How to Use the IMLS Online Reviewer System
Museums for America Panel Review

Introduction

- You will access the applications assigned to you by clicking on a link provided in an email message from your IMLS primary contact.
- You will enter one whole-number score and one set of comments for each application through the IMLS Online Reviewer System.
- Museums for America (MFA) panel review uses a scale of 1 (low) to 5 (high).
- You must write a constructive and substantive comment of between 30 and 2000 characters in length for each criterion—Goals, Implementation, and Results—and summary remarks in Application Overview.
- You should address your comments to the applicant, not to IMLS.
- Your comments and the numeric score you provide for the application should align with each other.

Step-by-Step Instructions

1. **Verify Access to Applications**
   Use the link provided to you in an email message from your IMLS primary contact to access the entire group of applications that your panel will review along with the field review comments and scores for each application. **The same email message included a list of applications assigned specifically to you.** Save at least the applications assigned to you (and more if you wish) and associated field reviews 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 the IMLS Online Reviewer System**
   To verify that you have access to the IMLS Online Reviewer System, visit the Museum Reviewer Resources page:

   https://www.imls.gov/grants/become-reviewer/reviewer-resources/museum-reviewer-resources

   Then scroll to the bottom of the page to "Review Online," and click on the link to access the Online Reviewer System Login.

   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.

Technology Issues

Browsers: Microsoft Internet Explorer® is the only reliable Web browser that will successfully work with the IMLS Online Reviewer System. Unfortunately, the system is not compatible with Mac or Microsoft Vista operating systems nor with browsers such as Mozilla Firefox, Apple Safari, Camino, or Opera.

Compatibility View Settings: If you are using Internet Explorer® and experience difficulty in viewing the text in the IMLS Online Reviewer System, try adding www.imls.gov to Compatibility Views under "Tools."

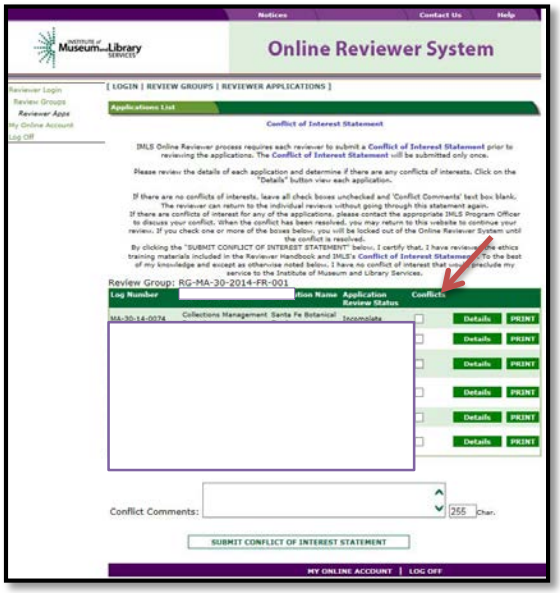
Passwords: There is no need to remember or rediscover a password you may have created in prior years. We reset all passwords for the IMLS Online Reviewer System to the default at the end of each review cycle, and so all reviewers must use the default to establish new accounts.

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 MFA Notice of Funding Opportunity at https://www.imls.gov/nofo/museums-america-fy16-notice-funding-opportunity . Then read the applications assigned to you, keeping in mind the three panel review criteria: **Goals, Implementation,** and **Results**. 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. Choose the project category below in which you are reviewing applications to access the review criteria as a separate document –

   Learning Experiences
   Community Anchors
   Collections Stewardship

   You may want to print this information to keep handy as you read your applications.

   New in 2016:
   On the Program Information Sheet (Section 4), applicants were required to select at least one pre-determined performance goal that reflects a measurable change or outcome they intend their project to achieve. For those projects in the Learning Experiences and Community Anchors categories, applicants were then required to select one or more specific performance measure statements associated with specific information that they will be required to collect during the grant period and report at the end of their projects. These pre-determined performance goals statements will help IMLS document the collective achievements of the projects we fund, and they may be found here: https://www.imls.gov/performance-measure-statements-and-information-learning-and-community-projects. For projects in Collections Stewardship category, applicants were asked to write their own performance measurement statements to reflect what success will look like upon the completion of their projects. Elements that you as a reviewer will evaluate in the Project Impact section of each application relate directly to performance goal(s) and performance measure statement(s).

5. **Draft Comments**
   You must write a constructive and substantive comment for each of three criteria for each application you review.

