

Fiscal Year 2025

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# Field Reviewer Handbook

Museums Empowered

Office of Museum Services

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# Welcome!

Thank you for agreeing to serve as a peer reviewer for this year's Museums Empowered grant program. We hope you find this to be a rewarding experience and draw satisfaction from helping museums across the country create engaging learning environments, address the needs of their communities, and serve as trusted stewards of the collections they hold in trust for the public. We assure you that your contribution of time and expertise will be invaluable to IMLS and to the applicants who will receive your comments.

In this handbook, you will find the information you need to carry out field review, including information about the program, tips for writing effective comments, and three appendices with important reference material.

Additional guidance for peer reviewers includes:

- [Webinar for Potential Museum Reviewers](#)
- [Complying with Ethical Obligations and Avoiding Conflicts of Interest](#) (PDF, 88 KB)
- [How to Use Login.gov to Access eGMS Reach](#) (PDF, 1.3 MB)
- [How to Review Applications in eGMS Reach](#) (PDF, 1.1 MB)

If you have any questions about this material or the processes described, please do not hesitate to contact your panel chair at any time.

Once again, thank you for the service you are about to render to museums and communities throughout the nation.

# Museums Empowered Program Overview

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## Executive Summary

Museums Empowered (ME) is a special initiative of the Museums for America grant program. It supports projects that use the transformative power of professional development and training to generate systemic change within museums of all types and sizes.

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. The Museums Empowered grant program identifies four areas of museum operations to focus for professional development.

*Digital Technology* focused projects will support the work of museum staff in using digital technology to enhance audience engagement, collections access, or general museum operations.

*Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion* focused projects will increase cultural competency among museum staff and support relevancy of museum programs through learning activities that strengthen their ability to connect with the communities they serve.

*Evaluation* focused projects will enhance the ability of museum staff to understand a broad spectrum of evaluation methods and techniques as well as better use evaluation reports, data, and metrics to improve the design and delivery of programs.

*Organizational Management* focused projects will help museum staff develop and implement effective practices in organizational management, human resources, and strategic planning in response to emerging internal or external priorities.

We expect ME projects to:

- ✓ reflect a solid understanding of relevant theory and effective practices in professional development, organizational dynamics and change management.
- ✓ engage staff, leadership, and volunteers in a series of training activities tied to directly to a key need or challenge.
- ✓ generate systemic change or organizational growth that results in a more agile and sustainable museum.

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## ME Program Goals and Objectives

Reflecting IMLS's agency-level goals, Museums Empowered has four program goals and two objectives associated with each goal. You should align your proposed project with one of these four goals and one of the associated objectives, and clearly identify your choices in your project Narrative.

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## ME Program Goal 1, Digital Technology

Provide museum staff with the skills to integrate digital technology into museum operations.

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### Objective 1.1

Support staff learning and integration of digital communication platforms and social media tools to enhance audience engagement and community outreach.

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### Objective 1.2

Support staff learning and integration of digital tools and services that enhance access to museum collections.

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## ME Program Goal 2, Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

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

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### Objective 2.1

Create training and learning opportunities that increase cultural competency of museum staff and enhance relevancy of museum programs.

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### Objective 2.2

Develop and implement inclusive and equitable fellowship, internship, and mentoring programs to increase support for emerging professionals from diverse communities entering the museum field.

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## ME Program Goal 3, Evaluation

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

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### Objective 3.1

Increase staff knowledge of program evaluation methods and the usefulness of evaluation reports, tools, data, and metrics.

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### Objective 3.2

Provide museum staff with the tools and strategies to adapt evaluation methods to address a specific audience or institutional need.

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## ME Program Goal 4, Organizational Management

Strengthen and support museum staff as the essential part of a resilient organizational culture.

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### Objective 4.1

Develop comprehensive organizational learning opportunities that address one or more emerging priorities facing a museum.

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### Objective 4.2

Develop programs that address the specific learning and growth opportunities identified by staff needs assessments.

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## Funding Amounts

Amount of Individual Awards	\$5,000 - \$250,000
Cost Share Requirement	1:1
Period of Performance	1 to 3 years

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## Step-by-Step Instructions for Reviewers

At this stage, IMLS has screened applications only for institutional eligibility and application completeness. We are counting on you to determine how good a job each applicant does in:

- ✓ meeting the overall purpose of the Museums Empowered grant program,
- ✓ aligning with the specific goal and objective they selected, which includes Digital Technology, Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, Evaluation, or Organizational Management, and
- ✓ presenting a clear justification for the project, detailing the project workplan, and articulating the project results.

