



**21st Century
Museum Professionals Grants

2009
Field Reviewer Handbook**

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Questions about the field review process?
Contact Chris Reich at (202) 653-4685, creich@imls.gov, or Twinet Kimbrough at (202) 653-4703,
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The Field Review Process

Thank you for offering to serve as a 21st Century Museum Professionals Grants (21MP) field reviewer. We have selected you to review this year's applications because of your professional expertise in either museums, institutions of higher education, and/or professional service organizations that serve museums.

The staff at IMLS prepared this handbook specifically for 21MP field reviewers to support the fair and candid review of all eligible applications. It will provide you with the procedural and technical information you need. Please use it in tandem with the *2009 21st Century Museum Professionals Grants--Grant Program Guidelines*.

Goals of the 21st Century Museum Professionals Grants Program

The purpose of the 21st Century Museum Professionals Grants (21MP) program is to increase the capacity of museums to connect people to information and ideas by improving the knowledge and skills of museum staff in multiple institutions.

21st Century Museum Professionals Grants are intended to reach broad groups of museum professionals throughout a city, county, state, region, or the nation and increase their capacity to serve their audiences. These projects should reach multiple institutions and diverse audiences. Successful proposals will reflect an understanding of museum service needs in the communities to be served by the project and will explain why the proposed activity will be effective in meeting those needs.

Funding will support projects in the full range of museum operations, involving core management skills such as planning, leadership, finance, program design, partnership, and evaluation. Project focus areas may also include, but not be limited to, collections care and management, interpretation, marketing and audience development, visitor services, governance, and other areas of museum operations. Proposals may also focus on projects that help museums attract and retain staff, and improve the capacity of museums to address the rapid changes facing many communities.

Examples of activities may include one or more of the following:

- development and implementation of classes, seminars or workshops that deliver information on how to improve staff practices in the operation of museums;
- resources and activities to support the development of museum leaders;
- organizational support for the development of internship and fellowship programs;

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- support for the enhancement of pre-professional training programs;
- collection, assessment or development of information that leads to better museum operations;
- dissemination of information to museum professionals through publications, Web sites or other means;
- activities that increase and strengthen the use of contemporary technology tools to deliver programs and services.

Eligible Activities

Eligible expenses include but are not limited to:

- training and education;
- technical assistance or consultation with museum and/or business professionals;
- program development and implementation;
- purchase of equipment, materials, supplies, or services;
- research;
- publication;
- integration of technology into training activities or programs;
- activities related to general museum operations;
- internship stipends and support activities;
- costs associated with evaluation of grant activities
- staffing;
- indirect or overhead costs.

Grant funds may not be used to support:

- 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 for promotional activities other than those related to the specific project;
- social activities, ceremonies, receptions, or entertainment;
- acquisition of collections;
- collection conservation activities including installation of HVAC systems, creation of collections storage facilities, object treatment, collections surveys, or historic structure renovation;
- construction and renovation of museum facilities;
- 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.

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The Program Process

1. Applicants register with Grants.gov and download the grant application guidelines; they complete the application forms and upload forms and attachments to the Grants.gov portal.
2. IMLS receives the applications and checks them for eligibility and completeness.
3. IMLS identifies a pool of qualified and available field reviewers and assigns three of these reviewers to evaluate each application.
4. IMLS matches grant applications to field reviewers with appropriate experience.
5. Field reviewers receive the applications, evaluate them, and complete their online reviews
6. IMLS processes comments and scores, and ranks the applications. The ranking will be used to determine which applications are sent to the review panel. The panel will make final recommendations based on the field review comments and their own experience.
7. The 21MP review panel meets to provide a second level of review. The review panel is comprised of individuals with expertise relating to the goals of the funding program. They will meet in Washington, DC, in July, after the field review period. IMLS will ask members about issues pertinent to this year's competition and about improving the grant program, its application and process.
8. IMLS reviews 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 Agency Director for approval.
10. IMLS awards 21st Century Museum Professionals Grants. The Director of IMLS makes the awards and announces them in September. At that time, IMLS notifies all applicants by mail whether or not they have received an award. We also send a list of grantees to all participating reviewers. With their notification, all applicants receive anonymous reviews completed by field reviewers. Applicants can benefit tremendously from your thoughtful, constructive comments.

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How Are Your Reviews Used?

Your scores will determine the ranking of applications to help IMLS staff identify those that will be sent to the sitting review panel and those that will not.

For those applications that go to panel review, your reviews will provide important assistance, guiding panelists to the strong and weak aspects of each application. If a panel-reviewed application is not funded, your review comments, along with those of panelists, will have the potential to assist the applicants as they consider whether they wish to revise their applications for resubmission.

For those applications that are not ranked highly enough to go to panel, field reviewer feedback will be the only guide as applicants consider whether or not they would like to resubmit their proposals.

