



# Museums Empowered Grant Program

## Applicant Information Session



FY25 Video

August 2024

Welcome to the Institute of Museum and Library Services informational video “Museums Empowered 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.



# Introduction

The goal of this video is to provide an overview of our Museums Empowered grant program - and the process of preparing an application for funding.



# Video Chapters

- 1 **Chapter 1: What is Museums Empowered?**
- 2 **Chapter 2: What can Museums Empowered Grants Fund?**
- 3 **Chapter 3: Application Components - Overview**
- 4 **Chapter 4: Application Components - Narrative**
- 5 **Chapter 5: Application Components – Budget**
- 6 **Chapter 6: Application Tips and Next Steps**

This video is organized into six chapters:

- What is Museums Empowered? This introductory section explains the purpose and design of the grant program.
- What can Museums Empowered Grants Fund? This section provides detail on the types of projects funded in this grant program and the amount of funds that can be requested.
- Application Components – Introduction. This section describes the types of documents that are needed to create a grant application.
- Application Components – Narrative. This section provides guidance on composing the narrative part of the application.
- Application Components – Budget. This section describes what to include in your project budget.
- Application Tips and Next Steps. The concluding section offers a few tips and next steps.

The complete set of instructions for how to prepare and submit a Museums Empowered grant application are found in the Notice of Funding Opportunity published on Grants.gov and also available on the IMLS website.

Please refer to the Notice of Funding Opportunity for the most detailed information to prepare your application.

## Using This Video

### Watch

Watch this video in its entirety

### Review

Review the Museums Empowered Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) at [www.imls.gov/grants](http://www.imls.gov/grants)

### Refer

Refer to this video as needed

- 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 Museums Empowered grant program, the types of projects that can be funded, and the necessary application components.
- You may also want to review the Museums Empowered Notice of Funding Opportunity before, during and after you watch the video. Notices of Funding Opportunities, also known as NOFOs, are documents that detail the requirements of each of our grant programs. All of our NOFOs can be found at [imls.gov/grants](http://imls.gov/grants).
- As you navigate the application process, you can use this video as a reference tool. 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.



# What is Museums Empowered?

In this section we will answer the question “What is Museums Empowered?” providing information on the purpose and intent of this grant program and who it is designed to serve.



## Museums Empowered

Museums Empowered is a special initiative of the MFA grant program.



Designed to strengthen the ability of an individual museum to serve its public...

by using the transformative power of *professional development* and training to generate *systemic change* within a museum.

Museums Empowered is a special initiative of the MFA (Museums for America) grant program. Like MFA, this grant program is designed to strengthen the ability of an individual museum to serve its public.

However, what's unique in Museums Empowered is the emphasis on helping your museum tap into the transformative power of *professional development* and training to generate *systemic change or organizational growth* within your museum.

These projects are expected to involve multiple levels of staff, leadership, and volunteers in a set of logical, interrelated activities tied directly to addressing a key need or challenge in your strategic plan.



## ME and Your Strategic Plan

Museums Empowered projects are expected to focus on a key component of your museum's strategic plan.

IMLS wants to support your museum in advancing priority areas that ultimately benefit your community.

Museums Empowered (sometimes referred to as ME) is a grant program that supports projects that focus on a key component of your museum's strategic plan. IMLS wants to help advance something that is a priority for your museum and hopefully something that will ultimately benefit your community.

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 project's 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.



## ME is for Museums

- Museums must
  - ✓ Have at least one full time or equivalent professional staff person, either paid or unpaid
  - ✓ Have a physical location that it owns or operates
  - ✓ Have been open to the public for at least 120 days in the year prior to the application deadline
  - ✓ Own or use tangible objects
- Museums may be stand-alone organizations, or they may be part of a larger institution, such as a college, university, Tribe, or a state or local government.

Museums Empowered is a grant program for museums.

As a museum, you should keep in mind that all applicants must meet certain requirements to be eligible for federal funding.

- Your organization must be located in one of the United States' 50 States, its Territories, or the District of Columbia.
- Your organization must be a unit of State, local, or tribal government, or a private nonprofit organization with tax-exempt status.

If you meet those two requirements, then the next step is to consider what it means to be eligible for IMLS funding as a museum.

Museums must:

- Have at least one full time or equivalent professional staff person, either paid or unpaid.
- Have a physical location that it owns or operates.
- Have been open to the public for at least 120 days in the year prior to the application deadline.
- And own or use tangible objects.