As you begin the process, you need to set aside enough time to read each application, understand the review criteria, and write your evaluation. The amount of time it takes to complete this work may vary significantly depending on the complexity of the application and your familiarity with the review process. Reviewers may spend from 1 to 3 hours on each application and often need to reread an application before completing their review.

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## Step 1: Sign in to eGMS Reach

eGMS Reach is IMLS's platform that you will use to access and review applications. To access eGMS Reach, users are required to have an account through [Login.gov](https://login.gov) to securely access information. You will receive an email with the subject line "eGMS Reach Account Information," that includes a link to the reviewer portal. If you do not receive such an email, please check your junk folder. If you still do not see the email, contact [imls-museumreviewers@imls.gov](mailto:imls-museumreviewers@imls.gov).

Once you have the email, please visit <https://grants.imls.gov/Reach/> and follow the instructions located in the [How to Use Login.gov to Access eGMS Reach](#) Job Aid to create a Login.gov account or link your email to an existing Login.gov account.

Instructions for navigating eGMS Reach are available in the [How to Review Applications in eGMS Reach](#) Job Aid, which is accessible on the IMLS website here:

<https://imls.gov/grants/peer-review/reviewer-resources/museum-reviewer-resources>

Visit the [Federal Service Desk](#) or call 1-866-606-8220 for questions about registering or renewing your registration with Login.gov. Hours of operation are Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. Eastern Time.

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## Step 2: Consider Field Review Criteria and Read Applications

We recommend that you begin by reviewing the [FY 2025 Museums Empowered Notice of Funding Opportunity](#) to which applicants have responded in creating their applications. This document is also available in the Shared Files for all Panel Participants section of the Files and Forms tab in eGMS Reach. Then, read the applications, keeping in mind the review criteria listed below for each section of the Narrative. You will not need to reference each bullet point in your comments, but these questions should guide your thinking about the strengths and weaknesses of each application.

### Review Criteria

#### Project Justification

- How well does the proposal align with the selected ME program goal and associated objective? (See [ME Program Goals and Objectives](#).)
- 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 primary audience and beneficiaries, as applicable, for this work?
- Have the primary audience and other project stakeholders been appropriately involved in planning the project?

### Project Work Plan

- 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 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?
- 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?
- 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 allow course adjustments when necessary?
- Will the proposed methods for tracking the project's progress provide reliable and measurable information about the project results?

### Project Results

- 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?
- Will the proposed activities generate organizational growth or systemic change that result in a more agile and sustainable museum?
- Will the products created by the project be made available and accessible to the primary audience?
- Is the plan to sustain the benefits of the project beyond the conclusion of the period of performance reasonable and practical?

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## Step 3: Draft Comments

For each application you review, we ask you to write a constructive and substantive comment for each section of the Narrative: Project Justification, Project Work Plan, and Project Results. All three sections of the Narrative have equal weight and are equally important in identifying the overall strengths and weaknesses of an application.

You may wish to prepare your comments in a separate document for later copying and pasting into the eGMS Reach evaluation form.

### When drafting your comments...

- Take all the review criteria questions for each section into consideration. It is not necessary to restate the review criteria questions in your comments.
- Use your professional knowledge and experience to assess the information objectively.



- Judge the application on its own merits, and do not base your evaluation on any prior knowledge of an institution.
- Make sure your comments justify the scores you provide. A highly complimentary comment does not remove the sting of a low score, and a negative comment does not even out a high one. Comments and scores must complement each other and make sense as a whole.

### Characteristics of effective and poor field reviewer comments

Effective Comments...	Poor Comments...
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• are presented in a constructive manner.</li> <li>• are both substantive and easy to read and understand.</li> <li>• reflect the resources of the institution.</li> <li>• are specific to the individual application.</li> <li>• reflect the numeric score assigned.</li> <li>• highlight the application’s strengths and identify areas for improvement.</li> <li>• are directed to applicants—not IMLS or panel reviewers—for their use.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• simply summarize or paraphrase the applicant’s own words.</li> <li>• make derogatory remarks.</li> <li>• penalize an applicant because you feel the institution does not need the money.</li> <li>• offer or ask for irrelevant or extraneous information.</li> <li>• compare the application to others in the review group.</li> <li>• make vague or overly general statements.</li> <li>• question an applicant’s honesty or integrity.</li> </ul>

See [Appendix C](#) for examples of effective comments, as they appear to applicants.

