



Museum Grants for African American History and Culture

FY2012 AAHC Tier 1 Reviewer Handbook

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**Welcome
to
The AAHC
Program
Review
Process**

Thank you for offering to serve as a Museum Grants for African American History and Culture (AAHC) Tier 1 reviewer. We have selected you to review this year's applications because of your professional expertise in museum operations, programs, and activities. 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 Museum Grants for African American History and Culture Guidelines available at:

http://www.ims.gov/applicants/african_american_history_and_culture_guidelines.aspx

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

Museum Grants for African American History and Culture (AAHC) is an annual, federal grant program that awards applicants up to \$150,000 to help support projects and ongoing activities that build museums' capacity to serve their communities. .

IMLS has awarded 66 AAHC grants since the program's inception in 2006.

Purpose and Scope of the Museum Grants for African American History and Culture Program

Museum Grants for African American History and Culture are intended to build professional capacity in the African American museum community. They provide opportunities for African American museums to design projects that will enhance institutional capacity and sustainability by utilizing professional training, technical assistance, internships, outside expertise, and other tools.

For FY2012, proposals for funding through the AAHC program should focus on one or more of the following three goals:

- Developing or strengthening knowledge, skills and other expertise of current staff at African American museums;
- Attracting and retaining professionals with the skills needed to strengthen African American museums; and/or
- Attracting new staff to African American museum practice and providing them with the expertise needed to sustain them in the museum field.

Funds will support a wide range of activities that support these goals, including:

- staff exchange, mentoring, education or training, or other strategies that increase the skills needed to improve African American museum services;
- attendance at conferences and other professional meetings;
- enrollment in courses or workshops;
- technical assistance or consultation with museum or business professionals from outside the institution; and
- organizational support for the development and implementation of internship and fellowship programs. (Awards are not made to individuals.)

Use of Funds

Eligible Activities

Allowable expenses for AAHC grants may include:

- staffing;
- staff training;
- internship stipends and support activities;
- project personnel, contract, or in-house staff time necessary for the proper and efficient execution of the project;
- project consultants and their travel;
- costs related to planning and maintenance of project partnerships;
- purchase of equipment, materials, supplies, or services;
- integration of technology into museum operations;
- costs associated with evaluation of grant programs or activities;
- publication;
- indirect or overhead costs.

All proposed expenses must be justified in the application budget.

Ineligible Activities

Unallowable expenses for AAHC grants may include:

- general museum fundraising costs, such as development office expenditures or other staff time devoted to general fundraising;
- contributions to endowments;
- general advertising or public relations costs designed solely to promote the organization and not a specific project;
- social activities, ceremonies, receptions, or entertainment;
- acquisition of collections;
- collection conservation activities including installation of HVAC systems, treatment of objects/specimens, or collections surveys;
- construction and renovation of museum facilities. (Generally any activity involving contract labor in the construction trades is not an allowable cost.);
- exhibit fabrication that includes creation of large-scale permanent structures for animals or objects that would involve contract labor of the construction trades; pre-grant costs

**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. This ranking is used to determine which applications are sent for Tier 2 panel review.
6. AAHC 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 represent a cross-section of museum disciplines, budget sizes, geographic regions, and governing authorities. Tier 2 panelists are not asked to do detailed technical reviews. Rather, they and IMLS staff are relying 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 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.
7. IMLS staff members review the financial/accounting information and the budget sheets of each potential grantee.
8. IMLS staff members provide a list of applications recommended for funding to the IMLS Director for approval.
9. IMLS awards Museum Grants for African American History and Culture grants in late July. 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.

Your Tier 1 scores determine the ranking of applications and are the basis upon which IMLS decides which go to Tier 2 panel review for further consideration and which do not.

**How Your
Reviews
Are Used**

For those applications that go to Tier 2 panel review, your reviews will help focus attention on the strengths and weaknesses of each application. If a Tier 2 panel-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 panel review receive only your Tier 1 review comments.

Successful applicants point to good scores and positive comments as a stamp of approval for their project proposals. Museum administrators report that receiving IMLS awards enhances fundraising success with private foundations as well as state and local sources. Unsuccessful applicants often use reviewer comments to improve or revise their applications for resubmission.

