



## **National Leadership Grants**

# **FY2016 NLG Phase 1 Reviewer Handbook**

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## **Welcome to The NLG Program Review Process**

Thank you for agreeing to serve as a National Leadership Grants for Libraries (NLG) Phase 1 reviewer. We have selected you to review this year's applications because of your professional expertise and knowledge of the field. This handbook was prepared specifically for Phase 1 reviewers to provide procedural and technical information, ensuring a fair and candid review of all eligible NLG applications. Please use it in tandem with the FY2016 NLG Guidelines, available at:

<https://www.ims.gov/nofo/national-leadership-grants-libraries-fy16-notice-funding-opportunity>

Even if you have reviewed for NLG or any other IMLS grant program in the past, it is important that you read through this handbook since we recently made changes to our grant programs.

## **Purpose and Scope of the National Leadership Grants Program**

### **What is this grant program?**

National Leadership Grants for Libraries (NLG) support projects that address challenges faced by the library and archive fields and that have the potential to advance practice in those fields. Successful proposals will generate results such as new tools, research findings, models, services, practices, or alliances that can be widely used, adapted, scaled, or replicated to extend the benefits of federal investment.

We anticipate two FY16 National Leadership Grants for Libraries funding opportunities with two separate deadlines. In addition to the opportunity described in this Notice of Funding Opportunity, an additional NLG funding opportunity is anticipated to be announced in December 2015 with an application submission due date of February 2016.

### **What are the characteristics of successful projects?**

For the NLG deadline, we encourage applications to address one of two agency priorities:

- National digital platform: the combination of software applications, social and technical infrastructure, and staff expertise used by libraries, museums, and archives to provide online content and services to all users in the United States. Libraries have made important advancements in this area over the past 20 years, but much of that work was experimental or isolated. We want to bridge gaps between disparate pieces of the existing digital library infrastructure, for increased efficiencies, cost-savings, access and services. The program cannot support the digitization of content, or pre-digitization activities like inventorying collections.
- Learning in libraries: work that builds institutional capacity, develops STEM learning, engages community and encourages partnerships to support all types of learning and inquiry, including participatory inquiry-based, and/or other forms of learning, in libraries. Competitive proposals in this category should focus on supporting and enhancing libraries' ability to make their own decisions and investments, rather than the development of learning spaces or programs in individual libraries and communities.

We will also accept any applications that explore the following issues:

- What will move library and archival services in the United States forward?
- What will help libraries and archives make decisions about their own investments?
- What knowledge, capacity, functions, or infrastructure can libraries and archives share?

We conducted a series of [IMLS Focus convenings](#) in 2015 that identified issues in the National Digital Platform and Learning in Libraries areas, among other topics. [The reports, synthesizing key takeaways from this year's Focus convenings](#), may help inform the development of projects.

What are the funding categories?

Applicants may choose to submit a Project Grant, Research Grant, Planning Grant, or National Forum Grant proposal in any of the above categories. The same proposal may not be submitted under more than one category. An institution may submit only one proposal.

The award amount limitations are as follows:

- Project Grants: \$10,000 - \$2,000,000
- Research Grants: \$10,000 - \$2,000,000
- Planning Grants: \$10,000 - \$50,000
- National Forum Grants: up to \$100,000

*Project Grants* support fully developed projects for which needs assessments, partnership development, feasibility analyses, prototyping, and other planning activities have been completed.

*Research Grants* support the investigation of key questions important to library or archival practice. The term “research” includes systematic study directed toward fuller scientific knowledge or understanding of the subject studied. It also includes activities involving the training of individuals in research techniques where such activities utilize the same facilities as other research and development activities and where such activities are not included in the instruction function.

*Planning Grants* allow project teams to perform preliminary planning activities, such as analyzing needs and feasibility, solidifying partnerships, developing project work plans, or developing prototypes or proofs of concept. These activities should have the potential to lead to a full project, such as those described in Project Grants above.

*National Forum Grants* provide the opportunity to convene qualified groups of experts and key stakeholders to consider issues or challenges that are important to libraries or archives across the nation. Grant-supported meetings are expected to produce reports for wide dissemination with expert recommendations for action or research that address a key challenge identified in the proposal. The expert recommendations resulting from these meetings are intended to guide future applications to the NLG-Libraries program. National Forum Grant recipients are required at the end of the project to submit to us a brief whitepaper for public distribution summarizing those expert recommendations,

which we will post online.

## **Application and Review Process**

Applicants submit their preliminary proposals using Grants.gov—the single point of entry for IMLS grant applications.

IMLS receives the applications and checks them for organizational eligibility and application completeness.

IMLS identifies a pool of available Phase 1 reviewers with appropriate expertise and assigns reviewers to evaluate each application.

Phase 1 reviewers receive access to the preliminary proposals, evaluate them, and complete their reviews via Dropbox.

NLG Phase 1 review panels meet in Washington, DC, to rank the proposals, discuss the merits of the proposals, and to provide recommendations and feedback for improvement of the preliminary proposals. IMLS uses Phase 1 reviewers' comments and feedback to create a list of proposals recommended for invitation to Phase 2 (review of full applications).

Invited institutions are provided reviewer comments and invited to speak with IMLS staff regarding their proposals. They are invited to make any changes to their proposals and submit full applications by the deadline of January 15, 2015.

Applicants submit their full proposals using Grants.gov—the single point of entry for IMLS grant applications.

IMLS receives the full proposals and checks them again for organizational eligibility and application completeness.

IMLS identifies a pool of available Phase 2 reviewers with appropriate expertise and assigns reviewers to evaluate each application. Phase 2 reviewers receive access to the full applications, evaluate them, and complete their reviews and scores through the online reviewer system.

