take a minute to consider just exactly what that means. The Project Management Institute has a good definition, which is “A temporary endeavor undertaken to create a unique product, service, or result.” They go on further to explain that a project is temporary because it has a defined beginning and end in time and therefore defined scope and resources.

And a project is unique in that it is not a routine operation but rather a specific set of operations designed to accomplish a singular goal.

We recommend that you keep this definition in mind as you conceptualize your IMLS project. Think of it as a temporary non-routine set of activities, which collectively have a beginning and an end in time, a defined scope requiring specific resources, and which are designed to accomplish a specific, singular goal.

Photo Courtesy of Historic Cherry Hill



## MFA Project Categories

**Lifelong Learning:** IMLS supports the ability of museums to empower people of all ages and backgrounds through experiential and cross-disciplinary learning and discovery.

**Community Engagement:** IMLS promotes the role of museums as essential partners in addressing the needs of their communities by leveraging their expertise, knowledge, physical space, collections, technology, and other resources to identify and implement solutions.

**Collections Stewardship and Access:** IMLS supports the role of museums as trusted stewards of museum collections as the natural, cultural, artistic, historical, and scientific foundations of our shared heritage and knowledge.

With that concept of “project” in mind, let’s turn to project categories. Second to choosing to apply to the Museums for America grant program, this is likely to be the most important decision you make about your funding application. As you can see here, there are three options: Lifelong Learning, Community Engagement, and Collections Stewardship and Access.

You will find these three areas described under the Goals of the MFA program in the Notice of Funding Opportunity. You will select your project category on the Museum Program Information Form.

**Why is your decision about which project category to choose so important?** For one thing, your application will be reviewed by museum professionals who have experience and expertise in these general categories. And for another, your application will be competing against others who have chosen the same category. In short, the entire review process incorporates an assumption that your project aligns with the category you’ve identified. So, it’s an important choice.

## Goals and Objectives: Lifelong Learning

**Goal 1, Lifelong Learning: Empower people of all ages and backgrounds through experiential and cross-disciplinary learning and discovery.**

- Objective 1.1: Support public programs, adult programs, family programs, and early childhood programs.
- Objective 1.2: Support exhibitions, interpretation, and digital media.
- Objective 1.3: Support in-school and out-of-school programs.



*Successful Lifelong Learning projects will provide high-quality, inclusive educational opportunities that address particular audience needs.*

So let's take a look at what kinds of activities a project in each of these categories might include. In this and the two slides that follow, the objectives provide a list of the types of projects that fit within the Goal. And, the Goals correspond to the MFA program categories.

A project in Lifelong Learning might include but is not limited to design and fabrication of an exhibit, program development for all types of audiences, creating interpretive plans, media, training for teachers, partnerships with schools or out-of-school audiences, professional development opportunities for museum staff, or program evaluation.

As you plan your project in this category, we strongly recommend starting with the concept of “learner at the center” and build around it. Spend time really thinking through who your learners in this project are and what their needs are. It's not likely going to be “everybody,” so who is it really? What do they want to learn, what do you want them to learn, and what's the best way to achieve that goal? We'll get to the whole idea of problems and needs in a few minutes, but a major takeaway here is to be focused on identifying your audience and thinking about how you are going to serve them.

Image courtesy of New-York Historical Society

## Goals and Objectives: Community Engagement:

- **Goal 2, Community Engagement: Maximize the use of museum resources to address community needs through partnerships and collaborations**
  - Objective 2.1: Support audience research, evaluation, and outreach.
  - Objective 2.2: Support community-driven exhibitions and programs.
  - Objective 2.3: Support community-focused planning and civic engagement



*Successful Community Engagement projects strive to create a better quality of life within communities.*

A Community Engagement project is likely to include activities that contribute directly to your institution's functioning as an essential partner in addressing community needs. As you scan this list, you'll see the word "community" in nearly every entry. Simply saying you plan to be welcoming to your community or you plan to serve your community is not likely to be enough. Reviewers should be able to see clearly that you have involved members of your community in planning your project and that you'll continue to involve them in its implementation and evaluation.

So, if your project involves exhibitions or interpretive programs, how do you know if your project fits best within Lifelong Learning or Community Engagement? Which category should you pick? We suggest that you consider whether or not your intended exhibitions or interpretive programs require the input of community partners to co-create the content, or if your museum's curatorial staff will drive the content internally. If it is the former, then Community Engagement is probably the best category to select, and if it is the latter, then Lifelong Learning would be appropriate to select. Both approaches are legitimate, and both are fundable. Ultimately, it's your choice. What's important is that you choose one and write your application that way.

Photo courtesy of Hermann-Grima Gallier Historic House Museum

## Collections Stewardship and Access: Goals and Objectives

- **Goal 3, Collections Stewardship and Access: Advance the management and care of collections and their associated documentation.**
  - Objective 3.1: Support cataloging, inventorying, and registration; collections information management; and collections planning.
  - Objective 3.2: Support conservation and environmental improvement and/or rehousing; conservation surveys; and conservation treatment.
  - Objective 3.3: Support database management, digital asset management, and digitization.



