0:03
Hello and welcome to the Institute of Museum and Library Services, Office of Museum Services Informational Video, the Museums for America Grant Program Applicant Information Session. My name is Mark Isaksen, one of the program staff in the Office of Museum Services at IMLS, and I'll be narrating this presentation.

0:28
The goal of this video is to provide an overview of our Museums for America grant program, which we call MFA for short, and also review the process of preparing an application for funding. This video is organized into six chapters. First is, What is Museums for America? The section explains the purpose and design of the Museums for America grant program. What can MFA grants fund?

0:57
This section explains the types of projects that can be funded in MFA and the amount of funds that can be requested. Next is, Application Components and Introduction, where we describe the types of documents that are needed to create an MFA grant application. Following that is the Application Components Narrative section, which focuses on composing the narrative part of the application.

1:22
And next is a section that provides details on the information to include in your budget. And finally, the concluding section provides a few tips and next steps. The complete set of instructions for how to prepare and submit an MFA grant application are found in the Notice of Funding Opportunity published on Grants.gov and available on the IMLS website. Please refer to the Notice of Funding Opportunity for the most detailed information to prepare your application.

1:56
To get the most out of this video, we recommend that you watch it in its entirety. This will give you an understanding of the MFA grant program, the types of projects that can be funded, and the necessary application components. You may also want to review the MFA Notice of Funding Opportunity before, during, and after you watch the video.

2:19
Notices of Funding Opportunities, also known as NOFOs, are documents that detail the requirements of each of our grant programs for fiscal year 2024, and all of the NOFOs can be found at imls.gov/grants. As you navigate the application process, you can use this video as a reference tool; and if you'd like to skip to a specific section, please use the time bar below or the links in the description box to navigate the chapters.

2:51
What is MFA? In this question, we're going to provide information on the purpose and intent of this grant program and who it is designed to serve. Museums for America 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.

3:13
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 wellbeing 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.

3:41
And it may well be exactly the same as what the museum across town or in a neighboring state needs, And that's okay. The important thing here is that our support should help you make a local impact. MFA projects are expected to focus on a key component of your museum strategic plan. IMLS wants to help advance something that is a priority for your museum and, hopefully, something that will ultimately benefit your community.

4:11
To help demonstrate that connection in your grant application, we ask for a summary of your strategic plan, usually no more than two pages, so that reviewers will be able to understand how your proposed projects activities will further your institutional goals and objectives. The strategic plan summary is your opportunity to make a thoughtful and well-constructed connection between the proposed project and your museum's priorities.

4:37
The priorities in your strategic plan may connect to a range of activities from exhibitions and educational and interpretive programs, digital learning resources, professional development or community debate, dialogue, audience focused studies, broad collections management activities, or curation care, and conservation of the collection. These are the kinds of activities that can be funded in the MFA grant program.

5:06
Characteristic of a successful MFA grant application is making that connection between the proposed project and a key need or challenge that faces your museum and whose resolution is identified in your strategic plan. Now, keep in mind that MFA is a grant program for museums, and as a museum, you should keep in mind that all applicants must meet certain requirements to be eligible for federal funding.

5:34
Your organization must be located in one of the United States' 50 states, its territories, or the District of Columbia; and your organization must be a private, nonprofit organization with tax exempt status or a unit of state or local or tribal government. Now, if you meet these two requirements, then the next step is to consider what it means to be eligible for IMLS funding as a museum.

6:01
And museums must: have at least one full-time or equivalent professional staff person, either paid or unpaid; have a physical location that you own or operate; have been open to the public for at least 120 days in the year prior to the grant application, which is November 15th, 2023;

6:21
and, also, you should own or use tangible objects. Now, museums can also be a standalone organizations or part of a larger institution such as a college or university or tribe or state or local government. If you have any questions about these categories, please feel free to reach out to one of our Office of Museum Services program staff to discuss your situation.

6:49
And of course, MFA is a grant program for all types of museums. And here's a brief list of some of the types of museums that routinely apply to this grant program. Many do and, in many ways,

apply each year, so please consider yourself one of these types. Now in this section, we will answer the question, "what can MFA fund?", providing details on the types of projects and associated goals

7:19
within the MFA grant program as well as offer some summary data on the number and type of MFA projects that were funded last year. So, MFA grants are designed to support project-based activities. So, let's take a minute to consider just 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." That's a project.

