



Museums for America

FY2013 MFA

Panel Reviewer Handbook

Learning Experiences

Welcome to the MFA Program Review Process

Thank you for agreeing to serve as a Museums for America (MFA) panel reviewer. We have selected you to review this year's applications because of your professional expertise in museum educations, learning, and program issues. We have prepared this handbook specifically for panel reviewers to ensure the fair and candid review of all eligible applications and to provide you with the procedural and technical information you need. Please use it in tandem with the FY2013 Museums for America Guidelines available at:

http://www.ims.gov/applicants/2013_museums_for_america_guidelines.aspx

Even if you have reviewed for other IMLS programs, including MFA, in the past, you should read through this booklet since we have made major changes to MFA this year.

Purpose and Scope of the Museums for America Program

The goal of the Museums for America program is to strengthen the ability of an individual museum to serve the public more effectively by supporting high-priority activities that advance its mission, plans, and strategic goals and objectives.

The Museums for America program accepts applications under three project categories. Those that you will be reviewing are in the Learning Experiences category.

- *Learning Experiences:* IMLS places the learner at the center and supports engaging experiences in museums that prepare people to be full participants in their local communities and our global society. Projects should deliver high quality, inclusive, accessible and audience-focused programs and services for lifelong learning in formal or informal settings.

Important: The FY2013 Museums for America program incorporates applications previously solicited through the Conservation Project Support program, including surveys, treatments, and environmental improvements.

Application and Review Process

1. Applicants submit their applications using Grants.gov.
2. IMLS receives the applications, and staff members check them for organizational eligibility and application completeness.
3. IMLS staff members identify a pool of available field reviewers with appropriate expertise and assign three reviewers to evaluate each application.
4. Field reviewers receive online access to the applications, evaluate them, and complete their reviews online.
5. IMLS uses field reviewers' comments and scores to rank the applications and determine which applications are sent for panel review.



6. MFA panels meet in Washington, DC, after the field review period to provide a second level of review and make final funding recommendations.
7. IMLS staff members review the budgets and past performance of the highest ranked applications.
8. IMLS staff members provide a list of applications recommended for funding to the IMLS Director.
9. IMLS awards Museums for America grants in September. IMLS notifies all applicants whether or not they have received an award.

Your Role

For the FY2013 MFA program, we received 597 applications on January 15, 2013. Of these, 276 were within the Learning Experiences project category and received field reviews. Approximately 50% or 138 are being considered further by panel reviewers.

As a panel reviewer, you can rely on field reviews for an analysis of the technical strengths and weaknesses of each proposal you evaluate. You will consider applications from a broader perspective, identifying projects that best meet IMLS MFA program and learning experiences project category goals, that are poised for successful implementation, and that are most likely to achieve their intended results.

We have a limited amount of time for each panel meeting, and we find that the panel discussions are most fruitful when panelists are well prepared. We therefore suggest that you follow the step-by-step procedures outlined in the next few pages for evaluating the applications assigned to you.

Application Review Instructions



Verify Access to IMLS Online Reviewer System

The **IMLS Online Reviewer System** allows you to identify potential conflicts of interest and to enter your evaluative comments and score for each application you review.

IMPORTANT: Internet Explorer® is the only reliable Web browser that will successfully work with the IMLS Online Reviewer System. Unfortunately, the system is not compatible with Mac or Microsoft Vista operating systems nor with browsers such as Mozilla Firefox, Apple Safari, Camino, and Opera.

Use the following link to verify that you have access to the IMLS Online Reviewer System:

<https://e-services.ims.gov/grantapps/reviewers.aspx>

To log in, enter the email address you have on file with IMLS, and use the default password. An **E-Review Security Screen** will appear. Read this page, and when you are

finished, click **OK**.

Next, follow the on-screen instructions to create a user account and establish your own password.

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Assess Potential Conflicts of Interest

After you have created a new password, your review assignment will appear. To access the list of applications assigned to you, click **VIEW**.

Read through your list of applications to see if there are any potential conflicts of interest. Please see “Complying With Ethical Obligations and Avoiding Conflicts of Interest” included as **Appendix I** of this handbook. A conflict of interest would arise if you have a financial interest in whether or not the application is funded, or if for some reason, you feel that you cannot review it objectively. Call or email your IMLS primary contact immediately if you have a conflict, or what may appear to be a conflict. (Do **not** check any box in the “Conflicts” column.)

If you have no conflicts of interest with any of the applicants on the list, click **SUBMIT CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT** at the bottom of page. Close out of this system.

