START RECORDING

Welcome to the Institute of Museum and Library Services’ webinar, “Sparks! Ignition Grants for Museums, Fiscal Year 2015 Information Session.”

My name is Helen Wechsler, and with me today are Jill Connors-Joyner and Katherine Maas. All of us work in the Office of Museum Services here at IMLS, and we’re delighted that you are interested in learning more about the Sparks! Ignition Grants for Museums program.
If you have not viewed our pre-recorded introductory webinar about IMLS’s funding opportunities, we strongly recommend that you do so at your earliest convenience. You can access it at any time by going to the Resources section of our website, then webinars, then Grant Program Webinars.
As a quick summary, in that webinar, we discussed IMLS's vision, mission and strategic plan which are at the core of our grant-making.

We also talked about all of IMLS’s funding programs and opportunities, which include two technical assistance programs (CAP, MAP) and five grant programs: Museums for America, National Leadership Grants for Museums, Native American/Native Hawaiian Museum Services Grants, Museum Grants for African American History and Culture, and Sparks! Ignition Grants for Museums.
We reviewed the eligibility requirements for each grant program and provided staff contacts and links to Notice of Funding Opportunity.

We covered registration requirements, which are critical to the application process. So critical, in fact, that we’ll address that again a little later.

And lastly, we encouraged potential applicants to view the webinar for each program to which they might want to apply.
In this presentation, we’ll be addressing the following topics:

• Sparks-Museums Program goals
• Characteristics of Successful Sparks Projects
• Important dates
• The questions of How much and how many?
• Allowable and Unallowable Costs
• Application Components
• Application Tips
• The Review Process
• IMLS Staff Contact Information
As you can see, Spark is a fairly selective grant program. We funded a little more than 17% of the applications we received. This is partly due to the fact that we receive many applications that do not fit the goals of the program, which I am about to describe.
The Sparks! Grant program is an special funding opportunity under the National Leadership Grant Program. Like National Leadership, Sparks! Supports projects that address problems of broad relevance to museums by prototyping and evaluating innovative approaches to operations and services that result in new tools, products, services, or organizational practices.

Testing and evaluating innovative approaches to museum operations and services is what Sparks is all about. Another important aspect to Sparks projects is that, success or failure, the information needs to get out the field, which is why a white paper is part of the requirements.

Like NLG, Sparks! Is distinguished from other IMLS funding programs by a focus on a need within the museum field rather than within an individual museum and the creation of tools, resources, findings, etc. that can be used to meet that need.

If you are looking for a small amount of project funds, without a matching requirement to undertake a project within your museum to meet your own strategic goals and the needs of your audiences – take a look at the 25K funding level option of Museums for America – it might better meet your needs.
I am just going to read these slides that come directly from the NLG-Museums guidelines because we worked hard to capture the essence of what makes a strong and appropriate Sparks-Museums project.

### Characteristics of Successful Sparks-Museums Projects

- **Broad Impact:** potential for far-reaching impact beyond your institution; influencing practice within the museum profession.
- **In-depth Knowledge:** reflect a thorough understanding of current practice and knowledge about the subject matter.
- **Innovative Approach:** employ novel approaches or techniques new to your project area to strengthen and improve museum services to benefit the audiences and communities being served.
- **Shared Results:** generate results that can be widely used, adapted, scaled, or replicated to extend and leverage the benefits of federal investment. *Grantees are required to submit a short white paper, or create their own dissemination tool, to be publicly posted and shared with the field.*
We want to remind you of important dates for Sparks-Museums applications. They are due by 11:59 pm Eastern Time on December 1, 2014. That is non-negotiable and the time stamp is auto-generated by the Grants.gov system. We will say this over and over again, but start early and submit early. That way, if you encounter a difficulty of any kind when submitting your proposal, you’ll have some time to solve the problem.

Sparks-museums awards will be announced in July, 2015.

And all Sparks-museums projects must be scheduled to start August 1, September 1, or October 1, 2014. The choice is yours.
Sparks applicants can request anywhere from $10,000 to $25,000. There is no cost share requirement.

There is no limit on the number of applications your museum may submit to Sparks-Museums.
We want to point out two places on the IMLS website to learn more about the projects we have funded in Sparks-Museums.

On the right hand side of nearly every page of our website is a feature called Search Awarded Grants. This is an opportunity to search our archive of grants that we have awarded in past years by grant name, grant issue area, state, year, institution name, and keyword. Your search will return a brief description of the project. For every Sparks grant that has been completed, you will find a PDF of their white paper attached to the project description.

