

Timed Transcript for IMLS Office of Museum Services Webinar: Museums for America FY 2022 Information Session

0:01

Welcome to the Institute of Museum and Library Services' webinar, Museums for America Grant Program Fiscal Year FY 2022 Information Session.

0:12

My name is Helen Wechsler, and I'm pleased that you could join me today and that you're interested in preparing an application for the IMLS Museums for America grant program.

0:22

Our goal in this presentation is to provide specific information about the Museums for America grant program and make some recommendations that you may wish to consider when preparing your application. Since this is a pre-recorded webinar and you won't have the opportunity to ask questions, feel free to contact me or any of the other staff of the Office of Museum Services to seek answers to your questions or to discuss a project idea. The staff contact slide is shown later in this webinar.

1:02

This is one of a series of pre-recorded webinars designed to help you find the information you need to create a competitive application for IMLS museum funding.

1:12

Choosing a Funding Opportunity for FY 2022 was pre-recorded and is available as a video and as a PDF of the slides plus a transcript on our website at the link identified here.

1:26

In that webinar, we cover the IMLS vision, mission, and strategic plan, with an emphasis on how they influence our grant making.

1:36

We also address institutional eligibility.

1:38

Provide a quick overview of all of our funding opportunities, how to find more information online with a focus on our website, and we cover the three places you must be registered in order to apply for an IMLS grant.

1:52

We strongly recommend that you view this webinar to get the complete picture of preparing and submitting a competitive application to Museums for America.

2:02

In addition to this pre-recorded webinar for Museums for America, we are providing pre-recorded webinars for all of our grant programs. You can find links to these on the grant program landing pages on our website.

2:20

Before we jump into the details, we are often asked about numbers of applications and funding success rates, and so here are the figures for the just completed FY 21 cycle.

2:33

As you can see, with just over twenty-three point three million available, we were able to fund over 32% of the applications we received.

2:49

In this presentation, we'll be addressing the following topics: MFA Program Goals, Characteristics of Successful Projects, Important Dates and Times, the questions of How Much and How Many, Project Categories, Allowable and Unallowable Costs, what you can and cannot include in your project.

3:12

Application Components, Application Tips, The Review Process, and the IMLS Staff Contact Information.

3:23

Museums for America, or MFA, is our largest grant program, receiving the largest number of applications each year, and the one through which we make the largest number of awards.

3:35

The overall goal of the program is to support activities that strengthen the ability of individual museums to serve their publics. This might be through activities that reflect museums as active resources for lifelong learning, as institutions important in improving the well-being of their communities, or as good stewards of the nation's collections.

3:58

MFA is all about what your museum needs in order to better serve your public. It may well be exactly the same as what the museum across town or in a neighboring state needs, and that's OK.

4:10

The important thing here is that our support should help you make a local impact.

4:20

With this focus on supporting the individual museum, what are the characteristics of successful Museums for America applications?

4:28

There are four, and successful projects exemplify all of them well.

4:32

As you prepare your application, then, you should keep these characteristics in mind.

4:39

It has been our experience that an unfunded application is one that has failed to deliver convincingly on one or more of these, so it is wise to think hard about how to structure your application to show how your project will be strong in each.

4:55

We're looking for institutional impact.

4:57

The project addresses a key goal identified in the institution's strategic plan.

5:04

In-depth knowledge.

5:05

The project design reflects a thorough understanding of current practice and knowledge about the subject matter.

5:12

Project-based design. The work plan consists of a set of logical, interrelated activities tied directly to addressing the key need or challenge.

5:22

Demonstrable results. The project generates measurable results that tie directly to the need or challenge it was designed to address.

5:36

Here are important dates relating to MFA applications. Applications must be received through Grants dot gov by 11 59 PM Eastern Time on November 15, 2021.

5:50

The date is not negotiable.

5:52

The time stamp is auto generated by the Grants dot gov system, and we have no ability to override it.