### What should not be considered in your reviews

Sometimes reviewers ask about or mention characteristics that are outside the scope of the ME review criteria. This is a list of commonly identified factors that you should NOT consider when reading ME proposals:

- An institution’s financial or staffing needs
- Whether a project is innovative
- Whether a project is new or a resubmission
- The size or age of an organization
- An institution’s indirect cost rate (IMLS honors indirect cost rate agreements that an institution has negotiated with another federal agency, or accepts the 15% rate in the absence of a negotiated agreement)

### Bias in the review process

Everyone has biases, which are informed by our own experiences as well as our cultural and social environments. Recognizing this is an important step in mitigating the effects of bias in

your reviews. The chart below shows different types of bias that commonly happen in the review process. Think about what may feel familiar as you review applications.

AFFINITY BIAS	CONFIRMATION BIAS	CONTRAST EFFECT
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Favoring those like you</li> <li>• Applicants who “speak the lingo” get less scrutiny</li> <li>• Seen as more believable/trustworthy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focusing on information that aligns with preconceived notions</li> <li>• Rejecting ideas or actions that challenge held notions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Evaluating quality and other characteristics relative to its surroundings (e.g., other applications in review group) rather than on its own merits</li> <li>• Can result in unfair assessment of risk and capacity</li> </ul>

As you review, pay attention to your preferences—for example, a project may be well conceived and ready to implement even if the narrative is poorly formatted or has spelling errors. We all have biases but staying aware of your preferences and what makes you feel comfortable can interrupt your bias and help ensure that every application is reviewed fairly.

*Example Biased Comments*

The following comments contain bias	Explanation
"I couldn't figure out what this project was about because the narrative was filled with spelling mistakes that were very distracting."	Comment demonstrates affinity bias.
"While it's important that museums connect with their communities, they should not be the lead for social service projects like a food bank in the museum. That type of work is not mission critical for museums."	Comment demonstrates confirmation bias.
"The risks identified in the narrative were not as realistic and robust as those I read in other proposals."	Comment demonstrates contrast effect bias.

## Step 4: Assign Scores

Assign a single preliminary score to the entire application. Use a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being Inadequate/Insufficient and 10 being Exceptional.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Inadequate/ Insufficient			Good				Exceptional		

Strive to bring the same approach to all the applications you review. Evaluate each application using the criteria in the Notice of Funding Opportunity and in the Reviewer Resources—not against other proposals. It is theoretically possible for you to have been assigned all “Exceptional” proposals, or all “Inadequate” proposals, meaning that you could arrive at all very high scores or very low scores. You do not need to evaluate on a curve of any kind.

If the project is misaligned to the goals of the ME grant program or the objectives of the goal that the applicant selected, your score should reflect that misalignment and your written comments should indicate why and even suggest alternatives or ways to improve.

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## **Step 5: Review Your Work**

IMLS is one of the few federal agencies that provides reviewers’ comments to applicants, directly and in their entirety without editing. We do this to make sure our process is as transparent as possible, and to provide anonymous feedback to applicants from their peers. If an applicant is unsuccessful, then they may use these comments to improve their proposal for resubmission. If they are successful, they may use the comments to improve their funded projects.

We hear repeatedly that getting your comments is one of the most highly valued things about IMLS museum grant programs, therefore, review your draft comments and preliminary scores. Adjust your scores, if necessary, to reflect your written evaluation more accurately. Scores should support comments, and comments should justify scores.

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## **Step 6: Enter Scores and Comments by the Evaluation Due Date**

When you are ready to enter your scores and comments, visit <https://reach.ims.gov/> and sign in with your Login.gov email and password. Refer to the [How to Review Applications in eGMS Reach Job Aid](#) for instructions on completing comments and selecting scores. Your reviews must be completed and entered in eGMS Reach by the **Evaluation Due Date** listed in the Panel Information tab in eGMS Reach.

