

Fiscal Year 2025



Panel 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 panel 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

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.

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.

ME Program Goal 1, Digital Technology

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

Objective 1.1

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

Objective 1.2

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

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.

Objective 2.1

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

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.

ME Program Goal 3, Evaluation

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

Objective 3.1

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

Objective 3.2

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

ME Program Goal 4, Organizational Management

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

Objective 4.1

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

Objective 4.2

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

Funding Amounts

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

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 that they selected, 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.

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](#) 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.

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.

Step 2: Consider Panel 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 panel review criteria listed below. 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.

Panel Review Criteria

Goals

Does the project meet the overall purpose of the ME funding opportunity to support projects that use the transformative power of professional development and training to generate systemic change within a museum?

How well does the project align with one of the goals of the ME program?

- Digital Technology projects: Provide museum staff with the skills to integrate digital technology into museum operations
- Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion projects: Support museum staff in providing inclusive and equitable services to people of diverse geographic, cultural, and socioeconomic backgrounds and to individuals with disabilities

- Evaluation projects: Strengthen the ability of museum staff to use evaluation as a tool to shape museum programs and improve outcomes
- Organizational Management projects: Strengthen and support museum staff as the essential part of a resilient organizational culture

Implementation

Is the project poised for successful implementation?

- Reflects a solid understanding of relevant theory and effective practice in professional development, organizational dynamics or change management.
- Engages staff, leadership, and volunteers in a series of training activities tied directly to an identified need
- Allocates resources for the successful completion of the project
- Connects goals and objectives to appropriate activities and intended outcomes

Results

If funded, will the project achieve its intended results?

- Tracks, measures, and adapts in order to achieve desired outcomes
- Generates organizational growth or systemic change that is likely to result in a more agile and sustainable museum

Step 3: Draft Comments

For each application you review, we ask you to write a constructive and substantive comment for each of the panel review criteria: Goals, Implementation, and Results. All three areas 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 panel reviewer comments

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

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

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 project timeline seems ambitious, especially since two key partners aren’t identified/confirmed. That said, [Museum Name] is one of the top museums in the US, and I’m sure they’ll be able to make this happen.”	Comment demonstrates conformity 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 5, as described in the Scoring Definitions chart.

Scoring Definitions

Score	Rank	Description
5	Exceptional	The application is outstanding and provides exceptional support for the proposed project.
4	Very Good	The application provides solid support for the proposed project.
3	Good	The application is adequate but could be strengthened in its support for the proposed project.
2	Some Merit	The application is flawed and does not adequately support the proposed project. The project proposal could be revised and strengthened for a future submission.
1	Poor	The application does not fit the program goals, is inadequate, or provided insufficient information to allow for a confident evaluation.

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 “Poor” 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 overall purpose and goals of the ME grant program, your scores should reflect that misalignment, and your written comments may suggest alternatives.