   To organize notes for writing your comments, you may use the "Panel Review Notes Template." As you think about the review criteria, be sure to consider all the required components of the application as well as relevant Supporting Documents as resources for your evaluation. 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 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 scores 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** panel reviewer comments:

Goals	
"You have made a compelling argument for your database project. The lack of centralized collections management is clearly causing numerous difficulties between museum staff and the conservation lab and is putting this complex and valuable collection at risk. It makes good sense for the museum to pull upon existing resources and utilize the same database as is used throughout the larger system to manage these data; this will enable the museum and the lab to comply with database standards and share collections information in real time and more broadly.	*Comment is substantive and addresses the review criteria.*
"Your museum is making good strides in accomplishing the goals identified in your strategic plan by creating new exhibits and a suite of programs to offer with them. It is not clear, however, that your efforts are audience-focused rather than staff-focused. Focus groups, interest surveys, or similar information gathering among your target audience might be helpful."	*Comment correlates with a score of 3 and makes implementable suggestions for improving the project.*

Implementation	
"You have a sound plan for evaluation throughout the process and a project advisory committee is in place. Your project team has worked together successfully to create the first online database and app that you will use as a foundation for this project. Overall, the timeline and funds are reasonably allocated for the project. "There is, however, a significant concern regarding staff and content production/goals. You do not articulate in any clear detail the scope of the enhancements to the app to create a more participatory experience. Second, there doesn't seem to be any member of the team with expertise in interpretation and public engagement/education on this team. Those are critical skills sets to enhancing the online database content and the engagement strategies for the app. Please consider adding them through different staff or bringing in expertise from the outside."	*Comment provides a constructive assessment of the application and suggestions likely to benefit the applicant.*
"The budget and human resources allocated to this project seem adequate to produce a quality learning experience. My real concern is about the scope of the proposed changes to the historic house itself. The project's goals are in some measure to address a gap in historic understanding in the community; and a point is made that there is no other history museum nearby. But the changes at your house seem to be restricted to the story of the family itself rather than the history of horticulture or the history of the region. There is an expert in genealogy on the team, but I do not see a voice for the broader historical narrative. "The project might benefit from greater use of professional resources in the region. It would seem to be an excellent opportunity to seek partnerships with kindred institutions in your city or the nearby coast."	*Comment addresses the review criteria and makes implementable suggestions for improving the project.*
Results	
"The historic tool cataloging project will greatly benefit staff and researchers; the public impact could be even more pronounced if professional images are simultaneously created and shared more broadly via online exhibits or through ARTstor. "The most exciting result may be in the museum's ability to take advantage of crowdsourcing around these historic tools. Obviously, there exists a community of hobbyists, amateur/ professional historians, and scholars very interested in these technical artifacts. I would recommend working some talk back features into the online collections search to facilitate conversation and take advantage of the knowledge and experience held by this particular group."	*Comment verifies strong points and makes solid recommendations for additional improvements.*

Results	
"Goals of this project are to create online access to the records and associated assets and to photograph and scan/digitize a group of materials in addition to the 30% of the collection that has been photographed. There are no details, however, about how this will happen. I have concerns about the digital assets that will be produced during the course of this project. The details are provided neither in the narrative nor on the IMLS digital products form. "The CAP report states that there is no space set up for object photography. It might be worthwhile for the museum to consider creating a space for the tech to capture better quality images of the collections that are being cataloged. "The narrative states that staff will be able to catalog 10,000 items a year; however, other than the two-week test period (where results are not fully explained), there was no mention of how the museum justifies this estimate, leaving this reviewer unsure as to the museum's ability to achieve this result. "The narrative also discusses an online interface to the database but offers no information about how this will be created. The proposal would be stronger if public access were more strongly addressed-although it is clear that the public would be impacted by reinterpreted exhibitions and researchers would greatly benefit from more accurate collections information."	*Comment is thoughtful, draws on reviewer's expertise, and makes implementable suggestions for improvement.*

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

Goals	
"The museum plans to organize a symposium on the topic of after-school programs in art museums that will bring together museums professionals to discuss best practices. They will partner with the Parks and Recreations Department, the Boys and Club and other after school providers."	*Comment paraphrases the applicant's own words.*
Implementation	
"The work plan would be improved by putting in more time onsite."	*Comment is very brief and has little value to the applicant.*
"One suggestion is that you have a discussion about what the term "key deliverable" means. Usually it pertains to a physical product rather than a nebulous goal or objective."	*Comment does not provide useful feedback.*
Results	
"The plan, staffing, and external reviewers indicate a good possibility of success."	*Comment is very brief and has little worth or value to the applicant.*

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

Should I consider … ?	Yes	No
Whether a project helps the organization advance its strategic plan	X	
An institution's financial or staffing needs		X
Whether the applicant has included all the information necessary for an adequate evaluation of the project's merits	X	
Whether an application is new or a resubmission		X
The size or age of the applicant organization		X
The applicant organization's indirect cost rate		X

6. **Assign Scores**
   Assign a single preliminary score to each application. Use a scale of 1 to 5, as described below.

