Timed Transcript for IMLS Office of Museum Services Webinar: National Leadership Grants for Museums FY 2021 Information Session

0:05
Welcome to the Institute of Museum and Library Services' webinar, "National Leadership Grants for Museums Fiscal Year 2021 Information Session." My name is Helen Wechsler, and I'll be hosting this webinar. We're delighted that you could join us today and that you are interested in learning more about the NLG for Museums program.

0:33
This is one of a series of webinars designed to help you find the information you need to create a competitive application for IMLS museum funding.

0:43
"Choosing a Funding Opportunity for 2021" is available as a recording and as a PDF of slides along with their transcript on our website at the link on this slide.

0:56
The webinar covers the IMLS vision, mission, and strategic plan with an emphasis on how they influence our grantmaking.

1:05
We also address institutional eligibility; provide a quick overview of all of our funding opportunities; discuss how to find information on our website; provide tips to help you complete an application; and we cover the three places you must be registered in order to apply for an IMLS grant.

1:25
There are also individual webinars for each of the museum grant programs.

1:33
Before we jump into details about the NLG for Museums program, I want to provide some numbers from the last two cycles.

1:41
As you can see, NLG for Museums is a fairly competitive grant program. We were able to fund about 21% of applications received in FY19 and FY20.

1:54
This webinar will help you determine if your project is right for NLG, which is essential before putting in the effort to prepare an application, and it will give you tips for creating a competitive proposal.

2:11
I also want to make sure to point out where the application process begins, which is on our website.

2:17
Use the Grants drop-down menu and choose Apply for a Grant. Clicking on that will take you to a list of grant programs from which you will choose National Leadership Grants for Museums.

2:30
These guidelines, or Notice of Funding Opportunity, which you see on the right side of the screen, will walk you through the application process and they contain most of the information I will provide today.

2:46
In this presentation, we'll be addressing the following topics: Eligibility; NLG for Museums Program Goals; Characteristics of Successful Projects; Important Dates; How Much money you can apply for and How Many applications you can submit;

3:06
Project Categories; Allowable and Unallowable Costs; Application Components; Application Tips; Review Process; and Contacts.

3:23
For eligibility, you can be one of three types of organizations to be eligible to apply for National Leadership Grants.

3:31
If you are applying as a museum, you will need to certify that you use a professional staff;

3:38
You're organized on a permanent basis, for essentially educational or aesthetic purposes; that you own or use tangible objects, either animate or inanimate; that you care for these objects;

3:51
and that you exhibit these objects to the general public on a regular basis, at least 120 days a year, through facilities that you own or operate.

4:03
Regarding the 120 day rule during our current COVID-19 reality, you can count these 120 days in either the year preceding the application due date, the year preceding any shutdown due to COVID-19, or the calendar year preceding this current one, so that would be 2019.

4:26
You can also be eligible for NLG for Museums if you are an organization or association that engages in activities designed to advance the well-being of museums and the museum profession, or if you are an institution of higher education.

4:46
Now, for the NLG for Museums goals. NLG supports innovative projects that address critical needs of the museum field, and that have the potential to advance practice in the profession so that museums can improve services for the American public.

5:04
NLG is all about meeting the needs of the museum field, our institutions, and our professionals.

5:12

We invest in leaders, institutions and partnerships, that understand the challenges and opportunities facing the field and devise plans to move the field forward through the development of resources and tools for wide use.

5:31

Making sure your project shares the characteristics of successful NLG projects is an important first step to preparing an application.

5:40

We're looking for projects that are structured intentionally to produce results that can be used by the field to influence practice.

5:49

We're looking for tangible results, such as tools, resources, and research findings that will be useful to a broad segment of the museum field.

5:58

We expect proposals to demonstrate deep familiarity with previous work on this project topic.

6:05

Proposals supported by needs assessments, environmental scans, and/or research are stronger.

6:12

We encourage new perspectives and innovative ideas and we're looking to see that the expertise needed to achieve results are represented in the proposal, so multi-institutional efforts, collaborations, and expert advisors are important.

6:33

We want to remind you of important dates for NLG applications.

6:37

They are due by 11:59 PM Eastern Time on November 16th, 2020.

6:44

The Grants dot gov system, which you apply through, generates a time-stamp, so this deadline is not negotiable.

6:53

We will say this again and again, but start early and submit early. That way, if you encounter a difficulty of any kind when submitting your proposal, you'll have time to resolve the problem.

7:06

NLG for Museums awards will be announced in August of 2021, and all NLG projects must be scheduled to begin on September 1st, 2021.