7:48
And they go on further to explain that a project is temporary because it has a defined beginning and end, and therefore a defined scope and needed 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

8:17
temporary, non-routine set of activities which collectively have a beginning and an end, a defined scope requiring specific resources, which are designed to accomplish a specific singular goal. Now, keeping our focus on project-based activities, let's look a little further at what characteristics are most often seen in successful MFA applications.

8:48
First is, Institutional Impact. The project should address a key goal identified in the institution's strategic plan. Next is, In-depth Knowledge. The project should reflect a thorough understanding of current practice and knowledge about the subject matter.

9:08
Next is, Project-based Design. The work plan should consist of a set of logical interrelated activities tied directly to addressing the key need or challenge. Finally, Demonstrable Results. The project should generate measurable results that tie directly to the need or challenge it was designed to address. Again, successful projects most often exemplify all of these characteristics, and will most likely fit well within the MFA grant program.

9:38
And it's been our experience that unfunded applications usually fail to deliver on one or more of these characteristics. So, if project-based design and institutional impact are core elements of your idea, then now it's time to consider how your application aligns with the grant program polls and associated objectives.

10:07
The type of project activity you are seeking to fund should align with one of these three options: Lifelong Learning, Community Engagement, and Collection Stewardship and Access. Now, why is your decision about which project goal to choose so important? For one thing, your application will be reviewed by museum professionals who have experience and expertise in these general categories.

10:33
And for another, your application will be competing against others who have chosen the same category or goal. So, in short, the entire review process sort of incorporates an assumption that

your project aligns with one of these goals, the one that you identified. So, it's an important choice. So, let's take a look at the kinds of activities that might fit within these goal areas and in this one and the two slides that follow

11:03
the objectives provide some of the types of projects that fit within the goal. Now, 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; maybe creating interpretive plans or new media; or training for teachers; or partnerships with schools or out of school audiences;

11:30
professional development opportunities for museum staff; or some sort of program evaluation. And as you plan your project in the Lifelong Learning category, we strongly recommend starting with the concept of putting the learner at the center, build around that concept. Spend time really thinking through who your learners are in this project and what are their needs. And it's not like they're going to be everybody. So, who is it really?

11:59
Name that audience and think about what they want to learn and what do you want them to learn and what's the best way to achieve that goal, and we'll get to the whole idea of problems and needs in a few minutes. But a major take away here is to be focused on identifying your audience and thinking about how you're going to serve them.

12:28
Now, in the next goal, under Community Engagement, these projects are likely to include activities that contribute directly to your institution's role as an essential partner in addressing community needs. So, successful community engagement projects strive to create a better quality of life within and also with communities. So, projects in this category will demonstrate a direct involvement

12:56
by members of your community in planning your project, as well as direct involvement in the implementation of activities and the evaluation of results. Your application should clearly define who or what the community is that you are serving. Many museums regularly undertake activities that engage with their communities, such as exhibitions and public programs and audience development and outreach,

13:25
and civic engagement and other kinds of things that we we've talked about. And so how do you know if your project is a better fit within Lifelong Learning the goal in the previous slide or Community Engagement, which we're talking about on this slide. So, if your project requires the involvement of community partners to co-create the content or to drive the programming in some in some way,

13:53
then it may be a strong fit for the Community Engagement goal. Now, if your project involves mostly museum staff working internally with within the museum to produce content, perhaps with some element of external input, then that might be a better fit within the Lifelong Learning goal. Now, both approaches are allowable, and both are certainly fundable.

14:18
Ultimately, it's your choice, and what's important is that you choose a goal and write your

application to align with that program goal and associative objective. If you're still uncertain about this, if it's a great opportunity to talk to one of our program staff and really think through where your project might fit best. Our third category is that of Collections Stewardship and Access.

