



Phase One Reviewer Handbook

Community-Centered Implementation Projects in the National Leadership Grants for Libraries

Office of Library Services
Fiscal Year 2025

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Welcome

Thank you for agreeing to serve as a peer reviewer for this year's Community-Centered Implementation proposals in the National Leadership Grants for Libraries program. We hope you will find this a rewarding experience and will draw satisfaction identifying projects that will help address the information needs of communities across the nation. 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 your review, including information about the program you are assigned to, the Community-Centered Implementation (CCI) project type, instructions for using eGMS Reach, and important reference material. CCI is a brand-new project type and functions quite differently than the other categories so please review this information carefully.

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

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

IMLS Office of Library Services Staff

Proposal and review timeline

Below is a summary of the process from application proposal submission through award announcements.

Phase one

1. Applicants submit preliminary proposals to IMLS.
2. IMLS checks the preliminary proposals for eligibility and completeness.
3. IMLS identifies available reviewers with appropriate expertise and assigns reviewers to evaluate each preliminary proposal.
4. Preliminary proposal reviewers receive access to the proposals, evaluate them, and complete their comments and scores.
5. IMLS staff aggregate reviewer comments and scores and make invitation decisions.
6. IMLS invites select applicants to submit full proposals. All applicants receive anonymized copies of their peer review comments and scores, regardless of whether they are invited.

Phase two

7. Invited applicants submit full proposals to IMLS.
8. IMLS checks the full proposals for eligibility and completeness.
9. IMLS identifies available reviewers with appropriate expertise and assigns reviewers to evaluate each full proposal.
10. Full proposal reviewers receive access to the proposals, evaluate them, and complete their comments and scores.
11. IMLS staff members may hold calls with reviewers to discuss scores and the merits of the proposals, if needed.
12. IMLS staff aggregate reviewer comments and scores and recommend proposals for funding to the IMLS Director.
13. The IMLS Director makes all final funding decisions.
14. IMLS notifies all applicants whether they have received an award or not and provides anonymous copies of their peer review comments and scores.

Review process

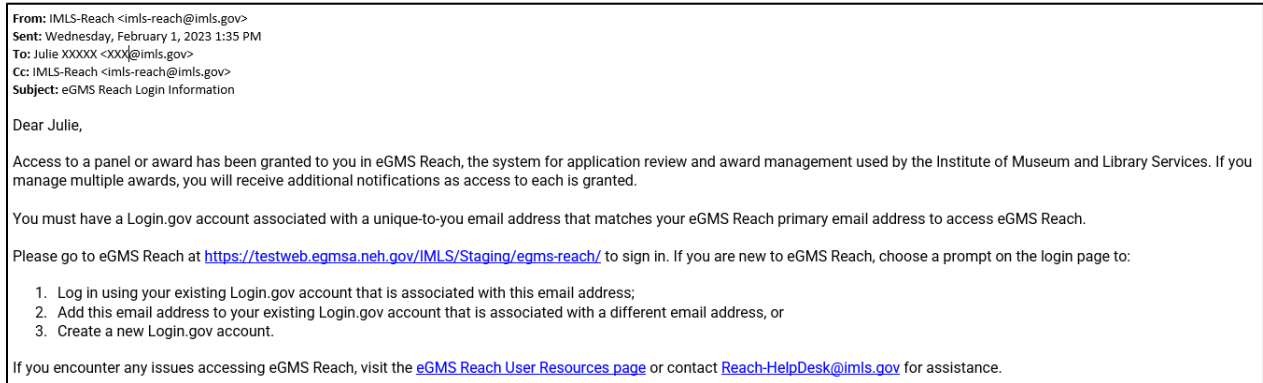
Access to online portal

All review materials will be provided to you via the IMLS application review and grants management system maintained by the agency. This system is called “eGMS Reach.” It is both the online portal that you will use to receive materials for review and the system where you will input your reviews.

