National Leadership Grants for Libraries

FY 2017 Preliminary Proposal (Phase 1)
Field Reviewer Handbook

Contents

Introduction

Thank you for serving as a reviewer for the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS)! We appreciate the tremendous amount of time and effort you commit to the peer review process. By lending your professional expertise, you make a significant contribution to IMLS grant programs and provide an invaluable service to the entire museum, archives, and library communities.

IMLS staff members have prepared this handbook to ensure fair and candid review of all eligible proposals. It provides you with the procedural information you need. Please use it in conjunction with this year's [National Leadership Grants for Libraries](#) Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO).

Even if you have reviewed for IMLS in the past, you should read through this handbook, since we make changes each year that may impact your reviews.

Purpose and Scope of National Leadership Grants for Libraries

National Leadership Grants for Libraries (NLG) support projects that address significant challenges and opportunities facing the library and archive fields and that have the potential to advance theory and practice. Successful proposals will generate results such as new tools, research findings, models, services, practices, or alliances that will be widely used, adapted, scaled, or replicated to extend the benefits of federal investment.

We anticipate two FY17 NLG funding opportunities, each with two separate deadlines. In addition to the opportunity described in this Notice of Funding Opportunity, a separate NLG funding opportunity is anticipated to be announced in December 2016 with a preliminary proposal application submission due date in February 2017.

Indicators of successful projects

Indicators (characteristics) of successful proposals in the National Leadership Grants for Libraries Program are as follows:

- **National Impact:** Proposals should address key needs, high priority gaps, and challenges that face libraries and/or archives. It should expand the boundaries within which libraries and archives operate; show the potential for far-reaching impact, influence theory and practice throughout the library and archival communities; and build upon current strategic initiatives and agendas in these fields. This could include far reaching impact across sizes and complexity of institutions; rural or tribal libraries; and/or networks or consortia of cultural heritage institutions that involve libraries or archives.
- **Current Significance:** Proposals should appropriately address a critical emergent issue facing libraries and archives. It should be positioned to catalyze efforts across the field based on a clear understanding of existing work, opportunities, and the broader (e.g., economic, demographic, technological) environment and influences

surrounding and supporting libraries and archives (e.g. work with other relevant non-profits, agencies, etc).
- **Strategic Collaborations:** Proposals should involve key stakeholders and partners necessary to ensure it can succeed and have broad impact from a variety of domains and sectors. These collaborations should establish or build on mutually beneficial national partnerships with allied organizations beyond the library and archives sector with the potential to broadly elevate the role of libraries and archives and expand services to new audiences. Collaborations may strengthen expertise, leverage resources, or enable expanded reach.
- **Demonstrated Expertise***:* Proposals should articulate a thorough understanding of current practice and knowledge about the subject matter. It should establish how the team possesses the necessary skills, experience and knowledge to realize significant shifts in theory and practice across the sector. It should also demonstrate a thorough understanding of the realities of implementation and the ultimate user adoption of new services, practices, or perspectives.

IMLS agency-level goals

The mission of the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) is to inspire libraries and museums to advance innovation, lifelong learning, and cultural and civic engagement. We provide leadership through research, policy development, and grant making.

U.S. museums and libraries are at the forefront in the movement to create a nation of learners. As stewards of cultural and natural heritage with rich, authentic content, libraries and museums provide learning experiences for everyone. In FY2017, each award under this program will support one of the following three goals of the IMLS strategic plan for 2012–2016, *Creating a Nation of Learners*:

- IMLS places the learner at the center and supports engaging experiences in libraries and museums that prepare people to be full participants in their local communities and our global society.
- IMLS promotes museums and libraries as strong community anchors that enhance civic engagement, cultural opportunities, and economic vitality.
- IMLS supports exemplary stewardship of museum and library collections and promotes the use of technology to facilitate discovery of knowledge and cultural heritage.

The goals focus on achieving positive public outcomes for communities and individuals; supporting the unique role of museums and libraries in preserving and providing access to collections and content; and promoting library, museum, and information service policies that ensure access to information for all Americans.

Funding categories

The funding categories are:

- Sparks Grant
- Planning Grant
- National Forum Grant
- Project Grant
- Research Grant

Applications must designate one of these funding categories. *Please note*: proposals that focus on education and training of librarians should be submitted to the Laura Bush 21st Century Librarian grant program.