5:59

We will say this over and over again, but please start early and submit your application early.

6:04

That way, if you encounter a difficulty of any kind when submitting your proposal, you'll have some time to resolve the problem and resubmit.

6:13

And, this year, awards will be announced in August, 2022.

6:17

And MFA projects must be scheduled to start on the first day of September, 2022.

6:24

Please make sure that everyone involved in preparing your grant application is aware of these dates.

6:32

Regarding how much money you may request, there is only one option in MFA.

6:38

All requests must be between 5,000 and 250,000, including both direct and indirect costs.

6:47

If you ask for less than 5,000, or more than 250,000, your application will most likely be rejected and not reviewed.

6:56

Requests to Museums for America must have at least a 1 to 1 non-federal cost share.

7:02

Cost share can take a number of forms.

7:04

Among them are cash, staff time, volunteer time, third-party contributions, grants from foundations, and support from state or local government.

7:17

Cost share cannot come from other federal sources.

7:21

In terms of how many applications you may submit, there is no limit to the number of applications you can file in response to the FY 2022 funding announcement for Museums for America.

7:37

We've made reference several times to projects here, and so let's take a minute to consider just exactly what that means.

7:45

The Project Management Institute has a good definition, which is a temporary endeavor undertaken to create a unique product, service, or result.

7:55

They go on further to explain that a project is temporary because it has a defined beginning and an end in time, and therefore defined scope and resources. And a project is unique in that it is not a routine operation, but rather a specific set of operations designed to accomplish a singular goal.

8:15

We recommend that you keep this definition in mind as you conceptualize your IMLS project.

8:20

Think of it as temporary non-routine set of activities, which collectively have a beginning and an end in time, a defined scope requiring specific resources, and which are designed to accomplish a specific, singular goal.

8:40

With that concept of project in mind, let's turn to project categories.

8:45

Second to choosing to apply to Museums for America grant program, this is likely to be the most important decision you make about your funding application.

8:54

As you can see here, there are three options.

8:57

Lifelong Learning, Community Catalyst, I'm sorry, Community Engagement, and Collections Stewardship and Access.

9:08

You will find these three areas described under the goals of the MFA program in the Notice of Funding Opportunity.

9:16

You will select your project category on the Museum Program Information Form.

9:22

Why is your decision about which project category to choose so important?

9:27

For one thing, your application will be reviewed by museum professionals who have experience and expertise in these general categories. And for another, your application will be competing against others who have chosen the same category.

9:43

In short, the entire review process incorporates an assumption that your project aligns with the category you've identified. So, it's important to choose correctly.

9:56

So, let's take a look at what kinds of activities a project in each of these categories might include.

10:02

In this, and the next two slides that follow, the objectives provide a list of the types of projects that fit within the goal, and the goal corresponds to the MFA program category.

10:15

A project in Lifelong Learning might include but is not limited to design and fabrication of an exhibit, program development for all types of audiences, creating interpretive plans, media, training for teachers, partnerships with schools or out-of-school audiences, or program evaluation.

10:36

As you plan your project in this category, we strongly recommend starting with the concept of learner at the center and build around it.

10:44

Spend time really thinking through who your learner is in this project, and what their needs are.

10:53

It's not likely going to be everybody. So, who is it, really?

10:57

What do they want to learn? What do you want them to learn?

11:00

And what's the best way to achieve that goal?

11:03

You'll get to the whole idea of problems. We'll get to the whole idea of problems and needs in a few minutes, but a major takeaway here is to be focused on identifying your audience and thinking about how you are going to serve them.

11:21

A Community Anchor, a Community Engagement project is likely to include activities that contribute directly to your institution's functioning as an essential partner in addressing community needs.

11:34

As you scan this list, you'll see the word community in nearly every entry.

11:39

Simply saying you plan to be welcoming to your community, or you plan to serve your community is not likely to be enough. Reviewers should be able to see clearly that you have involved members of your community in planning your project and that you are continuing to involve them in implementing and evaluating.