*Successful Collections Stewardship and Access projects contribute to the long-term preservation of, increased access to, and expanded use of materials entrusted to the museum's care.*

Our third project category is that of Collections Stewardship and Access, and this includes just about anything you need to do for and with collections, except acquire them.

We are very open to projects that have multiple components configured in ways that make sense for you. One project might consist of cataloging, taking digital photographs, and updating database records, while another might combine digitization activities with rehousing. We invite applications for projects that involve preparing to mitigate the impact of natural and man-made disasters on collections and collections information. This might be planning and training in emergency preparedness; developing networks for response; executing strategies for recovery; and/or developing resilience in preparation for the next time.

We support conservation projects of all kinds—general, detailed, and environmental surveys as well as treatments and environmental improvements. And you are welcome to incorporate aspects of training and/or collections management into these projects if doing so makes sense for your situation.

It's important to note that in this project category, we encourage a step-by-step, progressive approach to collections work, including conservation. This means assessing needs, creating a prioritized list of activities, and following through by **doing the most important things first**.

Photo Courtesy of Winterthur Museum, Garden and Library

# Choosing a Project Category



Lifelong Learning



Community Engagement



Collections Stewardship and Access

## *Having a hard time choosing? Try these:*

1. Think carefully about what is “in the center” of your project. Who or what will benefit from your work? What will be improved once you’ve finished your project?
2. Decide whom you want to review your application. What kind of skill sets and experience do you want them to have?
3. List all the activities you plan to carry out and assign each to a category. Which category includes the largest number of activities? Where will most of the resources be spent?

Before we close our discussion of project categories, we want to mention our guidance for projects that could belong logically in more than one. Sometimes it’s tough to choose, and you might be tempted to think that the best strategy would be to align with more than one—two, and maybe even three! We advise against that for several reasons.

The project categories have different goals, and we expect that projects aligned with each will address different problems, use different approaches, and will measure success in achieving the intended results in different ways. So how can you choose the best category for your project?

Here are three things we suggest you try. **Think carefully about what is “in the center” of your project.** Is it the learner? Will people who engage with you as a result of your project, let's say to create a new exhibition and related programming, acquire new knowledge, develop a skill, experience a change in attitude about the subject of your exhibit? Or is it the community that’s in the center of your thinking? Is your project one that will address an important community need, and require engaging a number of community members, and are you doing it because you believe your museum can make a difference? Or is your project about the collections? Will your project result in a better managed, better cared-for, or more accessible set of objects?

A second way to go at this might be to think about **who you want to review your application.** If you apply under Lifelong Learning, we will put your application in front of museum educators, exhibits professionals, interpretive specialists and professionals with deep

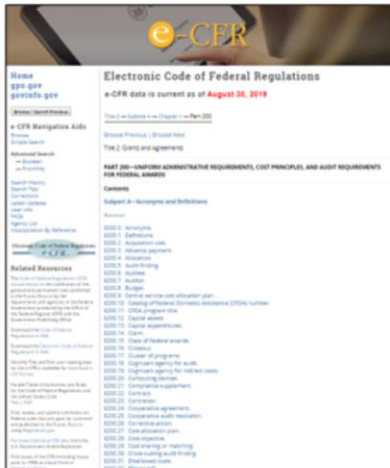
experience in understanding how people learn in museum environments. Would you rather we put it in front of a combination of experts in civic engagement and social justice, community outreach, and collective impact? If that sounds “right,” then it may push you toward Community Engagement. And if you apply under Collections Stewardship and Access, you can be confident that your application will be reviewed by some combination of registrars, collection managers, curators, conservators, or collections information specialists. If that seems appropriate, then this is most likely your best choice.

Our most important advice, is to choose one project category, study the instructions for preparing an application as well as the review criteria for that category, and write your proposal accordingly. As always, if you have questions, call the IMLS staff to discuss them.

Top Left: Image courtesy of USS Constitution Museum. Top Center: Image courtesy of Peralta Hacienda Historical Park. Top Right: Image Courtesy of Winterthur Museum and Gardens