Successful applicants point to good scores and positive comments as a stamp of approval for their program proposals. Grantees report that receiving IMLS awards enhances fundraising success with private foundations or state and local sources.

How Can You Get Feedback On Your Performance?

After we announce awards for the 21MP program in September, we invite you to call one of the 21MP program contacts to schedule an appointment to discuss your reviews and provide feedback.

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 IMLS grant program and provide an invaluable service to the entire museum community. Thanks!

Application Review Instructions

First Steps

This section of the handbook contains detailed information on how to review a 21MP program application. If you think that you may not be able to review every proposal you received, do not begin the review process. Instead, contact an IMLS staff person:

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Check Shipping Envelope and CD

If you have not already done so, be certain that you received the items listed in the welcome letter in your field reviewer packet. Open the enclosed CD to check that all of your assigned applications are there and can be opened on your computer. Contact IMLS immediately if any of the items listed are missing.

Conflict of Interest

Read the Conflict of Interest statement carefully. Then look through your list of assigned applications to see if there are any potential conflicts of interest. A conflict of interest would exist 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, applicant project activities, or any other information contained in the proposal. Contact IMLS 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. Review the narrative instructions and application review criteria in the *2009 21st Century Museum Professionals Grants--Grant Program Guidelines*. The bulleted items under each narrative section represent the types of information you should look for in the applicant's responses and should serve as guideposts for your review. A 21MP Review Criteria Quick Reference is included in your packet for easy reference during the review process.

Quality of a Good Proposal

A good 21MP proposal will reflect an understanding of museum service needs in the communities to be served and explain how the proposed project will be effective in helping museum professionals meet those needs. 21MP proposals should indicate how they will build the knowledge and skills of museum professionals and impact multiple institutions.

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Evaluate Applications

Read your applications again and take notes. Draft comments for each of the four narrative responses. We recommend that you draft your comments using Microsoft Word, and then cut and paste them into the online review 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 organization.
- 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.
- Comments should be specific to the individual applicant; vague, general statements are not helpful.
- Address the applicant's *entire* response to each narrative question and provide feedback in your comments that is detailed and specific enough to provide concrete, constructive guidance to the applicant.
- Acknowledge and compliment strengths.
- Consider a project's strengths *and* weaknesses; acknowledge and compliment strengths; offer practical suggestions for improving weaknesses.
- Comments should *analyze* the narrative section of the application; simply summarizing or paraphrasing the applicant's own words will not help the applicant.
- Consider whether the applicant has the resources to successfully complete the project.
- Comments should be easy to read and understand.
- Comments should address both positive aspects as well as areas for improvement.

Assign Scores

Assign preliminary scores to each narrative section, using a scale of 1-7. SCORES and DEFINITIONS

7 --- The applicant's response provides **exceptional** support for proposed project activities.

6 --- The applicant's response provides **superior** support for proposed project activities.

5 --- The applicant's response provides **good** support for proposed project activities.

4 --- The applicant's response provides **adequate** support for proposed project activities.

3 --- The applicant's response provides **minimal** support for proposed project activities.

2 --- The applicant's response provides **inadequate** support for proposed project activities.

1 --- The applicant's response provides **insufficient** information for evaluation.

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

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

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 review 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 1-7 for each of the four narrative sections; and
- additional comments, if desired (this section is optional and is not scored).

The Online Review Process

All reviewers will use the online review process. It is easy to do. All you need is Internet access. You will not have to email or fax your reviews to us. When you complete your online reviews, IMLS can print out an anonymous copy to forward to the panelists and applicants. Just follow these steps:

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

Your login is: your e-mail address that is on file with IMLS

Your password is: password, unless you already established a password in previous years.

When you log in and create your user account, you will need to create a new password.

The instructions for creating and submitting your reviews will be at your fingertips. **For all questions about reviewing, either technical or programmatic, contact a 21MP program contact. Please do not use the hotlink that may be visible on the online review page, as your questions may not receive an immediate response.**

When you have completed assigning scores and giving comments for each application assigned to you, we recommend that you print a copy of each completed review to keep for your files. You will then submit the entire review electronically to IMLS.

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Reminders

The online review process is a wonderful tool; however, there are a few points regarding its use of which you should be aware:

- When accessing this system you can only use the e-mail address we have on file for you.
- Once you submit your reviews, you cannot go back in and make revisions. To do so, you must contact IMLS and we will authorize your re-entry into the system so you can make changes. However, prior to submitting your reviews, you can repeatedly enter and exit the system without losing your information.
- The online review system seems to work best with these browsers—Internet Explorer, Netscape, Firefox, and Safari.
- Complete your online reviews by **May 22, 2009**.
- Fax your Direct Deposit Sign-Up form and signed Peer Reviewer Services Agreement to 202-653-4608.