Sparks Grants are small grants for rapid prototyping and evaluating of specific innovations in the ways libraries operate and the services librarians provide resulting in new tools, products, services, or organizational practices. You may propose activities or approaches that involve risk, but the project results – be they success, failure, or a combination thereof – must offer valuable information or insight to the library or archives fields, promise an impact beyond the applicant's institution and provide the potential for improvement in the ways libraries and archives serve their communities. Findings about new processes are as valuable as new tools and services. Projects are required to submit a short white paper, which IMLS will post and share publicly. Additional mechanisms for widely reaching and building awareness of and interest in the findings are encouraged. Sparks Grants are for periods of one year only.

Planning Grants allow project teams to perform preliminary planning activities, such as analyzing needs and feasibility, solidifying partnerships, developing project work plans, or developing prototypes, proofs of concept, and pilot studies. Assessing the outcomes of planning activities should be appropriate to this early stage of work. These activities should have the potential to lead to a full project, such as those described in Project Grants below. Planning Grants are for periods of one year only.

National Forum Grants provide the opportunity to convene qualified groups of experts and key stakeholders, including those from adjacent fields as appropriate, to consider issues or challenges that are important to libraries or archives across the nation. Grant-supported meetings are expected to produce reports for wide dissemination with expert opinions for action or research that address a key challenge identified in the proposal. Additional mechanisms for widely reaching and building awareness of and interest in the findings by library and archive practitioners are encouraged. The expert opinions resulting from these meetings may be used to inform future applications to the NLG-Libraries program. National Forum Grants are for periods of one year only.

Project Grants support fully developed projects for which needs assessments, partnership development, feasibility analyses, prototyping, and other planning activities have been completed. Given the national focus of the project, it is essential that projects have clear potential for significant national impact, involve partners from multiple parts of the country, and realistically address growth and sustainability. Assessing scalability or further evolution of an earlier phase of work could be common attributes of this type of grant.

Research Grants involve the investigation of key questions important to library or archival practice. Research projects should address an area of interest or concern for libraries and archives and may build upon prior work to apply further development of a concept or approach or nuances to scale to new contexts or uses; include clearly articulated research questions; build on existing theory and research already done in the area of interest; feature data collection and analysis methods that help the project team answer their questions and can be applied to other projects; and include dissemination that allows the research team to share broadly the research findings and implications of the findings for libraries and archives.

Project categories

The project categories are:

- Community Anchors
- National Digital Platform
- Curating Collections

Applications must designate one of these project categories. The same proposal may not be submitted to IMLS under more than one project category.

Below is detailed information about what is required in each project category area.

Community Anchors: We are interested in projects that advance the role of libraries as community anchors that provide civic and cultural engagement, facilitate lifelong learning, promote digital inclusion, and support economic vitality through programming and services. The benefits of projects and programs must not be limited to the local community but also advance national practice. Projects in this category may involve:

- Testing strategies for increasing and sustaining relationships and collaborations between libraries and other community/cultural organizations in formal or informal settings; performing an environmental scan to better understand and serve community needs; incorporating universal, inclusive design principles; or piloting a program addressing a community need that has potential to be scaled and implemented in a variety of settings nationally. Possible community/cultural organizations might include, but are not limited to: museums, youth service

organizations, community development groups, city departments, or workforce development organizations.

● Exploring, designing, and/or developing new, replicable, and responsive library programming models and tools that engage communities and provide learning experiences for patrons across the lifespan, with focus on underserved communities.   Possible audiences might include, but are not limited to, young children and their families/caregivers; tweens and teens; un- and underemployed adults; veterans; immigrants and refugees; people with disabilities; English language learners; and senior citizens.

● Improving the development and assessment of programs and services contextualized to community issues/interests, patron interests, and localized demographics and economics. This could include interdisciplinary learning, literacy, providing access to STEAM professionals and citizen science, and supporting the learning of children with their families and caregivers, senior citizens, or persons with special needs.

● Investigating widespread community challenges that both inform and are informed by current library and archival practice, feature mutually beneficial relationships between researchers and practitioners; and communicate research findings in ways that will lead to demonstrable improvements in library services, prolonged patron engagement, and increased reach to new and repeat patrons and underserved audiences. Findings, including unexpected results and challenges, must be shared broadly—with other individuals, institutions, communities, states, and across the nation—throughout the grant period, rather than at the conclusion of a project. Research teams must ensure that new practices have the potential to be easily adoptable, affordable, sustainable, and widely implemented.