Panel Information    Files and Forms    Applications    Messages    Readings

### Panel Information

Date(s)	2/11/2022
Coordinator	
Chair	<b>Mark Isaksen</b> 202-653-4667 misaksen@imls.gov
Evaluation Due Date	3/4/2023
Instructions	<p>Thank you for agreeing to serve as an IMLS peer reviewer for the FY22 Museums for America grant cycle.</p> <p>Guidance for reviewers is accessible under the Panel Files Tab below.</p> <p>Before proceeding to the Application Tab, you must:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Review the Conflicts of Interest Statement located under your Personal Files (to review the statement, click the paper icon); and</li> <li>2. Certify that you have reviewed the Conflicts of Interest Statement and that you have no conflicts with the applications that have been assigned to you (to certify that you have reviewed the statement and have no conflicts, click the pen icon to access the click-through signature function).</li> </ol> <p>The deadline for completing your reviews is Friday, March 4 at 11:59:59 PM EST.</p>

Screenshot. Panel Information tab illustrating where to find the Evaluation Due Date.

## Step 7: Completing Your Service as a Reviewer

Once you have completed your reviews, please hold on to any notes or digital copies of files in case there are any follow-up questions from IMLS staff. You may delete electronic files and shred paper copies of applications and notes after August 31, 2025.

If you requested an honorarium when you submitted the Peer Reviewer Services Agreement, you may expect to receive the electronic payment 4-6 weeks after completing your service. Please email [IMLS-museumreviewers@imls.gov](mailto:IMLS-museumreviewers@imls.gov) with any questions.

If you would like to be notified when final award decisions are announced by IMLS go to the [Subscribe](#) link to be sure you receive these updates.

# Appendix A: Confidentiality and Application and Review Process

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## Confidentiality and Use of Artificial Intelligence

The information contained in grant applications is strictly confidential. Do not discuss or reveal names, institutions' project activities, or any other information contained in the applications. Because Artificial Intelligence (AI) generative tools rely upon the submission of substantial information, and because AI users are unable to control where the information they have submitted will be sent, saved, viewed, or used in the future, IMLS explicitly prohibits its peer reviewers from using AI tools to analyze and critique IMLS grant applications.

While funded applications become a matter of record, IMLS does not release information about applications that are not funded through our programs, nor do we share peer reviewers' names or other identifiable information. You may share that you have served as an IMLS peer reviewer, but do not share details about the program on which you are working or the applications you are considering. This applies to communications that are in person, in email, and through all forms of social media.

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## Application and Review Process

The success of IMLS grant programs depends upon the quality of its peer review process, through which hundreds of reviewers consider thousands of eligible applications fairly, candidly, and impartially in order to make recommendations for funding each year. Below is a summary of the process from application submission through award announcements.

1. Organizations submit their applications electronically using [Grants.gov](https://www.grants.gov), the central portal of the United States government for receipt of electronic applications.
2. IMLS receives the applications, and staff members check them for organizational eligibility and application completeness.
3. IMLS staff members identify a pool of available peer reviewers with appropriate expertise. Peer review takes place in one or two tiers, depending on the grant program: field review, panel review, or both. Each complete application submitted by an eligible organization typically receives between three and six reviews.
4. For the applications ranked most highly by peer reviewers, IMLS staff members carefully assess the budgets and past organizational performance.
5. IMLS staff members provide a list of applications recommended for funding to the IMLS Director.
6. The IMLS Director makes all final funding decisions.
7. IMLS notifies all applicants whether they have received an award. With their notifications, all applicants receive anonymous copies of the field and/or panel reviews. IMLS also sends notification of the awards to each participating reviewer.

# Appendix B: Complying with Ethical Obligations and Avoiding Conflicts of Interest

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As a Reviewer for IMLS, you perform a vital role in ensuring the integrity of the IMLS's peer review process and must carry out your duties in accordance with government ethics rules. Before you evaluate applications, we ask that you review the following General Principles of Ethical Conduct and Summary of the Conflict of Interest Laws. You will be asked to certify compliance with the IMLS Reviewer Conflict of Interest Statement and Certification. IMLS allocates up to one hour of your reviewer time for you to consider these materials.

If, at any time in the course of performing your duties at IMLS, you believe you may have a conflict of interest, please contact the IMLS program officer coordinating your review process. Other questions about the ethics rules and responsibilities may be directed to IMLS's Designated Agency Ethics Official at [ethics@imls.gov](mailto:ethics@imls.gov); (202) 653-4787; 955 L'Enfant Plaza North, SW, Suite 4000, Washington, DC 20024-2135.