# Allowable/Unallowable Costs



## 2 CFR 200 Cost Principles

Subpart E - COST PRINCIPLES	
General Provisions	
§ 200.400	Policy guide
§ 200.401	Application
Basic Considerations	
§ 200.402	Composition of costs
§ 200.403	Factors affecting allowability of costs
§ 200.404	Reasonable costs
§ 200.405	Allowable costs
§ 200.406	Applicable costs
§ 200.407	Prior written approval (prior approval)
§ 200.408	Limitation on allowance of costs
§ 200.409	Special considerations
§ 200.410	Collection of unallowable costs
§ 200.411	Adjustment of previously negotiated indirect (F&A) cost rates concerning unallowable costs
Direct and Indirect (F&A) Costs	
§ 200.412	Classification of costs
§ 200.413	Direct costs
§ 200.414	Indirect (F&A) costs
§ 200.415	Special considerations
Special Considerations for Grants, Loans, Borrowings and Other Transactions	
§ 200.416	Cost allocation plans and indirect cost proposals
§ 200.417	Emergency services
Special Considerations for Institutions of Higher Education	
§ 200.418	Costs incurred by states and local governments
§ 200.419	Cost accounting standards and disclosure statement
General Provisions for Scientific Work or Cost	
§ 200.420	Considerations for selected items of cost
§ 200.421	Advertising and public relations
§ 200.422	Alcoholic beverages
§ 200.423	Alcoholic beverages
§ 200.424	Alcoholic beverages
§ 200.425	Adult services
§ 200.426	Ball games
§ 200.427	Bonding costs

[https://www.ecfr.gov/cgi-bin/text-idx?tpl=/ecfrbrowse/Title02/2cfr200\\_main\\_02.tpl](https://www.ecfr.gov/cgi-bin/text-idx?tpl=/ecfrbrowse/Title02/2cfr200_main_02.tpl)

We'll turn now to types of allowable and unallowable costs for your project. Be careful when preparing your proposal to only include allowable costs in your federal funding request and any cost share you choose to provide. Including unallowable costs can hurt your chances of getting positive reviews and being recommended for funding.

We'll go through some common expenses that are allowable and unallowable, but for details, you'll want to consult the federal regulations that govern federal awards. We call these "2 CFR 200" for short, but the full title is "Title 2, Subtitle A, Chapter II, Part 200 - Uniform Administrative Requirements, Cost Principles, and Audit Requirements for Federal Awards." I know that sounds like a mouthful, but these regulations contain important guidance that all Federal grant applicants and recipients should be aware of.

Fortunately, they are available online in a searchable format via the U.S. Government Publishing Office website listed on this screen. Of particular interest for the topic of allowable or unallowable costs is Subpart E - Cost Principles, a small section of which is shown on the right side of this slide.

# Allowable Costs

## Examples of allowable costs

- personnel salaries, wages, and fringe benefits
- travel expenses for key project staff and consultants
- materials, supplies, software, and equipment related directly to project activities
- equipment to improve collections storage and exhibit environments
- third-party costs
- publication design and printing
- staff and volunteer training
- internships/fellowships
- indirect or overhead costs



In the MFA Notice of Funding Opportunity – on page 17 - we provide a partial list of the most common examples of allowable costs as listed here.

These costs may be part of what you ask IMLS to pay for with federal funds or what you will pay for as part of your cost share. Again, the rules about allowability apply to both, so when completing your project budget, be sure to check that all the costs you include, whether grant funds or cost share, are allowable. You are required to explain all of your proposed expenses in your application budget justification.

# Unallowable Costs



## Examples of unallowable costs

- general fundraising costs, such as development office staff or other staff time devoted to general fundraising
- contributions to endowments
- general operating support
- acquisition of collections
- general advertising or public relations costs for general promotional activities
- construction or renovation of facilities (generally, any activity involving the construction trades is not an allowable cost)
- social activities, ceremonies, receptions, or entertainment
- research projects

On pages 17-18 of the MFA Notice of Funding Opportunity, we also provide a list of generally unallowable costs, again both for IMLS funds and for cost share. These costs may **not** be part of what you ask IMLS to pay for, **nor** can they be part of what you will pay for as part of your cost share. In fact, unallowable expenses can't show up anywhere in your proposal.

As you prepare your application, it's a good idea to compare your list of proposed expenses against these lists of allowable and unallowable costs and against the appropriate set of cost principles. If after that you have specific questions, please contact us and we'll be happy to help.



## Application Components: Required Documents

These components are required of all MFA applications.

- Application for Federal Assistance/Short Organizational Form (SF-424S)
- IMLS Supplementary Information Form (including Abstract)
- IMLS Museum Program Information Form
- Organizational Profile (1 page)
- Strategic Plan Summary (2 pages max.)
- Narrative (7 pages max.)
- Schedule of Completion (1 page per year max.)
- Performance Measurement Plan (2 pages max.)
- IMLS Budget Form
- Budget Justification
- List of Key Project Staff and Consultants
- Resumes (2 pages max. each)

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

These application components fall into three categories in Museums for America. The first is that of **Required Documents**. **All applications must include the documents listed here.** Omission of even just one might result in your application's rejection. Also important to note are page limits. If you exceed the page limit specified in the Notice of Funding Opportunity, we must remove the extras before your application goes out for review. That means your reviewer may well see a paragraph or sentence end in mid air and will wonder about your organizational skills and your attentiveness to detail. We often see this with resumes so if you are requesting resumes from staff, outside contractors or consultants please make sure they are 2 pages maximum. 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 a PDF.



## Conditionally Required Documents

These components are required of some MFA applications.