14:47
And this includes just about anything you need to do for your collection and with your collection except acquire them. Now, we're very open to projects that have multiple components configured in ways that make sense for you. So, one project might consist of cataloging, taking digital photographs, and updating a database of records, while another my combine digitization activities with rehousing. We invite applications for projects that involve

15:16
preparing to mitigate the impact of natural and man-made disasters on collections; as well as projects that might be focused on planning and training in emergency preparedness, or developing networks for response, executing strategies for recovery, or developing resilience and preparation for the next time. We also support conservation projects of all kinds.

15:45
Both general, detailed and environmental surveys, as well as treatments and environmental improvements. And you're welcome to incorporate aspects of training and collections management into these projects, if doing so makes sense for your situation. It's important to note that this project category encourages a step-by-step progressive approach to collections work, including conservation.

16:15
So, this means assessing needs, creating a prioritized list of activities, and then following through by doing the most important things first. Now, projects should fit within one of these three program goals, but sometimes there's an overlap in the kinds of activities you are proposing, which may make it difficult to select one goal. Now, we expect that projects aligned with a specific goal will address different problems,

16:47
maybe use different approaches, and measure success in different ways. So, how are you going to choose which category, if you're confused about which one is the best to align with your project? So, here's a few things you might want to try. Think 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 --

17:14
will they acquire new knowledge or develop a skill as a result 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 or partners; and you're doing it because your museum can help to address that need? You have resources you can leverage to address that need. Or is your project about the collections? Will your project result in a better managed, better cared for

17:44
and more accessible set of objects and associated data in your collection. A second way to go about this might be to think about who you want to review your application. If you apply in Lifelong Learning, we will put your application in front of museum educators, exhibit professionals, and interpretive specialists; people with a deep experience and understanding

how people learn in museum environments. Or would you rather we put you in front of a combination of experts in civic engagement

18:14
and social justice, community outreach. If that sounds right, then it might push you to into the Community Engagement aligned goal. Now, if you apply under Collections Stewardship, you can be confident that your application will be reviewed by some combination of registrars and collections managers and curators and conservators. And if that seems appropriate, then you found the right goal category.

18:39
And you know, another option is really just list out the activities you plan to carry out and think about the project budget and where is most of the time and resources going, and pick the goal based on that. Again, our most important advice is to choose one goal and write your proposal accordingly. And of course, reach out to IMLS staff if you have any further questions. Now, MFA supports projects of all sizes, but there's a specific range of funding available in this program.

19:09
Your project budget can request a minimum of $5,000 to a maximum of $250,000 in federal funds, and if you ask for less than $5,000 or more than $250,000 in federal funds, your application may be rejected, not reviewed. So, remember to keep your budget aligned to the scope and scale of your project, including all costs necessary to complete the proposed activities. So, here are some examples: In the MFA grant program,

19:34
all project budgets are required to have a one-to-one non-federal cost share. So, say your total project budget for all the work you want to do is $100,000, then you could request 50,000 in federal funds and provide a cost-share at least $50,000. Thus, your total project budget of $100,000. Say, your total project budget was $300,000, then you would be able to request

20:01
$150,000 in federal funds and provide cost share of $150,000. Or if your total project was $500,000, then you'd be able to request $250,000 in federal grant funds and provide a cost-share of at least $250,000. Cost-share can take a number of forms. Among them are cash, staff time, volunteer time, third party contributions, grants from foundations, support from state and local government. Cost-share.

20:31
cannot come from other federal sources. The amount of applications received and the amount of awards made can vary from year to year, but here's a snapshot of the most recent cycle. In FY23 we made 122 MFA awards with a total of $24.3 million in federal funds. We received 281 MFA applications last year, resulting in 43% of those applications being funded.

21:02
And you know, generally about 45% of the MFA awards went to the Lifelong Learning goal, about 35% into Collections Stewardship and about 20% to Community Engagement. And the average amount of each award was about $199,000. Now on the IMLS website, you can use the Search Awarded Grants function to explore our archive of grants that we have awarded in past years.

