Instructions for Assigning Scores and Comments – Sparks! Ignition Grants for Museums

Summary

- You will access the applications assigned to you by clicking on a link provided to you in an email message from your IMLS primary contact.
- You will enter your scores and comments through the IMLS Online Reviewer System.
- Sparks-Museums uses a 7-point scale. You will determine one overall score for each application and entered it three times, in each section of the Online Reviewer System.
- You will answer "yes" or "no" to two questions relating to innovation and broad impact.
- Scores are in whole numbers only. Fractions, ranges, decimals, and zeroes are not allowed.
- You must write a constructive and substantive comment of between 30 and 2000 characters in length for each section of the application narrative.
- All three sections of the narrative have equal weight and are equally important in identifying the overall strengths and weaknesses of an application.
- Address your comments to the applicant, not to IMLS or to panel reviewers.
- Your comments should reflect the numeric score you provide for the proposal.

Step-by-Step Instructions

1. **Verify Access to Applications**
   Use the link and the Sparks-Museums Application Reading Assignments document provided to you in an email message from your IMLS primary contact to access the applications assigned to you. You will see a file for containing all applications that will be discussed in panel but you need only download those that are assigned to you. Save each application to your computer in a secure place that is not accessible to others. Call or email your IMLS primary contact immediately if any applications are missing or if you cannot open them.

   Confidentiality in IMLS Peer Review: 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.

2. **Verify Access to IMLS Online Reviewer System**
   Use the following link to verify that you have access to the IMLS Online Reviewer System:

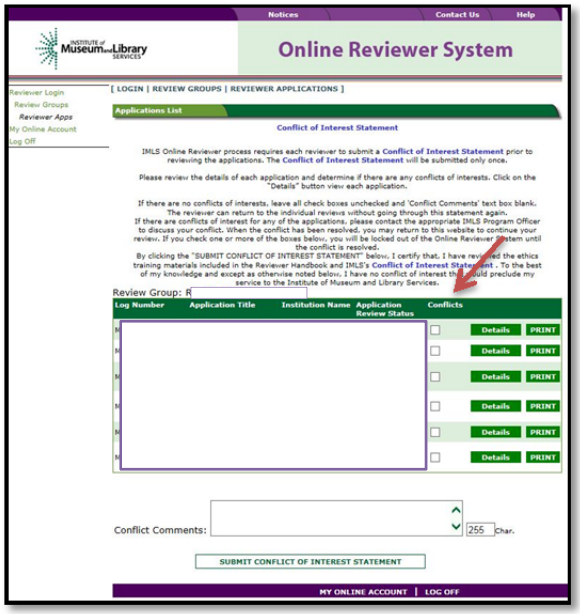
   https://e-services.imls.gov/grantapps/reviewers.aspx

   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.

3. **Assess Potential Conflicts of Interest**
After you have created a new password, click **REVIEW GROUPS,** and your review assignment will appear. To access the list of applications assigned to you, click **VIEW**.

Read through your list of applications again to see if there are any potential conflicts of interest. Please see "Complying With Ethical Obligations and Avoiding Conflicts of Interest."

CAUTION: Depending on your computer's operating system and/or the browser you use, you *may* see a screen with a column labeled "Conflicts" with a checkable box by each application. **Do not check any of these boxes** as doing so will disable access to the system and make it impossible for others in your review group to do their work. Instead, call or email your IMLS primary contact immediately if you have a conflict, or what may appear to be a conflict.



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.

4. **Read Applications**
Revisit the Sparks-Museums guidelines at http://www.imls.gov/applicants/sparks_museums_nofo_2015.aspx. Then read the applications assigned to you in the Sparks-Museums Application Reading Assignment document, keeping in mind the review criteria for each section of the narrative. You will not need to reference each bullet point in your comments, but these questions should guide your thinking about the strengths and weaknesses of each application. You can also access these review criteria as a separate document to keep handy as you read your applications.

To evaluate the **Project Justification**, consider the following:

- Is the project clearly explained?
- Is the need, problem, or challenge to be addressed clearly identified and supported by relevant evidence?
- Are the people who will benefit from the project clearly identified and have they been involved in planning the project?
- Are the performance goals and intended results well formulated and achievable?
- Does the project address current needs of the museum field and/or have the potential to advance practice in the museum profession?
- Does the project meet the Sparks-Grants requirement of demonstrating broad impact, in-depth knowledge, and an innovative approach?

To evaluate the **Project Work Plan**, consider the following:

- Are the proposed activities informed by appropriate theory and practice?
- Do the identified staff, partners, consultants, and service providers possess the experience and skills necessary to complete the work successfully?
- Is the schedule of work realistic and achievable?
- Are the time, personnel, and financial resources identified appropriate for the scope and scale of the project?
- Does the institution provide evidence of its capacity to carry out the project activities?
- Is the proposed evaluation methodology appropriate for project activities? Will it result in valid, reliable, and generalizable findings?
- Is a clear methodology described for tracking the project's progress and adjusting course when necessary?
- Is there an effective plan for communicating results and/or sharing discoveries?

To evaluate the **Project Results,** consider the following:

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- Are the project's intended outcomes and performance indicators clearly articulated, appropriate, and realistic?
- If successful, what value will the results from the proposed project provide to the museum field?

5. Draft Comments

You must write a constructive and substantive comment for each section of the narrative for each application you review. All three sections of the narrative have equal weight and are equally important in identifying the overall strengths and weaknesses of an application.