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





## ME is for all types of museums

- Anthropology museums
- Aquariums
- Arboretums
- Art museums
- Botanical gardens
- Children's/youth museums
- General museums
- Historic houses/sites
- History museums
- Natural history
- Nature centers
- Planetariums
- Science/technology centers
- Specialized museums
- Zoological parks

ME is a grant program for all types of museums. Here's a brief list of some of the types of museums that routinely apply to this grant program.



## What Can Museums Empowered Grants Fund?

In this section we will answer the question “What can Museums Empowered Grants Fund?” providing details on the types of projects and associated goals within the Museums Empowered grant program as well as offer some information on the types of projects that were funded last year.



## ME Funds Projects

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.

Museums Empowered grants are designed to support project-based activities 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.

## What Makes an ME Project Successful?



INSTITUTIONAL  
IMPACT



IN-DEPTH  
KNOWLEDGE



STAFF-CENTERED  
DESIGN

Now let's look a little further at some of the key characteristics of successful Museums Empowered applications.

- **Institutional Impact:** The project uses professional development as a catalyst to generate systemic change or organizational growth within a museum.
- **In-depth knowledge:** The project design reflects a solid understanding of relevant theory and effective practices in professional development
- **Staff-centered project design:** The work plan engages staff, leadership and volunteers in a set of logical, interrelated activities tied directly to addressing the key need or challenge.

Successful projects most often exemplify all these characteristics and fit well within the Museums Empowered grant program.

It has been our experience that unfunded applications fail to deliver convincingly on one or more of these areas.

# Museums Empowered Program Goals

Digital Technology	Goal 1: Provide museum staff with the skills to integrate digital technology into museum operations.
Diversity, Equity, Inclusion	Goal 2: Support museum staff in providing inclusive and equitable services to people of diverse geographic, cultural, and socioeconomic backgrounds and to individuals with disabilities.
Evaluation	Goal 3: Strengthen the ability of museum staff to use evaluation as a tool to shape museum programs and improve outcomes.
Organizational Management	Goal 4: Strengthen and support museum staff as the essential part of a resilient organizational culture

If project-based design and institutional impact are core elements of your project idea, then now it's time to consider how your application aligns with the grant program goals and associated objectives.

IMLS recognizes the many challenges facing individual museums and the need to invest resources, time, and energy towards nurturing the professional development of staff and strengthening museum operations. So, in this grant program we have identified four areas of museum operations to focus for professional development. These are listed in the following grant program goals.

Goal 1: Provide museum staff with the skills to integrate **digital technology** into museum operations.

Goal 2: Support museum staff in providing **inclusive** and **equitable** services to people of diverse geographic, cultural, and socioeconomic backgrounds and to individuals with disabilities.

Goal 3: Strengthen the ability of museum staff to use **evaluation** as a tool to shape museum programs and improve outcomes.

Goal 4: Strengthen and support museum staff as the essential part of a **resilient organizational culture**.

## Digital Technology Goal



- Support staff learning and integration of digital communication platforms and social media tools to enhance audience engagement and community outreach.
- Support staff learning and integration of digital tools and services that enhance access to museum collections.

So let's take a look at each goal in a little more detail.

Goal 1 supports projects that provide museum staff with the skills to integrate **digital technology** into museum operations. This might involve activities that support staff learning and integration of digital communication platforms and social media tools to enhance audience engagement and community outreach; or activities that support staff learning and integration of digital tools and services that enhance access to museum collections. The emphasis here is on staff learning and integration of these new tools, not just on the acquisition of the new tools.



# Digital Technology Example

## Phillips Collection

---

Log Number: **ME-252033-OMS-22**

The Phillips Collection will improve staff understanding of digital asset management (DAM) practices and build consensus around how best to steward these assets. A cross-departmental staff team will engage in informal and formal training designed to develop skills that will allow them to select and rollout the museum's first digital asset management system (DAMS). The staff team will participate in a professionally facilitated needs assessment, attend DAM-related conferences, and meet with peer institutions that use DAMS. The team will hire a digital asset manager and develop a digital asset management policy. As a result of this project, staff will have the skills, knowledge, and infrastructure to incorporate a DAMS in their daily work, mitigating the risk to museum digital assets through loss, lack of use, or misuse.

Here's an example of a Digital Technology focused project.

- **ME-252033-OMS-22**

The Phillips Collection in Washington DC was awarded \$239,688 to improve staff understanding of digital asset management (DAM) practices and build consensus around how best to steward these assets.

A cross-departmental staff team will engage in informal and formal training designed to develop skills that will allow them to select and rollout the museum's first digital asset management system (DAMS). The staff team will participate in a professionally facilitated needs assessment, attend DAM-related conferences, and meet with peer institutions that use DAMS. The team will hire a digital asset manager and develop a digital asset management policy. As a result of this project, staff will have the skills, knowledge, and infrastructure to incorporate a DAMS in their daily work, mitigating the risk to museum digital assets through loss, lack of use, or misuse.

## Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Goal



- Create training and learning opportunities that increase cultural competency of museum staff and enhance relevancy of museum programs.
- Develop and implement inclusive and equitable fellowship, internship, and mentoring programs to increase support for emerging professionals from diverse communities entering the museum field.

Goal 2 focuses on **diversity equity and inclusion** and supports projects that help museum staff in providing inclusive and equitable services to people of diverse geographic, cultural, and socioeconomic backgrounds and to individuals with disabilities.

This might involve activities that create training and learning opportunities that increase cultural competency of museum staff and enhance relevancy of museum programs; or activities that develop and implement inclusive and equitable fellowship, internship, and mentoring programs to increase support for emerging professionals from diverse communities entering the museum field.





## Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Example

### New-York Historical Society

---

Log Number: **ME-256041-OMS-24**

The New-York Historical Society will build staff cultural competency in accessibility and improve K-12 programming for students with disabilities. The project will create sustainable systems and structures for ensuring that all programs take the needs of students with disabilities into account; establish a pattern of consistent accessibility training for all museum education staff; and create space for staff to learn from and network with peer organizations. Project activities will include building an advisory council of teachers and parents, conducting quarterly trainings for museum educators, consulting among peers to build a network of access, and hiring an expert consultant to assess K-12 student programs. The project will also develop pilots for two types of access-specific K-12 programming that will be implemented, assessed, and revised. The project will result in a strategy document that will continue implementation of the initiative for a period of five-years to ensure the sustainability of the program and benefits to the students.

**Sample Application Available**

Here's an example of a Diversity Equity and Inclusion focused project.

The New York Historical Society was awarded \$189k in 2024 to build staff cultural competency in accessibility and improve K-12 programming for students with disabilities.

The project will create sustainable systems and structures for ensuring that all programs take the needs of students with disabilities into account; establish a pattern of consistent accessibility training for all museum education staff; and create space for staff to learn from and network with peer organizations. Project activities will include building an advisory council of teachers and parents, conducting quarterly trainings for museum educators, consulting among peers to build a network of access, and hiring an expert consultant to assess K-12 student programs. The project will also develop pilots for two types of access-specific K-12 programming that will be implemented, assessed, and revised. The project will result in a strategy document that will continue implementation of the initiative for a period of five-years to ensure the sustainability of the program and benefits to the students.

We have also made this available as a sample application, with the narrative and schedule available as a PDF on the IMLS website. Go to Search Awarded Grants and search by log number to find this example.

## Evaluation Goal



- Increase staff knowledge of program evaluation methods and the usefulness of evaluation reports, tools, data and metrics.
- Provide museum staff with the tools and strategies to adapt evaluation methods to address a specific audience or institutional need.

Goal 3 supports projects helps that strengthen the ability of museum staff to use **evaluation** as a tool to shape museum programs and improve outcomes.

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



## Evaluation Example

### Mid-America Science Museum

---

Log Number: **ME-255504-OMS-24**

The Mid-America Science Museum will build capacity of staff to use evaluation as an ongoing cycle of inquiry when creating or improving museum programs and exhibits. Project activities include hiring an expert consultant to train staff on evaluations. As part of this training, departmental teams will work with the consultant to conduct evaluation studies on programs and exhibits to gain practice in developing goals, designing data collection instruments, and analyzing information. As a result of the project, staff will have developed the skills needed to implement and sustain a consistent evaluation practice that will instill a culture of evaluation within the institution for the long-term benefit of the museum and future visitors.

Sample Application Available

Here's an example of recently funded project focused on Evaluation:

The Mid-America Science Museum was awarded \$46K in 2024 to build capacity of staff to use evaluation as an ongoing cycle of inquiry when creating or improving museum programs and exhibits.

Project activities include hiring an expert consultant to train staff on evaluations. As part of this training, departmental teams will work with the consultant to conduct evaluation studies on programs and exhibits to gain practice in developing goals, designing data collection instruments, and analyzing information. As a result of the project, staff will have developed the skills needed to implement and sustain a consistent evaluation practice that will instill a culture of evaluation within the institution for the long-term benefit of the museum and future visitors.

We have also made this available as a sample application, with the narrative and schedule available as a PDF on the IMLS website. Go to Search Awarded Grants and search by log number to find this example.

## Organizational Management Goal



- Develop comprehensive organizational learning opportunities that address one or more emerging priorities facing a museum.
- Develop programs that address the specific learning and growth opportunities identified by staff needs assessments.