21:29
All of the 122 MFA awards announced in August are listed here, along with those from prior years. You can search this database using a variety of criteria, such as institution name, location,

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

21:58
In this section, we will introduce the components of an MFA grant application and provide an overview about the Required, Conditionally Required and Supporting documents. The MFA Notice of Funding Opportunity or NOFO includes a complete list of all the application components and most of these components are created by applicants and saved as a PDF for uploading as part of your application package in Grants.gov.

22:38
The table of application components starting on page 7 lists which application components are required as well as those that are conditionally required. For example, some components are included in the application depending on the type of application or the type of project. So aside from the SF-424 and the IMLS Museum Program Information form, which are completed in the Grants.gov workspace,

23:04
All application components must be submitted as PDF documents. These are the 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, there's a seven-page limit for the narrative. If you exceed the page limit specified in the NOFO,

23:32
we must remove the extras before your application goes out for review. That means your reviewer may well see a paragraph or sentence and in midair. So, make sure your content fits into the page limit specified and make sure that the number of pages hold when you convert your document to a PDF. The second category of application components

24:00
is that of conditionally required documents. Some applications must include one, two, or even all of these, and it's your job to figure out which are required for yours. Now, if you're applying as a nonprofit, then you must include your proof of nonprofit status and a determination letter that's issued by the Internal Revenue Service. We will not accept a letter of state sales tax exemption as proof of nonprofit status.

24:31
If you're using a federally negotiated indirect cost rate in your budget, then you must include a copy of your final rate agreement. And if you will create digital products during the course of your project, then you must complete and submit a Digital Products Plan. And if you're requesting support for conservation treatment, then you must include a detailed Condition Report or formal Conservation Treatment Proposal.

25:00
Now, just like the required documents, omission of even one might result in your applications rejection. Please note that the term digital product includes digitized and born digital content, resources or assets as well as software. So, if you're creating any of these types of materials, you must include the form with your application.

25:30
The third group of application components is Supporting Documents, and here is a partial list of a few examples. Supporting documents are optional. You may submit some or none. Include only

those items that will supplement your proposal. This is the place to provide documents that support your project justification, your work plan, and your intended results.

25:56
Things that you've already spelled out in your application narrative. So, for example, if you've identified a partner whose involvement is key to the project success, then a letter of support or commitment would go a long way to reassuring reviewers that this project partner is on board. Now, pictures also can help give reviewers, who might not be familiar with your institutions, programs, or collections

26:23
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 projects. We recommend that you be respectful of your reviewer's time and avoid the temptation to include hundreds of pages of extraneous material. So, be judicious. It will be helpful to the reviewers as well.

26:52
Include what is important, helpful, and directly relevant to your project and stop there. In the following sections of this presentation, we will focus on the following application components, the narrative, and the budget. Let's go to the notice of Funding Opportunity for complete instructions on how to prepare and complete all the application components.

27:19
In this section, we'll go over the questions, you will need to answer in your project Narrative and offer details on the review criteria associated with each section, project justification, project work plan, and the project results. So, let's talk about the Narrative of your proposal. You have 7 pages to cover 3 very important issues in the NOFO. The Notice of Funding Opportunity provides lengthy guidance on what the Narrative should cover.

27:49
First, Project Justification. What need, problem or challenge will your project address, and how did you identify it? Describe how you use demographic information or economic circumstances or condition assessments or other data to define the need, problem, or challenge. Here's another example. Who's the target group for your project and how have they been involved in the planning?

28:19
For our purposes, "Target Group" refers to those who will be most immediately and positively affected by your project. So, identify the number of individuals in the target group or in each group, if you've identified more than one. Another example, who are the ultimate beneficiaries for this project. "Beneficiaries", for our purposes, refers to those who are likely to be aided in the long-term by your project.

28:50
They may or may not be the same as your target group, so identify the number of individuals who will benefit from your project in the long-term; and describe the characteristics of those beneficiaries you expect to be served, eventually, by your project. Now, in Section E of the Notice of Funding Opportunity, under Review Criteria,

29:16
you will find a list of questions that reviewers are asked to consider when they review your

proposal. Those questions are listed here on the slide. It's a good idea to refer to these as you craft your narrative to be certain that you are providing reviewers clear, solid information. You'll see that they correspond fairly directly with the prompts you are given to write your Narrative.

