INSTITUTE of Museum and Library SERVICES

Museums for America Grant Program

Applicant Information Session

FY25 Video

August 2024

Welcome to the Institute of Museum and Library Services, Office of Museum Services informational video "Museums for America Grant Program Applicant Information Session."

My name is Mark Feitl, 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 for America grant program – which we call "MFA" for short - and the process of preparing an application for funding.

Video Chapters

1. **Chapter 1:** What is Museums for America (MFA)?

2. **Chapter 2:** What can MFA 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 for America? This section explains the purpose and design of the MFA grant program.
- What can MFA Grants Fund? This section explains the types of projects that can be funded in MFA and the amount of funds that can be requested.
- Application Components – Introduction. This section describes the types of documents that are needed to create an MFA grant application.
- Application Components – Narrative. This section provides guidance on composing the narrative part of the application.
- Application Components – Budget. This section provides details on the information to include in your project budget.
- Application Tips and Next Steps. 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.

Using This Video

Watch	Review	Refer
Watch this video in its entirety	Review the MFA Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) at www.imls.gov/grants	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 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. 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
- 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 MFA?
Museums for America

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

MFA = Museums for America

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

Activities might reflect museums as:
- active resources for learning and literacy
- institutions important in improving the well-being of their communities
- good stewards of the nation's collections

Emphasis is on local impact.

New York Botanical Garden

New Bedford Whaling Museum

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. The overall goal of the program is to support activities that strengthen the abilities of individual museums to serve their publics. This might be through activities that reflect museums as active resources for lifelong learning, as institutions important in improving the well-being of their communities, or as good stewards of the nation's collections.

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

Top photo courtesy of Museum of Craft and Design. Bottom photo courtesy of Woodland Park Zoo.

MFA and Your Strategic Plan

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

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

Explora Science Center

Troy University, Rosa Parks Museum

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

A characteristic of a successful MFA grant application is making the connection between the proposed project and a key need or challenge that faces your museum and whose resolution is identified in your strategic plan.

MFA 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 November 15th, 2024
  - ✓ 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.

MFA 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 grant application deadline, which is November 15th, 2024
  - 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.

MFA 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 museums
- Nature centers
- Planetariums
- Science/technology centers
- Specialized museums
- Zoological parks

MFA 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 MFA Fund?

In this section we will answer the question "What can MFA Fund?" providing details on the types of projects and associated goals and objectives 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.

MFA Funds Projects

What is a "project"? A temporary endeavor undertaken to create a unique product, service, or result.

Historic Cherry Hill

- 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.

MFA 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.

Photo courtesy of Historic Cherry Hill.

What Makes an MFA Project Successful?

INSTITUTIONAL IMPACT

IN-DEPTH KNOWLEDGE

PROJECT-BASED DESIGN

DEMONSTRABLE RESULTS

Keeping our focus on project-based activities, let's look a little further at what characteristics are most often seen in successful MFA applications.

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

Successful projects most often exemplify these four characteristics and fit well within the MFA grant program.

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

MFA Program Goals

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

Community Engagement: IMLS promotes the ability of museums to maximize the use of museum resources to address community needs through partnerships and collaborations.

Collections Stewardship and Access: IMLS supports the role of museum in advancing the management and care of collections and their associated documentation.

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.

The type of project activity you are seeking to fund should align with one of these three options: Lifelong Learning, Community Engagement, and Collections Stewardship and Access.

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. And for another, your application will be competing against others who have chosen the same category. In short, the entire review process incorporates an assumption that your project aligns with the goal you've identified. So, it's an important choice.

MFA Lifelong Learning

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

- o Objective 1.1: Support public programs, adult programs, family programs, and early childhood programs.

- o Objective 1.2: Support exhibitions and interpretation.

- o Objective 1.3: Support in-school and out-of-school programs.

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

New York Historical Society

So let's take a look at what kinds of project activities might fit within these goal areas. In this and the two slides that follow, the objectives provide some of the types of projects that fit within the Goal.

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

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

Image courtesy of New York Historical Society.

