

Fiscal Year 2025



Field Reviewer Handbook

National Leadership Grants for Museums

Office of Museum Services

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Welcome!

Thank you for agreeing to serve as a peer reviewer for this year's National Leadership Grants for Museums 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.

National Leadership Grants for Museums Program Overview

Executive Summary

The National Leadership Grants for Museums program (NLG-M) supports projects that address critical needs of the museum field and that have the potential to advance practice in the profession to strengthen museum services for the American public. We expect NLG-M projects to:

- ✓ reflect a thorough understanding of current practice and knowledge about the subject matter and an awareness of and support for current strategic priorities in the field;
- ✓ use collaboration to demonstrate broad need, field-wide buy-in and input, and access to appropriate expertise;
- ✓ articulate intentional impact across one or more disciplines within the museum field; and
- ✓ employ novel approaches to the project area, as appropriate.

The models, new tools, research findings, services, practices, and/or alliances can be widely used, adapted, scaled, or replicated to extend and maximize the benefits of Federal investment.

NLG-M Program Goals and Objectives

Reflecting IMLS's agency-level goals, the National Leadership Grants for Museums program has three program goals and three objectives associated with each goal. Each applicant should align their proposed project with one of these three goals and one of the associated objectives. Program goal and objective choices should be identified clearly in the Project Justification section of the Narrative and align with the grant program goal and objective selected by the applicant on the IMLS Museum Program Information Form.

NLG-M Program Goal 1, Lifelong Learning

Advance the museum field's ability to empower people of all ages and backgrounds through experiential and cross-disciplinary learning and discovery.

Objective 1.1

Support the development, implementation, and dissemination of model programs that facilitate adoption by museums across the field.

Objective 1.2

Support research focusing on the role of museums in engaging learners of all types.

Objective 1.3

Support forums that convene experts and stakeholders, including those from adjacent fields as appropriate, to explore current and emerging issues and inform the field.

NLG-M Program Goal 2, Community Engagement

Advance the museum field's ability to maximize the use of museum resources to address community needs through partnerships and collaborations.

Objective 2.1

Support the development of new and innovative methods for addressing community challenges through partnerships, services, processes, or practices for use across the museum field.

Objective 2.2

Support research focusing on museums' roles in engaging diverse audiences and fostering civic discourse.

Objective 2.3

Support forums that convene experts and stakeholders, including those from adjacent fields as appropriate, to explore current and emerging issues and inform the field.

NLG Program Goal 3, Collections Stewardship and Access

Advance the museum field's ability to identify new solutions that address high priority and widespread collections care or conservation issues.

Objective 3.1

Support the development, implementation, and dissemination of new tools or services that facilitate access, management, preservation, sharing, and use of museum collections.

Objective 3.2

Support research focusing on any broadly relevant aspect of the management, conservation, and preservation of collections.

Objective 3.3

Support forums that convene experts and stakeholders, including those from adjacent fields as appropriate, to explore current and emerging issues and inform the field.

Funding Amounts

Amount of Individual Awards	\$50,000 - \$750,000
Cost Share Requirement, non-research	1:1
Cost Share Requirement, research	None
Period of Performance	1 to 3 years

Non-research projects address critical needs of the museum field; have the potential to advance practice in the profession so that museums can improve services for the American public; and generate results such as models, new tools, services, practices, and/or alliances that can be widely used, adapted, scaled, or replicated.

Research projects investigate key questions important to museum practice; result in findings that have the potential to advance the profession so that museums can improve services for the American public; address clearly articulated research questions; and feature appropriate methods, including relevant theoretical or conceptual approaches, data collection, and analysis.

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 goals of the National Leadership Grants for Museums grant program,
- ✓ meeting the objective and the goal that they selected, which includes Lifelong Learning, Community Engagement, or Collections Stewardship and Access, 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](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.

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 Field Review Criteria and Read Applications

We recommend that you begin by reviewing the [FY 2025 National Leadership Grants for Museums 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 National Leadership Grants for Museums program goal and associated objective? (See [NLG-M Program Goals and Objectives](#).)
- 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(s) and beneficiaries, as applicable, for this work?
- Have the primary audience and other project stakeholders been appropriately involved in planning the project?
- Does the project address current needs of the museum field and/or have the potential to advance practice in the museum profession?