Follow Up

After we announce awards for the AAHC program in July, we invite you to call the IMLS Office of Museum Services 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 Museum Grants for African American History and Culture grant program and provide an invaluable service to the entire museum community. Thank you!

Application Review Instructions

- First Steps** This section of the handbook contains detailed information on how to review a Museum Grants for African American History and Culture program application. If you encounter any problems while undertaking your Tier 1 reviews, contact an IMLS staff person:
- | | |
|---|--|
| Mark Isaksen
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|---|--|
- Verify Access to Applications Online** You will need to use **two** online systems—one to download applications and another to upload and submit your review comments and scores. Detailed instructions for downloading applications are included as **Appendix I** of this handbook for easy reference.
- Conflict of Interest** Read through your list of applications to see if there are any potential conflicts of interest. 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. Contact IMLS immediately if you have a conflict, or what may appear to be a conflict.
- 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** Read your applications to develop a feel for the range of responses. In advance of doing so, reread the AAHC guidelines at http://www.imls.gov/applicants/african_american_history_and_culture_guidelines.aspx
On the next page is a quick reference sheet that you may wish to print and place in your workspace where you can easily refer to it throughout the review process. It lists the types of information you should look for in each applicant’s responses and should serve as guideposts for your review.

Museum Grants for African American History and Culture FY2012 Tier 1 Review Criteria Quick Reference

1. STATEMENT OF NEED
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evidence that the applicant is familiar with the community it serves and has performed a formal or informal assessment of museum and/or community needs • Evidence that the project is designed to improve staff expertise in a manner that will enhance institutional capacity and sustainability
2. IMPACT
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evidence that the project will create specific changes and benefits for the museum professionals involved in the project, the organization itself, and/or the community served • Evidence that the applicant has plans to sustain those changes and benefits beyond the grant period • Evidence of specific outcomes that will be used to evaluate the impact and success of the project
3. PROJECT DESIGN
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evidence that the project proposes efficient, effective, and reasonable approaches to accomplish clear goals and objectives • Evidence that the methodology and design are appropriate to the scope of the project • Evidence that the project will meet IMLS program goals • If the project includes digitization, evidence that appropriate procedures will be followed
4. PROJECT RESOURCES: PERSONNEL, TIME, BUDGET
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The timeline for specific activities to implement the project and its justification • Identification of key project staff, their duties, and their qualifications for successfully completing their project tasks • The amount of time that key project staff will devote to the project and how they will balance project responsibilities with other ongoing duties • Qualifications of personnel assigned to manage project finances • Identification of consultants and service providers involved in project activities, the process for selecting them, and how they will work with project staff • Source(s) of matching funds and/or in-kind contributions; • Contributions to and benefits from the project for both the applicant and the partner organization(s), if applicable

Evaluate Applications

Read your applications again and take notes as you read. Draft comments for each of the four 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.

- 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.
- Consider a project's strengths *and* weaknesses. Acknowledge and compliment strengths, and offer practical suggestions for improving weaknesses.
- Analyze the narrative section of the application in your comments. Summarizing or paraphrasing the applicant's own words will not help the applicant.
- Make your comments specific to the individual applicant. Vague, general statements are not helpful.
- Make your comments easy to read and understand.

Remember that IMLS staff members use your comments to help applicants improve their future applications.

Qualities of a Good Proposal

Every good AAHC proposal should:

- Strengthen the capacity for education and public service
- Advance the institution's strategic plan
- Be an investment for the future; even if one-time activities are included, they must have long term institutional impact

Assign Scores

Assign a preliminary score to each narrative section. Use a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 = lowest and 5 = highest.

- 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.

Type Size and Format

The application does not provide a form for the narrative part of the application. Applicants may divide the space for narrative responses as they wish, as long as they address all questions in number order as indicated in the application guidelines and the narrative response does not exceed seven pages.

If you see a problem ...

- Contact IMLS Staff: Twinet Kimbrough at 202/653-4703 or Mark Isaksen at 202/653-4667.
- Review the application, and DO NOT lower an applicant’s score because of reduced type or reformatting.
- DO NOT note the problem on your review sheet itself, but rather as a separate note for IMLS only.