National Digital Platform: We are interested in projects that create, develop, and expand the open source software applications used by libraries and archives to provide digital content and services to all users in the United States. Projects in this category might involve:

● Developing or improving open source digital library tools that build on existing work, are grounded in the needs of a wide range of libraries and archives, and involve a range of partners who will be involved in iterative testing and use case development. This work might include improving interoperability, usability, or user community involvement in these tools.

● Addressing intersections between digital issues facing libraries and cutting edge work in other fields to yield broadly applicable modeling or analytic methods and tools. For example, projects might address digital humanities, digital sciences, civic data initiatives, open educational resources or computational analysis of collections. Projects should be collaborative in nature and draw from expertise in multiple domains and sectors.

● Researching the need for and impact of investments in national digital library infrastructure and services. This could involve the development of approaches to

measuring and assessing the economic, educational, scholarly, scientific, social or cultural value and impact of digital collections. It could also involve documenting opportunities for libraries to meet their users' demand for digital content areas, such as ebooks, and might explore growth models, user adoption and retention, and mechanisms for sustainability for such infrastructure and services.

Curating Collections: We are interested in projects that can have a significant national impact on shared services for the preservation and management of digital library collections and content across the country. Projects focused on preserving or providing access to a particular collection or set of collections cannot be supported. Similarly, the program cannot support the digitization of content or pre-digitization activities such as inventorying collections. Projects in this category might involve:

- Rapid prototyping and testing of workflows and approaches to managing digital content or implementing and using digital tools and services in novel contexts to inform their development.
- Catalyzing regional or national efforts to establish plans for shared services for preserving, conserving, providing access to, and interpreting digital content.
- Scaling out regional or national infrastructure and shared services for the management, description, or analysis of digital collections in libraries. These projects should build on established and sustainable alliances and networks of libraries and include plans for broadening those alliances and networks. These projects should also clearly articulate how they plan to recruit and support smaller and mid-sized libraries' engagement with infrastructure and services.
- Exploring methods and techniques for providing digital access to users at scale. This may include issues such as digital stewardship, data curation, applications of linked data, or crowdsourcing.
- Researching computational methods for working with collections that have significant potential to scale collecting, arranging, describing, preserving or providing access to digital content.

Proposal and Review Process
To better familiarize yourself with the process, we are including a chart that documents the entire program cycle. Your participation in the process begins where highlighted.

Sept. 1, 2016	✔	Applicants submit their preliminary proposals.
Sept. 2016	✔	IMLS checks the preliminary proposals for eligibility and completeness.
Sept. 2016	✔	IMLS identifies available preliminary proposal reviewers with appropriate expertise and assigns reviewers to evaluate each proposal.

Sept.–Oct. 2016	*ongoing*	Preliminary proposal reviewers receive access to the proposals, evaluate them, and complete their reviews and scores.
Oct.–Nov. 2016		IMLS staff members may hold phone calls to discuss scores and rankings with reviewers.
Dec. 2016		Based on the preliminary proposal review panel feedback, IMLS invites select applicants to submit full proposals.
Jan. 13, 2017		Applicants submit their full proposals.
Jan. 2017		IMLS checks the full proposals for eligibility and completeness.
Jan. 2017		IMLS identifies available full proposal reviewers with appropriate expertise and assigns reviewers to evaluate each proposal.
Jan.–Feb. 2017		Full proposal reviewers receive access to the proposals, evaluate them, and complete their reviews and scores.
Feb. 2017		IMLS staff members may hold phone calls to discuss scores and rankings with reviewers.
Feb. 2017		IMLS staff members review the financial information for each potential grantee.
March 2017		IMLS staff members recommend proposals for funding to the IMLS Director, who has the authority to make final funding decisions.
April 2017		IMLS makes awards. Whether or not they have received an award, all applicants receive anonymous copies of the panel reviews. IMLS also sends notification of the awards to each participating reviewer.

How Your Reviews Are Used

Your scores inform the ranking of proposals and are the basis for decisions about which proposals receive funding. Your work helps the Director and IMLS staff understand the strengths and weaknesses of each proposal. As such, it important that your scores support your comments and that your comments justify your scores. Your comments also help unsuccessful applicants revise their proposals for future grant cycles.