12:02

So, if your project involves exhibitions or interpretive programs, how do you know if your project fits best within lifelong learning or community engagement? Which category should you pick?

12:14

We suggest this test.

12:16

If the motivation for doing the project comes from within your institution, then you might well be looking at a Lifelong Learning project.

12:25

If the motivation for doing the project comes from outside your institution generated by your community and the need they have identified, then you might have a Community Engagement project.

12:37

Both approaches are legitimate and both are fundable.

12:41

Ultimately, it's your choice.

12:43

What's important is that you choose one and write your application that way.

12:48

So, again, Community Anchor projects are more external. Lifelong Learning projects are more internal and provide support for all types of education projects that the previous slide already identified.

13:02

But the primary goal of Lifelong Learning is generally not the overall improvement of the community by addressing a community need.

13:14

Our third project category is that of Collections Stewardship and Access, and this includes just about anything you need to do for and with collections, except acquire them.

13:27

We are very open to projects that have multiple components configured in ways that make sense for you.

13:33

One project might consist of cataloging, taking digital photographs, and updating database records while another might combine digitization activities with rehousing.

13:46

We invite applications for projects that involve preparing to mitigate the impact of natural and man-made disasters on collections and collections information.

13:57

This might be planning and training in emergency preparedness, developing networks for response, executing strategies for recovery, and/or developing resilience in preparation for the next time.

14:11

We support conservation projects of all kinds, general, detailed, and environmental surveys, as well as treatments and environmental improvements.

14:20

And you're welcome to incorporate aspects of training, and/or collections management into these projects if doing so makes sense for your situation.

14:29

It's important to note that in this project category, we encourage a step-by-step, progressive approach to collections work, including conservation.

14:39

This means assessing needs, creating a prioritized list of activities, and following through by doing the most important things first.

14:53

Before we close our description of project categories, we'd like to mention our guidance for projects that could belong logically in more than one category.

15:04

Sometimes it's tough to choose, and you might be tempted to think that the best strategy would be to align with more than 1, 2, and maybe even three. We advise against this for several reasons.

15:16

First, the project categories have different goals, and we expect that projects aligned with each will differ, will address different problems, use different approaches, and will measure success in achieving the intended results in different ways.

15:31

Second, not only do our instructions for applicants differ for each category, but so do our guidance for reviewers.

15:40

So, how do you choose the best category for your project?

15:43

Here are three ways we suggest you try.

15:46

Think carefully about what is in the center of your project. Is it the learner?

15:52

Will people who engage with you as a result of your project, let's say, to create a new exhibition and related programming,

15:59

Acquire new knowledge, develop a skill, experience a change in attitude about the project, about the subject of your exhibition?

16:08

Or is it the community that's at the center of your thinking?

16:12

Is your project one that will address an important community need, and are you doing it because you believe your museum can make a difference?

16:20

Or is your project about collections? Will your project result in a better managed, better cared-for, or more accessible set of objects?

16:31

A second way to go at this might be to think about who you want to review your application.

16:38

If you apply under Lifelong Learning, we will put your application in front of museum educators, exhibit professionals, interpretive specialists, and professionals with deep experience in understanding how people learn in museum environments.

16:53

Would you rather we put it in front of a combination of experts in civic engagement and social justice, community outreach, and collective impact?

17:02

If that sounds right, then it may push you towards Community Engagement.

17:07

And if you apply under Collections Stewardship and Access, you can be confident that your application will be reviewed by some combination of registrars, collections managers, curators, conservators, or collections information specialists.

17:22

If that seems appropriate, then this is the most likely your best choice.

17:27

Our most important advice is to choose one project category, study the instructions for preparing an application, as well as the review criteria for that category, and write your proposal accordingly.

17:40

As always, if you have questions, call the IMLS staff to discuss them.

17:49

We'll turn now to allowable and unallowable costs for your project.