To access the online portal for the first time, you will receive a separate email (see example

below) from IMLS providing instructions for accessing eGMS Reach. If you do not receive the email, please check your junk folder. If you still do not see the message, contact imls-librarygrants@imls.gov.

The email body will include instructions for how to use Login.gov to access eGMS Reach.



Please alert IMLS staff immediately if you have not received your access email, if any materials are missing, you cannot open them, or if you encounter any other issues.

Upon receipt of the email, you should log into eGMS Reach. After you have completed the successful login, please ensure that you can access your reviewer materials. To do this, click on the “Go to Panel” button for your panel. Your panel will have a name that begins with “FY25_NLG”.



The Panel section of eGMS Reach will provide you with the information you need to perform and submit your reviews. It begins with IMLS contact information for the panel, followed by your reviewer materials, and then includes the applications you will be reviewing.

Your review process consists of three main activities:

- Preparing for peer review by reading available documentation
 - Quick Reference Guide
 - Reviewer Handbook (this document)
 - Notice of Funding Opportunity

- Confirming no Conflicts of Interest (you must check this box in eGMS Reach before accessing the proposals)
- Reading and reviewing the applications

In the online portal (eGMS Reach), you will complete an evaluation form for each application by providing written comments and a score. More guidance on evaluating applications is provided in this document, but if any application seems to be missing pages or other information, please contact imls-librarygrants@imls.gov.

Please note that all reviews are due by **Wednesday, November 20, 2024**.

For additional information about using eGMS Reach, please reference [How to Review Applications in eGMS Reach](#).

Conflict of interest statement

Before proceeding to the Applications Tab, you must affirm that you have reviewed and approved the Conflict-of-Interest Statement located under your Personal Files and in the Complying with Ethical Obligations and Avoiding Conflicts of Interest section of this document. Click on the paper icon to review Complying with Ethical Obligations and Avoiding Conflicts of Interest. Then click on the pen icon to affirm that you have reviewed this file and approved its contents. This step is **in addition to** the e-mail correspondence you already had with your IMLS contact regarding potential institutional conflicts of interest.

Once you begin reviewing your assigned proposals, you may identify other conflicts. **Contact us immediately if you identify any potential conflicts of interest.**

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 or post on social media about your involvement in the process.**

Because generative AI 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.

Managing records

Keep the proposals and a copy of your reviews in case there are questions from IMLS staff. Please destroy your review materials after awards are made.

Reading proposals

Your thorough reading and understanding of each proposal will be key to providing insightful comments aligned with your overall grade or score for the proposal. Before you review the proposals, please ensure you are familiar with your program's Notice of Funding Opportunity (which can be found on our website, is linked below, and is available in your eGMS Reach

portal), and reference it as needed throughout the review process.

- For the National Leadership Grants for Libraries (NLG) program, please review the [FY25 NLG-L Notice of Funding Opportunity \(PDF\)](#).

We estimate that it may take up to an hour to evaluate one proposal. First time reviewers may require additional time.

Writing comments

As you are typing your reviews into eGMS Reach:

- Please do not have more than one of the review forms open at the same time. The autosave will NOT work and you will lose your information.
- We recommend saving frequently to avoid losing any of your work.
- Please use the Plain Text feature for pasting or editing your comments

Write comments of 3-5 sentences minimum for each of the review questions:

- Project Justification
- Project Work Plan
- Diversity Plan (Optional): The Diversity Plan is optional. If there is not a Diversity Plan included, write “N/A” in this section and do not factor this section, or the absence of this section, into your overall review comments or score. If there is a Diversity Plan included, please consider the Diversity Plan in your overall review.
- Project Results and Overall Impact

Questions for each section are provided for your reference within the review form, but you do not have to answer each individually.