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## General Principles of Ethical Conduct

1. Public service is a public trust, requiring you to place loyalty to the Constitution, the laws, and ethical principles above private gain.
2. You shall not hold financial interests that conflict with the conscientious performance of duty.
3. You shall not engage in financial transactions using nonpublic Government information or allow the improper use of such information to further any private interest.
4. You shall not, except pursuant to such reasonable exceptions as are provided by regulation, solicit or accept any gift or other item of monetary value from any person or entity seeking official action from, doing business with, or conducting activities regulated by IMLS, or whose interests may be substantially affected by the performance or nonperformance of your duties.
5. You shall put forth honest effort in the performance of your duties.
6. You shall make no unauthorized commitments or promises of any kind purporting to bind the Government.
7. You shall not use public office for private gain.
8. You shall act impartially and not give preferential treatment to any private organization or individual.
9. You shall protect and conserve Federal property and shall not use it for other than authorized activities.
10. You shall not engage in outside employment or activities, including seeking or negotiating for employment, that conflict with official Government duties and responsibilities.

11. You shall disclose waste, fraud, abuse, and corruption to appropriate authorities.
12. You shall satisfy in good faith your obligations as citizens, including all just financial obligations, especially those – such as Federal, State, or local taxes – that are imposed by law.
13. You shall adhere to all laws and regulations that provide equal opportunity for all Americans regardless of race, color, religion, sex, national origin, age, or handicap.
14. You shall endeavor to avoid any actions creating the appearance that you are violating the law or the ethical standards.

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### **Summary of Conflict of Interest Laws**

**18 U.S.C. § 201** – Prohibits you from acceptance of bribes or gratuities to influence Government actions.

**18 U.S.C. § 203** – Prohibits you from accepting compensation for representational activities involving certain matters in which the United States is a party or has a direct and substantial interest.

**18 U.S.C. § 205** – Prohibits you from certain involvement in claims against the United States or representing another before the Government in matters in which the United States is a party or has a direct and substantial interest.

**18 U.S.C. § 207** – Imposes certain restrictions on you related to your activities after Government service.

**18 U.S.C. § 208** – Prohibits you from participating in certain Government matters affecting your own financial interests or the interests of your spouse, minor child, general partner, or organization in which you are serving as an officer, director, trustee, general partner, or employee.

**18 U.S.C. § 209** – Prohibits you from being paid by someone other than the United States for doing their official Government duties.

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### **Sample Reviewer Conflict of Interest Statement**

As a Reviewer or panelist for the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS), you may receive a grant application for review that could present a conflict of interest. Such a conflict could arise if you are involved with the applicant institution, or in the project described in the application, as a paid consultant or through other financial involvement. The same restrictions apply if your spouse or minor child is involved with the applicant institution or if the application is presented on behalf of an institution with which you, your spouse or minor child is negotiating for future employment.

A present financial interest is not the only basis for conflict of interest. Through prior association as an employee or officer, you may have gained knowledge of the applicant that would preclude objective review of its application. Past employment (generally more than five years prior to submission of the application) does not by itself disqualify a Reviewer so

long as the circumstances of your association permit you to perform an objective review of the application.

If you believe you may have a conflict of interest with any application assigned to you for review, please notify us immediately.

You may still serve as a Reviewer even if your institution is an applicant in this grant cycle or you were involved in an application submitted in this grant cycle, as long as you do not review any application submitted by your own institution or any application in which you were involved.

However, if you believe that these or any other existing circumstances may compromise your objectivity as a Reviewer, please notify us immediately.

If an application presents no conflict of interest at the time you review it, a conflict of interest may still develop later on. Once you have reviewed an application, you should never represent the applicant in dealings with IMLS or another Federal agency concerning the application, or any grant that may result from it.

Pending applications are confidential. It is not appropriate, for your purposes or for the purposes of the institutions or organizations you represent, for you to make specific use of confidential information derived from individual applications that you read while you were serving as an IMLS Reviewer. Accordingly, you must obtain approval from IMLS before sharing any proposal information with anyone, whether for the purpose of obtaining expert advice on technical aspects of an application or for any other reason.

If you have any questions regarding conflict of interest, either in relation to a specific application or in general, please contact the IMLS program officer who is coordinating the review process.

### **Certification**

I acknowledge that I have reviewed the ethics training materials and the Conflict of Interest Statement above. To the best of my knowledge, I have no conflict of interest that would preclude my service to the Institute of Museum and Library Services.

**Note:** Once you have reviewed this document, return to eGMS Reach to affirm that you have approved its contents.



# Appendix C: Example Peer Reviewer Comments

The following samples are the anonymized comments made available to both successful and unsuccessful applicants after funding decisions are announced.