17:55

Be very careful in preparing your proposal, and include only allowable costs in both your IMLS request and your cost share. To do otherwise can hurt your chances of getting positive reviews and being recommended for funding.

18:11

We'll go through some common expenses that are allowable and unallowable, but for details, please see 2 CFR, Part 200.

18:20

This is the part of the Code of Federal Regulations covering Uniform Administrative Requirements, Cost Principles, and Audit Requirements for Federal Awards.

18:30

Fortunately, the regulations are available online in a searchable format on the U.S. Government Publishing Office website and a tiny URL link is listed on this slide.

18:43

Of particular interest is Subpart E, Cost Principles, a small section of which is shown on the right side of the slide.

18:55

In the MFA Notice of Funding Opportunity, we provide a partial list of the most common examples of allowable costs.

19:04

And they are here on the slide.

19:06

These costs may be part of what you ask IMLS to pay for and/or what you will pay for as part of your cost share.

19:14

The rules about allowability apply to both sides of your budget.

19:19

So, they include things like personnel salary and wages, salary, wages, and fringe, travel expenses for project staff, materials and supplies, and software and equipment associated with the project, equipment for collections storage or exhibitions, third-party costs,

publications, staff and volunteer training, internships and fellowships, and indirect or overhead costs.

19:49

We also provide a list of generally unallowable costs, again both for IMLS funds and for cost share.

19:56

These costs may not be part of what you ask IMLS to pay for, nor can they be part of what you will pay for as part of your cost share.

20:05

In fact, unallowable expenses can't show up anywhere in your proposal.

20:09

As you prepare your application, it's a good idea to compare your list of proposed expenses against these lists of allowable and unallowable costs, and against the appropriate set of cost principles. If after you have done this, you have specific questions, please contact us and we'll be happy to help.

20:30

So, examples of unallowable costs include fundraising and development staff, contributions to endowments, general operating support, acquisition of collections, advertising or public relations not associated with a particular project.

20:47

Construction or renovation of facilities, social activities like ceremonies or other entertainment, and research projects.

21:00

Next up are application components.

21:03

Your application will consist of a series of individual documents, and it's very important to make sure you prepare and submit everything you should.

21:14

These application components fall into three categories in Museums for America.

21:19

The first is that of Required Documents.

21:23

All applications must include the documents listed here. Omission of even just one might result in your application's rejection.

21:32

Also important to note are page limits. If you exceed the page limit specified in the Notice of Funding Opportunity, we must remove the extras before your application goes to review.

21:44

That means your reviewers may well see a paragraph or a sentence end in mid-air and will wonder about your organizational skills and your attentiveness to detail.

21:54

We often see this with resumes, so if you are requesting resumes from staff outside contractors, or consultants, please make sure they are two pages maximum.

22:05

So, make sure your content fits into the page limits specified and make sure the number of pages holds when you convert your documents to PDF.

22:18

The second category of application components is that of Conditionally Required Documents.

22:25

Some applications must include 1, 2, or even all four of these, and it's your job to figure out which are required for you.

22:34

If you are applying as a non-profit, then you must include your non-profit status letter from the IRS.

22:42

If you are using a federally negotiated indirect cost rate in your budget, you must include a copy of your final rate agreement.

22:51

If you will create digital products during the course of your project, then you must complete a Digital Product Plan.

22:59

If you are requesting support for conservation treatment, then you must include detailed condition reports and/or formal conservation treatment proposals.

23:09

Just like the required documents, omission of even one might result in your application's rejection.

23:17

Please note that the term digital product includes digitized and born-digital content, resources, or assets, and software.

23:26

Please see the form itself for more specific examples.

23:30

If you're creating any of these types of materials, you must include the form with your application.

23:42

The third group of application components is Supporting Documents, and here's a partial list of examples.

23:49

Supporting documents are completely optional.

23:52

You may submit some or none.