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Verify Access to the Applications Online System

The **Applications Online System** allows you to download the applications assigned to you. Detailed instructions for downloading applications are included as **Appendix II** of this handbook for easy reference.

Use the following link to verify that you have access to all your assigned applications and supporting documentation:

<http://applicationsonline.imls.gov>

For “User” and “Password,” refer to the email message from your IMLS primary contact.

IMPORTANT: Depending on your computer system, you may need to click **CLOSE** on two or more error messages. See **Appendix II** for more details.

Call or email your IMLS primary contact immediately if any applications are missing or if you cannot open them.

Confidentiality: The information contained in grant applications is strictly confidential. Do not discuss or reveal names, institutions’ project activities, or any other information contained in the applications. Call or email your IMLS primary contact if you have any questions concerning an application. Do not contact an applicant directly.

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Read Applications

Revisit the MFA guidelines at http://www.ims.gov/applicants/museums_for_america_guidelines.aspx, and then read the applications. You will provide comments for each of three review criteria listed below and one score for each application. Consider the entire proposal as you evaluate each application.

Museums for America Learning Experiences FY2013 Panel Review Criteria	
1. Does the project meet the goals of Museums for America and the Learning Experiences project category?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Supports high-priority activities reflected in the museum’s mission and strategic goals, and expands the museum’s capacity to support these goals• Delivers high quality, inclusive, accessible and audience-focused programs, exhibitions, activities, and/or services to support lifelong learning in formal and informal settings.
2. Is the project poised for successful implementation?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Demonstrates thorough understanding of relevant issues and current practices• Addresses an assessed need• Allocates resources for the successful completion of the project• Connects goals and objectives to appropriate activities and intended outcomes
3. If funded, will the project achieve its intended results?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Tracks, measures, and adapts in order to achieve desired outcomes• Generates continuing benefits for applicant and/or audience served
4. Application Overview	Share your overall impressions of the application and general comments that do not fall into one of the above categories. You will select a numeric score for the application in this section

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Draft Comments

Draft comments for each of the three criteria:

- **Goals:** Does the project meet the goals of the MFA funding program and the Learning Experiences project category?
- **Implementation:** Is the project poised for successful implementation?
- **Results:** If funded, will the project achieve its intended results?

We strongly recommend that you draft your comments using a word-processing program so that you may copy and paste them into the IMLS Online Reviewer System (see **Appendix III**). Each comment must be between 30 and 2000 characters long.

When drafting your comments ...

- use your professional knowledge and experience to assess the information objectively.
- judge the application on its own merits. Do not base your evaluation on any prior knowledge of an institution.
- if you question the accuracy of any information, call us to discuss it.

Constructive and effective comments ...	Poor comments ...
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • are presented in a constructive manner • are concise, specific, easy to read and understand • reflect the resources of the institution • are specific to the individual applicant • correlate with the numerical score assigned • reflect the application’s strengths and identify areas for improvement • are directed to applicants for their use 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • simply summarize or paraphrase the applicant’s own words • make derogatory remarks • penalize an applicant because you feel the institution does not need the money • penalize an applicant because of missing materials • offer or ask for irrelevant or extraneous information • make vague or overly general statements • question an applicant’s honesty or integrity

IMPORTANT: Remember that successful and unsuccessful applicants use your comments to help improve their projects or future applications.

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Enter Comments and Assign Scores

Return to the IMLS Online Reviewer System and log in, using the email address you have on file with IMLS and the password you created in Step 1. Copy and paste your comments into the appropriate text boxes for each application. Use the links on the left side of the screen to navigate between criteria, and be sure to click **SAVE** after each one. When you reach “Application Overview,” select a single numeric score using the scale of 1 to 5, as described on the next page.

SCORE DEFINITIONS	
5 – Excellent	The applicant’s response is outstanding and provides exceptional support for the proposed project.
4 – Very Good	The applicant’s response provides solid support for the proposed project.
3 – Good	The applicant’s response is adequate but could be strengthened in its support for the proposed project.
2 – Some Merit	The applicant’s response is flawed and does not adequately support the proposed project.
1 – Inadequate / Insufficient	The applicant’s response is inadequate or provides insufficient information to allow for a confident evaluation.

Once you have completed assigning a score and providing comments for each application assigned to you, we recommend that you print a copy of each completed review to keep for your files. Then click on **I AM READY TO SUBMIT THIS REVIEW TO IMLS**.