General Review Information

Verify access to proposals online

We will use Dropbox, an online file sharing system, to deliver proposals and supporting materials. (You do not need a Dropbox account to access the materials.) You will be emailed a link to a Dropbox folder. Please alert IMLS staff immediately if any proposals are missing or you cannot open them, or if you encounter any other issues.

Conflict of interest

Once you begin reviewing your assigned proposals, **contact us immediately if you identify any potential conflicts.** Please see the Reviewer Conflict of Interest Statement included as [Appendix I](#) of this handbook. A conflict of interest would arise if you have a financial interest in whether or not the proposal is funded, or if for some reason, you feel that you cannot review it objectively.

Required paperwork

You will receive a Conflict of Interest Statement and Certification, Peer Reviewer Services Agreement, and Direct Deposit Form. **Please complete these forms and return them to your IMLS contacts no later than Wednesday, October 26, 2016.**

Time required

We estimate that it takes 20 to 30 minutes to evaluate one preliminary proposal. If you are a first time reviewer you may need more time.

Confidentiality

The information contained in grant proposals is strictly confidential. Do not discuss or reveal names, institutions, project activities, or any other information contained in the proposals. Contact IMLS if you have any questions concerning a proposal. **Do not contact applicants directly.**

Managing records

Keep your proposals and a copy of your reviews until we instruct you to destroy them, in case there are questions from IMLS staff. We will contact you after the review and award process has concluded instructing you to destroy your records. Please maintain confidentiality of all proposals that you review.

Review Process

Reading proposals

Your thorough reading and understanding of each proposal will be the key to providing both insightful comments and an overall rating for the proposal, ensuring that your

comments are a reflection of your overall score. Before you review proposals, please read the [National Leadership Grants for Libraries](#) NOFO.

Review criteria

Please provide summary evaluative comments for each of the three review areas. Below are the review areas as well as some example criteria you should consider for each area:

How well does the project address the goals of the National Leadership Grants Program and funding priorities of the agency?	**Questions to consider may include:** • Does the project provide a sound basis and means for measuring impact? • Does the project support IMLS digital stewardship policy? • Does the project have the potential for impact upon library and archival services and practices? • Does the project directly and practically address one of the two agency priorities, if applicable? See below for additional information.
Are the appropriate components in place to ensure successful implementation of the proposed project?	**Questions to consider may include:** • Does the project require partners, and have appropriate partners been contacted? • Is the staffing and expertise appropriate for the proposed project? • Are appropriate project management skills demonstrated? • Is the project cost-effective and easily replicable by other institutions? • Do the amount requested, budget breakdown, and timeline proposed seem appropriate for the project?
How could this proposal be strengthened or improved?	**Questions to consider may include:** • Are there other experts that should be included in the project? • Is there related work or research that should be considered? • Are there changes that could make the project more replicable or create a greater impact?

Writing comments

Draft comments for each of the required prompts. **We strongly recommend that you draft your comments using word processing software, and paste the comments into the review spreadsheet**.
- Use your professional knowledge and experience to assess the information objectively.
- If you question the accuracy of any information, call IMLS to discuss it. **Do not question the applicant's honesty or integrity in your written comments.**
- Do not contact the applicant directly.
- **Analyze** the proposal in your comments; summarizing or paraphrasing the applicant's own words will not help the applicant.

Should I consider...	Yes	No
an institution's financial or staffing needs?		X
the size or age of the organization?		X
my prior knowledge of an institution or project staff?		X
whether the organization has the appropriate resources to complete the project?	✔	
whether the applicant has included the information necessary for an adequate evaluation of its merits?	✔	
whether a project is new or a resubmission?		X
the proposed cost share? *(IMLS will confirm whether the proposed cost share meets the program requirements.)*		X
an institution's indirect cost rate?		X

Characteristics of constructive and effective comments:
- Presented in a constructive manner
- Concise, specific, easy to read and understand
- Specific to the individual applicant
- Reflect the professionalism of the reviewer
- Correlate with the rating that is given
- Acknowledge the resources of the institution
- Reflect the proposal's strengths and identify areas for improvement

Characteristics of poor comments:
- Make derogatory remarks (Offer suggestions for improvement rather than harsh criticism.)