23:55

We urge you to make good decisions here and include only those that supplement the Narrative and support the project description you provide in your application.

24:05

This is not the place to introduce new information.

24:08

We also recommend that you 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. More is not necessarily better.

24:23

Being judicious really does work to your benefit. Include what is important and helpful and stop there.

24:34

Let's turn to two specific documents that are very important and about which applicants seem to have the most questions.

24:42

First is the Strategic Plan Summary.

24:47

As you read the Museums for America Notice of Funding Opportunity, you will see frequent references to strategic plans or strategic goals.

24:57

IMLS wants to help you achieve your goals, and, indeed, we've seen that one of the characteristics of successful MFA projects is addressing a key need or challenge that faces your museum and whose resolution is identified in your strategic plan.

25:15

We ask for a summary of your plan, no more than two pages, so the reviewers will be able to understand how your proposed project's activities will further your institutional goals and objectives.

25:28

To verify its legitimacy, we ask that you indicate when and by whom the plan was approved. For some institutions, this might be the Board of Trustees. For others, it might be someone or a group representing the authority for a division or a department.

25:45

And here's some insider advice.

25:47

Use a narrative format for your strategic plan summary. Although infographics and cleverly designed imagery might be just the thing for communicating your strategic plan to some audiences, it typically doesn't work well for our reviewers. These two pages are all they have,

and they tell us they find a well-constructed, thoughtful, written summary the best way to confirm connections to your project. So, make it easy for them.

26:19

At the end of last year, the government added a new requirement to all federal awards. Agencies are now required to measure the performance of their awardees.

26:30

This Performance Measurement requirement is different from Project Evaluation, which is typically included in your project proposals already.

26:40

Performance Measurement tells us how good a job you did as a federal awardee.

26:46

It helps IMLS understand, manage, and improve our grant programs and the assistance we provide to applicants and awardees.

26:54

And it helps us inform internal stakeholders (IMLS' leadership; key staff in the program, or grants management offices, and our finance office) and external audiences (like the legislative and oversight committees, media, and the public) about our grantmaking.

27:14

Project evaluation, by contrast, is all about your project's intended results or outcomes.

27:20

The prompts that help you write your narrative, which we will talk about in just a moment, will guide you through a discussion of your evaluation methods.

27:29

We ask you what need you are addressing and what associated results do you want your project to have.

27:35

How you will track project progress towards achieving your intended results, and how the knowledge, skills, behaviors, and and/or attitudes of your target audience will change as a result of your project.

27:48

That's project evaluation.

27:51

But let's turn now to our focus on performance measurement, and how we will ask you to plan for it and report it.

28:06

In the Notice of Funding Opportunity, we provide a sample chart which applicants may, but are not required to use.

28:15

On the left side of the chart are four commonly used Performance Measures that IMLS has adopted for this effort.

28:25

We're going to ask you to report on effectiveness, which is the extent to which activities contribute to achieving the intended results.

28:35

We're going to ask you to report on efficiency, how well resources, like funds, expertise, time, are used and costs are minimized while generating maximum value for the target group.

28:50

Then, you'll report on quality, how well the activities meet the requirements and expectations of the target group, and timeliness, the extent to which each task activity is completed within the proposed timeframe.

29:08

Across the top are the information points we're asking you to use in your statements, with examples for each.

29:17

For instance, with Data We Will Collect are listed counts, costs, weights, volumes, temperatures, percentages, and hours, as well as qualitative observations, opinions, and feelings.

29:34

For each performance measure, we provide a couple of examples addressing issues that might turn up in a library or museum project.

29:45

Our intent was to make it easy for applicants to see the relationship between this request and the projects they are proposing.

29:53

The blank space is where we suggest applicants write their own performance measure statements, and the chart is constructed such that it can expand to allow as much space as you need.

30:06

We're looking for only one statement for each required performance measure.

30:10

You may provide more than one statement per measure, if you wish.