**Sample 1: Field Peer Reviewer Evaluation**  
**Program: Museums Empowered**  
**Goal: Organizational Management**

**ME-123456-OMS - Name of Applicant Museum**

**Field Reviewer 1**

**Project Justification:**

The applicant has appropriately selected Museums Empowered goal #4: Organizational Management. Their project is focused on building their organizational capacity to engage the public in conservation and has great potential to affect systemic change. The applicant's plans align with their strategic mandate and will be measured through a variety of surveys and by assessing the impacts of the multiple documents and workshops that will be produced. The multi-part project is well researched and includes relevant data and best practices to describe a compelling need. The robust list of references provides evidence that their proposal is well-grounded. The multiple project activities will take place over two years and include different professional development and training activities to generate systemic change within the institution. The proposal clearly states the target groups of staff and volunteers as well as the beneficiaries, and why and how they were identified for the project. The proposal states that the target group has been involved in project planning. The voices of beneficiaries captured in survey feedback have been included in the planning process.

**Project Work Plan:**

The applicant's work plan cites numerous highly regarded frameworks, research literature and practices. The overall goal for the project is clear and the numerous proposed activities support the goal. To the significant risks discussed in the proposal, I would add staff turnover and have a plan ready to train any new staff that are added to the project. The key staff, their roles and resumes provide the evidence that they possess the experience and skills necessary to complete this project successfully. The position descriptions for the to-be-hired positions provide details about the kinds of staff and qualifications that are desired. The applicant's proposal includes features that will result in equitable and mutually beneficial opportunities for all participants. The time, as evidenced in the schedule of completion, budget details and personnel involvement appear necessary and appropriate for the scope and scale of this project. The applicant has spelled out how each of the Effectiveness, Efficiency, Quality, and Timeliness measurements will be generated in their Performance Measurement Plan. The Digital Products Plan covers a wide range of materials that will result from this project: documents, curricula, lectures that will be recorded, text and audiovisual media, interpretive signage, academic posters for conferences, data collection instruments, evaluation activities and resulting datasets, and reports. The proposed plan provides evidence that these will be appropriately created, managed and stored on a secure network. The project plan describes how progress will be tracked toward achieving the intended results and how periodic team meetings will allow for opportunities to identify the need for course adjustments. The overall project plan and Performance Measurement Plan provides a structure for the applicant to generate reliable and measurable information about the results of the project.

**Project Results:**

The project's intended results are specific, clearly stated, replicable and linked to the needs stated in the project justification. The plans for each of the project's components are well thought out and describe activities that will lead to measurable changes – to be captured via surveys – in knowledge, skills, behaviors, and attitudes. In addition to aligning with a Museums Empowered goal, the proposal identifies and explains how the project also aligns with IMLS strategic goals. This project has the potential to be replicated, rendering the federal investment made through this grant beneficial to society. The various products created by the project will be made available and accessible to the target group as well as benefit the beneficiaries. The applicant's sustainability plans are solid and will allow for the project to continue to generate benefits beyond the grant period. The proposal also mentions that the approaches taken by this project for the specified area can be applied to other exhibit areas thereby expanding the benefits of this project within their organization.

**Overall Score**

**10**

**Sample 2: Field Peer Reviewer Evaluation  
Program: Museums Empowered  
Goal: Evaluation**

**ME-123457-OMS - Name of Applicant Museum**

**Field Reviewer 2**

**Project Justification:**

This is a very unique project that has merit. As was identified, there aren't a lot of formal-informal education partnerships that have been studied in the museum field. This project presents a unique opportunity to explore the relationship between the two. It's ambitious, with the museum wanting to make this a longitudinal study.

I like that this project is building on the work of a nonprofit partner. That helps ensure there is a good foundation for this project. I also think partnering with the local university strengthens this proposal. However, I would like to understand more about how this work fits into previous formal-informal partnership research and work. It's not totally clear who the stakeholders are in this project, how they have been involved in the planning, and how they will be involved in the execution of the project.

There is a clear connection between the project objectives and the strategic plan. I think the proposal could be strengthened by ensuring the objectives of the project are influencing the strategic plan in an actionable and measurable way. This project has the potential to provide capacity building opportunities for the museum and to research how these formal-informal learning experiences are impacting children.