We have also posted the abstract, narrative, and schedule of completion of 2 successful Sparks-Museums applications from 2014. These may be found at [www.imls.gov/applicants/sample_applications.aspx](http://www.imls.gov/applicants/sample_applications.aspx). Below where my screen shot ends.
We’ll turn now to allowable and unallowable costs for your project. You want to be very careful in preparing your proposal and include only allowable costs in both your IMLS ask and your cost share, if one is required.

Within the past year, the Office of Management and Budget has issued final guidance on Uniform Administrative Requirements, Cost Principles, and Audit Requirements for Federal Awards—or for short, Grant Reform (2 CFR 200), and this will be effective for all awards made after December 26, 2014. That includes the grants for which you will be applying this round. And this means you will be required to follow those regulations that will be in place at the time of the award.
The following list includes some examples of allowable costs, both for IMLS funds and for any cost share, in this grant program.

• personnel salaries, wages, and fringe benefits
• travel expenses for key project staff and consultants
• materials, supplies, software, and equipment directly related to project activities
• publication design and printing
• consultant fees
• design, technical support, printing, non-construction labor
• internships/fellowships

You must justify all proposed expenses in your application budget.
Unallowable Costs

Examples of unallowable costs

- General museum fundraising costs
- Contributions to endowments
- General museum operating support
- Acquisition of collections
- General advertising or public relations costs
- Construction and renovation of museum facilities
- Exhibit fabrication that involves contract labor of the construction trades
- Reconstruction or renovation of historic sites
- Social activities, ceremonies, receptions, or entertainment
- Pre-award costs
- Overhead or indirect costs

The following list includes some examples of unallowable costs, both for IMLS funds and for cost share, in this grant program.

- general museum fundraising costs, such as development office staff or other staff time devoted to general fundraising
- contributions to endowments
- general museum operating support
- acquisition of collections
- general advertising or public relations costs designed solely to promote activities other than those related to the specific project
- construction and renovation of museum facilities (generally, any activity involving contract labor of the construction trades is not an allowable cost)
- exhibit fabrication that involves contract labor of the construction trades
- reconstruction or renovation of historic sites
- social activities, ceremonies, receptions, or entertainment
- pre-award costs
- overhead or indirect costs
Next up are application components.

Application components fall into three categories in Sparks-Museums. The first is that of Required Documents. All applications must include these. Omission of one results in exclusion from further consideration.

The second group is that of Conditionally Required Documents. Some applications must include these. Omission of one results in exclusion from further consideration.

The third group of application components are Supporting Documents. These are completely optional. You may submit some or none. Make good decisions here and include only those that supplement the narrative and support the project description provided in the application.

This is not the place to introduce new information. Also, be respectful of your reviewers’ time and avoid any temptation to include hundreds of pages of extraneous material that is not directly relevant to your project.
In the Sparks-Museums Notice of Funding Opportunity is a Table of Application Components organized by Required, Conditionally Required, And Supplemental documents. We recommend that you use this to keep yourself organized. It serves as a checklist and tells you what formats and naming conventions to use for each document so that you may upload your application to Grants.gov successfully.

It provides links to instructions and forms.
Now we’re going to look at some of the forms that are required for your application, and we’ll focus on those areas that seem to be the most challenging for applicants. The first form we’ll consider is the SF 424S, or the Application for Federal Domestic Assistance, Short Organizational Form. This is a Required Document, and the form is downloaded as part of the Grants.gov package. It is not available from the IMLS website.

There are three important things to watch for on this page:

The **Legal Name** is the name to which your DUNS number is officially tied.

The **Organizational DUNS number** is important in confirming your eligibility, identity, and tax-exempt status. It must link to the Legal Name.

And at the bottom of the page is space for a **Project Description**. This is important for at least two reasons: (1) We use this for several purposes during the review process, and if you’re funded, it can be the basis for the representation of your project that goes on our website and to the media. Write your project description to address **what you plan to do, for whom, and for what purpose**. You might consider making this the last piece you write so that it is as concise and accurate as possible. (2) There is a character limit that you won’t encounter until the moment you press the **SUBMIT** button. Your entire application might be rejected by Grants.gov if you exceed the limit. You’ll get an immediate message to that effect, but if you’re minutes away from the deadline, you might not have time to rewrite it. Our experience is that 150 words is close to the maximum limit.
Page 2 of the SF-424S is about the Project Director and the Primary Contact/Grants Administrator. The Project Director should be the person who is responsible for the day-to-day activities of the project—in short for making sure the project gets done. The Primary Contact might be someone in the grants office or someone whose role is more purely administrative. In many cases these two positions may be the same person.
But, The Authorizing Official, also known as the Authorized Representative, MUST be different from the Project Director. This is the person who has the authority and the responsibility for certifying that statements made in the application are true, complete, and accurate and that the organization will comply with all necessary certifications, assurances, and terms if an award is made. If awarded, this is also the person who signs reports, financial documents, and change requests. This might be the President/CEO, Director, Board President, or other position of authority within the institution. Again, **It cannot be the Project Director**
Let’s turn now to the Program Information Sheet, which is an IMLS form downloadable from our website. Its five-pages and the Notice of Funding Opportunity provides complete instructions for how to fill it out,