- Proof of Private, Nonprofit Status
- Final Federally Negotiated Indirect Cost Rate Agreement
- Digital Products Plan (2 pages max.)
- Detailed Condition Reports and/or Conservation Treatment Proposals

The second category of application components is that of **Conditionally Required Documents**. **Some** applications must include one, two, or even all four of these, and it's your job to figure out which are required for yours.

- If you are applying as a nonprofit, then you must include your proof of nonprofit status issued by the Internal Revenue Service. We will not accept a letter of State sales tax exemption as proof of nonprofit status.
- If you are using a federally negotiated indirect cost rate in your budget, then you must include a copy of your final rate agreement.
- If you will create digital products during the course of your project, then you must complete and submit a Digital Products Plan.
- If you are requesting support for conservation treatment, then you must include detailed condition reports and/or formal conservation treatment proposals.

Just like the required documents, omission of even one might result in your application's rejections.

Please note that the term “digital product” includes (1) digitized and born-digital content, resources, or assets; and (2) software. If you are creating any of these types of materials, you must include the form with your application.



## Supporting Documents

These components are optional in MFA applications. Make good decisions, and include only those that supplement the Narrative and support the project description provided in the application.

- Letters of commitment from partners, third-parties and groups who you will work with
- Bibliography or references relevant to your proposed project design or evaluation strategy
- Letters of support from experts and stakeholders
- Relevant images
- Exhibit design plans
- Reports from planning activities
- Contractor or vendor quotes
- Equipment specifications
- Products or evaluations from similar completed or ongoing projects
- Collections, technology, or other departmental plans as applicable to the proposed project
- Web links to relevant online materials
- Needs assessments

The third group of application components is Supporting Documents, and here is a partial list of examples. Supporting documents are optional. You may submit some or none. We urge you to make good decisions here and include those that will supplement your proposal. This is not the place to introduce brand new information, 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.

For example, have you identified a partner whose involvement is key to the projects success? 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. Pictures can help give reviewers – who may not be familiar with your institution, programs, collections, or community – a better idea of what you're describing within your narrative. Vendor quotes or equipment specifications show you've done some of the legwork in getting appropriate estimates for project costs.

We recommend that you be respectful of your reviewers' time and avoid any temptation to include hundreds of pages of extraneous material that is not directly relevant to your project. Being judicious really does work to your benefit, as supporting documents can make – or break – an application. Include what is important and helpful, and stop there.

## Strategic Plan Summary

- Summary must be no more than two pages long
- Focus: Helps connect your proposed project activities to your institutional goals and objectives
- Shows date and by whom the plan was approved



**Inside advice:** Use a narrative format for your strategic plan summary.

Let's turn to two specific documents that are very important and about which applicants seem to have the most questions.

First is a **strategic plan summary**. As you read the MFA Notice of Funding Opportunity, you will see frequent references to strategic plans or strategic goals. IMLS wants to help you achieve your goals, and indeed, we've seen that one of the characteristics of a successful MFA project is addressing a key need or challenge that faces your museum and whose resolution is identified in your strategic plan. We ask for a summary of your plan—no more than two pages—so that reviewers will be able to understand how your proposed project's activities will further your institutional goals and objectives. To verify its legitimacy, we ask that you indicate when and by whom the plan was approved. For some institutions this might be the Board of Trustees. For others it might be someone or a group representing the authority for a division or a department.

Use a narrative format for your strategic plan summary. Although infographics and cleverly designed imagery might be just the thing for communicating your strategic plan to some audiences, it typically doesn't work well for our reviewers. These two pages are all they have, and they tell us they find a well-constructed, thoughtful, written summary the best way to confirm connections to your project. Make it easy for them to see them.



# Performance Measurement

## Performance Measurement

- How good a job did an organization do as a federal awardee?
- Helps us understand what level of performance is achieved by a specific project and by extension, a specific grant program

## Project Evaluation

- How successful was a project at achieving a set of specific intended results?
- Helps us understand and explain why we are seeing the results or outcomes that we are in specific projects and grant programs

The federal government recently added a new requirement to all federal awards. Agencies are now required to measure the performance of awardees. This Performance Measurement requirement is different from Project Evaluation, which is typically included in your project proposals.

Performance Measurement tells us how good a job you did as a federal awardee. It helps IMLS understand, manage, and improve our grant programs and the assistance we provide to applicants and awardees. And, it helps us inform internal stakeholders (IMLS leadership; key staff in programs, grants management, and finance) and external stakeholders (legislative and oversight committees, media, and the public) about our grant making.

Project evaluation, by contrast, is all about your project intended results or outcomes. The prompts that help you write your narrative, which we will talk about in a moment, will guide you through a discussion of your evaluation methods – we ask you what need you are addressing and what associated results do you want your project to have, how you will track progress toward achieving your intended results, and how the knowledge, skills, behaviors, and/or attitudes of your target audience will change as a result of your project.