7:22

There are three funding options for NLG for Museums.

7:27
Option 1 is for full NLG for Museums projects that result in robust results for the field.

7:35
These can request anywhere from $50,000 to $1 million dollars, and there is a one to one cost share requirement.

7:42
Cost share may be in the form of cash, staff or volunteer time, or third-party contributions. It may not be funds from another federal source.

7:54
Option 2 is for research projects, from $50,000 to $1 million dollars, which do not require a cost share. We'll talk a little more about research projects a little later.

8:06
Option 3 supports one-year, rapid prototyping projects budgeted between $5,000 and $50,000 with no cost share required.

8:18
If you have an idea for an innovative solution to a field-wide challenge, that requires some funding to rapidly develop, test, iterate, and retest, this funding level is for you.

8:30
Remember, whether you succeed or fail, or come out somewhere in between, we want you to report your results to the field, tell others what worked and what is promising, what needs to be tweaked, and what they should not try at home.

8:54
There are five project categories. I will go through each one and provide a summary followed by some examples of project topics.

9:03
Please refer to the NLG for Museums Notice of Funding Opportunity on our website, which contains more detail.

9:14
Collections Care and Access projects should support the museum field in addressing state-of-the-art collections care and collections information management, curation, preventative conservation, conservation treatment, as well as broad access to and use of museum collections.

9:34
We would like projects that focus on helping the field address challenges associated with preservation and care of collections, as well as those that work to expand access and use of collections.

9:54
Some possible project examples include: new tools or services that enhance collection management strategies, facilitate access, and aid in the use of museum collections; Research focusing on any broadly relevant aspect of care and management;

10:12
Coalitions to enhance collections care and digital access across institutions of all sizes, disciplines, and locations; New avenues for gathering and incorporating collections information from stakeholders.

10:31
Data and Evaluation projects should support the collection or use of data that can be analyzed to lead to new understanding about the museum field and its impacts on individuals, communities, and society, and that can demonstrate trends, identify gaps and opportunities, contribute to improved practice, and help understand the landscape for museum programs and services.

10:59
Some possible project examples include: studying the impact of museums on people and communities; using gap analysis and needs assessment to understand the capacity of the museum sector and inform tools to advance the field;

11:19
Partner with higher education to better understand museum practice; Conducting longitudinal studies on museum professional preparation to benefit the sector; and testing methods for assessing needs and evaluating impacts that can be scaled and replicated.

11:40
Next is Digital Platforms and Applications. These should explore, understand, and optimize the use of digital technology in museums to further lifelong learning, community collaboration, and public access to collections.

12:02
Here are some project topics: Shared systems, networks, and technologies to enhance, access, optimize use, and manage digital assets;

12:14
Tools and technologies that enable people of all backgrounds and abilities to use museum collections and resources;

12:23
Digital media tools for online access to learning resources; New media communications tools that foster engagement, learning and conversation;

12:34
Experiments and tools focusing on educational trends such as open education resources, blended and flipped classrooms, gaming, etcetera;

12:44
Expanded access to and use of collections through technologies, such as 3D visualization, augmented and virtual reality, digital archiving, or crowd-sourcing models; Strategies to leverage rich data, linked data, and open data resources.

13:08
Diversity and Inclusion projects should support museums in engaging with communities and providing inclusive services for people of various backgrounds, circumstances, and abilities.

13:21

They should understand the current status and future trends in the demographics of communities and structure programs and services accordingly and help museums work with community members and community-based organizations to broaden opportunity and the access.

13:41

Here are some project topic examples: User-centered programs that focus on learning for families and individuals from various backgrounds, circumstances, and abilities; Policies and partnerships that address barriers to accessing museum services; Programs that raise early awareness about museum careers;

14:06

Models and templates that incorporate diversity and inclusion objectives into its organizational plans; Investigating questions related to diversity and inclusion, findings from which will inform museums' work in this area; Resources that promote museums as trusted spaces for civic discourse and dialogue.

14:36

The fifth and final project category is Professional Development.

14:40

These projects should support the recruitment, training, and development of museum staff, volunteers, and interns, to grow a skilled, professional, diverse, and inclusive workforce and strengthen museums capacity to serve their audiences.

14:56

They should share and adopt best practices and innovations by creating programs to ensure the highest standards in all aspects of museum practice.