29:47
One of the prompts in the Project Justification section of the Narrative is the identification of the need, problem or challenge the project addresses. It's a foundational part of your application. So, here's a few points to keep in mind. The federal government wants its investment to result in something getting better. So, as you define your need, problem, or challenge,

30:11
articulate what will get better as a result of your project; and be as precise as possible. Will someone learn something or develop a skill? Will members of your community be better able to work together to solve problems? Will collections be better cared for, or will their lifespan be extended? Or will access to your collection and the information surrounding them be expanded?

30:37
Again, identify why it's important that this particular change happens. Hone your problem definition carefully, using as clear and succinct terms as possible; and gather and present data that support your problem definition. Now, if the Project Justification section is the "why",

31:02
the Project Work Plan section is where you identify the "who, what, when, and how". Who will do what activities, when will they do that, 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,

31:31
and to tell us how you've taken that into account in your planning, I'll say more about that in a few minutes. Now again, here's a list of the questions the review criteria. These are also in Section E of the Notice of Funding Opportunity. These are the criteria that reviewers are asked to consider when they review your proposal. So, make sure that your narrative is answering these effectively.

32:04
Now, your work plan is going to be built on a set of activities, and so it's important to be clear about what is an activity. An activity is something that someone does, and it has a beginning and an end, just like projects. And you know when you finished it because it doesn't need to be done anymore. An activity is not a goal or a result or an outcome. Rather it's just something you do,

32:28
as part of trying to achieve all those goals, results and outcomes. We also asked you to think about risks that are inherent in your particular project and to tell us about how you've taken that into account when you're planning. And this is sort of the question, "What if?" So, there's no checklist of risks, and every project probably has some risks somewhere.

32:55
Now, the best proposals will show that you're aware of them and thought them through and you have some plan for dealing with them. So, look at your activities and think about what could go wrong and focus on the ones where, in your experience, well that probably could happen; and identify steps you would take in response. We just want you to be prepared by identifying implementable options if there's some major risk. So, here are some examples.

33:25
A project may be dependent upon fundraising to generate the cost-share, but it is not complete by the time the application is submitted. So, what will the institution do if that money is unavailable by the time the project gets underway? Or maybe a project depends on your community partners to achieve success, but what if one partner becomes unavailable? Then what do you do?

33:51
Or maybe a project involves rehousing collections into new museum quality storage furniture. You might have some delays in the delivery of the cabinet. So, what happens to the collection items then? How will the institution ensure that they remain safe and secure? The final section of the Narrative is about results, and this should be devoted to articulating your intended results.

34:19
It's your chance to convince the reviewers that your project will result in something getting better. Remember, the need or problem you identified in your Project Justification will be addressed directly, or diminished, or eliminated, or somehow modified by the Work Plan. So, now is your chance to tell us what are the Results.

34:43
And we ask you to tell us what data you're going to collect and report in order to measure your success, and if your project will generate tangible products. And many do. Here's the opportunity to describe them and make the case that those products will be useful, particularly for the intended audience. And last but not least, we ask that you tell us how you'll sustain the benefit of the project.

35:13
Now again, here is the list of review questions that reviewers are asked to consider when they read and score the project results part of your narrative. All of your results should tie back to your need, problem, or challenge. You may experience some tangential benefits or positive outcomes, and you can identify those in addition to or instead of your original intended result

35:42
But here's your chance to articulate them. When you think about results, we often hear that defining those intended results and success measures can be challenging for some applicants. So, let's just look a little bit more at that. When we think back to the questions we referenced a couple of slides ago, we talked about defining the need, problem or challenge that your project is addressing.

36:11
Now, if you said someone will learn something, how are you going to know if that person has learned something? Or if your problem was related to a segment of your community being better able to work together, how are you going to know when that's been achieved? Or if the collections will be better cared for, how will you be sure and how will you measure "better"?

36:42
Or maybe if you're digitizing materials to expand accessibility, how will you know that this has been expanded. The focus on results and measuring success in meaningful ways is not new, there's been a tremendous amount of work done on ways to measure success. We encourage you to consider using a logic model or an outcomes-based evaluation tool

37:09
to explain your intended results and your plan for achieving them. So, to recap, your Narrative has three sections: Project Justification, Project Work Plan, and Project Results, and you have 7 pages to write about those things. The sections are all equally important, so clearly address what we ask you to address.