And goal 4 is about **organizational management** and is intended to support museum staff as the essential part of a resilient organizational culture

This might involve activities that help you to develop and implement comprehensive organizational learning opportunities that address one or more emerging priorities facing a museum; or activities that help you develop and implement programs that address the specific learning and growth opportunities identified by staff needs assessments.



## Organizational Management Example

### Peabody Essex Museum

---

Log Number: **ME-255937-OMS-24**

Peabody Essex Museum will create a professional development initiative that will improve the workplace environment and fill gaps in expertise, while creating an environment that supports staff in their professional growth and varied learning, working, and management styles. Project activities will include developing and implementing a learning agenda for approximately 243 staff as well as establishing a leadership program, which will be made up of 53 managers and staff interested in becoming managers. A series of customized skill-building workshops for all staff that include managerial, communication, and project management training will be composed by senior staff from Employee Experience, Executive Office, Collection Management, and Education and Civic Engagement divisions. As a result of the project, staff will be better able to navigate public expectations and provide museum experiences that respond to a wide range of diverse audiences' needs and interests.

**Sample Application Available**

Here is an example of a recently funded project focused on Organizational Management:

- Peabody Essex Museum was awarded \$250k in 2024 to create a professional development initiative that will improve the workplace environment and fill gaps in expertise, while creating an environment that supports staff in their professional growth and varied learning, working, and management styles.

Project activities will include developing and implementing a learning agenda for approximately 243 staff as well as establishing a leadership program, which will be made up of 53 managers and staff interested in becoming managers. A series of customized skill-building workshops for all staff that include managerial, communication, and project management training will be composed by senior staff from Employee Experience, Executive Office, Collection Management, and Education and Civic Engagement divisions. As a result of the project, staff will be better able to navigate public expectations and provide museum experiences that respond to a wide range of diverse audiences' needs and interests.

We have also made this available as a sample application, with the narrative and schedule available as a PDF on the IMLS website. Go to Search Awarded Grants and search by log number to find this example.

# Choosing a Program Goal



Digital Technology



Diversity & Inclusion



Evaluation



Organizational Management

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 who you want to review your application. What kind of skill set and experience do you want them to have?
3. List all the activities you plan to carry out and assign each to a goal. Which goal gets the most? Where will most of the resources be spent?

Projects should fit within one of these four program goals, but sometimes there is an overlap in the kinds of activities you are proposing, which may make it difficult to select one program goal. Here are a few strategies to help you select a goal that aligns best with your project:

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 who you want to review your application. What kind of skill set and experience do you want them to have?
3. List all the activities you plan to carry out and assign each to a goal. Which goal gets the most? Where will most of the resources be spent?

Why is your decision about which goal to choose so important? Because it impacts the review process. Your application will be reviewed by museum professionals who have experience and expertise in aligned with that goal. In addition, your application will be competing against others who have chosen the same goal.

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

## What Size Are ME Projects?

ME project budgets can range in size.



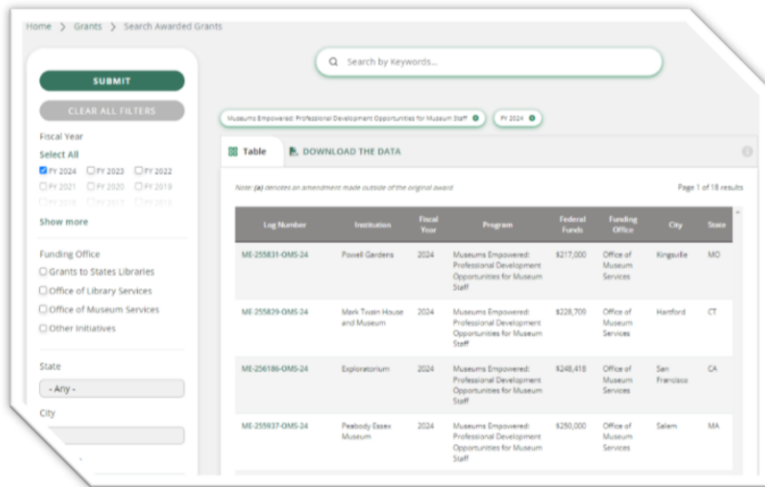
\$5,000 - \$250,000 in federal grant funds with **1:1** cost share required.

Scale your budget request to the needs of your project.

Regardless of the program goal selected, all Museums Empowered project budgets must stay within a specific range of funding in this grant program. Your project budget can request a minimum of \$5,000 to a maximum of \$250,000 in federal funds. If you ask for less than \$5,000 or more than \$250,000 in federal grant funds, your application may be rejected and not reviewed. Remember to keep your budget aligned to the scope and scale of your project, including all costs necessary to complete the proposed activities.