- Penalize an applicant because you feel the institution does not need the money (An eligible institution may receive funds, regardless of institutional need.)
- Penalize an applicant because of missing materials (If you believe a proposal is missing required materials, please contact an IMLS staff member immediately.)
- Question an applicant's honesty or integrity (You may question the accuracy of information provided by the applicant, but if you are unsure how to frame your question, contact IMLS.)
- Offer or ask for irrelevant or extraneous information (Your comments should concern only the information IMLS requests of applicants.)
- Offer limited explanation or detail for the score provided

Remember that both successful and unsuccessful applicants use your comments to help improve their projects or future proposals.

Assigning scores

After you have read, evaluated, and written comments for each proposal, please provide a single numeric score from 1-5 (5 being the highest) that reflects your opinion of the proposal's overall quality and your recommendation of whether it should be funded this year. A score of 3 or above is typically considered "fundable."

Invite-able	**Excellent**	5	The preliminary proposal exemplifies all of the characteristics of a successful project. You believe it is well positioned to have a **national impact**, it addresses a key issue of **current significance**, it involves the right **strategic collaborations** and the team behind the work has **demonstrated expertise**. <u>You recommend inviting a full proposal for this project without reservation.</u>
	Very Good	4	The preliminary proposal demonstrates most of the characteristics of a successful project, but with some minor improvements needed in developing the full proposal. You believe it has the potential to have a **national impact**, it addresses a key issue of **current significance**, it involves the right **strategic collaborations** and the team behind the work has **demonstrated expertise**. <u>You recommend inviting the full proposal.</u>
	Good	3	The preliminary proposal demonstrates some of the characteristics of a successful project, but would require some major improvements in developing the full proposal. With these changes, you believe it has the potential to have a **national impact**, it addresses a key issue of **current significance**, it involves the right **strategic collaborations**, and the team behind the work has **demonstrated expertise**. <u>You recommend inviting the full proposal, but acknowledge it may not be competitive without significant changes.</u> You think the

			proposal and/or the project could be easily strengthened for resubmission in a future grant cycle.
Do not Invite	**Some Merit**	2	The preliminary proposal does not demonstrate the characteristics of a successful project. While it may be a worthwhile project, it is flawed in one or more ways and would require major rethinking in order to be competitive for this particular grant program. <u>You do not think the proposal should be invited for funding in its current form, but that it demonstrates potential to be competitive in a future grant cycle.</u>
	Inadequate	1	The proposal is inadequate or is not well aligned with the goals of this particular grant program. It would not be possible to revise the project to meet all of the criteria for a successful project. <u>You do not recommend the proposal for funding or for resubmission.</u>

To help applicants understand and benefit from your reviews, make sure that your scores accurately reflect your written comments.

Submitting reviews

Review your draft comments and scores. Adjust your scores, if necessary, to more accurately reflect your written evaluation. **Remember, scores should support comments, and comments should justify scores.**

Once you have completed your scores and comments for each proposal, we recommend that you keep a digital copy of your completed reviews until told to destroy it by IMLS.

Please send the review spreadsheet to your assigned Program Officer and Program Specialist via email. **The deadline to submit reviews is Wednesday, October 26 at 11:59PM Eastern.**

For all questions about reviewing, either technical or programmatic, contact IMLS staff.

Appendix I: Reviewer Conflict of Interest Statement

As a reviewer or panelist for the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS), you may receive for review a grant proposal 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 proposal, 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 proposal 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 proposal. Past employment (generally more than five years) does not by itself disqualify a reviewer so long as the circumstances of your association permit you to perform an objective review of the proposal. If you believe you may have a conflict of interest with any proposal 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 a proposal submitted in this grant cycle, as long as you do not review any proposal submitted by your own institution or any proposal 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 a proposal presents no conflict of interest at the time you review it, a conflict of interest may still develop later on. Once you have reviewed a proposal, you should never represent the applicant in dealings with IMLS or another Federal agency concerning the proposal, or any grant that may result from it.

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 proposals that you read while you were serving as an IMLS reviewer. In addition, pending proposals are confidential. 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 a proposal or for any reason.

If you have any questions regarding conflict of interest, either in relation to a specific proposal or in general, please contact IMLS immediately.