



## Sparks Ignition Grants - Museums

# FY2013 Sparks Panel Reviewer Handbook

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## Welcome to the Sparks-Museums Program Review Process

Thank you for offering to serve as a Sparks panel reviewer. We have selected you to review this year's applications because of your professional expertise in museums. We have prepared this handbook 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 Sparks! Ignition Grants for Libraries and Museums guidelines available at:

[http://www.ims.gov/applicants/2013\\_sparks\\_ignition\\_grants\\_guidelines.aspx](http://www.ims.gov/applicants/2013_sparks_ignition_grants_guidelines.aspx)

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

## Purpose and Scope of the Sparks! Ignition Grant program

Sparks! Ignition Grants for Libraries and Museums ("Sparks Grants") are a special funding opportunity within the IMLS National Leadership Grants program. These small grants encourage libraries, museums, and archives to test and evaluate specific innovations in the ways they operate and the services they provide. Sparks Grants support the rapid prototyping and evaluation of promising and groundbreaking new tools, products, services, or organizational practices. Applicants may propose activities or approaches that involve risk, as long as the risk is balanced by significant potential for improvement in the ways libraries and museums serve their communities. Sparks grantees are required to submit a short white paper with the results of their work to be publicly posted and shared with the field.

To maximize the public benefit from federal investments in these grants, the Sparks grants will fund only projects with the following characteristics:

- **Broad Impact:** Proposals should address key needs and challenges that face museums, libraries, or archives. Projects should show the potential to broadly impact practice throughout the museum, library or archive profession; and reflect awareness and support of current strategic initiatives and agendas in the field. Proposed innovations should be widely adoptable or adaptable.
- **Significant Innovation:** Proposals should demonstrate a thorough understanding of current practice and knowledge about the subject matter, and show how the project has

the potential to strengthen and improve services to benefit the audiences and communities being served.

## **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 reviewers with appropriate expertise and assign three reviewers to evaluate each application.
4. Reviewers receive online access to the applications, evaluate them, and complete their reviews online.
5. IMLS uses reviewers' comments and scores to rank the applications.
6. IMLS staff members review the budgets and past performance of the highest ranked applications.
7. IMLS staff members provide a list of applications recommended for funding to the IMLS Director.
8. IMLS awards Sparks grants in July. IMLS notifies all applicants whether or not they have received an award. With their notification, all applicants receive anonymous copies of the panel reviews. IMLS also sends notification of the awards to each participating reviewer.

## **How Your Reviews Are Used**

Your scores determine the ranking of applications and are the basis for decisions about which proposals are recommended for funding and which are not.

For applications that are not funded, your comments may be used to revise proposals for future submission.

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

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 Sparks program and provide an invaluable service to the entire museum community. Thank you!

## Application Review Instructions

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### 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 scores for each application you review. Use the following link to verify that you have access to the IMLS Online Reviewer System:

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

To login, enter the email address you have on file with IMLS, and use the default password: **password**. An **E-Review Security Screen** will appear. Read this page and click **OK**.

Next, create a user account and establish your own password.

2

### 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 the box in the “Conflicts” column.)

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

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### Verify Access to Applications Online

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.ims.gov>

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

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.



## Read Applications

Revisit the Sparks guidelines at

[http://www.ims.gov/applicants/2013\\_sparks\\_ignition\\_grants\\_guidelines.aspx](http://www.ims.gov/applicants/2013_sparks_ignition_grants_guidelines.aspx). Then read the applications, keeping in mind that your thorough review of each will be the key to providing both insightful comments and ratings. On the next page is a quick reference sheet that lists the review criteria and should serve as a guidepost for your review.

**Sparks! Ignition Grants for Libraries and Museums**  
**FY2013 Review Criteria Quick Reference**

<b>1. PROJECT JUSTIFICATION</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Is the project clearly explained?</li><li>• Is the need, problem, or challenge clearly identified and supported by relevant evidence?</li><li>• Are the people who will benefit from the project clearly identified and have they been involved in project planning?</li><li>• Are the intended results well formulated and achievable?</li><li>• Does the project address current needs of the museum, library, or archive field and/or have the potential to advance practice in the museum, library, or archive profession?</li><li>• Does the project meet the Sparks Grants requirement of demonstrating broad impact and significant innovation?</li></ul>
<b>2. PROJECT WORK PLAN</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Are the proposed activities, technology and/or methodologies informed by appropriate theory and practice?</li><li>• Are the technical details including all information required in the IMLS <a href="#">Specifications for Projects that Develop Digital Products</a> form provided for projects generating digital products?</li><li>• Do the identified staff, partners, consultants, and service providers possess the experience and skills necessary to complete the work successfully?</li><li>• Is the schedule of work realistic and achievable?</li><li>• Are the time, personnel, and financial resources identified appropriate for the scope and scale of the project?</li><li>• Does the institution provide evidence of its capacity to carry out the project activities?</li><li>• Is a clear methodology described for tracking the project's progress and adjusting course when necessary?</li><li>• Is there an effective plan for communicating results and/or sharing discoveries?</li></ul>
<b>3. PROJECT RESULTS</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Are the project's intended results clearly articulated?</li><li>• Are the <a href="#">measures of success</a> in achieving results appropriate for the project?</li><li>• Will the proposed project generate results such as models, tools, services, practices, and lessons learned that can be broadly used, adapted, scaled or replicated in the museum, library, or archive profession?</li></ul>