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



Performance Measure	Data We Will Collect (e.g., counts, costs, weights, volumes, temperatures, percentages, hours, observations, opinions, feelings)	Source of Our Data (e.g., members of the target group, project staff, stakeholders, internal/external documents, recording devices, databases)	Method We Will Use (e.g., survey, questionnaire, interview, focus group, informal discussion, observation, assessment, document analysis)	Schedule (e.g., daily, weekly, monthly, quarterly, annually, beginning/end)
<b>Effectiveness:</b> The extent to which activities contribute to achieving the intended results	<i>Example: At the end of each month, using a report prepared by the registrar, we will compare the cumulative count of rehoused objects against the total number proposed for the project.</i> <i>Example: At the end of each project year, our external consultant will present results of the ongoing observation-based evaluation and compare them against our intended project results.</i>			
<b>Efficiency:</b> How well resources (e.g., funds, expertise, time) are used and costs are minimized while generating maximum value for the target group	<i>Example: Twice per year, we will assess our expenditures for program supplies on a per-person-served basis.</i> <i>Example: Each quarter, we will calculate the dollar value of volunteer hours contributed to the project as recorded in our online volunteer management system.</i>			
<b>Quality:</b> How well the activities meet the requirements and expectations of the target group	<i>Example: At the beginning, the mid-point, and end of the project, we will administer a satisfaction survey to staff who have participated in the training.</i> <i>Example: We will gather opinions about our online services through questionnaires provided to every 20<sup>th</sup> user.</i>			
<b>Timeliness:</b> The extent to which each task/activity is completed within the proposed timeframe	<i>Example: Every six months, our Project Director will assess the fit between our proposed Schedule of Completion and actual activity completion dates.</i> <i>Example: Each quarter, each project partner will submit to our Project Director a templated report showing their progress on meeting project milestones.</i>			

In the Notice of Funding Opportunity, we provide a sample chart which applicants may, but are not required to use. On the left side of the chart are four commonly used Performance Measures that IMLS has adopted for this effort:

- **Effectiveness:** The extent to which activities contribute to achieving the intended results
- **Efficiency:** How well resources (such as funds, expertise, and time) are used and costs are minimized while generating maximum value for the target group
- **Quality:** How well the activities meet the requirements and expectations of the target group
- **Timeliness:** The extent to which each task/activity is completed within the proposed timeframe

Across the top are the information points we're asking you to use in your statements with examples of each. For instance, with "Data We Will Collect" are listed counts, costs, weights, volumes, temperatures, percentages, and hours, as well as qualitative observations, opinions, and feelings.

For each performance measure, we provide a couple of examples addressing issues that might turn up in library and museum projects. Our intent was to make it easy for applicants to see the relationship between this request and the project they are proposing.

The blank space is where we suggest applicants write their own performance measure statements, and the chart is constructed such that it can expand to allow as much space as needed. We are looking for one statement for each required performance measure. You may provide more than one statement per measure, if you wish. We do limit the performance measurement plan to two pages.



## Narrative: Project Justification

### Tell us:

- Which program goal/project category and associated objective(s) of Museums for America will your project address?
- How will your project advance your museum's strategic plan?
- What need, problem, or challenge will your project address, and how was it identified?
- Who is the target group for your project and how have they been involved in the planning?
- Who are the ultimate beneficiaries for this project?

Now let's talk about the Narrative of your proposal. You have seven pages to cover three very important issues, and the Notice of Funding Opportunity provides lengthy guidance on what the Narrative should cover.

### First is the PROJECT JUSTIFICATION

What need, problem, or challenge will your project address, and how was it identified? Describe how you have used demographic information, economic circumstances, condition assessments, and other relevant data from reliable sources to define the need, problem, or challenge and develop the scope for the project.

Who is the target group for your project and how have they been involved in the planning? "Target group" refers to those who will be most immediately and positively affected by your project. Identify the number of individuals in the target group or in each target group, if you identify more than one.

Who are the ultimate beneficiaries for this project? "Beneficiaries" refers to those who are likely to be aided in the long-term by your project. They may or may not be the same as your "target group." Identify the number of individuals who will benefit from your project in the long term, if reliable and defensible counts are possible. Otherwise describe the characteristics of the beneficiaries you expect to be served eventually by your project.



## Narrative: Project Justification

### *Reviewers will look for:*

- Has the applicant selected an appropriate program goal/project category and one or more associated objectives of Museums for America?
- Are the ways in which this project advances the museum's strategic plan specific and measurable?
- How well has the applicant used relevant data and best practices to describe the need, problem, or challenge to be addressed?
- Has the applicant appropriately defined the target group(s) and beneficiaries, as applicable, for this work?
- Have the target group and other project stakeholders been involved appropriately in planning the project?
- *For Collections Stewardship and Access projects:* Are the collections and/or records that are the focus of the project and their current condition described and quantified in enough detail?

In section E of the Notice of Funding Opportunity, under Review Criteria, you will find a list of questions that reviewers are asked to consider when they review your proposal. It is a good idea to refer to these as you craft your narrative to be certain you are providing reviewers clear, solid information. You will see that they correspond fairly directly with the prompts you are given to write your narrative.