We will assign penalties as necessary.

Review Your Work

Review your draft comments and preliminary scores. When you are finished, proofread your reviews. 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.

For each application, you must complete an online review that includes:

- written comments about each of the four narrative sections;
- a corresponding score from 1-5 for each of the four narrative sections; and
- additional comments, if desired. (This section is optional and is not scored.)

The Online Reviewer System

All Tier 1 reviewers will use the IMLS Online Reviewer System to submit comments and scores for each application. *IMPORTANT*: This system is different from the one you used to download the applications. Instructions and tips for using the Online Reviewer System are in **Appendix III** of this handbook (How to Use the IMLS Online Reviewer System).

For all questions about reviewing, either technical or programmatic, please contact the AAHC team directly. Please do not use the hotlink on the Online Reviewer page, as your question may not receive an immediate response.

Once you have completed assigning scores 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 the submit box to send the entire review to IMLS.

Reminders

The Online Reviewer System is a wonderful tool; however, there are a few points regarding its use of which you should be aware:

- When accessing this system, use only the e-mail address we have on file for you.
- 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 an AAHC staff member, 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.
- Complete your online reviews by **March 30, 2012**.

Creating Constructive and Effective Comments

As you formulate your comments, keep in mind the following characteristics of good and helpful remarks:

- 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.

Remember, both successful and unsuccessful applicants use your comments to improve their institutions and future applications. Each of the following examples is annotated with an explanation of why it is a good comment.

Statement of Need:

“The Museum has done a superior job of developing a strategic plan with input from many stakeholders- college faculty, students, administrators, staff, alumni, and the community. The focus group summary was a good example of the outreach included in the planning process. With respect to digitization, the statement of need is spelled out with clarity. The ability to use more of the Museum's collections yearly by making it possible for the potential users to view digital images as an aid in the selection of artwork is compelling. The desire to integrate the Museum's collections in courses across the curriculum is impressive, and the application clearly explains why faculty outside the arts, in particular, needs digital images to choose items from the collection.” (Provides clear, specific information)

“It is particularly compelling that the Museum sees the completion of its digital database as the catalyst for allowing more students and other audiences to experience the original objects, rather than as a substitute for that experience.”(Provides specific information)

“This project goes hand-in-hand with the museum’s strategic plan and mission statement. This project will directly go to improving the membership base and provide a better access to the community.” (Provides a good explanation of how this project fits into the strategic plan)

Project Design:

“The Museum has an excellent grasp of the requirements of this project. The fact that it has already added digital images for 37% of its collection gives the institution needed experience in assessing the requirements for the completion of the project. The Museum has apparently taken advantage of the experience of peer institution and other advisors in designing the project. The project design has built in quality control checks at various levels to anticipate and correct problems. It makes sense to use this project to achieve the stated secondary goals - of correcting cataloging data, as necessary, and to flag condition concerns.” (Provides specific information.)

Project Resources: Time, Personnel, and Budget:

“The budget is realistic for the numbers of participants, and for the

compensation of consultants and the number of hours for the assistance for this project.” (Provides specific information)

Impact:

“The evaluation plan includes both on-going evaluations of project implementation and of project outcomes for the participants. It would have been good to have a bit more information about the criteria that will be used to pre- and post-test workshop participants in order to evaluate the effectiveness of project activities.” (Provides specific information and a constructive comment)

Avoiding Poor Comments

Vague, derogatory, or extraneous remarks are not helpful to Tier 2 panelists or to applicants. These comments actually hinder the evaluation process rather than help it.

To avoid making poor comments, DO NOT:

- 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 AAHC 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.)

Each of the following examples is annotated with an explanation of why it is a poor comment.