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.

7. **Review Your Work**
   Review your draft comments and preliminary scores. A review with a missing score or even one missing 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.

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

   https://www.imls.gov/grants/become-reviewer/reviewer-resources/museum-reviewer-resources

   Then scroll to the bottom of the page to "Review Online," and click on the link to access the Online Reviewer System Login.

   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. After entering comments for all three review criteria, go to the **Application Overview** section and choose a numeric score between 1 and 5 from the **SCORE** dropdown menu. You must enter a summary comment in this section for the system to accept your score. Use the controls on the side or top of the screen to navigate between sections.

   NOTE: "Funding Priorities Addressed" is not relevant. You may simply ignore the radio button.

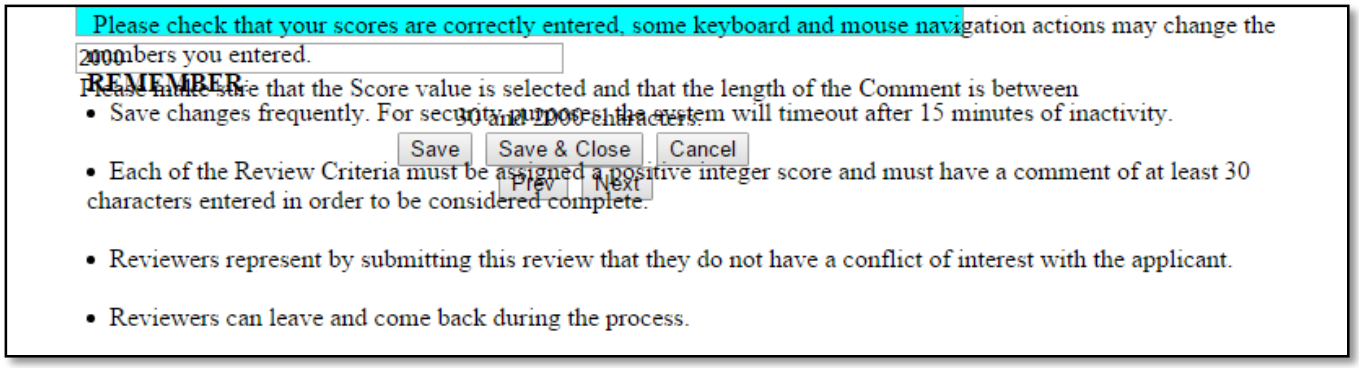
   Once you have completed assigning a score and providing comments for each application assigned to you, print a copy of each completed review to keep for your files. Then click on **I AM READY TO SUBMIT THIS REVIEW TO IMLS** to send all your work to IMLS. At this point, you will not be able to re-enter 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.

9. **Manage Your Copies**
   Keep your applications and a copy of each review sheet until **September 30, 2016,** 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, 2016, destroy the applications and the review sheets.

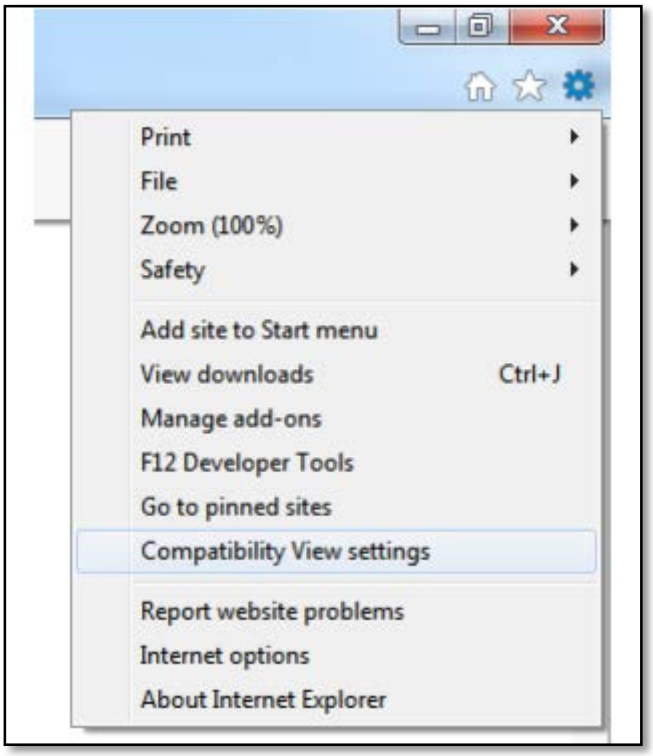
Appendix: Online Reviewer System Troubleshooting