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## Draft Comments

Draft comments for each of the three narrative sections. We strongly recommend that you draft your comments using a word-processing program for later copying and pasting them into the IMLS Online Reviewer System (see **Appendix III**).

When considering 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. Do not question the applicant's honesty or integrity in your written comments.
- Do not contact the applicants.

### 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

- They make derogatory remarks. (Offer suggestions for improvement rather than harsh criticism.)
- They penalize an applicant because you feel the institution does not need the money. (Any eligible institution may receive funds, regardless of need.)
- They penalize an applicant because of missing materials. (If you believe an application is missing required materials, please contact your IMLS primary contact immediately.)
- They offer or ask for irrelevant or extraneous information. (Your comments should concern only the information IMLS requests of applicants.)
- They simply summarize or paraphrase the applicant's own words.

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

# 6

## Assign Scores

After entering and saving comments in the IMLS Online Reviewer System for each application's three review criteria, assign a single numeric score that reflects your overall opinion of the proposal under "Application Overview." Use a scale of 1 to 5, as described below. Use only whole numbers; do not use fractions, decimals, zeroes, or more than one number.

<b>SCORE DEFINITIONS</b>	
<b>5 – Excellent</b>	The applicant’s response is outstanding and provides exceptional support for the proposed project.
<b>4 – Very Good</b>	The applicant’s response provides solid support for the proposed project.
<b>3 – Good</b>	The applicant’s response is adequate but could be strengthened in its support for the proposed project.
<b>2 – Some Merit</b>	The applicant’s response is flawed and does not adequately support the proposed project.
<b>1 – Inadequate / Insufficient</b>	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.



### **Evaluate Innovation and Impact**

After you have finished providing evaluative comments and a numeric score (the same score entered into each of the three narrative sections of the Online Reviewer form), proceed to the last section, called “Application Overview.” In this section, please enter a Yes/No response for the two main characteristics Sparks grants seek to fund – Broad Potential Impact and Significant Innovation. Do not enter additional comments in this section, only the following text:

**Broad Potential Impact: Yes or No**  
**Significant Innovation: Yes or No**



### **Review Your Work**

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

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

### **Tips**

There are a few points regarding the use of the Online Reviewer System of which you should be aware:

- When accessing this system, use only the email 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 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.

**Deadline:** The deadline to submit Sparks reviews is **April 19, 2013.**



### **Prepare for Panel Meeting (April 23-24)**

At the panel meeting we will provide you with laptops loaded with all Sparks applications. You will also have access to the Online Reviewer System.

During panel we present and discuss each proposal. You will serve as a “lead” reader for some of your assigned applications. When those proposals are discussed, you will start the discussion by giving a brief synopsis of the project (no more than three minutes), and then move on to your evaluative comments. After your synopsis and review, the other assigned readers will explain their ratings and evaluation of each application. When all three readers have explained their ratings, other panelists will have the opportunity to join the discussion. You will be given the opportunity to edit your comments and scores in the Online Reviewer System when the discussion is over.

At some point during the panel, we will pause for an issues discussion. This is an opportunity to provide feedback on the grant review process and guidelines. We also hope to hear whether you think the Sparks Grant program and these proposals are collectively meeting the needs of the field.

We look forward to seeing you here in Washington, DC on April 23rd.

**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 the applications and review sheets.

**Thank you for serving as a Sparks 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?**

Contact your IMLS primary contact immediately and discuss the possibility of a conflict of interest. Not all cases are conflicts, but please call us to discuss your situation.
- 6. 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.
- 7. Why do some institutions have such high indirect cost rates, and should my scoring take this into account?**

Some institutions, such as universities, may seem to have high indirect cost 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 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 serve their public 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 Quick Reference Sheet.