## Defining a need, problem, or challenge



- Remember that the federal government wants its investment to result in something getting better.
- Articulate what will get better as a result of your project as precisely as possible.
- Identify why it is important that this change happens.
- Hone your problem definition carefully.
- Present data that support your problem definition.

One of the prompts in the Project Justification section of the narrative is the identification of the need, problem, or challenge your project addresses. It is foundational in your application, so keep these points in mind.

- The federal government wants its investment to result in SOMETHING getting better.
- As you define your need, problem, or challenge, articulate WHAT will get better as a result of your project as precisely as possible. Will someone learn something, develop a skill, change an attitude? Will members of your community be better able to work together to solve problems? Will collections be better cared for? Will their lifespan be extended? Will access to your collections and the information surrounding them be expanded? Identify why it is important that this particular change happens.
- Hone your problem definition carefully in clear, succinct terms.
- Gather and present data that support your problem definition.

# Narrative: Project Work Plan



## Tell us:

- What specific activities will you carry out and in what sequence?
- What are the risks to the project and how will you mitigate them?
- Who will plan, implement, and manage your project?
- What time, financial, personnel, and other resources will you need to carry out the activities?
- How will you track your progress toward achieving your intended results?

## PROJECT WORK PLAN

If the Project Justification section was 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? You should explain how you will track your progress toward achieving your intended results, and what you'll do if you need to correct course. 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. I'll say more about that in a few minutes.



## Narrative: Project Work Plan

*Reviewers will look for:*

- Are the proposed activities informed by relevant theory and practice?
- Are the goals, assumptions, and risks clearly stated?
- Do the identified staff, partners, consultants, and service providers possess the experience and skills necessary to complete the work successfully?
- Are the time, financial, personnel, and other resources identified realistic for the scope and scale of the project?
- Is the proposed Performance Measurement Plan likely to generate the required measures of Effectiveness, Efficiency, Quality, and Timeliness?
- If present, does the Digital Products Plan reflect appropriate practices and standards for creating and managing the types of digital products proposed?
- Will the proposed methods for tracking the project's progress toward achieving the intended results allow course adjustments when necessary and result in reliable and measurable information about the results of the project?

Again, this is the list of questions, in Section E of the Notice of Funding Opportunity, that reviewers are asked to consider when they review your proposal, so make sure your narrative is answering these effectively.

## Defining an activity



- An activity is something that someone does.
- It has a beginning and an end.
- You know when you've finished it because it doesn't need to be done any more (or it is no longer on your To Do List).
- It is not a "goal," "result," or "outcome." It is a thing you do as part of striving to achieve those.
- Aim for a reasonable level of granularity in identifying your activities—not too much, not too little, just right.

[Image: <https://pixabay.com/en/stick-figure-road-sign-traffic-sign-1097163/>]

Your work plan will be built on activities, so it's important to be clear about just what an activity is.

An activity is something that someone does. 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 any more.

An activity is NOT a goal, a result, or an outcome. Rather it is something you do as part of striving to achieve those.

Aim for a reasonable level of granularity in identifying your activities.

# Defining risks



## About Risk

- There is no checklist of risks, but every project has them.
- The best proposals will show that the applicant is aware of them and has a plan for dealing with them.
- Answer the question, “What if?”

## Examples of Risk

- A project is dependent upon fundraising to generate cost share, but it might not be complete by the time the application is submitted. What will the institution do if the money is unavailable by the time the project starts?
- A project may be structured around university interns, who will be selected and trained according to well thought-out processes. What will happen if one or more interns drops out? What’s the plan for replacing them mid-project?
- A project involving rehousing collections into new museum-quality collections storage furniture might run into delays in preparing the space or in the delivery of the cabinets. What happens to the collection items then? How will the institution ensure that they remain safe and secure?
- A project depends on your community partners to achieve success, but one partner drops out mid-project. What do you do now?

[Image: <https://cheekymunkey.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/What-is-an-IT-security-risk-1024x437.jpg>]

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. Think of it as answering the question, “What if?”

There is no checklist of risks, but every project has them. The best proposals will show that you are aware of them and have thought through a plan for dealing with them. Look at your activities and think about what could go wrong. Focus on the ones where your experience (your own or that of your group) tells you, “Yes, that could happen” and identify steps you would take in response.

IMLS knows things go differently than expected. We just want you to prepare by identifying implementable options.

**Here are some examples of risk that might be part of a project for which you might seek MFA funding.**

- A project may be dependent upon fundraising to generate the cost share, but it is not complete by the time the application is submitted. What will the institution do if that money is not available by the time the project gets underway?
- A project may be structured around university interns, who will be selected and trained



according to well thought-out processes. What will happen if one or more interns drops out? What's the plan for replacing them mid-project?

- A project involving rehousing collections into new museum-quality collections storage furniture might run into delays in preparing the space or in the delivery of the cabinets. What happens to the collection items then? How will the institution ensure that they remain safe and secure?
- A project depends on your community partners to achieve success, but one partner drops out mid-project. What do you do now?