30:14

We do not limit the performance measure plan, but we do limit the performance measure plan to two pages.

30:29

Now, let's talk about the Narrative of your proposal.

30:33

You have seven pages to cover three very important issues.

30:36

And the Notice of Funding Opportunity provides lengthy guidance on what the narrative should cover. Specifics differ for each project category: Lifelong Learning, Community Engagement, and Collections Stewardship and Access.

30:51

And so you should make sure you're following the guidance for the category you've chosen.

30:58

Project Justification. What need, problem, or challenge will your project address, and how is it identified?

31:06

Describe how you have used demographic information, economic circumstances, condition assessments, and other relevant data from reliable sources to define the need, problem, or challenge and develop the scope for the project.

31:21

Who is the target group for your project, and how have they been involved in the planning?

31:27

Target group refers to those who will be most immediately and positively affected by your project.

31:34

Identify the number of individuals in the target group or in each target group, if you identify more than one.

31:41

Who are the ultimate beneficiaries for this project?

31:44

Beneficiaries refer to those who are likely to be aided in the long term by your project.

31:51

They may be the same or not as your target group.

31:55

Identify the number of individuals who will benefit from your project in the long term, if reliable and defensible counts are possible. Otherwise, describe the characteristics of the beneficiaries you expect to serve eventually in your project.

32:17

In section E of the Notice of Funding Opportunity, under Review Criteria, you will find a list of questions that reviewers are asked to answer when they review your proposal.

32:29

It's a good idea to refer to these as you craft your narrative to be certain you are providing reviewers clear, solid information.

32:38

You will see that they correspond fairly directly with the prompts you are given to write the narrative.

32:44

So, in the Project Justification, reviewers are asked if you've met the goal of the program and the project categories. If you're advancing your museum's strategic plan. If you've used data to back up the need or problem well.

33:02

If you've identified your target group and your beneficiaries. Have they been involved in the planning? And then for Collections Stewardship, there's an extra question.

33:18

One of the prompts in the Project Justification section of the narrative is the identification of the need, problem, or challenge your project addresses.

33:26

It is foundational in your application, so keep these points in mind.

33:31

The federal government wants its investment to result in something getting better.

33:36

As you define your need, problem or challenge, articulate what will get better as a result of your project as precisely as possible.

33:44

Will somebody learn something, develop a skill, change an attitude?

33:49

Will members of your community be better able to work together to solve problems?

33:53

Will collections be better cared for? Will their lifespan be extended? Will access to your collections and the information surrounding them be expanded?

34:03

Identify why it is important that this particular change happens. Hone your problem definition carefully in clear and succinct terms.

34:14

Gather and present data that support your problem definition.

34:25

Project Work Plan.

34:27

This is where you identify who will do what activities, when, and using what resources.

34:33

We also ask you to think about risks that are inherent in your particular project and to tell us how you've taken that into account in your planning.

34:42

We'll say more about that in a few minutes.

34:45

We want you to explain how you will track your progress towards achieving your proposed results, and what you'll do if you need to correct course.

34:54

And finally, reflecting the federal government's desire that everything in which we invest generates a broad as private benefit as possible, we ask you to tell us how and with whom you will share your project results.

35:15

Again, we provide a list of the questions that reviewers will be asked.

35:19

So, they're going to look to see that your activities are informed by current practice.

35:24

They're going look for, your risks stated clearly.

35:30

Whether you've got the right people on board to do the work. Whether you've articulated the right finances, support, professional, and expertise.

35:43

And how are the performance measures? Do they make sense for you?

35:48

They'll look at your digital product plan if there is one in the proposal. And they'll look at what methods you have for tracking your results.

36:03

Your work plan will be built on activities, so it's important to be clear about just what an activity is.

36:10

An activity is something that somebody does.

36:13

It has a beginning and an end, just like projects, and you know when you finished it because it doesn't need to be done anymore.

