National Leadership Grants

FY2012 NLG Tier 1 Reviewer Handbook

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Welcome to The NLG Program Review Process

Thank you for offering to serve as a National Leadership Grant (NLG) Tier 1 reviewer. We have selected you to review this year's applications because of your professional expertise in one of the categories of funding for libraries and/or museums. We have prepared this handbook specifically for Tier 1 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 FY2012 National Leadership Grant Guidelines available at:

http://www.imls.gov/applicants/national_leadership_grant_guidelines.aspx

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

Purpose and Scope of the National Leadership Grant Program

National Leadership Grants support projects that address challenges faced by the museum, library, and/or archive fields and that have the potential to advance practice in those fields. Successful proposals will seek innovative responses to the challenge(s) identified in the proposals, and will have national impact.

The National Leadership Grant program accepts applications under four main categories:

- *Advancing Digital Resources*—Support the creation, use, presentation, and preservation of significant digital resources as well as the development of tools to enhance access, use, and management of digital assets.
- *Research*—Support research that investigates key questions that are important to museum, library, and archival practice.
- *Demonstration*—Support projects that produce a replicable model or practice that is usable, adaptable, or scalable by other institutions for improving services and performance.
- *Library Museum Collaboration Grants*— Support collaborative projects (between museums and/or libraries and other community organizations) that address the educational, economic, cultural, or social needs of a community. In 2012, a funding priority will be projects that promote early learning.

Applicants may choose to submit a Project Grant, Planning Grant, or National Forum Grant proposal in any of the above categories.

- *Project Grants* support fully developed projects for which needs assessments, partnership development, feasibility analyses, prototyping, and other planning activities have been completed.
- *Planning Grants* allow project teams to perform preliminary planning activities that could lead to a subsequent full project, such as needs and feasibility analyses, solidifying partnerships, developing project work plans, or developing prototypes or proofs of concept. Applications for Planning Grants must include at least one formal partner in addition to the lead applicant.
- *National Forum Grants* provide the opportunity to convene qualified groups of experts and key stakeholders to consider issues or challenges that are important to libraries, museums, and/or archives across the nation. Grant-supported meetings are expected to produce widely disseminated reports with expert recommendations for action or research that address a key challenge identified in the proposal. The expert recommendations resulting from these meetings are intended to guide future proposals to the National Leadership Grant program.

Application and Review Process

1. Applicants submit their applications using Grants.gov—the single point of entry for IMLS grant applications.

2. IMLS receives the applications and checks them for organizational eligibility and application completeness.

3. IMLS identifies a pool of available Tier 1 reviewers with appropriate expertise and assigns three reviewers to evaluate each application.

4. Tier 1 reviewers receive access to the applications, evaluate them, and complete their reviews online.

5. IMLS uses Tier 1 reviewers' comments and scores to rank the applications. IMLS may schedule conference calls with Tier 1 reviewers when scores for the same proposals diverge significantly and more conversation and an opportunity to revise scores/comments is warranted.

6. IMLS staff uses final scores to create a ranking and determine which applications are sent for Tier 2 panel review.

7. NLG Tier 2 review panels meet in Washington, DC, after the Tier 1 review period to provide a second level of review and make final funding recommendations. Tier 2 panelists rely on Tier 1 reviewers to point out specific technical strengths and weaknesses of each proposal. Tier 2 panelists review applications from a broad perspective, identifying applications that best meet IMLS and NLG program goals. They also provide insight into issues pertinent to this year's competition as well as provide recommendations on improving the grant program, its application, and its process.

8. IMLS staff members review the financial/accounting information and the budget sheets of each potential grantee.

9. IMLS staff members provide a list of applications recommended for funding to the IMLS Director for approval.

10. IMLS awards National Leadership Grants in September. IMLS notifies all applicants whether or not they have received an award. With their notification, all applicants receive anonymous copies of the Tier 1 and Tier 2 reviews. IMLS also sends notification of the awards to each participating reviewer.