NLG Phase 2 review panels meet in Washington, DC, to provide a second level of review for NLG proposals. Phase 2 panelists review applications from a broad perspective, identifying applications that best meet IMLS and NLG program goals. They also provide insight into issues pertinent to this year's competition as well as provide recommendations on improving the grant program, applications, and the review process.

IMLS staff members review the financial/accounting information and the budget sheets of each potential grantee.

IMLS staff members provide a list of applications recommended for funding to the IMLS Director for approval. By law, the director has the authority to make final funding decisions.

## **What to Expect at the Panel**

When the panel meets at IMLS in Washington, DC we will discuss each proposal. While our time is limited, we should have ample opportunities to go over every application in sufficient detail. IMLS will provide laptops with access to the complete applications as well as the reviews you submitted; you need not print out copies of applications, but it may be convenient to bring along copies of your reviews and any notes you may have.

We do not need to reach consensus on any evaluation, but you will have the opportunity to adjust your scores and add or revise your comments after each proposal is discussed.

During the meeting, we will set aside time to hear your ideas and feedback about the grant review process and the National Leadership Grants program.

## **Follow Up**

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 NLG program and provide an invaluable service to the entire museum, archives and library communities.

Thank you!

# Application Review Instructions

- Verify Access to Applications Online** This year we are using DropBox to deliver the proposals to you. You will receive an email containing a link to DropBox where you can access all of proposals. Please refer to the review form (included in the email), to see the proposals assigned to you. Please check your spam filters to ensure that this message is delivered to your inbox. Make sure you see all the applications referenced in the email. Then, save them to your computer in a secure place that is not accessible to others. Call or email Sarah Fuller immediately if any applications are missing or if you cannot open them.
- Conflict of Interest** Once you begin reviewing your assigned applications, if you discover any conflicts of interest, please contact us immediately. Please see the Reviewer Conflict of Interest Statement included as Appendix I of this handbook. A conflict of interest would arise if you have a financial interest in whether or not the proposal is funded, or if for some reason, you feel that you cannot review a proposal objectively.
- Confidentiality** The information contained in grant applications is strictly confidential. Do not discuss or reveal names, institutions' project activities, or any other information contained in the applications. Contact us if you have any questions concerning an application. Do not contact an applicant directly.
- Read Applications** Your thorough reading and understanding of each application will be the key to providing both insightful comments and an overall rating for the application, ensuring that your comments are a reflection of your overall score. Before you review proposals, please read the NLG guidelines at <https://www.imls.gov/nof/national-leadership-grants-libraries-fy16-notice-funding-opportunity>
- We have included a quick reference guide that you may wish to have accessible as you review proposals. It lists the types of information you should look for in each applicant's responses and provides guideposts for your review.
- Evaluate Applications** Read your applications again and respond with your comments under the prompts provided on the reviewer spreadsheet. For your convenience, we have expounded upon these prompts in the Quick Reference Guide.
- Please take constructive notes on the strengths and weaknesses of these proposals and how they might be improved using the provided spreadsheet.
- Use your professional knowledge and experience to assess the information objectively.
  - Judge the application on its own merits. Do not base your evaluation on any prior knowledge of an institution.
  - If you question the accuracy of any information, call IMLS to discuss

it. Do not question the applicant's honesty or integrity in your written comments.

- Do not contact the applicant directly.
- Consider whether the applicant has the resources to successfully complete the project.
- Analyze the two-page abstract of the application in your comments. Summarizing or paraphrasing the applicant's own words will not help the applicant.

#### Characteristics of Constructive and Effective Comments:

- They are presented in a helpful 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:

- Make derogatory remarks. (Offer suggestions for improvement rather than harsh criticism.)
- Penalize an applicant because you feel the institution does not need the money. (Any eligible institution may receive funds, regardless of institutional need.)
- Penalize an applicant because of missing materials. (If you believe an application is missing required materials, please contact a NLG staff member immediately.)
- Question an applicant's honesty or integrity. (You may question the accuracy of information provided by the applicant, but if you are unsure how to frame your question, contact IMLS.)
- Offer or ask for irrelevant or extraneous information. (Your comments should concern only the information IMLS requests of applicants.)

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

#### **Assign Scores**

After you have read, evaluated and provided written comments, please provide a single numeric score for the application that reflects your opinion of the proposal's overall quality and your recommendation of whether it should be funded this year on the spreadsheet.

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

## SCORE DEFINITIONS

- 5 – Excellent: The applicant’s response is outstanding and provides exceptional support for the proposed project.
- 4 – Very Good: The applicant’s response provides solid support for the proposed project.
- 3 – Good: The applicant’s response is adequate but could be strengthened in its support for the proposed project.
- 2 – Some Merit: The applicant’s response is flawed and does not adequately support the proposed project.
- 1 – Inadequate/Insufficient: The applicant’s response is inadequate or provides insufficient information to allow for a confident evaluation.

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

- Deadline** Completed spreadsheets should be returned to [sfuller@imls.gov](mailto:sfuller@imls.gov) **no later than Wednesday, November 4, 2015.**
- Returning Materials to IMLS** Along with the review materials, you will receive, via email, a Conflict of Interest form. Please print, complete, scan, and e-mail the form to Sarah Fuller at [SFuller@imls.gov](mailto:SFuller@imls.gov).
- Managing Copies** Keep your applications and a copy of your review sheets until **May 1, 2016**, in case there are questions from IMLS staff.
- Please maintain confidentiality of all applications that you review.

Thank you for serving as a NLG Reviewer!