Reviewer comments are used by IMLS staff to inform funding decisions and are provided to both successful and unsuccessful applicants to help improve their projects or future proposals. When drafting your comments:

- Present comments in a constructive and professional manner to help the applicant improve their proposal.
- Analyze the proposal in your comments; summarizing or paraphrasing the applicant’s own words will not help the applicant.
- Use your professional knowledge and experience to assess the information objectively. When possible, please provide specific suggestions for how they might improve their work.
- Address comments to the applicants, not IMLS staff.
- Make sure your comments align with the score you provide. Providing positive comments but a low score (or vice versa) is confusing for the applicant. A highly complementary comment does not remove the sting of a low score, and a negative

comment does not even out a high score. Comments and scores must complement each other and make sense as a whole.

- If there is not a Diversity Plan included, please do not comment on its absence or factor it into your overall review comments or score.

Characteristics of effective comments:	Characteristics of poor comments:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Presented in a constructive manner • Concise, easy to read and understand • Specific to the individual proposal • Reflect your experience and expertise • Correlate with the given score • Reflect the proposal's strengths and identify areas for improvement • Based on the NOFO criteria 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make derogatory remarks • Question an applicant's honesty or integrity • Offer or ask for irrelevant or extraneous information • Offer limited explanation or detail • Reflect personal biases or impact reviewer anonymity

Below are some examples of **effective** reviewer comments:

How well does the proposal address current, significant needs, problems, or challenges in the field? How well does it differ from, complement, build on, or adapt existing models, standards, theories, scholarship, or practice? How well does the proposal align with the program goal and objective?	
<p>“The authors of the proposal plan to include experts in the field and support personnel as well as librarians or archivists as partners in the planning and execution of the project. They also demonstrate expertise in the subject and plan to collaborate to fill any gaps in their current knowledge. Many universities experience this need and work towards resolving it will certainly support the filling of gaps in our national digital infrastructure. More stable preservation of this sensitive material will serve the population at large by making health and related data more securely preserved (both from loss and from exposure).”</p>	<p><i>Comment is substantive, addresses the review criteria, and employs a positive tone.</i></p>
<p>“You make a strong case for the needs of your target audience. However, I believe the work plan does not clearly articulate how the library will be involved in the project and this is therefore not a good fit with this program. Consider applying to opportunities through a local foundation.”</p>	<p><i>Comment correlates with their score of 1 and makes implementable suggestions for possible alternate funding sources.</i></p>
What elements are in place and what elements are missing for successful execution of the proposed project? What recommendations do you have for improving the proposal?	
<p>“The partnerships outlined in the proposal will be very important to the successful completion of the project. You did an excellent job identifying the tool you will be adapting to your local context. I would recommend connecting with the project team that created the original tool to help inform your work plan as you develop the full proposal. It might even be beneficial to find out if other communities have also used the tool so you can learn from their experiences.”</p>	<p><i>Comment provides a constructive assessment of the application and specific suggestions the applicant could implement. Comment weighs the strength of the work plan in terms of the specific criteria for Community-Centered Implementation.</i></p>

How well do the intended results support the project’s purpose and will the results be well disseminated to the intended audiences? Considering the topic, project type selection, amount of funds requested, dissemination plan, evaluation plan, and scope of the potential impact, should the applicant be invited to submit a full proposal at this time? Why or why not?	
<p>“The applicant has thoughtfully considered ways to disseminate the project results including through an existing website, blog posts, webinar, and journal articles. The applicant has thought about practical ways of getting the project results in front of practitioners. I recommend this proposal be invited. It is clear the applicant is committed to not just benefitting their local community but also to reporting out to benefit other communities who want to do this type of work. For submitting a full proposal, please clearly explain how this project is taking lessons from previous projects to move the field forward.”</p>	<p><i>Comment addresses questions from the review criteria and includes detail on a specific topic the reviewer would need to see in a full proposal.</i></p>

In contrast, below are some examples of **poor** reviewer comments:

How well does the proposal address current, significant needs, problems, or challenges in the field? How well does it differ from, complement, build on, or adapt existing models, standards, theories, scholarship, or practice? How well does the proposal align with the NLG-L program goal and objective?	
<p>“The library plans to organize a series of experimental interactive education programs on the topic of equity and evaluate them to determine which prove most successful in meeting their desired learning outcomes for their high school participants. They will share the results on a project website.”</p>	<p><i>Comment paraphrases the applicant’s own words.</i></p>
What elements are in place and what elements are missing for successful execution of the proposed project? What recommendations do you have for improving the proposal?	
<p>“This work is very important and the community really needs this. They did not identify an existing tool or practice and their work plan is very vague, but it’s a high need so they should get the benefit of the doubt.”</p>	<p><i>Comment knowingly overlooks the criteria of the program and project type.</i></p>
<p>“The work plan would be improved by putting in more time onsite.”</p>	<p><i>Comment is very brief and has little value to the applicant.</i></p>
How well do the intended results support the project’s purpose and will the results be well disseminated to the intended audiences? Considering the topic, project type selection, amount of funds requested, dissemination plan, evaluation plan, and scope of the potential impact, should the applicant be invited to submit a full proposal at this time? Why or why not?	
<p>“The staff is woefully unprepared and will fail in the execution of this project. Targeting federal funds to this project is a mistake.”</p>	<p><i>Comment is derogatory and does not provide useful feedback.</i></p>
<p>“Strong results with very sustainable benefits.”</p>	<p><i>Comment is very brief and has little value to the applicant.</i></p>

Assigning scores

After you have read, evaluated, and written comments for each proposal, please provide a single numeric grade or 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 or not. A score of 3 or above is typically considered "invite-able." (See the Guidance for Assigning Scores below for more information.)

To help applicants understand and benefit from your reviews, make sure that your scores accurately reflect your written comments. There is no "submit" button that notifies the IMLS staff when you are completed with your reviews, but the eGMS Reach system will automatically save as you work. As you complete each application review, please click the button indicating "This evaluation is complete". Once you are finished will all your reviews, please email your assigned Panel Chair and let them know.

Scoring rubric

Invite-able	Excellent	5	The proposal <i>exemplifies</i> a goal and objective of the grant program; clearly states the national model/tool/practice they are adapting and how they plan to use it; has <i>all</i> the elements in place for successful execution of the proposed project; and is designed to ensure community impact (as described in the Notice of Funding Opportunity). <u>You recommend inviting the proposal without reservation.</u>
	Very Good	4	The proposal <i>mostly</i> demonstrates a goal and objective of the grant program; clearly states the national model/tool/practice they are adapting and how they plan to use it; has <i>most</i> of the elements in place for successful execution of the proposed project; and is designed to ensure community impact. <u>You recommend inviting the proposal.</u>
	Good	3	The proposal <i>somewhat</i> demonstrates a goal and objective of the grant program; references a national model/tool/practice; has <i>some</i> of the elements in place for successful execution of the proposed project; and is designed to ensure community impact. <u>You recommend inviting the proposal but acknowledge it could be more successful with some changes.</u>

Do not invite	Some Merit	2	The proposal <i>does not</i> demonstrate a goal and objective of the grant program; <i>does not</i> identify a national model/tool/practice for adaptation; has <i>few</i> of the elements in place for successful execution of the proposed project; and/or is not designed to ensure community impact. <u>You do not recommend inviting a full proposal but think it could be strengthened for resubmission in a future grant cycle.</u>
	Inadequate	1	The proposal <i>does not</i> demonstrate a goal and objective of the grant program; <i>does not</i> identify a national model/tool/practice for adaptation; has <i>few or none</i> of the elements in place for successful execution of the proposed project; and is not designed to ensure community impact. <u>You do not recommend inviting a full proposal or resubmission.</u>

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

Purpose and scope of the National Leadership Grants for Libraries program

The NLG-L program supports projects that address critical needs of the library and archives fields and have the potential to advance practice in these professions to strengthen library and archival services for the American public.

NLG-L program-level goal and objectives

Each applicant should align their proposed project with the program goal and one associated objective.

NLG-L Program Goal:

Develop, enhance, or disseminate replicable practices, programs, models, or tools to strengthen library and archival services for the American public.