MFA Community Engagement

Goal 2, Community Engagement: Maximize the use of museum resources to address community needs through partnerships and collaborations

- o Objective 2.1: Support equitable engagement and inclusive collaboration with diverse and/or underserved communities.

- o Objective 2.2: Support efforts to improve access and eliminate barriers to museum services for all audiences.

- o Objective 2.3: Support community-centered planning, civic engagement, and resource sharing to address community needs.

Hermann-Grima Gallier Historic House Museum

Successful Community Engagement projects strive to create a better quality of life within - and with - communities.

A Community Engagement project is likely to include activities that contribute directly to your institution's role as an essential partner in addressing community needs. Successful Community Engagement projects strive to create a better quality of life within - and with - communities. Projects in this category will demonstrate a direct involvement by members of your community in planning your project and as well as 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; public programs; audience development, outreach, and evaluation; and civic engagement, to name a few. So how do you know if your project is a better fit within Lifelong Learning or Community Engagement?

If you project <u>requires</u> the involvement of community partners to co-create the content or drive the programming – then it may be a strong fit for the Community Engagement goal. If your project involves mostly museum's staff working internally to produce content - perhaps with some element of external input – then it may be a better fit with the Lifelong Learning goal. Both approaches are allowable, and both are fundable. Ultimately, it's your choice. What's important is that you choose one goal and write your application to align with that program goal and associated objective.

Photo courtesy of Hermann-Grima Gallier Historic House Museum.

MFA Collections Stewardship and Access

Goal 3. Collections Stewardship and Access: Advance the management and care of collections and their associated documentation.

- o Objective 3.1: Support cataloging, inventorying, and registration; collections information management; and collections planning.

- o Objective 3.2: Support conservation and environmental improvement and/or rehousing; conservation surveys; and conservation treatment.

- o Objective 3.3: Support database management, digital asset management, and digitization.

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

Winterthur Museum, Garden and Library

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

We are very open to projects that have multiple components configured in ways that make sense for you. One project might consist of cataloging, taking digital photographs, and updating database records, while another might combine digitization activities with rehousing.

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

We encourage a step-by-step, progressive approach to collections work, including conservation. This means assessing needs, creating a prioritized list of activities, and following through by **doing the most important things first.**

Photo Courtesy of Winterthur Museum, Garden and Library.

Choosing a Program Goal

Lifelong Learning

Community Engagement

Collections Stewardship and Access

1. Think carefully about what is "in the center" of your project. Who or what will benefit from your work? What will be improved once you've finished your project?

2. Decide whom you want to review your application. What kind of skill sets and experience do you want them to have?

3. List all the activities you plan to carry out and assign each to a category. Which category includes the largest number of activities? Where will most of the resources be spent?

Projects should fit within one of these three program goals, but sometimes there is an overlap in the kinds of activities you are proposing, which may make it difficult to select only one program goal. We expect that projects aligned with a specific goal will address different problems, use different approaches, and will measure success in achieving the intended results in different ways. So how can you choose the best category for your project?

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

A second way to go at this might be to think about **who you want to review your application.** If you apply under Lifelong Learning, we will put your application in front of museum educators, exhibits professionals, interpretive specialists and professionals with deep experience in understanding how people learn in museum environments. Would you rather we put it in front of a combination of experts in civic engagement and social justice, community outreach, and collective impact? If that sounds "right," then it may push you toward Community Engagement. And if you apply under Collections Stewardship

and Access, you can be confident that your application will be reviewed by some combination of registrars, collection managers, curators, conservators, or collections information specialists. If that seems appropriate, then this is most likely your best choice.

Lastly, a third strategy to try might be to make a list of all the activities you plan to carry out. Then assign each to a program goal, and then count to see where MOST of these activities occur and where MOST of the time and money will be spent. That might well provide your answer.

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

What Size Are MFA Projects?

MFA 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.

MFA supports projects of all sizes but there is a specific range of funding available 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 the MFA grant program, all project budgets are required to have at least a 1:1 non-federal cost share. For example:

● If your TOTAL project budget was $300,000 you would be able to request $150,000 in federal grant funds and provide a cost-share of at least $150,000.

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 MFA Projects Get Funded?