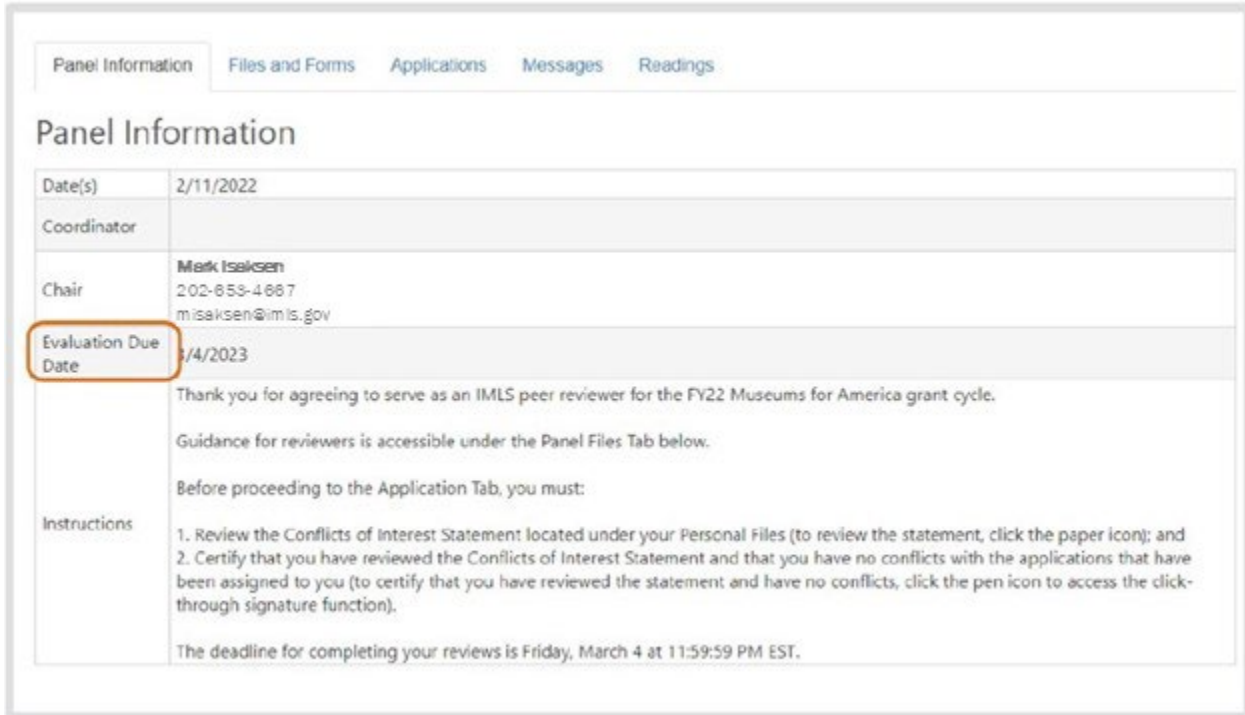
Step 5: Review Your Work

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.

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.



The screenshot shows the 'Panel Information' tab in the eGMS Reach system. The 'Evaluation Due Date' is highlighted with a red box and is 3/4/2023. The 'Chair' is Mark Isaksen, with contact information 202-653-4667 and misaksen@ims.gov. The 'Instructions' section provides guidance for reviewers, including a deadline of Friday, March 4 at 11:59:59 PM EST.

Panel Information	
Date(s)	2/11/2022
Coordinator	
Chair	Mark Isaksen 202-653-4667 misaksen@ims.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">1. Review the Conflicts of Interest Statement located under your Personal Files (to review the statement, click the paper icon); and2. 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). <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@ims.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

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.

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

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; (202) 653-4787; 955 L'Enfant Plaza North, SW, Suite 4000, Washington, DC 20024-2135.

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.

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.

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: Panel Peer Reviewer Evaluation
Program: Museums Empowered
Goal: Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

ME-123456-OMS - Name of Applicant Museum

Panel Reviewer 1

Goals:

This project is very much in line with the goals of the Museums Empowered special initiative and focuses on building capacity within their internship program. It appears this project is building off the success of a previously funded IMLS project that aimed to consolidate various intern programs across the organization into one. The proposed project seems like a logical next step in strengthening the intern program to become more inclusive and supportive of the museum's diverse team of interns. The previous project created a number of systems that removed barriers to access for underrepresented youth to become interns and this projects now aims to fill a gap identified after the new intern program was initiated.

The proposal includes a number of attachments that do a good job of communicating the organization's commitment to the intern program and the impact it's having on the broader community. The success shown in previous efforts to revamp this program and remove barriers to access give me full confidence that this project is well informed and worth funding.

Implementation:

The proposal does an excellent job of identifying and communicating the need for a more robust and equitable training for intern supervisors. The proposed project is well thought out and did a good job of connecting the goals of the project to the activities outlined in the proposal, including:(1) inventory of intern supervisor training resources used by the museum and other regional cultural institutions; (2) intern supervisor training curriculum covering positive youth development, cultural competence, supervising young adults, and mentoring; (3) refresher course on the same topics; (4) micro-training videos on key skills; and (5) evaluation reports describing implementation and impact. The proposal also includes a logic model that clearly shows how the goals and objectives of the project align with the intended activities and outcomes.