36:20

An activity is not a goal, a result, or an outcome. Rather, it is something you do as part of striving to achieve those. Aim for a reasonable level of granularity in identifying your activities.

36:39

We also asked you to think about risks that are inherent in your particular project and to tell us how you've taken that into account in your planning.

36:49

Think of it as answering the question, "What if?" There is no checklist of risks, but every project has them.

36:57

The best proposals will show that you are aware of them and have thought through a plan for dealing with them.

37:04

Look at your activities and think about what could go wrong. Focus on the ones where your experience, your own or that of your group, tells you, yes, that could happen, and identify steps that you would take in response.

37:19

IMLS knows things go differently than expected. We just want you to be prepared by identifying implementation options.

37:30

Here are some examples of risks that might be part of a project for which you might seek MFA funding.

37:37

A project may be dependent upon fundraising to generate the cost share, but it is not complete by the time the application is submitted.

37:46

What will the institution do if that money is not available in time for the project?

37:51

A project may be structured around university interns who will be selected and trained according to well thought-out processes.

37:59

What will happen if one or more intern drops out?

38:02

What's the plan for replacing them mid-project?

38:06

A project involving rehousing collections into new museum quality collections storage furniture might run into delays in preparing the space or in the delivery of the cabinets.

38:17

What happens to the collection items then?

38:19

How will the institution ensure that they remain safe and secure?

38:24

A project depends on your community partners to achieve success, but one partner drops out mid-project. What do you do now?

38:39

The third section of your narrative should be devoted to articulating your project's intended results.

38:45

This section is your chance to convince the reviewers that your project will result in something getting better.

38:52

The need or problem you identified in your Project Justification will be addressed directly, and it will be diminished or eliminated altogether.

39:01

We ask you to tell us what data you will collect and report in order to measure your project's success.

39:07

If your project will generate tangible results, and most do, here's the opportunity to describe them and make the case that they will be useful.

39:18

And last, but not least, we ask that you tell us how you will sustain the benefit of your project. How will this improvement that you propose to make continue once your grant is over?

39:36

And here are the questions that your reviewers will be asked about your project results.

39:43

Have you clearly articulated what those results should be?

39:48

Do you know how you're going to measure them?

39:53

Will the products that you create be made available and accessible to the target group?

40:00

Is there a plan to sustain this after the project period?

40:11

We often hear that defining intended results in success measures is challenging for applicants, so it's worth spending a bit more time on this here.

40:20

Let's think back to the questions we referenced a couple of slides ago when we talked about defining the need, problem, or challenge that your project is addressing.

40:31

If you said someone will learn something, how will you know?

40:35

If your problem related to segments of your community being better able to work together, how will you know when that has been achieved?

40:43

If collections will be better cared for, how will you be sure, and how will you measure better?

40:51

If you're digitizing to expand accessibility, how will you know when you've done it?

40:57

All of your results should tie back to your need, problem, or challenge.

41:01

You may well experience tangential benefits and/or positive outcomes, but make sure you identify them as in addition to, and not instead of, your original intended results.

41:13

Reviewers are likely to see that as a disconnect.

41:18

This focus on results and measuring success is meaningful, but it is not new.

41:26

There has been a tremendous amount of work done on ways to measure success.

41:30

For you as an applicant, though, we encourage you to consider using a logic model to explain your intended results and your plan for achieving them.

41:42

Many MFA applicants use logic models and reviewers appreciate their conciseness and their focus.

41:52

There are many excellent resources available to help you construct a logic model, and among these are the IMLS' Shaping Outcomes, a free online course developed in partnership with Indiana University-Purdue University of Indianapolis.

42:07

It is available at [WWW dot shaping outcomes dot org](http://www.shapingoutcomes.org), and it is customized to meet the needs of museum applicants.

42:16

There are downloadable worksheets and numerous examples that you are likely to find relevant to your own work.

42:24

So, to recap, your Narrative has three sections: Project Justification, Project Work Plan, and Project Results.