MFA AWARDS FY24

■ Lifelong Learning   ■ Community Engagment   ■ Collections Stewardship

32%

48%

20%
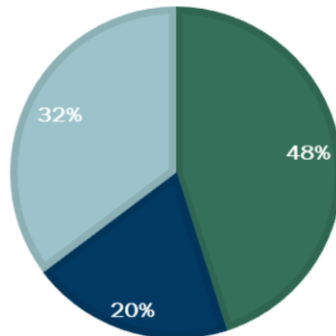
In FY24 IMLS made 115 MFA awards for a total of $23.3M.

The amount of applications received and the amount of awards made can vary from year to year.   Here is a snapshot of our most recent application and award cycle.

In FY2024 IMLS made 115 MFA awards with a total of $23.3 million in federal funds. We received 355 MFA applications last year, resulting in 33% of those applications being funded.

About 48% of the MFA awards were for projects supporting the Lifelong Learning goal, 32% of the projects supported the Collections Stewardship and Access goal, and 20% of the projects supported the Community Engagement goal.

The average amount of federal funds for each project was $203,147.

How Many MFA Projects Get Funded?

The Search Awarded Grants gives you an opportunity to explore our archive of grants.

On the IMLS website you use the Search Awarded Grants function to explore our archive of grants that we have awarded in past years. All of the 115 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 for each project.

Application Components
Overview

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.

Application Components

The MFA 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 MFA 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 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__ MFA applications.

- Application for Federal Assistance (SF-424S)
- IMLS Museum Program Information Form (including Abstract)
- Organizational Profile
- Strategic Plan Summary
- Narrative (7 pages max.)

- Schedule of Completion
- IMLS Budget Form
- Budget Justification
- List of Key Project Staff and Consultants
- Resumes
- Performance Measurement Plan

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.

Conditionally Required Documents

These components are required of <u>some</u> MFA applications.

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

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

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

Just like the required documents, omission of even one might result in your application's rejections. Please note that the term "digital product" includes digitized and born-digital content, resources, or assets; and software. If you are creating any of these types of materials, you must include the form with your application.

Supporting Documents

These components are <u>optional</u> in MFA applications. 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, and here is a partial list of 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, work plan, and intended results that you've already spelled out in your application narrative.

For example, have you identified a partner whose involvement is key to the 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, or collections– 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.

Museum of Craft and Design

Woodland Park Zoo

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.

Top photo courtesy of Museum of Craft and Design. Bottom photo courtesy of Woodland Park Zoo.

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 program goal and associated objective of Museums for America will your project address?

- How will your project advance your museum's strategic plan?

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

- Who is the target group for your project and how have they been involved in the planning?

- Who are the ultimate beneficiaries for this project?

- *For Collections Stewardship and Access projects: Describe and quantify the collections and/or records that are the focus of your project, and their current condition.*

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

First is the PROJECT JUSTIFICATION

What need, problem, or challenge will your project address, and how was it identified? Describe how you have used relevant data and other evidence to describe the need, problem, or challenge to be addressed. Who is the target group for your project and how have they been involved in the planning? "Target group" refers to those who will be most immediately and positively affected by your project. Identify the number of individuals in the target group or in each target group, if you identify more than one. Who are the ultimate beneficiaries for this project? "Beneficiaries" refers to those who are likely to be aided in the long-term by your project. They may or may not be the same as your "target group." Identify the number of individuals who will benefit from your project in the long term, if reliable and defensible counts are possible. Otherwise describe the characteristics of the beneficiaries you expect to be served eventually by your project.

Narrative: Project Justification Continued

Reviewers will look for:

- How well does the proposal align with the selected MFA program goal and associated objective?

- Does this project advance the museum'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 target group(s) and beneficiaries, as applicable, for this work?

- Have the target group and other project stakeholders been involved appropriately in planning the project?

- *For Collections Stewardship and Access projects:* Are the collections and/or records that are the focus of the project and their current condition described and quantified in enough detail?

In step 6 of the Notice of Funding Opportunity, under Peer Review Criteria, you will find a list of questions that reviewers are asked to consider when they review your proposal. It is a good idea to refer to these as you craft your narrative to be certain you are providing reviewers clear, solid information. You will see that they correspond fairly directly with the prompts you are given to write your narrative.