## **Appendix I**

### **Complying with Ethical Obligations and Avoiding Conflicts of Interest**

As a reviewer for IMLS, you perform a vital role in ensuring the integrity of the IMLS's peer review process and must carry out your duties in accordance with government ethics rules. Before you evaluate applications, we ask that you review the following *General Principles of Ethical Conduct* and *Summary of the Conflict of Interest Laws*. You will be asked to certify compliance with the IMLS Reviewer Conflict of Interest Statement and Certification. IMLS allocates up to one hour of your reviewer time for you to consider these materials.

If, at any time in the course of performing your duties at IMLS, you believe you may have a conflict of interest, please contact the IMLS program officer coordinating your review process. Other questions about the ethics rules and responsibilities may be directed to IMLS's Designated Agency Ethics Official, Nancy E. Weiss, General Counsel, who can be reached at [ethics@imls.gov](mailto:ethics@imls.gov); (202) 653-4787; or 1800 M Street, NW, 9<sup>th</sup> Floor, Washington, DC 20036.

#### **General Principles of Ethical Conduct**

1. Public service is a public trust, requiring you to place loyalty to the Constitution, the laws, and ethical principles above private gain.
2. You shall not hold financial interests that conflict with the conscientious performance of duty.
3. You shall not engage in financial transactions using nonpublic Government information or allow the improper use of such information to further any private interest.
4. You shall not, except pursuant to such reasonable exceptions as are provided by regulation, solicit or accept any gift or other item of monetary value from any person or entity seeking official action from, doing business with, or conducting activities regulated by IMLS, or whose interests may be substantially affected by the performance or nonperformance of the your duties.
5. You shall put forth honest effort in the performance of your duties.
6. You shall make no unauthorized commitments or promises of any kind purporting to bind the Government.
7. You shall not use public office for private gain.
8. You shall act impartially and not give preferential treatment to any private organization or individual.
9. You shall protect and conserve Federal property and shall not use it for other than authorized activities.
10. You shall not engage in outside employment or activities, including seeking or negotiating for employment, that conflict with official Government duties and responsibilities.
11. You shall disclose waste, fraud, abuse, and corruption to appropriate authorities.
12. You shall satisfy in good faith your obligations as citizens, including all just financial obligations, especially those -- such as Federal, State, or local taxes -- that are imposed by law.

13. You shall adhere to all laws and regulations that provide equal opportunity for all Americans regardless of race, color, religion, sex, national origin, age, or handicap.
  14. You shall endeavor to avoid any actions creating the appearance that you are violating the law or the ethical standards.
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### **Summary of Conflict of Interest Laws**

**18 U.S.C. § 201** – Prohibits you from acceptance of bribes or gratuities to influence Government actions.

**18 U.S.C. § 203** – Prohibits you from accepting compensation for representational activities involving certain matters in which the United States is a party or has a direct and substantial interest.

**18 U.S.C. § 205** – Prohibits you from certain involvement in claims against the United States or representing another before the Government in matters in which the United States is a party or has a direct and substantial interest.

**18 U.S.C. § 207** – Imposes certain restrictions on you related to your activities after Government service.

**18 U.S.C. § 208** – Prohibits you from participating in certain Government matters affecting your own financial interests or the interests of your spouse, minor child, general partner, or organization in which you are serving as an officer, director, trustee, general partner, or employee.

**18 U.S.C. § 209** – Prohibits you from being paid by someone other than the United States for doing their official Government duties.

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### **Reviewer Conflict of Interest Statement**

As a reviewer or panelist for the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS), you may receive a grant application for review that could present a conflict of interest. Such a conflict could arise if you are involved with the applicant institution, or in the project described in the application, as a paid consultant or through other financial involvement. The same restrictions apply if your spouse or minor child is involved with the applicant institution or if the application is presented on behalf of an institution with which you, your spouse or minor child is negotiating for future employment.

A present financial interest is not the only basis for conflict of interest. Through prior association as an employee or officer, you may have gained knowledge of the applicant that would preclude objective review of its application. Past employment (generally more than five years) does not by itself disqualify a reviewer so long as the circumstances of your association permit you to perform an objective review of the application. If you believe you may have a conflict of interest with any application assigned to you for review, please notify us immediately.

You may still serve as a reviewer even if your institution is an applicant in this grant cycle or you were involved in an application submitted in this grant cycle, as long as you do not review any application submitted by your own institution or any application in which you were involved.

However, if you believe that these or any other existing circumstances may compromise your objectivity as a reviewer, please notify us immediately.