Statement of Need:

“This project fits into the overall ‘big picture’ for the art museum and the university as a whole.” (Vague, not evaluative)

Impact: *“The benefits stated are better can and monitoring of the collection, which is adequate.”* (Vague, insensitive, difficult to understand)

Project Design:

“Efficient breakdown of categories for the individual parts of the project.” (Vague, irrelevant, not evaluative)

Project Resources: Time, Personnel, Budget:

“I might question some parts of the budget, but they probably know what they are doing.” (Vague, not evaluative, and irrelevant)

“The project budget is reasonable for this kind of project.” (Vague, not evaluative)

“The personnel are clearly experienced and qualified.” (Vague, not evaluative)

Overview (optional)

“This is worthy of funding; however, I would ask the project contact person for some additional details if appropriate.” (Vague, wrong audience)

Your Reviewer Materials

Deadline	The deadline to submit IMLS Tier 1 reviews via the Online Reviewer System is March 30, 2012 .
Returning Materials to IMLS	<p>You must print, complete, scan, and e-mail the Peer Reviewer Services Agreement and the Direct Deposit Sign-Up form to Mark Isaksen at misaksen@imls.gov. Honoraria are paid electronically, and the Direct Deposit Sign-Up form must be completed in its entirety, even if a similar form was submitted in a prior year with the identical banking information.</p> <p>Should you decide to use a private carrier rather than e-mail for sending in your Peer Reviewer Services Agreement and Direct Deposit Sign-Up form, please send both to:</p> <p style="text-align: center;">IMLS Attention: Museum Grants for African American History and Culture Office of Museum Services 1800 M Street NW, 9th Floor Washington DC 20036-5802</p>
Managing Copies	<p>Keep your applications and a copy of your review sheets – electronic or hard copy – until August 31, 2012, in case there are questions from IMLS staff.</p> <p>Please maintain confidentiality of all applications that you review.</p> <p>After August 31, 2012, destroy your copy of the review sheets.</p>

Thank you for serving as a AAHC Tier 1 Reviewer!

Frequently Asked Questions

1. How should I assign scores?

Assign scores for each of the four narrative questions, using a scale of 1–5 discussed under “Score Definitions”).

2. 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 proposal. An institution’s application history should not be a factor in your evaluation.

3. What should I do if I discover something missing in the application or if the applicant did not complete all parts of the application?

Immediately, call Twinet G. Kimbrough at (202) 653-4703 or Mark Isaksen at (202) 653-4667. 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.

4. Should I consider need when evaluating an application?

No. Need is not a review criterion. The application should be evaluated based on, among other things, whether or not it makes a convincing case that the project is one of their institution’s highest conservation priorities as documented in their narrative and supporting documentation.

5. To whom should the review comments be addressed?

Please address all comments to the applicant. While the IMLS Tier 2 panelists read the comments, it is important to write the comments to the applicant so they may use them constructively.

6. What should I do if I find that I know someone mentioned in the application?

Contact Twinet G. Kimbrough at tkimbrough@imls.gov (202) 653-4703 or Mark Isaksen at misaksen@imls.gov (202) 653-4667 immediately and discuss the possibility of a conflict of interest. Not all cases are conflicts, but please call us to discuss your situation.

7. Must I make comments for every question?

Yes, you must make a constructive and substantive comment for every question. This is the best way to help applicants improve all aspects of their applications.

8. What are indirect cost rates, and why do some institutions have such a high rate?

Indirect cost rates are negotiated rates at which institutions may charge overhead expenses when carrying out a project. Some institutions, such as universities, may seem to have high rates because of the infrastructure involved in carrying out a project within that institution. Also, an institution may have a high rate if they are in a very isolated geographic area, making it more expensive to carry on daily activities. Please do not allow these rates to bias your reviews.

9. Is there any type of project that carries more weight than another?

No. All types of projects have equal weight. Each score is important in determining the

overall strengths and weaknesses of a proposal.

10. What happens to my reviews once they are submitted?

We take the average of all three Tier 1 reviewer scores and rank the applications from highest to lowest. We then forward the most highly ranked applications to Tier 2 panel review for further consideration.

11. 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 serve their public better.

12. 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 Museum Grants for African American History and Culture Evaluation Criteria Sheet.

13. How do I consider a proposal from an institution that has a different discipline than my own?

You are evaluating the proposals based on their merit in your area of museum operations, whether it is administration, education, community outreach, or curatorial. Please evaluate the application based on the soundness of the project ideas, and its ties to the IMLS evaluation criteria and the institution's strategic plan.

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