- Does the applicant clearly articulate how the proposed work differs from, complements, or builds upon existing theory, scholarship, and practice?

Project Work Plan

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

These additional questions are for Research project proposals only. See [Guidance for Research Applications on page 80 of the NOFO.](#)

- Are the proposed research questions, methods, and theoretical framing appropriate for addressing the identified need, problem, or challenge?
- Is the research informed by current practice and does it have the potential to produce generalizable results that could advance professional practice?
- Are the selected methods for data collection, analysis, and use appropriate for the project?
- Is the approach to securing Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval appropriate?
- Is the Data Management and Sharing Plan for managing, sharing, preserving, documenting, and enabling reuse of the information and research products created during this project appropriate?
- Is the dissemination and communication plan comprehensive in terms of broad reach to practitioners and other communities of interest?

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?
- Is the plan for ensuring that the proposed models, tools, research findings and/or services will be broadly adaptable and usable by other institutions and widely disseminated to the field likely to be effective?
- Is the plan to sustain the benefits of the project beyond the conclusion of the period of performance reasonable and practical?

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">• 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.

[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 NLG-M review criteria. This is a list of commonly identified factors that you should NOT consider when reading NLG-M proposals:

- An institution’s financial or staffing needs
- 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">• 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">• 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 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 National Leadership Grants for Museums grant program or the objectives of the goal that the applicant selected, your comments and scores should reflect it.

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 interface includes a navigation bar with tabs for 'Panel Information', 'Files and Forms', 'Applications', 'Messages', and 'Readings'. The 'Panel Information' section contains a table with the following data:

Date(s)	2/11/2022
Coordinator	
Chair	Helen Wechsler 202-653-4779 hwechsler@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: Field Peer Reviewer Evaluation
Program: National Leadership Grants for Museums

MG-123456-OMS - Name of Applicant Museum

Field Reviewer 1

Project Justification:

This application displays an excellent use of relevant data and best practices. The application builds on current work of their network, which has proven results. The target group is clearly defined and the need to reach that groups clearly articulated and backed by research. Reaching a younger audience, well defined here as 18-29, is a huge need in the museum field. The fact that the applicant's program was able to achieve successful programming during the pandemic is a strong measure of success. The program was already looking outside of the museum walls and meeting people where they are, technologically speaking and through creative partnerships.

Project Work Plan:

The proposed activities are well grounded in theory and practices. The target group is involved as decision makers and formal participants in all aspects of this work plan. They are using popular platforms that are underutilized by the museum field, formalizing the role of youth leadership within museum spaces, using social media for educational opportunities and not just marketing. This project is helping to bring museum content into popular spaces and vice versa. I did not see the criteria for expanding the network. What are the criteria for membership or is it open to anyone who wants to join?

Some elements are ambitious: Monthly check-ins for the Steering Committee, monthly meetings of innovation board, 200 Zoom interviews. There are many arms to this project and a lot to manage and coordinate. The increase in assessments and impact measurement will aid the success of this project as it continues to grow in networked institutions and participants. The mixed methods evaluation methods feel appropriate, and the timing provides a baseline and measurable change.

Project Results:

Tying this into planned national celebrations is smart for buy-in and marketability. The project results are clearly articulated, realistic and meaningful. If successful, this will create new, flexible, relevant models for engaging an important and underserved population in the museum field, hopefully turning them into a sustainable population of museum-engaged adults.

Overall Score

10

Sample 2: Field Peer Reviewer Evaluation
Program: National Leadership Grants for Museums

MG-123457-OMS - Name of Applicant Museum

Field Reviewer 2

Project Justification:

This project identifies an important and universal problem facing living collections in arboreta and botanic gardens worldwide. Data from previous studies suggest that background turnover in living collections is rapid and potentially can be exacerbated by climate change. The Project Justification is well-written, but it is unclear whether the proposed project aims to address all living plant collections or just collections of trees. Similarly at points "conservation collections" are singled out, but it is unclear if this project will focus on conservation collections specifically or if the focus is broad. This is important as it has implications for the broader significance of the project as well as feasibility and scope. The Project involves several key partners who are leaders in the botanic garden community, and each contain diverse and large living collections with detailed inventories and have staff with experience in dealing with and addressing the issue. It is suggested that implications of this work will be important for other, smaller botanic gardens, but it's unclear how the recommendations developed by gardens with significant resources will translate to smaller botanic gardens with limited resources to apply the results and recommendations of this work. It was surprising that the literature and previous research on community succession was not raised as a potential avenue to set up null hypotheses to test expectations for collections cycling in comparatively highly managed botanic garden environments.