15:12

Again, some examples include: Multi-institutional and cross-sector networks and coalitions in support of professional development opportunities;

15:22

Dissemination of content and skills-based information through online communities of practice and other digital platforms;

15:31

Creating opportunities to encourage a more inclusive and diverse museum professional and volunteer workforce;

15:38

Professional development in relevant sector needs in relevant sector needs, such as digital technology, evaluation, and project management;

15:50

Innovative courses, internships, and museum placement plans for emerging professionals.

16:00

Before we close our discussion of Project Categories, we want to note that many projects could fit logically into more than one category. Sometimes it's tough to pick just one.

16:12
In these cases, think about the primary need you are addressing and the tangible results that you intend to have for the field. Will they help the field: 1, care for their collections and broaden access and use?; 2, use data to better understand the needs and trends in the field?; or will they use digital technology for learning and access?;

16:38
Or will they foster more inclusive environments and services for everyone in their community?;

16:43
And finally, could they help the museum field gain the skills and capacity needed to move their institutions forward?

16:55
A second way to go at this might be to think about who you want to review your application. Collections and digital access experts, data and assessment experts, museum technologists, diversity specialists, or museum development practitioners?

17:11
As always, if you have questions, call the IMLS staff to discuss them.

17:22
We've posted the abstracts, narratives, and schedules of completion for a cross-section of successful NLG for Museums applications.

17:31
The proposals posted present a variety of project types, meet the overarching goal of the National Leadership Grants for Museums program, and were considered to be clear and well-written by our reviewers. Looking at these exemplary proposals might help clarify your thinking about your own application.

18:01
Next up are the documents that make up your application and that you will upload into Grants dot gov.

18:08
These application components fall into three categories. The first is Required Documents, and as it sounds, all of these are required with your application.

18:19
The second group is Conditionally Required Documents. Some applications must be included.

18:26
It might depend on the nature of your institution or some aspect of your project. In either case, omission of any of these could result in your application not being considered further.

18:39
The third group of application components are Supporting Documents. These are completely optional.

18:45

You may submit some or none. Think about including only those that supplement or backup your Narrative.

18:52

You may refer to these materials in your Narrative so that reviewers know where to look. This is not the place to introduce new information and be respectful of your reviewers' time.

19:09

In the NLG for Museums Notice of Funding Opportunity, you will find a Table of Application Components. We recommend that you use this to keep yourself organized.

19:21

It serves as a checklist of application components. The middle column tells you about document formats and the third tells you how to name each document.

19:32

Note that attempting to upload a document that is not a PDF, such as a Word or Excel document, will result in an error and the document will not be included in your full application.

19:44

The table also provides links to instructions and forms and it tells you which documents are Required, Conditionally Required, and Supporting.

19:56

Now, let's talk about the narrative of your proposal. You have ten pages to cover these three sections.

20:03

The first section is the Project Justification. In this section of the narrative, you should lay out the reasoning for your project. Tell us in the clearest terms what need, problem, or challenge you expect to address; how you identified it; who or what will benefit from your work; and how your project will address the goals of the National Leadership Grants for Museums program and the project category you have chosen.

20:30

Remember that core to NLG for Museums is the desire to support projects that strengthen the museum field. Show the reviewers how this all fits together.

20:42

Reviewers will consider how well you've defended the need, problem, or challenge you will address; how well you've identified who or what will benefit from the project, and how good of a job you've done in involving them in the planning.

20:57

Reviewers also value external needs assessments and research that can support and validate the needs statement.

21:07

They'll look for how well your project aligns with NLG for Museums project category you've chosen.

21:21
In the Project Work Plan, this is the part of the narrative in which you explain what you will do, who will do it, when, and using what resources.

21:30
The reviewers will look for evidence that you know what you are doing; have the right people at the table; that the project is realistic; that there's room to change course, if needed; and, for research projects, they'll look for appropriate research design and answers to the questions outlined in the guidance on effective research proposals.

21:53
Speaking of which, here are the questions outlined and explained in the guidance for research applications within the NLG for Museums Notice of Funding Opportunity.

22:06
To submit a competitive research proposal, your Narrative should answer these questions.

22:12
We sometimes see projects submitted as Research that look like they're trying to avoid the cost share requirements, and this is not a winning strategy. Think carefully about these questions and if they do not make sense for your project, you likely do not have a research project.

22:32
Project Results, the final section of your narrative, should be devoted to articulating your project's intended results.

22:41
What specific results do you intend to achieve in your project and what will change as a result?

22:48
Tell us about the tangible products that will result from your project, if you have any, and last but not least, tell us how you will sustain the benefit of your project beyond the lifespan of this particular project.

23:03
In other words, when the federal funding goes away, how will the benefit to the field be sustained?