MAKE SURE THE PROGRAM INFORMATION SHEET YOU DOWNLOAD LOOKS LIKE THIS ONE. We made a few changes made this year, and you want to be sure you aren’t using a cached version.

In #1a on page 1, you’ll see “Legal Name.” This must be the same as the “Legal Name” you provided on the SF-424S, and again, it must link to the DUNS number for your organization.

In #1c, we ask about your SAM.gov registration. You MUST have a SAM.gov registration, and it MUST be active. We recommend that you check this immediately. If you haven’t registered yet, start the process now because it can take several weeks. If you need to renew, start that process now too because it also can take several weeks. Please remember: Your SAM.gov registration must be active throughout the grant review period, at the time awards are made, and throughout the lifespan of your grant. Without it, we cannot accept your application, review it, make an award, or provide you money.

In #1d, we ask you to record your organizational unit if that is different from the Legal Name of the applicant. When might that be the case? Typically, it is a matter of governing authority – a parent child relationship – such as a University and its museum or a City and its museums.

If you have questions about your own situation, spend some time with the eligibility requirements for Sparks-Museums, and then call us if you need help in interpreting them.
On page 2, we ask questions about your organization’s finances—total revenue and expenses for three fiscal years; budget surplus or deficit greater than 10% of your annual operating budget; and any material weakness identified in your prior year’s audit report. If you are applying using an organizational unit designation, then these questions apply to it, rather than to the Legal Name entity.
On page 3, we ask you to select a grant program, which will be Sparks Ignition Grants: Museums

In #5a, we ask you to tell us how many dollars you are requesting from IMLS, and in #5b, we ask you to record your cost share. **Make sure these amounts reflect what’s in your budget.** Sometimes people skip these blocks because they intend to fill them in later but forget, and or they record preliminary numbers that change by the time they finish your application. Please double check them.
On page 4, we draw your attention to #8, Museum Profile. This is for Museum Applicants Only, and applies to you if you are a museum applying to Sparks-Museums. This is where you provide the information we need to verify your eligibility. We need answers for each question, a through m, so don’t skip any. To do so could result in your institution’s being found ineligible.
In this section of the narrative, you should lay out the reasoning for your project. Tell us in the clearest terms possible what you propose to do; what need, problem, or challenge you expect to address; who or what will benefit; what your performance goals and intended results will be;

Reviewers will evaluate your proposal on how well you explain your project; the narrative section of the notice of funding opportunity lists the questions reviewers are asked. They are like the answers to the test:

- Is the project clearly explained?
- Is the need, problem, or challenge to be addressed clearly identified and supported by relevant evidence?
- Are the people who will benefit from the project clearly identified, and have they been involved in planning the project?
- Are the performance goals and intended results well formulated and achievable?
- Does the project address current needs of the museum field and/or have the potential to advance practice in the museum profession?
- Does the project meet the Sparks Grants requirement of demonstrating broad impact, in-depth knowledge, and an innovative approach?
# Narrative: Project Work Plan

- What specific activities will you carry out?
- Who will plan, implement, and manage your project?
- When and in what sequence will your activities occur?
- What financial, personnel, and other resources will you need to carry out the activities?
- What resources will your institution contribute to the project?
- How will you evaluate your project?
- How will you track your progress toward achieving your performance goals and intended results?
- In addition to the white paper, how and with whom will you share your project’s results?

The Project Work Plan is the part of the narrative in which you relay who will do what when and using what resources?

We ask you to tell us what specific activities you will undertake; who will plan, implement, and manage your project; when and in what sequence your activities will occur; what financial, personnel, and other resources you will need to carry out the activities; what resources your institution will contribute if this is allowed and required; how you will track progress toward achieving your performance goals and intended results; and how and with whom you will share your project’s results.