Project Work Plan:

The Project Work Plan is broad and outlines ten tasks that will help the project personnel address several research questions using data that will be collected as part of this project. I was surprised that although hypothesis generation and testing was mentioned, there were no specific hypotheses identified in the Work Plan, and the methodology to test hypotheses was not elaborated in any technical or theoretical way. Some broad research questions were introduced, but hypotheses (and corresponding methodology) regarding how the collected data will be used to address these research questions were not specified. Another area of the work plan that was difficult to understand was the specific role that the 12-month fellowship position would play in contributing to this project. These fellows comprise a significant component of the budget, however, it was unclear what their role would be and how they would contribute to the project in meaningful and specific ways. It is also unclear whether the effort needed to characterize and understand the cycling crisis at each stakeholder garden is the same or similar, or whether there may be different levels of effort needed. Lastly, it was difficult to understand the focus and scope of this project – at various places in the Narrative the implications for this work were suggested to be broad and far-reaching for all plant collections, but in other places there was a focus on tree taxa and "conservation collections" at other times. The structure of the project work plan, divided across several institutions with differing collections strengths, indicates that institution-based case-study might be the approach, but this was not clear, and the work plan suggests that a very broad and generalized approach would be taken by each institution.

Project Results:

This proposal outlines a clear and strong plan for collection of results across all participating institutions contributing to this project. The implications for results would be of broad significance for other institutions both in the US and worldwide. Ultimately, the

proposal assumes that understanding loss/turnover/the collections cycling crisis will translate into better management as an outcome or result, however, it is unclear how the data characterizing trends of loss/cycling in these collections will actually inform curators and collection managers and therefore lead to improved practice in collections stewardship. This may have been presented more clearly if the hypotheses were more explicitly stated and the methodology for testing them elaborated.

Overall Score

6

Sample 3: Field Peer Reviewer Evaluation
Program: National Leadership Grants for Museums

MG-123458-OMS - Name of Applicant Museum

Field Reviewer 3

Project Justification:

Your proposal makes a compelling case for the need for a community or region-wide planning process to best support museum and cultural heritage organization's interpretive plans as a way to support the vitality of rural communities. I particularly appreciate the potential for this project to create a roadmap that other rural organizations and communities could use as a starting point for their own planning processes.

Unfortunately, you do not make the case as to why this is a research study rather than a non-research study. You do not outline key research questions or discuss how the process applied in this project may be able to be replicated in other rural communities across the country.

Project Work Plan:

The timeline and proposed work plan are well considered and highly flexible and engaging in their outline for involving community participation and offering opportunities for feedback of the interpretive plan. However, the research description is framed around individual choice and how audiences may choose to participate in a given experience or not. No part of the work plan includes gathering information from current or potential visitors to inform the interpretive experience plan or to segment and describe the audience. Instead, the researchers share that they already have basic profiles of key target audience segments and will use those as the basis for creating profiles. At what point in the year-long process will visitor data be gathered, how will it be gathered, and how will that data be protected and stored? In one of the work plan steps, you suggest that you will be gathering additional information about target audiences and parameters, but you do not speak to when and how you will gather visitor or potential visitor data.

Project Results:

This project outline suggests that it will create a visitor interpretive experience plan for the primary museum, but it does not speak to how that plan will support the broader community. The proposal also does not adequately describe how the project will support the broader field of rural cultural and heritage organizations, expand STEAM opportunities, or generate knowledge on particular research questions.

Additionally, the descriptions of the methodology, data management plan, and the intended dissemination strategies were incomplete or not directly answering the questions posed by the notice of funding.

I believe that this proposal would be greatly supported by being revised and shifted into a non-research project rather than trying to fit a relatively standard interpretive planning process into a research project.

Overall Score

1