Constructive and Effective Comments

As you formulate your comments, keep in mind the following characteristics of good, constructive remarks. They should be:

- presented in a constructive manner;
- concise, specific, easy to read and understand;
- specific to the individual applicant;
- correlated with the score that is given;
- acknowledging the resources of the organization;
- reflecting the application's strengths and identified areas for improvement; and
- directed to applicants for their use.

Remember, both successful and unsuccessful applicants use your comments to improve their organizations and future applications. Each of the sample excerpts from reviewer comments shown below is followed by an explanation of its good characteristics.

Section 3 – Project Resources: Time, Personnel, Budget: “The budget is realistic for the numbers of participants, and for the compensation of consultants and the number of hours for their assistance with this project. Appropriate use of current staff’s time—hiring new part time staff will ensure that existing needs will continue to be met.” (Provides specific information)

Section 4 – Impact: “The applicant has identified clear and measurable outcomes for the paid staff and volunteers who will participate in the training programs. The pre and post testing will provide valuable lessons for future professional development activities. The applicant is clearly committed to sustaining the new programs but could be more specific about the means through which ongoing expenditures will be funded.” (Identifies strengths and areas for improvement)

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Avoiding Poor Comments

Vague, derogatory, or extraneous remarks are not helpful to either panelists or 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 doesn't need the money. (Any eligible institution may receive funds, regardless of need.)
- Penalize an applicant because of missing materials. (If you are missing required materials, please contact IMLS 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 raise 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 poor comment excerpts below is followed by an explanation of why it is a poor comment.

Section 1 – Statement of Need: “This is clearly not the highest priority that the association should identify. They should be focusing on educational outreach and not collections management.” (Not the reviewer's job to determine the applicant's priorities)

“Not necessarily a highly polished application, which in this case is a strength. It adds to the expressed need.” (Insensitive and irrelevant)

Section 2 - Project Design:

“Good job—the project follows a plan.” (Vague, not evaluative)

Section 3 - Project Resources: Time, Personnel, Budget:

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

Section 4 - Impact:

“Evaluation is both financial compliance and administrative review.” (Vague, not evaluative)

Reviewer Material

Sign Peer Reviewer Services Agreement	Sign your Peer Reviewer Services Agreement and fax to IMLS along with your completed Direct Deposit Sign-Up form.
Return Materials to IMLS	<p>You must fax back the enclosed Direct Deposit Sign-Up form and Peer Reviewer Services Agreement to be paid for your services. Your honorarium is paid electronically and the Direct Deposit form must be completed in its entirety, even if it was submitted in a prior year with the identical banking information.</p> <p>Please fax to (202) 653-4608.</p> <p>Should you decide to use a private carrier rather than fax your Peer Reviewer Services Agreement and Direct Deposit Sign-Up form, please send to the following address:</p> <p>IMLS Attention: 21st Century Museum Professionals Grants Program Office of Museum Services 1800 M Street NW, 9th Floor Washington, DC 20036-5802</p> <p>If you fax your materials then you DO NOT need to send us your originals.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">The Deadline for 21MP field reviews is May 22, 2009.</p>
Keep Copies Until	<p>Keep your applications CD-ROM and a copy of your review sheets until September 30, 2009 (in case of questions from IMLS staff).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintain the confidentiality of all the applications you review. • After September 30, destroy the CD and associated materials.

Thank you for serving as an IMLS Field Reviewer!

Frequently Asked Questions

1. How should I assign scores?

Scores should be assigned for each of the four narrative sections, based on the scale of 1–7 discussed on pages 7 and 8 of this booklet.

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

Call IMLS immediately! IMLS may be able to send you the missing materials, or will contact the applicant for you. DO NOT contact the applicant.

3. Should the size or age of the organization be considered when evaluating its application?

These are not primary review criteria. The applicant should be evaluated using the stated review criteria outlined on the 21MP Field Review Criteria Quick Reference.

4. To whom should the review comments be addressed?

Please address all comments to the applicant (but remember the anonymity factor). While IMLS staff and panelists do read the comments, it is important to address comments to the applicants so that they may use them most constructively for their projects.

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

Call IMLS immediately and discuss the possibility of a conflict of interest. Not all cases are conflicts, but please call to discuss your situation.

6. Must I make comments for every section?

Yes, you must make constructive and substantive comments for every section of the narrative. This is the best way to help an applicant improve all aspects of their project.

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

Indirect cost rates are negotiated rates for institutions to charge overhead costs when completing a project. Some institutions, such as universities, may have higher rates because of the infrastructure involved in carrying out a project within that institution. Also, an institution may have a high rate if it is 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.

8. Is there any part of the application that carries more weight than another?

No, all sections of the application have equal weight. Each score is important in determining the overall strengths and weaknesses of a proposal.

9. Must 21MP projects have a national impact?

No! While national projects are within the scope of the program, applicants may submit proposals that reach groups of museum professionals in a city, county, state, region, or focused on a particular discipline or specialization. Impact should be evaluated based on the enhancement of knowledge and skills for the target audience of museum professionals as described in the proposal.

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