If an application presents no conflict of interest at the time you review it, a conflict of interest may still develop later on. Once you have reviewed an application, you should never represent the applicant in dealings with IMLS or another Federal agency concerning the application, or any grant that may result from it.

It is not appropriate, for your purposes or for the purposes of the institutions or organizations you represent, for you to make specific use of confidential information derived from individual applications that you read while you were serving as an IMLS reviewer. In addition, pending applications are confidential. Accordingly, you must obtain approval from IMLS before sharing any proposal information with anyone, whether for the purpose of obtaining expert advice on technical aspects of an application or for any reason.

If you have any questions regarding conflict of interest, either in relation to a specific application or in general, please contact the IMLS program officer who is coordinating the review process.

**Certification (submitted online)**

I acknowledge that I have reviewed the ethics training materials included in the Reviewer Handbook and the Conflict of Interest Statement above. To the best of my knowledge, I have no conflict of interest that would preclude my service to the Institute of Museum and Library Services.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name (Printed)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## Appendix II

### How to Locate Your Applications Online Using the IMLS Applications Online System to Download Applications for Review

These instructions will help you locate the PDF documents for each of the applications assigned to you. Be sure to download all the applications to your own workstation so that you can perform your work.

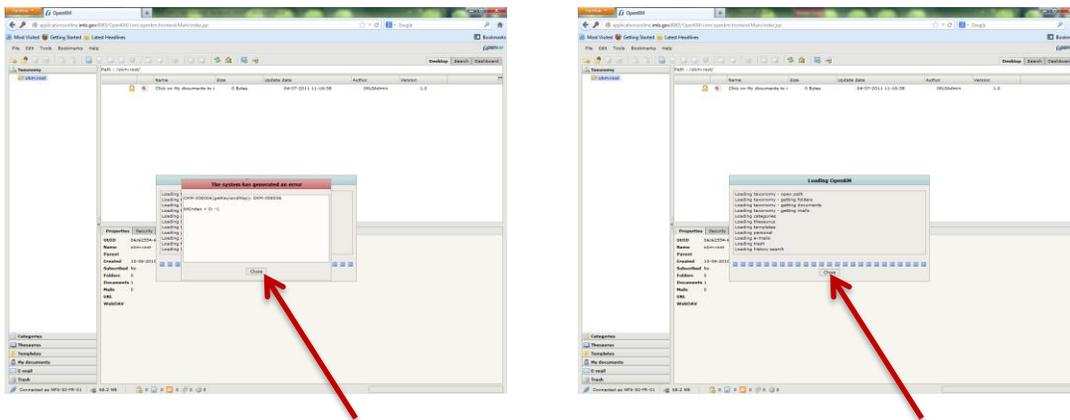
#### Accessing the Applications Online System

To begin, go to <http://applicationsonline.ims.gov> where you will see the login screen as below:

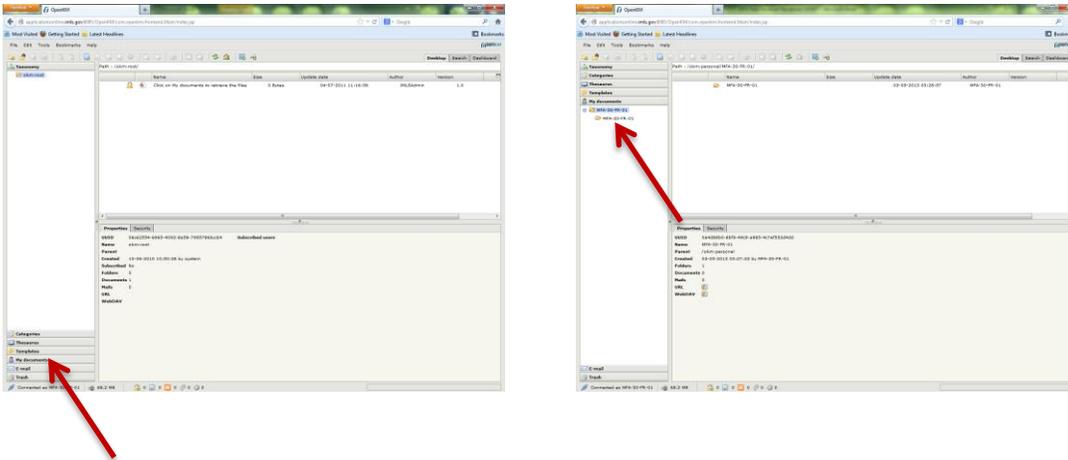


Enter the **User** and **Password** information provided to you in the same email message in which you received this handbook.