Defining a Need, Problem, or Challenge

- Remember that the federal government wants its investment to result in something getting better.

- Articulate what will get better as a result of your project as precisely as possible.

- Identify why it is important that this change happens.

- Hone your problem definition carefully.

- Present data that support your problem definition.

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

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

Narrative: Project Work Plan

Tell us:

- What specific activities will you carry out and in what sequence?

- What are the risks to the project and how will you mitigate them?

- Who will plan, implement, and manage your project?

- What time, financial, personnel, and other resources will you need to carry out the activities?

- How will you track your progress toward achieving your intended results?

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.

Narrative: Project Work Plan Continued

Reviewers will look for:

- Are the proposed activities informed by relevant theory and practice?

- Are the goals, assumptions, and risks clearly stated?

- Do the identified staff, partners, consultants, and service providers have the experience and skills necessary to successfully complete the work?

- Are the time, financial, personnel, and other identified resources appropriate for the scope and scale of the project?

- If present, does the Digital Products Plan reflect appropriate practices and standards for creating and managing the types of digital products proposed?

- Will the proposed methods for tracking the project's progress toward achieving the intended results allow course adjustments when necessary?

- Will the proposed methods for tracking the project's progress provide reliable and measurable information about the project results?

Reviewers will evaluate your proposal on how well your activities are informed by appropriate theory and practice; whether the goals, assumptions and risks clearly stated. Reviewers want to see that the team you've put together has the experience and skills necessary to complete the work successfully; and whether your schedule is realistic and achievable. They'll also be looking at whether the time, personnel, and financial resources identified are appropriate for the scope and scale of the project. They will consider if you've described a clear methodology for tracking your progress and adjusting course when necessary.

Defining an Activity

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

Your work plan will be built on activities, so it's important to be clear about just what an activity is. An activity is something that someone does. It has a beginning and an end (just like projects), and you know when you've finished it because it doesn't need to be done any more. An activity is NOT a goal, a result, or an outcome. Rather it is something you do as part of striving to achieve those.

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

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 key community partner or consultant is unavailable?
- What if there's a delay in the delivery of essential materials or equipment?

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

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 target group change as a result of your project?

- What products will result from your project, and how will you make them accessible to the target group?

- How will you sustain the benefit(s) of your project beyond the conclusion of the period of performance?

- *For Collections Stewardship and Access projects*: How will the care, condition, management, access to, or use of the museum collections and/or associated data that define the focus of your project improve?

The third section of your Narrative should be devoted to articulating your project's intended results. This section is your chance to convince the reviewers that your project will result in something getting better. The need or problem you identified in your Project Justification will be addressed directly, and it will be diminished or eliminated altogether. We ask you to tell us what data you will collect and report in order to measure your project's success. If your project will generate tangible products (and most do), here's the opportunity to describe them and make the case that they will be useful. And last but not least, we ask that you tell us how you will sustain the benefit of the project. How will this improvement that you propose to make continue once your grant is over?

Narrative: Project Results 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?

- *For Collections Stewardship and Access projects*: Will the care, condition, management, access to, or use of the museum collections and/or records improve as a result of the project?

Reviewers will give us their opinions on how well you've designed a feasible plan for collecting and reporting data; how likely the improvements that you've proposed will be realized; will the tangible products you plan to create be accessible to the primary audience you identified; and whether your plan for sustaining the benefits of the project are reasonable and practical.

Defining Intended Results, Success Measures
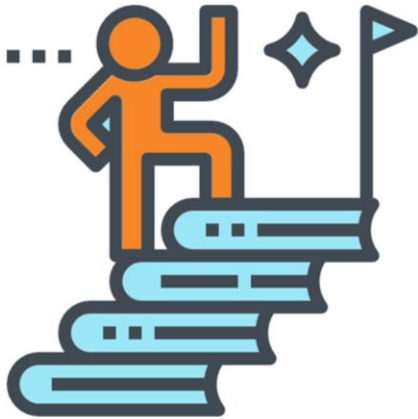
- Answer the question, "What will be better as the result of this work?"
- Know how you will measure success for each of your high-level activities.
- Tie everything back to your need, problem, or challenge.
- Consider constructing a logic model or using an outcomes-based evaluation tool to explain your 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 your problem related to segments of your community being better able to work together, how will you know when that has been achieved? If collections will be better cared for, how will you be sure and how will you measure "better?" If you're digitizing to expand accessibility, how will you know when you've done it? All of your results should tie back to your need, problem, or challenge. You may well experience tangential benefits and/or positive outcomes, but make sure you identify them as "in addition to" and not "instead of" your original intended results. Reviewers are likely to see that as a disconnect.