# Narrative: Project Results



## Tell us:

- What are your project's intended results and how will they address the need, problem, or challenge you have identified? Be sure to address this question from the dual perspectives of advancing knowledge and understanding and ensuring that the federal investment made through this grant generates benefits to society.
- How will the knowledge, skills, behaviors, and/or attitudes of the target group change as a result of your project?
- What products will result from your project?
- How will you sustain the benefit(s) of your project beyond the conclusion of the period of performance?
- *For Collections Stewardship and Access projects:* How will the care, condition, management, access to, or use of the museum collections and/or associated data that define the focus of your project improve?

## PROJECT RESULTS

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

This section is your chance to convince the reviewers that your project will result in something getting better. The need or problem you identified in your Project Justification will be addressed directly, and it will be diminished or eliminated altogether.

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

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. And last but not least, we ask that you tell us how you will sustain the benefit of the project. How will this improvement that you propose to make continue once your grant is over?



## Narrative: Project Results

### *Reviewers will look for:*

- Are the project's intended results clearly articulated, realistic, meaningful, and linked to the need, problem, or challenge addressed by the project?
- Is the plan to effect meaningful change in knowledge, skills, behaviors, and/or attitudes solidly grounded and appropriately structured?
- Is it clear that the federal investment made through this grant will generate identifiable benefits to society?
- Will the products created by the project be made available and accessible to the target group?
- Is the plan to sustain the benefits of the project beyond the conclusion of the period of performance reasonable and practical?
- *For Collections Stewardship and Access projects:* Will the care, condition, management, access to, or use of the museum collections and/or records improve as a result of the project?

Again, here is the list of review questions that reviewers are asked to consider when they read and score the Project Results section of your narrative. These are found in Section E of the Notice of Funding Opportunity. All of your results should tie back to your need, problem, or challenge. You may well experience tangential benefits and/or positive outcomes, but make sure you identify them as “in addition to” and not “instead of” your original intended results. Reviewers are likely to see that as a disconnect.

## Defining intended results, success measures



- Answer the question, “What will be better as the result of this work?”
- Think through how you’ll recognize success and how you’ll measure it for each of your high-level activities.
- Tie everything back to your need, problem, or challenge.
- Include tangential benefits or positive outcomes, but make sure they are in addition to, not instead of, your original intended results.
- Consider constructing a logic model to explain your intended results and your plan for achieving them.

We often hear that defining intended results and success measures is challenging for applicants, so it’s worth spending a bit of time on this here.

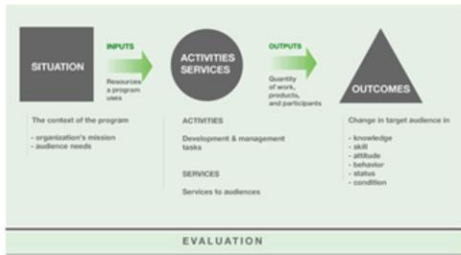
Let’s think back to the questions we referenced a couple of slides ago when we talked about defining the need, problem, or challenge that your project is addressing. If you said someone will learn something, how will you know? If your problem related to segments of your community being better able to work together, how will you know when that has been achieved? If collections will be better cared for, how will you be sure and how will you measure “better?” If you’re digitizing to expand accessibility, how will you know when you’ve done it?

This focus on results and measuring success in meaningful ways is not new. There has been a tremendous amount of work done on ways to measure success. For you as an applicant though, we encourage you to consider using a logic model to explain your intended results and your plan for achieving them.

# Logic Models



- Consider using a logic model to explain your intended results and your plan for achieving them.
- Learn more through IMLS's Shaping Outcomes online course at <http://www.shapingoutcomes.org/>



**shaping outcomes** Logic Model Worksheet

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**I. Situation: program partners and stakeholders**  
What is the program's name?  
What partners are involved?  
Who are the program's stakeholders?  
What does your organization aim to achieve through audience, program and any stakeholders?

**II. Program planning: connecting needs, solutions, and outcomes**  
What are the audience's needs?  
What are your audience considerations?  
What solution fits the needs?  
What will be the desired results?

**III. Logic model summary**  
For whom?  
For what intervention(s)?  
Inputs  
Activities  
Outputs  
Services

**IV. Outcomes**

Outcome 1	Indicator	Applied to	Data Source	Date Started	Target
Outcome 2					
Outcome 3					
Outcome 4					

Many MFA applicants use logic models, and reviewers appreciate their conciseness and focus. There are many excellent resources available to help you construct a logic model, and among these are IMLS's "Shaping Outcomes," a free online course developed in partnership with Indiana University-Purdue University of Indianapolis. It is available at [www.shapingoutcomes.org](http://www.shapingoutcomes.org), and it is customized to meet the needs of museum applicants. There are downloadable worksheets and numerous examples that you are likely to find relevant to your own work.