The organization has invested a great deal in the intern program and this project shows that the organization only plans to invest more to ensure its continued success. The majority of expenses are staff time which matches the key activities outlined in the proposal. One thing I didn't notice in the budget is a line item for hiring a trainer - but I may have missed it.

Results:

The museum aims to inspire a diverse and inclusive movement of conservation advocates and STEM professionals through the implementation of a more robust intern supervisor training program. This project not only aims to support internship supervisors in making the museum a more welcoming place, but also broadens representation of people who go into museum careers more broadly.

The activities and robust evaluation metrics, along with supporting documents, clearly show how this project aims to meet their desired outcomes and continue to be a benefit to the organization long after the grant is complete. The training materials and implementation plan is well thought out and communicates that the applicant took careful consideration in how to craft a project that has long term benefits.

This is a very well written proposal and I see no red flags.

Overall Score

5

Sample 2: Panel Peer Reviewer Evaluation
Program: Museums Empowered
Goal: Organizational Management

ME-123457-OMS - Name of Applicant Museum

Panel Reviewer 2

Goals:

This seems to be a strong proposal aligned with providing transformative professional development around organizational management. This project follows a ten-year period of improving the museum's physical infrastructure and reflects the next stage of their institutional development in creating a well-trained, mission-focused staff that will better serve their public.

The project supports investing in people who implement the museum's mission, so they are able to do their best work. Key strategies include 1) fostering a learning environment for staff and volunteers and 2) supporting and creating a collaborative, respectful culture that empowers and energizes. Both are intended outcomes of this project. Three-quarters of the museum's current staff hold audience-facing positions. About half the museum's staff work in Visitor Services, the majority of which are the frontline staff charged with interacting directly with visitors in the museum's exhibit spaces.

Implementation:

The museum has a relatively small full-time staff and a large part time staff. They have undergone rapid growth; they have assessed that they need to invest in their staff to properly take advantage of their opportunity to impact visitors and create a stronger museum. The creation of a task force to update personnel policies and procedures indicates that they are moving in the right direction in alignment with becoming a more mature organization. I was pleased to see in the budget section that attention was paid to hourly staff training as they are the ones interacting with visitors the most. Most grant resources otherwise were directed toward an external contract with a consulting firm, which seems to be appropriately tied to the intended outcomes.

Results:

I did appreciate under performance measures that visitor satisfaction survey results were included as a measure of quality; however, I would like to see more objective measures of employee satisfaction, management efficiency, and knowledge of mission, which should be easily measured.

This seems like a transformative opportunity for the museum to embrace its staffing assets and chart a new people centered strategy for the museum.

Overall Score

3

Sample 3: Panel Peer Reviewer Evaluation
Program: Museums Empowered
Goal: Digital Technology

ME-123458-OMS - Name of Applicant Museum

Panel Reviewer 3

Goals:

This project meets the goals of the Museums Empowered initiative in the Digital Technology category by introducing a 2-year plan to train its staff in using technological tools to serve its audience and improve staff efficiency and productivity. It focuses specific effort on making online and in-gallery programs accessible via best practices in visual design, captioning, audio augmentation, and other digital media accessibility enhancements.

Implementation:

The narrative clearly made the connection between the institution's technology strategic plan, the overarching audience goals of the museum, and the outcomes of this project. You have selected a key consultant experienced in audience surveys and data mining which should be able to direct you in what type of data you should be gathering and other accessibility consultants. The best practice research you have done seems appropriate to help you shape and drive the staff training plan.

While the work plan indicates what will be trained and when the training will be taking place, I struggled to find who the training would be aimed at and how the programs would be deployed. (In-person, online, self-study, synchronous, etc.?)

More detail on the curriculum and pedagogical approach would have garnered a higher score from me. Knowing who would receive training and giving me an example of how that would have an impact on their work would have also been helpful.

I saw no articulation of risks in the proposal, and I wonder about buy-in from the Director to have this much staff time devoted to training (if this is truly aimed at the whole staff).

The budget and cost share estimates seem appropriate for a project of this scale.

Results:

There was no mention of specifically evaluating the impact of the training and very little about continuing these activities post grant other than incorporating the training (in what form) in onboarding of new employees.

More detail on deliverables would have made this a stronger proposal.

Overall Score

2