- Objective 1.1 Serve the learning needs of the public through libraries and archives.
- Objective 1.2 Improve community well-being through libraries and archives.
- Objective 1.3 Provide broad access to and preservation of information and collections through libraries and archives.
- Objective 1.4 Provide services to affected communities in the event of an emergency or disaster.

NLG-L project type: Community-Centered Implementation

There are five project types in the NLG-L program however, you are only being asked to review proposals in the new Community-Centered Implementation project category.

Community-Centered Implementation projects adapt existing practices, findings, models, tools, and/or partnerships to address community needs. Applicants must identify and align their proposed work with established standards, practices, toolkits, open-source software, or research findings. Projects should share resources and lessons learned that can be used by libraries and archives in other communities throughout the nation.

The period of performance for this type of project is one to two years.

Complying with ethical obligations and avoiding conflicts of interest

As a reviewer for IMLS, you perform a vital role in ensuring the integrity of 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 while performing your duties at IMLS, you believe you may have a conflict of interest, please contact the IMLS staff member coordinating your review process. Other questions about the ethics rules and responsibilities may be directed to the IMLS Designated Agency Ethics Official at ethics@imls.gov; (202) 653-4787.

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.

Reviewer conflicts of interest

As a reviewer or panelist for 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) 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.

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. In addition, pending applications 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 an application or for any reason.

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

Protecting sensitive data at IMLS

IMLS is committed to protecting your private, sensitive information and employs the following physical and technical safeguards when collecting reviewer and panelist information:

1. **Email Security.** IMLS email is hosted on a cloud computing infrastructure which has been reviewed and approved as meeting the security requirements of the Federal Risk and Authorization Management Program (FedRAMP). FedRAMP is a government-wide standardized program for security assessment, authorization, and monitoring of cloud products and services. FedRAMP requirements are based on (and surpass) the Security and Privacy Controls for Federal Information Systems and Organizations developed by the National Institute of Standards and Technology. FedRAMP's

additional security controls address the unique elements of cloud computing to ensure all federal data is secure in cloud environments.

2. **Secure File Transmission.** IMLS Secure File Upload uses Hypertext Transfer Protocol Secure (HTTPS), a transmission protocol that verifies the identity of a website or web service for a connecting client and encrypts nearly all information sent between the website or service and the user. HTTPS is designed to prevent this information from being read or changed while in transit. HTTPS is a combination of HTTP and Transport Layer Security (TLS). TLS is a network protocol that establishes an encrypted connection to an authenticated peer over an untrusted network.
3. **Secure File Storage.** IMLS will only store secure files and any related passwords as long as necessary to complete the relevant transaction or process. A physical copy of personally identifiable information (PII) may be printed at IMLS for business use, after which the copy is secured in a locked location and destroyed after the business use ceases.
4. **Access Controls.** IMLS employs access controls to restrict access to sensitive information that is stored electronically. Access to IMLS files is restricted to authorized IMLS staff, and sensitive data is stored in folders that can only be accessed by a restricted set of authorized users. Files containing sensitive information are password-protected, providing an additional layer of security.
5. **Records Policies.** IMLS financial transaction records are subject to the agency's record retention policy and disposed of in accordance with the General Services Administration's General Records Schedule.

Glossary of terms

At times, the vocabulary used on the IMLS grants management portal, eGMS Reach, does not completely match the common IMLS vocabulary. We may use terms interchangeably throughout our instructions and in the online eGMS Reach interface. Here is a breakdown of common terms you will come across while completing your review:

- **Panel:** The online space in which you will be completing the review process
- **Coordinator:** IMLS staff member available for technical questions you may have
- **Chair:** IMLS staff member available for content-based questions you may have
- **Evaluation:** Your reviewer comments and feedback that are provided to applicants
- **Applications:** Proposals from applicants that you will be reviewing
- **Application Number:** The unique identifier assigned to each proposal
- **Primary Person/Individual:** Project Director (PD) or Principal Investigator (PI)
- **Primary Institution:** The lead applicant and fiscal agent for a project
- **Grade:** The single score or number you will provide for each proposal.