You may encounter an issue where the text displayed in the Online Reviewer System is superimposed on top of buttons or menus, making the buttons difficult or impossible to click. It may look like this:

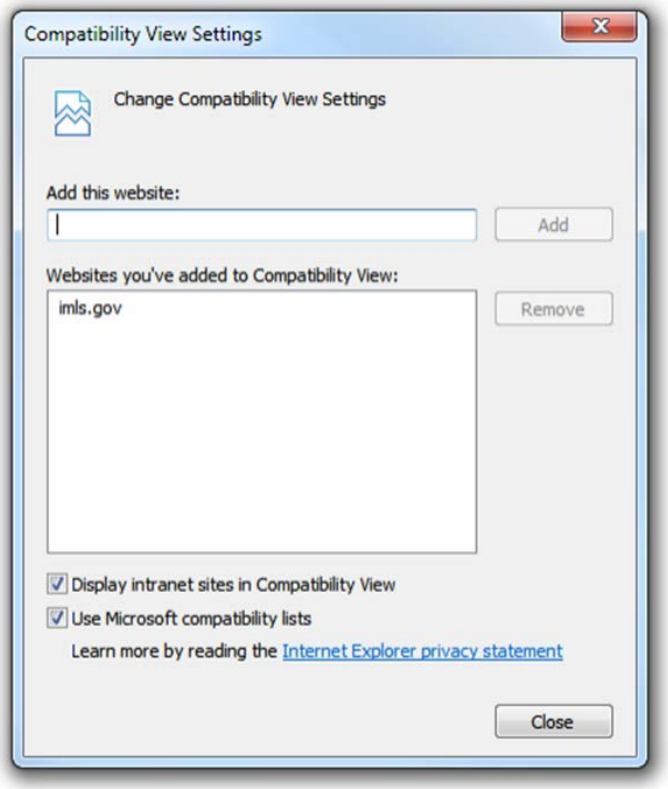


To resolve this issue, you must access the system using **Internet Explorer (IE) with Compatibility View (or Compatibility Mode) enabled**. In IE 11, this can be accomplished with the following steps:

1. Locate the Settings menu in the top right corner of the browser window and select Compatibility View settings.

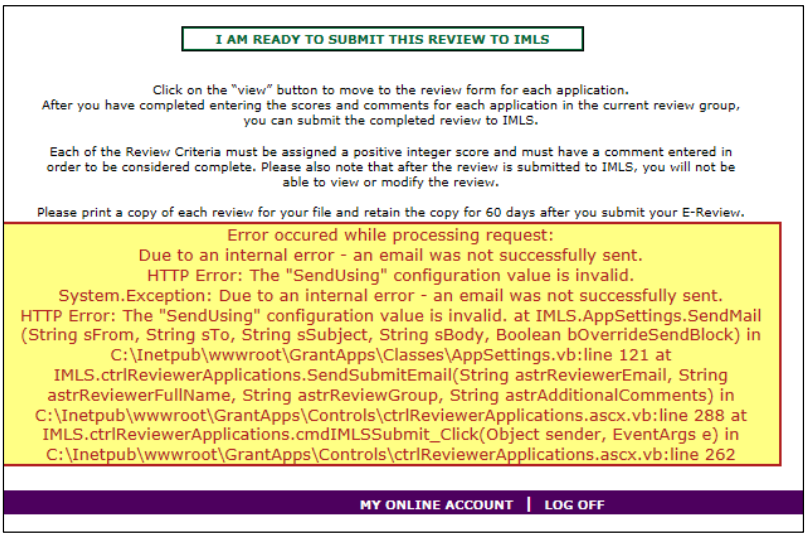


2. Type “imls.gov” in the **Add this website:** dialogue box, then click **Add**.



If you are using another version of IE, please refer to the help documentation for your version, or contact IMLS for assistance.

When you submit your comments and scores you may encounter the following error message:



Don’t worry. IMLS will have received your scores and comments if you receive this message.