**Project Work Plan:**

I appreciate that the first task after solidifying the team is to develop an evaluation framework. This will be important to do first rather than jumping right into the evaluation. This will help ensure the evaluation is well grounded. Some of the planned activities have date ranges associated with them while some do not. Also, it's not clear what methods will be used to conduct the evaluations.

I think the risks that were identified were clearly stated, and the proposal outlined ways to mitigate those risks. I think the regular meetings will be an effective tool for tracking the progress of this project. More could be said about making adjustments to the plan when needed. The communication plan could have been fleshed out a little more - which conferences or associations do you intend to share the findings at?

This is a competent group that can successfully execute the project. This team represents a set of individuals with varying backgrounds, helping ensure the team is structured in a way that is equitable and mutually beneficial for those involved. I think the project is realistic and achievable in the grant term.

**Project Results:**

The project intended results are listed and clearly articulated; however, I think the results could be made stronger by more closely tying them into the needs initially identified in this proposal. I feel like this project can influence the attitudes, knowledge, skills, and behavior of not only the project team and associated museum staff but also of the students who participate in the project. However, this section only discusses impacting the project team and museum staff. I feel like staff and students are both intended audiences.

This is the first time specific qualitative and quantitative measures are identified. It would have been helpful to touch on these earlier in the Narrative. The tangible products will be very useful both for formal and informal educators. This project provides a unique opportunity to look at the connection between the two types of education.

While I think the brief sustainability plan discussed at the end of the Narrative will help the project during the life of the award, the plan lacks information about how to sustain this amount of longitudinal evaluation long-term.

**Overall Score**

**5**

**Sample 3: Field Peer Reviewer Evaluation**  
**Program: Museums Empowered**  
**Goal: Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion**

**ME-123458-OMS - Name of Applicant Museum**

**Field Reviewer 3**

**Project Justification:**

The applicant has clearly identified the need and challenge to be addressed by this project. While they have identified their staff and audience as the beneficiaries of this project, they fail to explicitly include their board or volunteers, although they are mentioned as an ultimate long-term goal. This reads out of sync with the earlier part of their narrative where they shared their accomplishments related to doubling their board diversity. Given that the board of trustees are the stewards of the institution, it would be appropriate and expected for the board to be included as direct beneficiaries.

This project does not directly advance their current strategic plan. The applicant does state their new strategic plan, which is currently in development, will build upon these successes and reflect objectives that are included in the proposal. The challenge with this is that there are no guarantees that the strategic plan that the institution ultimately adopts will be reflective of the project they are proposing. They could make a stronger case for this if they were further along in the strategic plan process.

**Project Work Plan:**

A majority of the applicant's proposed activities are appropriate and informed by theory and practice however, there are areas of vagueness and others that do not seem to be grounded in theory and practice. In terms of vagueness, they could have provided more direction by grounding these generalities by citing examples of different approaches from existing research and like institutions doing that work. In terms of the risks, it is appreciated that the applicant is transparent in the less than impactful results from previous attempts at DEIA work. The failure to mention the emotional and physical bandwidth required to engage in this work could be potentially problematic toward reaching their stated goals.

The lack of grounding in theory and practice refers to the tracking progress section of this narrative where the applicant refers to the production of videos and guides as a resource to staff, partners, and other institutions. Their intent to produce training videos for use by other organizations is inappropriate. The project evaluation is appropriate. Achievability is dependent on their mediation of risk.

With regard to the project team, there is some risk in hiring a new curator and expecting them to be the project co-director. This type of work requires significant trust and to bring on someone at that level who is not grounded in the institution is challenging.

The applicant's performance management plan is also underdeveloped in terms of clear and defined strategies to track the progress. The narrative is far more focused on setting and meeting benchmarks. The lack of clear strategies throughout undermines their approach. Similarly, their proposed dissemination strategy for results lacks clarity and detail.

**Project Results:**

The intended results are clear, although this reviewer is not sure they are completely actionable. They read out of step with the workplan. While the workplan communicated regular and ongoing trainings, in this section most of the staff will have one training a year, with mid-level staff receiving an additional training, and Senior staff getting ongoing training. That is not equitable and is out of sync with the research because it is the general staff that will interact with the public far more than senior staff. In addition, the intended results, did not address tangible results related to overall organizational operations, policies, or procedures. The applicant's tangible results are largely organized around the production of videos and digital guide. They seem to be more interested in positioning themselves as an authority on DEIA rather than in meaningful organizational change.

**Overall Score**

**2**