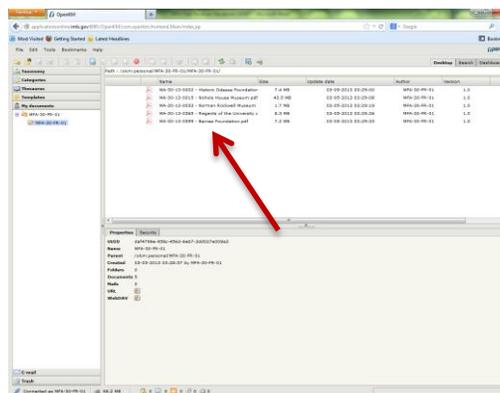
Depending on your computer system, you may need to click **Close** on two (or more) error messages.



On the left side of the next screen, click on the section tab labeled **My documents** to generate a list of files available for download. Then click on the folder below it.



Here you will find all the applications for your review. By double-clicking on each one, you can open and save each document to your computer.



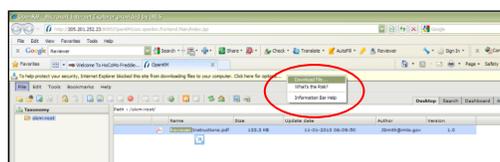
Some institutions use firewalls as a way to protect their computer systems. If you have difficulty accessing your applications, you might wish to check with your Information Technology (IT) staff to see if a firewall might be the problem. They will help you work through it.

You may get an Internet Explorer warning message like the following:



If you receive the warning message that Internet Explorer is blocking the download, then

- right-click on the yellow message bar for options and
- click on “Download File” as follows:

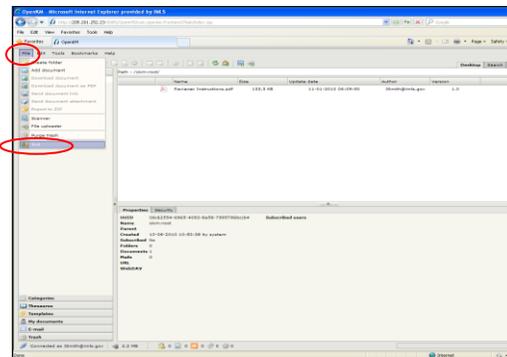


The **File Download** dialog box should open. Click on **Save**, and the save window will open.



Save the document in a convenient place so that you can refer to it when you wish. Return to **My documents** to open and save the remaining files to your computer.

Once you have finished saving all the files, click on **File**, and then click **Exit**.



Click on **Close** to completely log off the system.





each narrative section, using numbers between 1 and 7 and the score definitions described on page 9 in this handbook.

- Note: “**Funding Priorities Addressed**” is not relevant. You may simply ignore the radio button choice.
- Once you have completed an application review, click the **SAVE & CLOSE** box at the bottom of the screen. You will return to the **Applications List** and may choose another application to review.

## Revisiting Online Reviewer System

- With your email address and your new password, you will be able to re-enter the Online Reviewer System and complete or edit your reviews as often as you wish.
- Once you have logged in, the Security screen will appear again. Click **OK**.
- Once your review assignment appears, click **VIEW** in order to access the **Applications List** and proceed with the review process.

## Completing Your Online Reviews

- Once you have reviewed all applications assigned to you, the **Application Review Status** column should read **COMPLETE** beside each application.
- Please **PRINT** each review for your records.
- Once you have completed all your reviews, click **I AM READY TO SUBMIT THIS REVIEW TO IMLS** at the bottom of the screen.

## IMLS Online Reviewer System Help FAQs

This system was created several years ago in a Microsoft-based platform. While state-of-the-art at the time of development, it has not been updated. The system still works, but it can be frustrating at first. Once you have a few reviews underway, it should prove an efficient process for managing and submitting your reviews. **Our recommendation is to test out the system early.** Try to do your initial experiments between 9:00 am and 5:00 pm EST so we can be available to assist you

Here are some common user issues and our advice for addressing them:

### What web browser should I use?

Internet Explorer is the only reliable Web browser that will successfully work with the Online Reviewer System. Unfortunately, Mac users and those using Mozilla Firefox, Apple Safari, Camino, and Opera may **not** be able work with our review system. Also we have heard that Microsoft Vista does not work well either. Our recommendation is to use Internet Explorer 6.0 or later.

### Do any of the buttons for assistance work?

No. Please contact your IMLS primary contact for help if you have any problems.

### What is the best way to get started or comfortable with the system?

Try logging into the system and entering some practice remarks to get a feel for the set up and information display. Obviously, as the deadline approaches to complete your reviews, you can concentrate more on the substance of your reviews rather than the process of entering the information.