23:10
Reviewers will register their thoughts about how likely it is you will deliver on these results; how useful the tangible products you plan to create will be; and whether your plan for sustaining the benefits of the project are reasonable and practicable.

23:32
We'll now turn to allowable and unallowable costs for your project.

23:39
Be very careful in preparing your proposal and include only allowable costs in both your IMLS ask and your cost share.

23:48

We'll go through some common expenses that are allowable and unallowable, but for details, please see the Code of Federal Regulations covering Uniform Administration Requirements, Cost Principles, and Audit Requirements for Federal Awards. This is called "2 CFR 200" for short.

24:07

Fortunately, the regulations are available online in a searchable format on the U.S. Government Publishing Office website listed on the screen.

24:16

Of particular interest is Subpart E, Cost Principles, a small section of which is shown on the right side of this screen.

24:30

In the NLG for Museums Notice of Funding Opportunity, we provide a partial list of the most common examples of allowable costs for this grant program.

24:40

These include: personnel salaries, wages, and fringe benefits; travel expenses for key project staff and consultants; materials, supplies, software, and equipment related directly to the project activities;

24:56

Third-party costs, these would be either contracts or subawards; publication design and printing; training for staff and volunteers that impact multiple museums; indirect or overhead costs.

25:13

So, these are costs that may be part of what you ask IMLS to pay for and/or what you will pay for as part of your cost share, if one is required.

25:25

Unallowable costs include: general fundraising costs, such as development office staff or other staff time devoted to general fundraising; contributions to endowments; general operating support; acquisition of collections; general advertising or public relations costs designed solely for promotional activities other than those related to the specific project;

25:50

Construction or renovation of facilities; social activities, ceremonies, receptions, and entertainment.

25:58

So these costs may not be part of what you ask IMLS to pay for, nor can they be part of what you will pay for as part of your cost share. In fact, unallowable expenses cannot show up anywhere in your proposal.

26:15

Now, for some tips. First on the list is "Register Early!"

26:20
You must have a DUNS number, an active SAM dot gov registration, and a current and functional Grants dot gov registration.

26:30
You must have a DUNS number to register for SAM dot gov, and you must have an active SAM dot gov registration to register with Grants dot gov.

26:39
And you must have functional Grants dot gov registration in order to submit an application to IMLS.

26:46
Check to see whether your Grants dot gov registration is associated with a former staff member whose password is a mystery to you and leave time to deal with these eventualities.

26:57
It's also crucial to remember that your SAM dot gov registration expires each year and you must renew it. You can login to SAM dot gov at any time and find out your status.

27:15
Our regulations state that we can make grants only to eligible applicants that submit complete applications, including attachments, on or before the deadline.

27:27
So, once again, start early.

27:30
Do your background research. Make it easy for reviewers to see that you are up to date and know what you're talking about.

27:39
Revisit the grant Notice of Funding Opportunity frequently and follow the Narrative outline it provides. Use headings, subheadings, or numbered sections to make it easy for reviewers to read.

27:52
Avoid generalities, acronyms, and jargon. The people who will review your applications are experts, but they may not be totally familiar with your particular field's shorthand. Make it easy for them to understand what you mean.

28:08
Check your spelling, grammar, and math.

28:11
Ask a colleague to review everything with a fresh eye before you submit. Ask them to act like a reviewer who's seeing this for the first time.

28:20
Be sure your application is complete and pay close attention to the required documents and formats. Check it against the Table of Application Components.

28:31
Submit to Grants dot gov early so you can correct any errors.

28:39
We want to remind you of important dates for NLG applications. As we said, they are due by 11:59 PM Eastern Time on November 16th, 2020. The Grants dot gov system generates that time stamp.

28:55
Staff review the applications for completeness and institutional eligibility before they are sent to review, which will happen from February through June. There will be two tiers of review during that time.

29:11
This year, NLG for Museums awards will be announced in August, and the projects will be scheduled to begin on September 1st, 2021.

29:25
Thank you very much for your interest in IMLS and in the National Leadership for Museums program. We hope you found the information in this webinar helpful.

29:35
Here are the names of myself, Helen Wechsler and my colleague Mark Isaksen, who are designated to answer your questions about NLG. When you go to the landing page for National Leadership Grants on our website, you will find both our names and contact information, and you will see that we have divided up the categories of the grant program so that you know who to call for what category.

30:03
We encourage you to contact us with any questions and we're happy to help.

30:08
And finally, you can always start at our website, WWW dot IMLS dot gov, to get much of the information and answer most of the questions you may have.

30:19
Thank you very much.