37:37
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 the information and understand your process and your project. Now, in this section, we will provide information on what to include in your Project Budget and Budget Justification.

38:05
Provide some examples of allowable and unallowable costs. An important component of your application is the budget. This is the part of the application where you specify all the costs associated with your proposed project. The budget consists of two required components, the IMLS Budget Form and the Budget Justification. The Budget Form is a fillable PDF that accommodates up to three years of project activities and expenses.

38:32
The budget should include the project costs, those that will be charged to grant funds, as well as those that will be supported by cost-share. Any kind contributions to cost-share may include the value of services like volunteer time or consultant time that's donated, or equipment donated to the project between the authorized start and end dates of your project.

39:00
All the items listed, whether supported by grant funds or cost share, must be necessary to accomplish project activities, allowable according to the applicable federal cost principles, auditable, and incurred during the award period of performance. As you develop your budget, keep in mind that there are certain costs that are either allowable or unallowable according to federal regulations.

39:33
The allowability of a cost item for all federal grants are specified in the Code of Federal Regulations, also known as CFR, or" 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". Now using the 2 CFR 200 as a basis,

40:02
we've developed a short list of allowable costs that are most commonly seen in MFA grant applications. The Notice of Funding Opportunity includes a partial list of the most common examples of allowable costs. This short list of allowable costs is also shown on this slide. These costs may be part of what you asked IMLS to pay for with federal funds or what you pay for as part of your cost share.

40:32
The rules about allowability of a cost apply equally to grant funds as well as cost-share. And when completing your project budget, be sure to check that all of your costs that you've included, whether on grant funds or cost-share, are allowed. There are also some costs which are unallowable according to the federal regulations in 2 CFR 200.

40:57
And in the Notice of Funding Opportunity, we provide an abbreviated list of unallowable costs, which are also listed on this slide. Unallowable costs may not be part of what you've asked IMLS to pay for, and they cannot be part of what you pay for as part of your cost share. In fact, unallowable expenses can't show up anywhere in your proposal. Now, as you prepare your application, it's a good idea to compare your list of proposed expenses

41:24
against these lists of allowable and unallowable costs, and against the appropriate set of cost principles. If after looking at that you have a specific question, please contact us and we'll be happy to help. In addition to the IMLS Budget Form, you'll also prepare a Budget Justification. This is an opportunity to provide in a more detailed

41:55
narrative format, an explanation or justification for the project costs. The budget justification should be written to follow the cost categories in the IMLS Budget Form. In the Justification, you will identify each expense and show the method of cost computation used to determine each dollar amount, including any that you may have consolidated and summarized on the IMLS Budget Form.

42:22
So, in other words, this is the place to show your math. For example, in the section under Salaries and Wages, you should identify each person whose salary or wage will be paid for with IMLS funds or cost share by their names. Describe their role. Document the method of cost computation by including their base salary or wages for each person and the percentage of time each person is allocated to the project.

42:51
You can do this as a percentage of time or number of days or number of hours. If cost share is being provided by unpaid volunteers, you have to explain how you arrived at the dollar amount used to represent the value of their services. In the section for Supplies, Materials, and Equipment, you should list each type of supply, material and equipment that you propose to purchase or provide as cost-share.

43:17
Detail the number and unit for each item and explain how you arrived at the dollar amounts. You may also provide vendor quotes or price lists as supporting documents with your application. In this final section of our presentation, we offer some tips on application process and next steps.

43:44
We can only make grants to eligible applicants that submit complete applications, including attachments on or before the deadline. So, here are a few tips to help you do just that. Start the process early, and by watching this informational video, you're off to a good start. Become familiar with Grants.gov's workspace. There's many good features, such as the opportunity to collaborate with others and creating your application,

44:13
as well as a validation process that allows you to correct errors prior to submission. They even have tutorials available on grants dot gov. Also be sure that your application is complete. Check it against a table of application components in the Notice of Funding Opportunity. Also make sure

that your application components are in the proper format and follow the correct naming conventions.