In this grant program, all project budgets are required to 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.

# How Many ME Projects Get Funded?



The screenshot shows the IMLS Search Awarded Grants interface. On the left, there are filters for Fiscal Year (FY 2024, FY 2023, FY 2022, FY 2021, FY 2020, FY 2019, FY 2018, FY 2017, FY 2016), Funding Office (Grants to States Libraries, Office of Library Services, Office of Museum Services, Other Initiatives), State (-Any-), and City. The main area displays a table of results for the search "Museums Empowered: Professional Development Opportunities for Museum Staff" in FY 2024. The table has columns for Log Number, Institution, Fiscal Year, Program, Federal Funds, Funding Office, City, and State. The results are as follows:

Log Number	Institution	Fiscal Year	Program	Federal Funds	Funding Office	City	State
ME-258831-OM-24	Powell Gardens	2024	Museums Empowered: Professional Development Opportunities for Museum Staff	\$217,000	Office of Museum Services	Kingsville	MD
ME-258829-OM-24	Mark Tuan House and Museum	2024	Museums Empowered: Professional Development Opportunities for Museum Staff	\$228,700	Office of Museum Services	Hartford	CT
ME-258186-OM-24	Exploratorium	2024	Museums Empowered: Professional Development Opportunities for Museum Staff	\$248,418	Office of Museum Services	San Francisco	CA
ME-258827-OM-24	Peabody Essex Museum	2024	Museums Empowered: Professional Development Opportunities for Museum Staff	\$250,000	Office of Museum Services	Salem	MA

You can find a list of awards on the IMLS website under “Search Awarded Grants”

The number of applications received, and the number of awards made can vary from year to year. In most recent application cycle, we received 72 applications requesting \$13,105,016. From these applications, we selected 18 projects to receive funding totaling \$3,327,912.

On the IMLS website you use the Search Awarded Grants function to explore our archive of grants that we have awarded in past years. There are currently 155 Museum Empowered awards listed here plus the 18 awards just announced in August.

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 for each project.





In this section we will introduce the components of a Museums Empowered grant application, and provide an overview about the required, conditionally required, and supporting documents.



## Application Components

The Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) includes a complete list of all the application components.

Most of these components are created and saved as a PDF for uploading as part of your application package in Grants.gov.

The Museums Empowered Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) includes a complete list of all the application components. Most of these components are created by applicants and saved as a PDF for uploading as part of your application package in Grants.gov.

The Table of Application Components in the NOFO 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 applicant or the type of project.

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



## Required Documents

These components are required of all applications.

- Application for Federal Assistance (SF-424S)
- IMLS Museum Program Information Form
- Organizational Profile
- Strategic Plan Summary
- Narrative (7 pages max.)
- Schedule of Completion
- Performance Measurement Plan
- IMLS Budget Form
- Budget Justification
- List of Key Project Staff and Consultants
- Resumes

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 is a 7-page limit for the narrative. 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.

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 applications.

- Proof of Private, Nonprofit Status
- Final Federally Negotiated Indirect Cost Rate Agreement
- Digital Products Plan

The second category of application components 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.

- 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.

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. Include only those that supplement the Narrative and support the project description provided in the application.

- Letters of commitment from partners, consultants, or any third-parties you will work with on your project
- 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 projects
- Collections, technology, or other departmental plans applicable to the proposed project
- Web links to relevant online materials
- Needs assessments

The third group of application components is Supporting Documents. Supporting documents are optional. You may submit some or none. Include only those items that will supplement your proposal. This is not the place to introduce brand new information, rather, it's an opportunity to provide documents that support your project justification, project work plan and project results (from your narrative) as well as your budget justification.

For example, have you identified a partner whose involvement is key to the project's 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. Being judicious really does work to your benefit, as supporting documents can make – or break – an application. Include what is important, helpful, and directly relevant to your project, and stop there.



## Application Components Continued

In the following sections of this presentation, we will focus on two application components:

- Narrative
- Budget

The Notice of Funding Opportunity offers complete instructions on how to prepare and complete all application components.

In the following sections of this presentation, we will focus on these application components:

- Narrative
- Budget

Go to the Notice of Funding Opportunity for complete instructions on how to prepare and complete all of the application components.



# Application Components

Narrative

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



## Narrative: Project Justification

### Tell us:

- Which Museums Empowered program goal and associated objective 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 primary audience 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, and in this section we ask you to tell us:

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 primary audience for your project and how have they been involved in the planning? "Primary Audience" 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.