How Your Reviews Are Used

Your Tier 1 scores determine the ranking of applications and are the basis for decisions about which proposals receive further consideration and which do not.

For those applications that go to Tier 2 review, your reviews focus attention on the strengths and weaknesses of each application. If a Tier 2 reviewed application is not funded, your comments may be used to assist the applicant in revising the application for future submission.

Applicants whose proposals are not ranked highly enough for Tier 2 review receive only your Tier 1 review comments.

Follow Up

After we announce awards for the NLG program in September, we invite you to call the NLG staff to schedule an appointment to discuss your reviews and provide feedback to us about your experience as a Tier 1 reviewer.

We greatly appreciate the tremendous amount of time and effort you commit to being a reviewer. By participating in the peer review process, you make a significant contribution to the NLG program and provide an invaluable service to the entire museum and library community. Thank you!

Application Review Instructions

Verify Access to Applications Online

You will use **two** online systems:

1. ApplicationsOnline: A file sharing system from which to download proposals you will review.
2. IMLS Online Review System: A system to enter your evaluative comments and scores for each proposal.

Conflict of Interest

Before we assigned proposals for you to read, we provided you a list of applicants and asked you to identify any conflicts of interest. Once you begin reviewing your assigned applications, if you discover any previously unidentified potential conflict, contact us immediately. Please see the Reviewer Conflict of Interest Statement included as **Appendix II** of this handbook. A conflict of interest would arise if you have a financial interest in whether or not the proposal is funded, or if for some reason, you feel that you cannot review it objectively.

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. Contact us if you have any questions concerning an application. Do not contact an applicant directly.

Read Applications

Your thorough reading and understanding of each application will be the key to providing both insightful comments and an overall rating for the application. In advance of doing so, reread the NLG guidelines at http://www.imls.gov/applicants/national_leadership_grant_guidelines.aspx. On the next pages is a quick reference sheet that you may wish to print and place in your workspace. It lists the types of information you should look for in each applicant's responses and should serve as guideposts for your review.

National Leadership Grants
FY2012 Tier 1 Review Criteria Quick Reference

1. ASSESSMENT OF NEED
• Evidence that the applicant has identified an audience, performed a formal or informal assessment of its needs, is aware of similar projects completed by other institutions, and has developed the project and its goals as the best solution to answer those needs • Evidence of innovation shown by the degree to which the project results in more than incremental change • Research proposals should frame the project in the context of current research and explain what the project will contribute to the library, museum, and/or archive fields. • Planning grant proposals should describe the field-wide need or challenge the planning grant is addressing but do not require full needs assessments and environmental scans since these types of activities can be part of planning activities.
2. IMPACT
• Degree to which the project is likely to have a far-reaching impact through results or products that serve multiple institutions and constituencies • Evidence that the project will create, implement, and document workable models that have the potential for successful, widespread adaptation where appropriate • Degree to which potential benefits of the project outweigh its potential risks • Degree to which evaluation plan ties directly to project goals through measurable project outcomes, findings, or products • Evidence that the project evaluation will provide reliable information on which to judge impact or base actions • For projects that involve building digital collections, software, or other technology products, in addition to the above criteria, evidence that the project demonstrates interoperability and accessibility in its broadest context and potential for integration into larger-scale initiatives • For research projects, evidence that the results will be generalizable and useful to the library, museum, and /or archive communities • For planning grant proposals, evidence that the planning outcomes, findings, or products are identified, will be measured, and can be used to inform the development of a full project
3. PROJECT DESIGN
• Evidence that the project proposes efficient, effective, and reasonable approaches to accomplish its goals and objectives • Evidence that methodology and design are appropriate to the scope of the project • Evidence that the project uses existing or emerging standards or best practices • If products such as digital collections or software tools will be generated by the project, evidence that applicant has considered key technical details and has included the form *Specifications for Projects That Develop Digital Products* with relevant portions of Parts I and II completed