44:42
And be sure to submit your application in Grants.gov well before the deadline. That way you can correct any errors and avoid any issues created by technology challenges. It's important to get your application submitted online through Grants.gov before the deadline, and we don't accept any applications by mail or e-mail. Now, in order to register with Grants.gov, you must have an active SAM.gov registration and Unique Entity Identifier number.

45:11
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 don't 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 representative, who may hold the accounts and passwords that you'll need to submit. Both SAM.gov

45:41
and Grants.gov websites have robust help features as well as FAQ's, frequently asked questions. If you run into technical issues with either of these sites, you should reach out to their help desk and request a tracking number or case number or ticket number, in order to document your issue and attempts at resolving it. Remember that failure to having an active Sam.gov and

46:08
Grants.gov registration by the application deadline is not an excuse for submitting a late application. So, start early. There are many components that make up the Narrative of the entire application. And the Narrative is an essential and critical part of the package. Now, peer reviewers, museum professionals from all types of museums

46:34
will be selected by IMLS to read each application and provide constructive comments on the strengths and weaknesses of the proposed projects. They also base their reviews only on the information contained in the application. So, don't assume that a reviewer or IMLS will know something about your museum or your proposed project. Help make sure your narrative is as clear and complete as possible again.

47:01
Revisit the Notice of Funding Opportunity and follow the narrative outline it provides. Use the same headings and subheadings and numbered sections in your narrative to make it easy for your reviewers to read. Be sure to consider the review criteria associated with each section of the narrative. Try to avoid generalities or acronyms and jargon.

47:26
Now, the people who review your application are museum professionals, but they might not be completely familiar with your particular shorthand, so make it easy for them to understand what you mean. And of course, an advantage to starting your application early is that you can ask a colleague to review everything with fresh eyes before you submit. Ask some to act like a reviewer who's seeing this for the first time.

47:53
Now, we've also posted the narrative and scheduled completion from six or actually many more successful applications from 2023. To find these examples, go to the sample applications on the

IMLS website and scroll down the page to find the Museums for America examples. There are an assortment of funded applications listed under each grant program goal. Each sample application PDF contains a copy of the seven-page narrative

and also, the schedule of completion. Many of these 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. Looking at these proposals might help clarify your thinking about your own. Now here are a few important dates related to Museums for America applications.

All applications must be received through Grants.gov by 11:59 PM Eastern Time on November 15th, 2023. The date is non-negotiable. The time stamp is generated by the Grants.gov system and we have no ability to override. Be sure to start early and then if you encounter a difficulty of any kind when you submit your proposal, you'll have time to resolve the problem and resubmit before the deadline.

After the application deadline, IMLS staff will review your application for completeness and eligibility, and you may hear from us via e-mail if there are any problems. Next, we will select experienced and knowledgeable peer reviewers to read your applications and provide scores and comments based on the criteria outlined in the MFA Notice of Funding Opportunity. IMLS staff will examine your budget and the financials you provided

and your track record with past and current grants. We then prepare materials for the IMLS Deputy Director for Museums, as well as for the IMLS Director. And by law, the IMLS Director is charged with the authority and responsibility to make final award decisions. This typically happens in July, so by early August 2024, we will notify you and other successful applicants by e-mail

of the award decisions and provide the scores and comments created by the reviewers. MFA projects must be scheduled to start on the first day of September 2024. In conclusion, as you read through the NOFO and prepare your application, additional questions may arise before the application deadline. We can help you with learning more about the MFA grant program or other grant programs at IMLS.

You can address any specific concerns you may have with the various application components or help you understand the review process. You may contact IMLS Program staff by e-mail or phone. Contact information is listed on the Grant Program landing page on the IMLS website. You may also schedule a counseling call to meet directly with program staff. Use the links found on the Grant Program landing page to find an available time slot on our calendar.

And you'll then receive an e-mail with a calendar invite and a Microsoft Teams meeting link. So thank you for listening to our presentation and best of luck to you in preparing and submitting your IMLS grant application.