## Narrative: Project Justification Continued

***Reviewers will look for:***

- How well does the proposal align with the selected Museums Empowered program goal/project category and objective(s)?
- Does the project advance the institution's strategic plan in specific and measurable ways?
- How well has the applicant used relevant data and other evidence to describe the need, problem, or challenge to be addressed?
- Has the applicant appropriately defined the primary audience and beneficiaries, as applicable, for this work?
- Have the primary audience and other project stakeholders been involved appropriately in planning the project?

In 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.

One of the essential questions in Museums Empowered applications is the focus on project activities designed to use professional development and training to generate systemic change within the museum.

## 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?
- 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?
- 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 organize and structure the project team to support equitable and inclusive engagement of all participants?
- What are the risks to the project and how will you mitigate them?
- 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.

How will you organize and structure the project team to support equitable and inclusive engagement of all participants?



## Narrative: Project Work Plan Continued

*Reviewers will look for:*

- Are the proposed activities informed by relevant theory and effective practice in professional development, organizational dynamics or change management?
- 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 project team structured in a way that is equitable and mutually beneficial to those involved?
- Are the goals, assumptions, and risks clearly stated?
- Will the proposed methods for tracking the project's progress allow course adjustments when necessary?
- Will the proposed methods for tracking the project's progress provide reliable and measurable information about the project results?

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

For a Museums Empowered project, reviewers will be looking to see that if the proposed project team is structured in a way that is equitable and mutually beneficial to those involved?



## Defining risks

- Every project has potential risks.
- Show that you are aware of the risks and have a plan for dealing with them.
- Answer the question, “What if?”

### Examples of Risk

- What if cost-share funding is unavailable by the time the project starts?
- What if a needs assessment suggests alternative priorities for training?
- What if one or more key staff are not available during the project period?
- What if a key project partner or consultant drops out mid-project?

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 risks:

- 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 plan to conduct listening sessions with staff. What if staff feedback suggests different needs, issues or challenges should be the priority for training?
- A project may be structured around university interns. What will happen if one or more interns drops out? What’s the plan for replacing them mid-project?
- 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?
- How will the knowledge, skills, behaviors, and/or attitudes of the primary audience change as a result of your project?
- How will the proposed activities result in organizational growth or systemic change for the museum?
- What products will result from your project and how will you make them accessible to the primary audience?
- How will you sustain the benefit(s) of your project beyond the conclusion of the period of performance?

### 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, 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 Continued

*Reviewers will look for:*

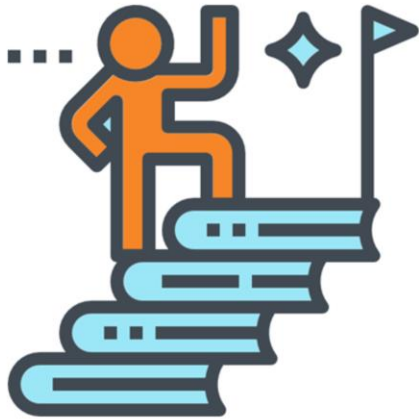
- Are the project's intended results clearly articulated, realistic, meaningful, and linked to the need, problem, or challenge addressed by the project?
- Is the plan to effect meaningful change in knowledge, skills, behaviors, and/or attitudes solidly grounded and appropriately structured?
- Is it clear 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?

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 the Notice of Funding Opportunity.

All of your results should tie back to your need, problem, or challenge that you identified in the Project Justification.



## Defining Intended Results



- Answer the question, “What will be better as the result of this work?”
- Know how you will recognize success and how you will measure it for each of your high-level activities.
- Tie everything back to your need, problem, or challenge.
- Consider constructing a logic model or an outcomes-based evaluation tool 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 you want to generate systemic change in your museum, how will that be measured?

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 or an outcomes-based evaluation tool to explain your intended results and your plan for achieving them.



## Narrative Recap

- Your Narrative has three sections—Project Justification, Project Work Plan, and Project Results
- 7-page maximum
- Refer to the review criteria in 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.



In this section we will provide information on what to include in your project budget and budget justification and provide some examples of allowable and unallowable costs.





## Allowable Cost Examples

- ✓ 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
- ✓ program evaluation
- ✓ staff and volunteer training
- ✓ paid internships/fellowships
- ✓ indirect or overhead costs

As you develop your budget, keep in mind that there are certain costs that are either allowable or unallowable according to federal regulations. The allowability of a cost item for all federal grants are specified in the Code of Federal Regulation (CFR) sometimes referred to as "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."