42:31

And you have seven pages for it.

42:33

The sections are all equally important. Write clearly, address what we ask you to address, and keep an eye on those review criteria.

42:43

We're telling you here, exactly what reviewers will look for, so make it easy for them to find it and to understand it.

42:54

At this point, we'd like to share a few tips gleaned from our collective experience in working with applications submitted to the MFA program each year.

43:03

First on the list, make sure your registrations are complete and your passwords and usernames are current.

43:11

You must have a DUNS number, an active SAM dot gov registration, and a current and functional Grants dot gov registration. And if you are just starting out, you will need to acquire them in that order.

43:24

In other words, you must have a DUNS number to register for SAM dot gov.

43:30

You must have an active SAM dot gov registration to register with Grants dot gov.

43:35

It's crucial to remember that your SAM dot gov registration expires each year, and you must renew it.

43:42

You can check your status at any time by going to WWW dot SAM dot gov.

43:49

In addition, your Grants dot gov password expires every 60 days, and leaving accounts inactive for years or more can result in a removal of all accounts roles.

43:59

So, make sure you know who your Grants dot gov Authorized Organization Representative is and be sure the username and updated password are in place.

44:10

Both the SAM dot gov and Grants dot gov websites have robust help features and FAQs.

44:23

Our regulations state that we can make grants only to eligible applicants that submit complete applications, including attachments, on or before the deadline. So, here are some tips to help you do just that.

44:37

Start early. You've already done that by participating in this webinar.

44:42

Become familiar with Grants dot gov's Workspace.

44:45

It has many good features, including upfront validation, which allows you to correct errors prior to submission, and the opportunity to collaborate with others in creating your application.

44:56

Consider starting with the Workspace Overview and checkout for tutorials.

45:02

Do your background research. Make it easy for the reviewers to see that you are up to date and know what you're talking about.

45:10

Revisit the MFA Notice of Funding Opportunity frequently and follow the Narrative outline it provides. Use headings, subheadings, or numbered sections in your Narrative to make it easy for reviewers to read.

45:24

Avoid generalities, acronyms, and jargon.

45:28

People who review your application are experts, but they may not be totally familiar with your particular field's shorthand.

45:36

Make it easy for them to understand what you mean.

45:39

Check your spelling, grammar, and math. It counts with the reviewers!

45:45

Ask a colleague to review everything with fresh eyes before you submit.

45:49

Ask them to act like a reviewer who is seeing this for the very first time.

45:54

Be sure your application is complete. Check it against the Table of Application Components in the Notice of Funding Opportunity.

46:02

Submit to Grants dot gov early, so you can correct any errors and avoid any trauma created by technology challenges.

46:15

This is the general schedule of events to show what happens to your application once we receive it.

46:22

IMLS staff will review your applications for completeness and eligibility. And you'll hear from us via e-mail if there are any problems.

46:31

Then, from February through June, your experienced and knowledgeable peers will provide scores and comments based on the criteria outlined in the MFA Notice of Funding Opportunity.

46:43

IMLS staff will examine your budget, your financials, and your track record with past and current grants.

46:51

We then prepare materials for the IMLS Deputy Director for Museums, and the IMLS Director.

46:58

By law, the IMLS Director is charged with the authority and responsibility to make final award decisions, and this happens in July.

47:08

In August, we will notify you by e-mail of the award decisions and provide the scores and comments created by the reviewers, and on September first, 2022, funded projects begin.

47:25

Thank you very much for your interest in IMLS and in Museums for America, and we hope you have found this information helpful.

47:34

Here is a list of names, e-mails, and direct phone numbers for program staff in the Office of Museum Services who are answering questions about Museums for America.

47:46

We encourage you to contact us with any questions you might have about what you've heard or seen in this webinar or in the online MFA materials. We'll be very happy to help.

47:58

So, with that, we wish you good luck, and we look forward to seeing your application in November.