Reviewers are asked:
- Are the proposed activities informed by appropriate theory and practice?
- Do the identified staff, partners, consultants, and service providers possess the experience and skills necessary to complete the work successfully?
- Is the schedule of work realistic and achievable?
- Are the time, personnel, and financial resources identified appropriate for the scope and scale of the project?
- Does the institution provide evidence of its capacity to carry out the project activities?
- Is the proposed evaluation methodology appropriate for project activities? Will it result in valid, reliable, and generalizable findings?
- Is a clear methodology described for tracking the project’s progress and adjusting course when necessary?
- Is there an effective plan for communicating results and/or sharing discoveries?
PROJECT RESULTS

The third and last section of your narrative should be devoted to articulating what changes as the result of your doing this project. It should tie back directly to the need, problem, or challenge you set out in the Project Justification.

We also ask you to tell us what performance indicators you will use to measure this change and what you are proposing as targets for these performance indicators. You’ll need to tell us how you will compare the proposed targets to the actual outcomes you achieve. We want to know what tangible products will result form your project, and how you will sustain the benefits of your project beyond the lifespan of this particular project.

Reviewers will ask:
• Are the project's intended outcomes and performance indicators clearly articulated, appropriate and realistic?
• If successful, what value will the results from the proposed project provide to the museum field?
In talking with potential applicants about their proposals, we often hear questions about what IMLS expects in terms of evaluation and measures of success. Our current approach is to empower applicants to define their intended outcomes, decide the best way to measure success in achieving them, and then of course convince reviewers that their choice is appropriate, informed, and likely to be successful. We are not prescriptive about it, but rather depend on you to make and defend your case.

For help and ideas, you might wish to visit one or all three of these webpages as you think through what is appropriate for your project:

- Evaluating Your Project
- Outcome Based Evaluation
- and Shaping Outcomes: Making a Difference in Libraries and Museums, which is a self-guided tutorial
At this point, we move on to the IMLS Budget Form. This is a single fillable PDF document that is four pages long and that you download from our website. You’ll use just the first set of columns, since all Sparks projects are one year in duration. The form adds for you automatically, although there are still some calculations you’ll need to do on your own to get the numbers you need to plug into the form. We urge you to check your figures very carefully, and make sure they are justifiable in the context of your project, and, of course, represent allowable costs.

It’s very important to make sure you have this version of the form, and not a cached one, as there are some important changes over previous years. The easiest way to make sure you’ve got the new form is to download it directly from our website and to make sure it has TEN numbered items, not ELEVEN.

Remember that indirect expenses are not allowed in Sparks-Museum grants so you will not be filling in section 9.
The Budget Justification is a very important part of your application and is a Required Document. Peer reviewers will use it to evaluate the appropriateness of the financial resources you have identified as necessary for your project, and IMLS staff will use it to check your calculations and to make determinations regarding the allowability of specific expenses according to the appropriate set of cost principles.

Your Budget Justification should coordinate closely with your IMLS Budget Form in format and content. It should identify the purpose for each expense and explain how you arrived at each cost, including any that you may have consolidated and summarized on the budget form.

Because there is no page limit on this document, take as much space as you need and make it easy to follow. DO NOT, however, use the Budget Justification to list qualifications of staff or to justify your project.

Take a look at the Guidance for Writing a Budget Justification, which you can access at www.imls.gov/applicants/budget_justification.aspx. It makes solid recommendations for how to structure your Budget Justification and what content should be included.
If your project includes creating a digital product of any kind—digital collections, web resources, metadata, software, or a digital dataset—you should complete and submit the Digital Stewardship Supplementary Information Form as a Supporting Document. It is available on our website as both a fillable PDF and a Word document. This five-part form makes it easy for reviewers and for IMLS to understand how you will create your digital products and how you will make them available for use and re-use by others.

Because technology is dynamic and because we do not want to inhibit innovation, IMLS does not prescribe set standards and best practices. Instead, IMLS asks a series of questions about your digital stewardship project, and your answers will be used by IMLS staff and by peer reviewers to evaluate your proposal. You need to complete the sections that align best with your project.

You may find the Federal Agencies Digitization Guidelines helpful at www.digitizationguidelines.gov.
At this point, we’d like to share a few tips gleaned from our collective experience in working with applications submitted to the Sparks program each year.

First on the list is “Register early!” You must have a DUNS number, an active SAM.gov registration, and a current and functional Grants.gov registration to apply.