Using the 2 CFR 200 as a basis, we've developed a short list of allowable costs that are most common seen in ME grant applications. The Notice of Funding Opportunity includes a partial list of the most common examples of allowable costs – this short list of allowable cost are also shown on this slide.

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. The rules about allowability apply equally to grant funds as well as cost share.

When completing your project budget, be sure to check that all the costs you include, whether grant funds or cost share, are allowable.



## Unallowable Cost Examples

- ❑ general fundraising costs
- ❑ contributions to endowments
- ❑ general operating support
- ❑ acquisition of collections
- ❑ general advertising or public relations costs
- ❑ construction or renovation of facilities
- ❑ social activities, receptions, or entertainment
- ❑ research projects

There are also some costs which are unallowable according to the federal regulations in 2 CFR 200. In the Notice of Funding Opportunity, we also provide an abbreviated list of unallowable costs – which are also listed on this slide.

Unallowable 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.



## Budget Justification

The Budget Justification is an opportunity to provide in a more detailed narrative format, an explanation or justification for the project costs itemized in the IMLS Budget Form.

- In Salaries and Wages you should identify each person whose salary or wages will be paid with IMLS funds or included as cost share. If cost share is being provided by unpaid volunteers, explain how you arrived at the dollar amount used to represent the value of their services.
- In Supplies, Materials and Equipment you should list each type of supply, material, and equipment you propose to purchase or provide as cost share for the project. Provide vendor quotes or price lists as Supporting Documents with your application.

In addition to the IMLS Budget Form, you will also prepare a Budget Justification. This is an opportunity to provide in a more detailed narrative format, an explanation or justification for the project costs.

The Budget Justification should be written to follow the costs 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. In other words, please show your math!

For example, in the section Salaries and Wages you should identify each person whose salary or wages will be paid with IMLS funds or by cost share, provide their names, and describe their role in the project. Document the method of cost computation by including the base salary or wages for each person and the percentage of time each person is allocated to the project activities, which may be shown as a percentage of time, number of days, or number of hours. If cost share is being provided by unpaid volunteers, 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 you propose to purchase or provide as cost share for the project. Detail the number and unit cost 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.



## **Application Tips and Next Steps**

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





## Application Tips

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.
- ✓ 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.

We can only make grants 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 the process early. By watching this informational video you're off to a good start.
- Become familiar with Grants.gov's Workspace. It has many good features, such as the opportunity to collaborate with others in creating your application as well as a validation process that allows you to correct errors prior to submission. Tutorials are available on grants.gov.
- Be sure your application is complete. Check it against the Table of Application Components in the Notice of Funding Opportunity.
- Make sure all application components are in the proper format and follow the correct naming conventions.
- Submit your application in Grants.gov well before the deadline so you can correct any errors and avoid any issues created by technology challenges.

## Application Tips Continued

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**

It's important to get your application submitted online through Grants.gov before the deadline. IMLS does not accept applications by mail or email.

In order to submit your application in Grants.gov, you must have an active SAM.gov registration and Unique Entity Identifier number. 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.



## Additional Application Tips

Peer reviewers will be selected by IMLS to read each application and provide constructive comments on the strengths and weaknesses of the proposed projects.

To help make sure your Narrative is as clear and complete as possible:

- ✓ Follow the Narrative outline in the Notice of Funding Opportunity.
- ✓ Use headings, subheadings, or numbered sections in your Narrative.
- ✓ Consider the review criteria associated with each section of the Narrative.
- ✓ Avoid generalities, acronyms, and jargon.
- ✓ Ask a colleague to review everything with fresh eyes before you submit it.

There are many components that make up the entire application and the Narrative is an essential and critical part of the package.

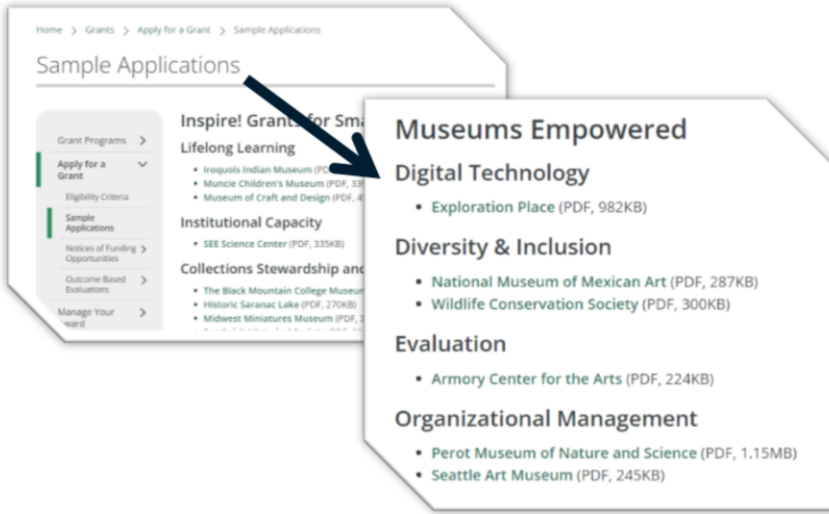
Peer reviewers – museum professionals from all types of museums – will be selected by IMLS to read each application and provide constructive comments on the strengths and weaknesses of the proposed projects. They also base their reviews only on the information contained in the application – so don't assume that a reviewer or IMLS will know something about your museum or your proposed project.