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 Step 6 of the Notice of Funding Opportunity

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

Application Components

Budget

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.

IMLS Budget Form

The IMLS Budget Form accommodates up to three years of project activities and expenses.

The budget should include the project costs that will be charged to grant funds as well as those that will be supported by cost share.

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 IMLS Budget Form is a fillable PDF that accommodates up to three years of project activities and expenses.

The budget should include the project costs that will be charged to grant funds as well as those that will be supported by cost share. In-kind contributions to cost share may include the value of services (e.g., donated volunteer or consultant time) or equipment donated to the project between the authorized start and end dates of your project.

All the items listed, whether supported by grant funds or cost share, must be necessary to accomplish project objectives, allowable according to the applicable federal cost principles, auditable, and incurred during the award period of performance.

The IMLS Budget form can be downloaded directly from the IMLS website (at https://www.imls.gov/sites/default/files/2021-05/imls-budget-form.pdf)

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." 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 a detailed narrative format, an explanation or justification for the project costs itemized in the IMLS Budget Form. For example:

- 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 in an opportunity to provide, in a more a 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. See https://www.grants.gov/web/grants/applicants/workspace-overview.html
- ✓ Do your background research.
- ✓ 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)
- Unique Entity Identifier (UEI)
- **Registration must be renewed every year!**

Grants.gov (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 register with Grants.gov, you must have an active SAM.gov registration and Unique Entity Identifier number. So make sure your registrations for both of these sites are complete, your accounts are active, and that any necessary passwords are current. These registrations expire periodically so DO NOT WAIT until it's time to hit the 'submit' button to check on them. You should coordinate with any other staff members, such as your Authorized Organization Representative, who may hold the accounts and passwords you'll need to submit.

Both the SAM.gov and Grants.gov websites have robust help features and FAQs. If you run into technical issues with either of these sites, you should reach out to their help desks and request a tracking, case, or ticket number in order to document your issue and attempts at resolving it. Failure to have active SAM.gov or Grants.gov registrations by the application deadline is not an excuse for submitting a late application so again, start early.

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.

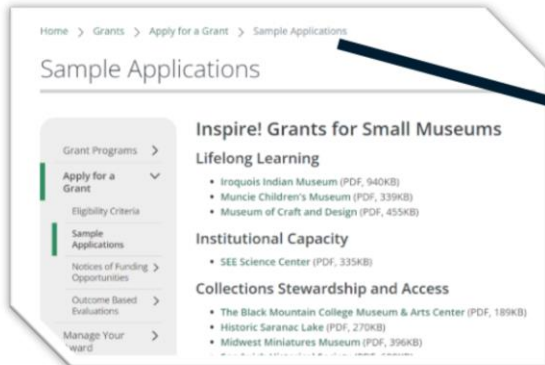To help make sure your Narrative is as clear and complete as possible:

- ✓ 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.

We have also posted the narrative, schedule of completion, and digital product plans from a selection of successful applications from FY2024. 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.

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 MFA applications. Applications must be received through Grants.gov by 11:59 pm Eastern Time on November 15, 2024. The date is non-negotiable. The time stamp is auto-generated by the Grants.gov system, and we have no ability to override it. We will say this repeatedly, to start early and submit your application early. That way, if you encounter a difficulty of any kind when submitting your proposal, you'll have some time to resolve the problem and resubmit.

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 MFA 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 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. MFA 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:

- MFA grant program
- Application Components
- Review Process

https://www.imls.gov/grants/available/museums-america

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 MFA 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

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