## Narrative Recap

- Your Narrative has three sections—Project Justification, Project Work Plan, and Project Results
- 7-page maximum
- Refer to the review criteria in section E of the Notice of Funding Opportunity

So, to recap: Your Narrative has three sections—Project Justification, Project Work Plan, and Project Results, and you have seven pages for it. The sections are all equally important. Write clearly, address what we ask you to address, and keep an eye on those review criteria. We're telling you here exactly what the reviewers will look for, so make it easy for them to find it and understand it.

## Application Tips

Check your registrations and know your usernames and passwords.



System for Award Management ([www.sam.gov](http://www.sam.gov))

- Unique Entity Identifier (UEI)
- Registration must be renewed every year!



Grants.gov ([www.grants.gov](http://www.grants.gov))

- Passwords expire every 60 days!
- Accounts are deactivated after 365 days of inactivity.

**START EARLY, DON'T DELAY**

At this point, I'd like to share a few tips based on our experiences with the MFA application submission process each year.

First off, you must submit your application online through Grants.gov. IMLS does not accept applications by mail or email. In order to register with Grants.gov, you must have an active SAM.gov registration and Unique Entity Identifier number. So make sure your registrations for both of these sites are complete, your accounts are active, and that any necessary passwords are current. These registrations expire periodically so DO NOT WAIT until it's time to hit the 'submit' button to check on them. 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.

Both the SAM.gov and Grants.gov websites have robust help features and FAQs. 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. 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.



## Application Tips

**IMPORTANT TO KNOW:** We can make grants only to **eligible** applicants that submit **complete** applications, including attachments, **on or before the deadline**. So...

- Start early.
- Become familiar with Grants.gov Workspace. See <https://www.grants.gov/web/grants/applicants/workspace-overview.html>
- Do your background research.
- Revisit the MFA Notice of Funding Opportunity frequently and follow the Narrative outline it provides. Use headings, subheadings, or numbered sections in your Narrative to make it easy for reviewers to read.
- Avoid generalities, acronyms, and jargon.
- Check your spelling, grammar, and math.
- Ask a colleague to review everything with fresh eyes before you submit it.
- Be sure your application is complete.
- Make sure all application components are in the proper format and follow the correct naming conventions.
- Submit to Grants.gov **early** so you can correct any errors.

**IMPORTANT TO KNOW:** Our regulations state clearly that we can make grants only to **eligible** applicants that submit **complete** applications, including attachments, **on or before the deadline**. So here are some tips to help you do just that.

- Start early. You've already done that by participating in this webinar.
- Become familiar with Grants.gov's Workspace. 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. Consider starting with the Workspace Overview and check out the tutorials.
- Do your background research. Make it easy for the reviewers to see that you are up to date and know what you're talking about.
- Revisit the MFA Notice of Funding Opportunity frequently, and follow the Narrative outline it provides. Use headings, subheadings, or numbered sections in your Narrative to make it easy for reviewers to read.
- Avoid generalities, acronyms, and jargon. The people who will review your application are experts, but they may not be totally familiar with your particular field's shorthand. Make it easy for them to understand what you mean.
- Check your spelling, grammar, and math. It counts with reviewers!
- An advantage to starting your application early is that you can ask a colleague to review everything with fresh eyes before you submit. Ask them to act like a reviewer who's seeing this for the first time.
- Be sure your application is complete. Check it against the Table of Application Components in the Notice of Funding Opportunity.



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



# Application Processing and Review Timeline

Date	Review Activity
Nov 15, 2022	Applicants submit packets through Grants.gov
Dec 2022 - Feb 2023	IMLS staff review applications for completeness and eligibility
Feb - Jun 2023	Peer Review period
Jul 2023	IMLS Director renders final award decisions
Aug 2023	IMLS notifies applicants of award decisions; provides reviewer comments
Sep 1, 2023	Awarded projects begin

This is the general schedule of events to show what happens to your application once we receive it. IMLS staff will review it for completeness and eligibility, and you will hear from us via email if there are any problems.

From February through June, your experienced and knowledgeable peers will provide scores and comments based on the criteria outlined in the MFA Notice of Funding Opportunity, and IMLS staff will examine your budget, your financials, and your track record with past and current grants. We then prepare materials for the IMLS Deputy Director for Museums and the IMLS Director. By law, the IMLS Director is charged with the authority and responsibility to make final award decisions, and this happens in July.

In August, we will notify you by email of the award decisions and provide the scores and comments created by the reviewers.

And on September 1, 2023, funded projects begin.



## IMLS Office of Museum Services

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Thank you very much for your interest in IMLS and in Museums for America, and we hope you have found the information in this webinar helpful. Here is a listing of the names, email addresses, and direct phone numbers for program staff in the Office of Museum Services who are answering question about Museums for America. We encourage you to contact us with any questions you might have about what you've heard or seen in this webinar or in the online MFA materials. We'll be very happy to help.

So, with that, we wish you good luck, and we look forward to seeing your application in November.

## Credit

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