To help make sure your Narrative is as clear and complete as possible:

- Revisit the Notice of Funding Opportunity and follow the Narrative outline it provides.
- Use headings, subheadings, or numbered sections in your Narrative to make it easy for reviewers to read.
- Be sure to consider the review criteria associated with each section of the Narrative.
- Avoid generalities, acronyms, and jargon. The people who will review your application are museum professionals, but they may not be totally familiar with your particular field's shorthand. Make it easy for them to understand what you mean.
- 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.

# Sample Applications

Sample applications of recently funded grants are available on the IMLS website



We have also posted the narrative and schedule of completion from several successful applications.

To find these examples, go to the Sample Applications on the IMLS website and scroll down the page to find the Museums Empowered examples.

# Sample Applications Continued

Perot Museum of Nature and Science Proposal, Page 1

**Project Justification**

**Project Goal/Category**

The Perot Museum of Nature and Science is seeking a Museums Empowered grant under Goal 4 Organizational Management: Strengthen and support museum staff as the essential part of a resilient organizational culture; Objective 4.1: Develop comprehensive organizational learning opportunities that address one or more emerging priorities facing a museum. This project will support the IMLS's strategic goals of championing lifelong learning, knowledge sharing and professional development. All aspects of the project will be conducted through the lens of diversity, inclusivity, equity and accessibility. The Perot Museum is a bilingual institution with a diverse staff serving a diverse population with great intentionality.

One of the three primary goals of the MFA program is to champion lifelong learning. For museums to be truly effective in their endeavor to inspire a love of learning, they need to start within their own house by supporting the training and professional development of their workforce. The Perot Museum strives to be an excellent place to work whether it is for a season or to build a career in informal education. To attract talent and help grow the next generation of museum leaders, the Museum is intentionally building a people-centered coaching and learning culture that will result in a more engaged, innovative, collaborative and empowered workforce. This grant project will provide training to roughly 120 full-time build-

Additional comments from the Museum include: embed employ access skills in Strategic The Pe STEM welcom

As the

Perot Museum of Nature and Science

Tasks	2023				2024				2025																	
	S	O	N	D	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A		
Core Values Academy																										
Dare to Lead Training Sessions																										
Dare to Lead Application Sessions																										
Crucial Conversations																										
Crucial Accountability																										
Pulse Survey																										
Cultural Engagement Survey																										
Engagement Action Planning for Managers																										

Each sample application includes a copy of narrative and the schedule of completion.

Each sample application PDF contains a copy of the 7 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.



## Important Dates and Times

Applications are due by **11:59 pm EST** on **November 15, 2024**.

- Awards will be announced in **August 2025**.
- Projects must start **September 1, 2025**.

Here are a few important dates relating to Museums Empowered applications.

Applications must be received through Grants.gov by **11:59 pm Eastern Time** on **November 15, 2024**. Your application will be time-stamped by the Grants.gov system.

After the application deadline, IMLS staff will review your application for completeness and eligibility, and you will hear from us via email 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 Notice of Funding Opportunity. 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 typically happens in July.

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

All Museums Empowered projects must be scheduled to start on the first day of September 2025.



## Next Steps

Connect with IMLS Program Staff in the Office of Museum Services to ask questions about the:

- Museums Empowered grant program
- Application Components
- Review Process

<https://www.imls.gov/grants/grant-programs>

And 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 Museums Empowered grant program or other grant programs at IMLS, address any specific concerns with the various application components or help you understand the review process.

You may contact IMLS program staff by email 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 to find an available time slot on our calendar. You will then receive an email with a calendar invite and Microsoft Teams meeting link.

Thank you for listening to our presentation and best of luck to you in preparing and submitting your IMLS grant application.

## Credit

This presentation text is a work of the U.S. Government and its contents are in the public domain. Images in this presentation are used with permission of the source noted, unless otherwise indicated. If you reuse our work, please acknowledge IMLS as the source.