It’s also crucial to remember that your SAM.gov registration expires each year and you must renew it. You can log into SAM.gov at any time and find out your status.
Separate and apart from registration matters, we have these suggestions to offer.

• Be certain your project goals relate to the goals of Sparks-Museums.
• Take time to carefully research and articulate the need for your project.
• Prepare your budget form and budget justification carefully and make sure that numbers coordinate with your narrative statements.
• Identify consultants and other key personnel by name, where possible.
• Provide a job description and outline the selection process for positions you will fill through grant funding.
Application Tips

- Follow the narrative outline provided in the Sparks-Museums Notice of Funding Opportunity. Use headings, subheadings, or numbered sections to make it easy to read.
- Avoid generalities, acronyms, and jargon.
- Ask a colleague to review everything before you submit.
- Contact IMLS program staff with questions.

- Follow the narrative outline provided in the Notice of Funding Opportunity. Use headings, subheadings, or numbered sections to make it easy for reviewers to read.

- Avoid generalities, acronyms, and jargon. The people who will review your application are experts, but they may not be totally familiar with your particular field’s shorthand. Make it easy for them to understand what you mean.

- Ask a colleague to review everything with fresh eyes before you submit. Ask them to act like a reviewer who’s seeing this for the first time.

- Contact IMLS program staff for assistance at any time during the process. We’ll be happy to help wherever we can.
Please be aware that by law, IMLS can make grants only to **eligible** applicants that submit **complete** applications, including attachments, **on or before the deadline**. So...

- Start early.
- Upload to Grants.gov prior to December 1, 2014.
- Check uploaded components against the Table of Application Components in Notice of Funding Opportunity.
- Resubmit if you need to do so.

Our best advice, then, is to start everything early; upload your application to Grants.gov **WELL** before December 1, 2014; and check what you’ve uploaded against the Table of Application Components in the Notice of Funding Opportunity. If you need to add or change something, you can resubmit as many times as you need to up to 11:59 pm on December 1. We’ll process the last one you put in.
Once you’ve submitted your proposal, you may wonder what happens next.

• Shortly after you submit your application to Grants.gov, you will receive e-mail message verifying its receipt.

• Ranging between a few minutes and a few hours later, you MAY receive an e-mail message indicating that your application has been “rejected with errors.” The message will specify the error, and as long as the deadline has not passed, you may correct it and resubmit your application.

• Several days later, you will receive another e-mail verifying that your application has been downloaded by IMLS.
• By mid-January, you will receive an e-mail message from IMLS-MuseumGrants confirming the names of the project director and authorizing official, the amount of the request, and providing you with the IMLS log number assigned to your application.

• IMLS staff check each application for eligibility and completeness. If your institution is found to be ineligible or your application is not complete, you will receive a notice from IMLS detailing the problem.

• By mid-January, you will receive an e-mail message from IMLS-MuseumGrants confirming the names of the project director and authorizing official, the amount of the request, and providing you with the IMLS log number assigned to your application.

• Next, IMLS staff check each application for eligibility and completeness. If your institution is found to be ineligible or your application is not complete, you will receive a notice from IMLS detailing the problem.
**Review Process**

- Experienced and knowledgeable peer reviewers score your eligible and complete applications and provide comments based on the criteria outlined in the program Notice of Funding Opportunity. Reviews may take place in one or two tiers.
- Reviewers use the review criteria provided in the Notice of Funding Opportunity and the Sparks-Museums reviewer materials posted on our website.
- By law, the IMLS director is charged with the authority and responsibility to make final award decisions.
- You will be notified by e-mail of the award decision in July 2015. You will receive the scores and comments provided by each reviewer.

- Experienced and knowledgeable peer reviewers score all eligible and complete applications and provide comments based on the criteria outlined in the program Notice of Funding Opportunity. Reviews may take place in one or two tiers.

- Reviewers use the review criteria provided in the Notice of Funding Opportunity and the Sparks-Museums reviewer materials posted on our website.

- By law, the IMLS director is charged with the authority and responsibility to make final award decisions.

- All applicants will be notified by e-mail of the award decision in July 2015. Each applicant will receive the scores and comments provided by each reviewer.
We hope you have found the information in this webinar helpful. Here is contact information for Jill and me. We encourage you to contact us with any questions you might have. We’ll be very happy to help. This information is also on the landing page for Sparks-Museums.

Contacts

Helen Wechsler  
Supervisory Grants Management Specialist  
hwechsler@imls.gov  
202-653-4779

Jill Connors-Joyner  
Museum Program Specialist  
jconnors-joyner@imls.gov  
202-653-4791
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