To organize notes for writing your comments, you may wish to use the "Review Notes Template." Think about the review criteria for each section of the application narrative as listed above, and be sure to consider all the required components of the application as well as relevant Supporting Documents as resources for your assessment. Draft your comments using a word-processing program for later copying and pasting into the IMLS Online Reviewer System. Remember that 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, and do not base your evaluation on any prior knowledge of an institution.
- if you question the accuracy of any information, call us—not the applicant—to discuss it.

Effective comments …	**Poor comments…**
• are presented in a constructive manner. • are concise, specific, and easy to read and understand. • reflect the resources of the institution. • are specific to the individual application. • reflect the numeric score assigned. • reflect the application's strengths and identify areas for improvement. • are directed to applicants—not IMLS or panel reviewers—for their use.	• 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. • offer or ask for irrelevant or extraneous information. • make vague or overly general statements. • question an applicant's honesty or integrity.

Make sure your comments justify the score you provide. A highly complementary comment does not "remove the sting" of a low score, and a negative comment does not "even out" a high one. Comments and scores must complement each other and make sense as a whole.

Below are some examples of **effective** field reviewer comments:

Project Justification	
"You clearly identify the need within the museum field and propose an innovative solution. The project partners add needed expertise and have been involved in the development of the project. Your intended results are well reasoned, well formulated, achievable, and will provide the field with valuable information. The proposed project is an excellent fit for the Sparks-Museums program."	*Comment is substantive, addresses the review criteria, and employs a positive tone.*
"You make a strong case for the museum to partner with the school district to provide STEM education and the project could clearly meet the needs of your target audience. However, I believe that the problem you identify is one based in your community rather than in the museum field, and does not meet the Sparks-Museum program goals of significant innovation and board potential impact. Perhaps you should consider resubmitting your proposal to the Museums for America grant program. "	*Comment correlates with the score of 1 and makes implementable suggestions for securing funding.*

In contrast, below are some examples of **poor** field reviewer comments:

Project Justification	
"The museum plans to organize a series of experimental interactive education programs on the topic of income equity and evaluate them to determine which prove most successful in meeting their desired learning outcomes for their high school participants. They will share the results on a project website."	*Comment paraphrases the applicant's own words.*
Project Work Plan	
"The work plan would be improved by putting in more time onsite."	*Comment is very brief and has little value to the applicant.*
"The design of this research study is wrong-headed and will not yield any useful data. The staff is woefully unprepared and will fail in the execution of this project. Targeting federal funds to this museum is a mistake."	*Comment is derogatory and does not provide useful feedback.*
Project Results	
"Strong results with very sustainable benefits."	*Comment is very brief and has little worth or value to the applicant.*

The chart below summarizes the most frequently asked questions from reviewers:

Should I consider … ?	**Yes**	**No**
An institution's financial or staffing needs		X
Whether the project is well planned and the organization has the appropriate resources to complete the project	X	
Whether the applicant has included the information necessary for an adequate evaluation of its merits	X	
Whether a project is new or a resubmission		X
The size or age of the organization		X

6. **Assign Scores**
   Assign a preliminary score to each application. Use a scale of 1 to 7, as described below. Use only whole numbers; do not use fractions, ranges, decimals, or zeroes.

SCORE DEFINITIONS	
7 – Exceptional	The applicant's response is exceptionally strong with essentially no weaknesses in its support of the proposed project.
6 – Excellent	The applicant's response is very strong with no more than one minor weakness in its support of the proposed project
5 – Very Good	The applicant's response is strong with only a few minor weaknesses in its support for the proposed project.
4 – Good	The applicant's response is adequate but with numerous minor weaknesses in its support for the proposed project.
3 – Some Merit	The applicant's response may have some strengths but has at least one moderate weakness in its support for the proposed project.
2 – Poor	The applicant's response is deficient and has at least one major weakness in its support of the proposed project.
1 – Inadequate/Insufficient	The applicant's response is either inadequate or insufficient to evaluate fully and/or has numerous major weaknesses in its support of the proposed project.
Minor	*An easily addressable weakness that does not substantially lessen the impact of the project*
Moderate	*A weakness that lessens the impact of the project*
Major	*A weakness that severely limits the impact of the project*

7. **Evaluate Innovation and Impact**
   After you have finished providing evaluative comments and a numeric score, consider whether the proposed project has broad potential impact and demonstrates significant innovation. Be prepared to answer Yes or No for both these characteristics.

8. **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.

9. **Enter Scores and Comments**
   Return to the IMLS Online Reviewer System at

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

   Login with the email address you have on file with IMLS and the password you created in Step 2. Go to your list of assigned applications and click **REVIEW** beside any of them to begin.

   Copy and paste your comments into the appropriate blue blocks for each section of the narrative for each application. Be sure to save each comment by clicking **SAVE** at the bottom of the page before you move on to the next one.

   You will be required to enter the one score you assign for the proposal into each section. Choose a numeric score between 1 and 7 from the **SCORE** dropdown menu.

   Now use the controls on the side or top of the screen to navigate to the Application Overview section. In the comment box for this section, enter the following text:

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

   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 **I AM READY TO SUBMIT THIS REVIEW TO IMLS** to send all your work to IMLS.

   At this point, you will not be able to re-enter the IMLS Online Reviewer System unless you notify your IMLS primary contact.

   For all questions about reviewing, either technical or programmatic, please call or email your IMLS primary contact directly.

10. **Manage Your Copies**
    Keep your applications and a copy of each review sheet until **September 30, 2015,** in case there are questions from IMLS staff. Continue to maintain confidentiality of all applications that you review by keeping electronic and paper copies in a secure place. After September 30, 2015, destroy the applications and the review sheets.