Once you submit your reviews, you cannot go back in to make revisions. If you feel you need to make a change, you must contact your IMLS primary contact, and we will authorize your re-entry into the system. However, prior to submitting your reviews, you may repeatedly enter and exit the system without losing your information

For all technical or programmatic questions about reviewing, please call or email your IMLS primary contact directly. Please do **not** use the IMLS Online Reviewer System help buttons.

Deadline: The deadline to submit your reviews is XXX, 2013.

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Prepare for the MFA Learning Experiences Panel Meeting

We will preload electronic copies of all applications slated for discussion onto a PC laptop for your use at the panel meeting. You will also use the laptop to record any changes to your final scores and/or comments in the IMLS Online Reviewer System. You are welcome to bring your own copies with notes, either paper or electronic. If you want to bring your own electronic files, we recommend using a portable drive for easy transfer to an IMLS laptop. Reviewers have told us that wrangling one laptop at a time is preferable to two.

In preparation for the panel meeting, be sure you will be ready to act as “presenter” for the specific applications for which you have been assigned this role. These are identified in the Application Assignment List sent to you via email at the beginning of the review period. In addition, be prepared to discuss and comment on the other applications you have been assigned.

At the panel meeting, you will share your thoughts and recommendations with the full panel. IMLS staff will identify the application to be discussed, and the panelist assigned to “present” the application will give a brief verbal synopsis of the organization and the proposed project, his or her preliminary score (using the 1-5 scale), and concise reasons to support these recommendations, reflecting the review criteria. Each summation should be no more than **three minutes** in length. Next, the two other assigned readers will share their comments and scores for the proposal. Discussion will then be opened to the entire panel. Following discussion, each reader will have an opportunity to assign a final score and make any additional comments for the applicant if necessary. On average, the discussions for each proposal total **ten to twelve minutes**.

Issues Discussion

During the panel meeting, we will set aside time for an issues discussion, during which you will be able to provide us with feedback on the MFA grant program, the application materials, and the review and panel process. Time permitting, we will also have a wide-ranging discussion of what challenges, trends, and opportunities you see today in museum education.

After the Meeting

After the panel review process is complete, IMLS staff will review your final recommendations with the IMLS Director, who will determine, based on the funds available, which applications to fund.

Our Thanks!

We hope it is clear that your participation as a panel reviewer is a pivotal component of the IMLS peer review process. We thank you for your gifts of time and expertise and this very important contribution to the museum community. Best of luck in working through your reviews, and safe travels. We look forward to seeing you in Washington DC.

Managing Copies

Keep your applications and a copy of your review sheets until **September 30, 2013**, in case there are questions from IMLS staff.

Please maintain confidentiality of all applications that you review.

After September 30, 2013, destroy and delete all application and review materials.

Thank you for serving as an IMLS Panel Reviewer!

Frequently Asked Questions

- 1. Should I consider new projects more competitive than resubmissions?**
No. All projects, whether new or resubmissions, should be considered on the basis of the current application. An institution's application history should not be a factor in your evaluation.
- 2. What should I do if I discover something missing in the application or if the applicant did not complete all parts of the application?**
Call your IMLS primary contact immediately. We may be able to send you the missing materials if they were submitted as part of the original application. **DO NOT** contact the applicant.
- 3. Should I consider need when evaluating an application?**
No. Need is not a review criterion.
- 4. To whom should the review comments be addressed?**
Please address all comments to the applicant. While IMLS staff and panelists read the comments, it is important to write the comments to the applicant so they may use them constructively.
- 5. What should I do if I find that I know someone mentioned in the application?**
Call or email your IMLS primary contact if you suspect a possible conflict of interest.
- 6. Must I make comments for each review criterion?**
Yes. You must make a constructive and substantive comment for each review criterion. This is the best way to help applicants improve all aspects of their applications.
- 7. Should my scoring take seemingly high indirect cost rates into account?**
No. Please do not allow these rates to bias your reviews or affect your scores.
- 8. Is one part of the narrative more important than another?**
No. All three sections of the narrative have equal weight and are equally important in identifying the overall strengths and weaknesses of an application.
- 9. Can a proposed project use its staff as its target audience?**
Yes. The staff is a reasonable target audience when a project is a behind-the-scenes or an infrastructure project that ultimately helps museum staff perform their jobs better.
- 10. Should the size or age of the institution be considered when evaluating an application?**
No, these are not review criteria. The applicant should be evaluated using the stated evaluation criteria outlined on the Panel Review Criteria sheet.