4. PROJECT RESOURCES: PERSONNEL, TIME, BUDGET
• Clear description of how the applicant will effectively complete the project activities through the deployment and management of resources including money, facilities, equipment, and supplies • Cost-efficient, complete, and accurate budget that uses appropriate resources to fulfill any cost-sharing requirement • Evidence that project personnel demonstrate appropriate experience and expertise and will commit adequate time to accomplish project goals and activities • If the project includes a partnership, evidence that all partners are active contributors to and beneficiaries of the partnership activities • For museums, if a budget surplus or deficit for one or both of the two previous fiscal years in shown on the Program Information Sheet, include an explanation as part of this section of the narrative
5. COMMUNICATIONS PLAN [Not required for planning grants]
• Extent to which the results, products, models, data sets, processes, and benefits of this project will be made accessible through effective communication channels to the museum, library, and/or archive fields, and to other professional organizations and communities, as appropriate • Extent to which research findings will be made available to the public
6. **SUSTAINABILITY [Not required for Planning Grants, National Forum Grants, or proposals in the Research Category]**
• Extent to which the project's benefits will continue beyond the grant period, either through ongoing institutional support of project activities or products, Web sites, and development of institutional expertise and capacity, or through broad long-term access to project products • Extent to which the project will lead to systemic change within the organization as well as within the museum, archive, and/or library fields • For projects that produce digitized collections, software, information systems, and other technology tools, in addition to the above criteria, the extent that project plans address activities to preserve and sustain the resulting digital products

Evaluate Applications

Read your applications again and take notes as you read. Draft comments for each of the six narrative responses. We strongly recommend that you draft your comments using Microsoft Word, and then cut and paste them into the Online Reviewer System form (see Appendix III).

- 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 IMLS to discuss it. Do not question the applicant's honesty or integrity in your written comments.
- Do not contact the museum.
- Consider whether the applicant has the resources to successfully complete the project.
- Analyze the narrative section of the application in your comments. Summarizing or paraphrasing the applicant's own words will not help the applicant.

Characteristics of Constructive and Effective Comments:

- They are presented in a constructive manner.
- They are concise, specific, and easy to read and understand.
- They acknowledge the resources of the institution.
- They are specific to the individual applicant.
- They correlate with the score given.
- They reflect the application's strengths and identify areas for improvement.
- They are directed to applicants for their use.

Characteristics of Poor Comments:

- Make derogatory remarks. (Offer suggestions for improvement rather than harsh criticism.)
- Penalize an applicant because you feel the institution does not need the money. (Any eligible institution may receive funds, regardless of need.)
- Penalize an applicant because of missing materials. (If you believe an application is missing required materials, please contact a NLG staff member immediately.)
- Question an applicant's honesty or integrity. (You may question the accuracy of information provided by the applicant, but if you are unsure how to frame your question, contact IMLS.)
- Offer or ask for irrelevant or extraneous information. (Your comments should concern only the information IMLS requests of applicants

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

Assign Scores

After you have read, evaluated and provided written comments, please provide a single numeric score for the application that reflects your opinion of the proposal's overall quality and your recommendation of whether it should be funded this year.

- Use only whole numbers.
- Do not use fractions, decimals, zeroes, or more than one number.

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.

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

Review your draft comments and preliminary scores. A review with even one missing score or comment cannot be accepted by the Online Reviewer System. Adjust your scores, if necessary, to more accurately reflect your written evaluation. Scores should support comments, and comments should justify scores.

Follow-up Conference Calls

In some cases, NLG staff may contact you in the weeks following the deadline to schedule a conference call with other reviewers. If scores for the same application are divergent, a conversation among those who reviewed the applications provides the opportunity to compare notes, hear others' opinions, and express specific concerns about or praise for a project. Reviewers will not be required to come to consensus, but will be able to change their scores and comments if they wish. These discussions are very valuable as staff try to determine which proposals should move to the next level of review.

Thank you for serving as a NLG Reviewer!

Note: Appendices I, II, and III have been removed from this sample handbook.