INSTITUTE of
Museum and Library
SERVICES

Program Overview – Museums for America

Museums for America (MFA) grants support projects that strengthen the ability of an individual museum to serve its public.

Distinguishing features of successful MFA projects are:

- *Institutional Impact:* Projects address a key goal identified in an institution's strategic plan.
- *In-depth Knowledge:* Applications reflect a thorough understanding of current practice and knowledge about the subject matter.
- *Project-based Design:* Work plans consist of a set of logical, interrelated activities tied directly to addressing the key need or challenge identified in the proposal.
- *Demonstrable Results:* Projects generate measurable results that tie directly to the need or challenge it was designed to address.

Project Categories
There are three project categories within the MFA grant program:

Learning Experiences
IMLS supports the unique ability of museums to open the door to meaningful knowledge and enhanced inquiry skills for people of all ages and backgrounds through multi-sensory learning, discovery, critical thinking, and problem solving. IMLS welcomes applications for projects that position museums as unique teaching and inquiry-focused institutions within today's formal and informal learning ecosystem. Successful projects will provide high-quality, inclusive educational opportunities that address particular audience needs. We encourage projects that are based upon current research in cognitive and behavioral science as well as best practices developed in museums and other informal learning environments.

Projects may include, but are not limited to, the following activities:
- Interpretive and educational program development and delivery
- Exhibition development, design, and fabrication (non-construction)
- Digital media development, design, and delivery
- Public programs for audiences of all ages and abilities
- Digitization activities designed to provide greater access and stimulate engagement for audiences with different learning styles
- Professional development for educators in school and out-of-school settings
- Publication of curriculum-support materials accessible online and/or in print
- Visitor studies that help guide the design and development or reassessment and realignment of current educational programs
- Training for staff, volunteers, and interns
- Learning partnerships with schools and development of museum resources and programs in support of school curricula

The Performance Goals associated with projects in this category are:
- Train and develop museum professionals.

- Support communities of practice.
- Develop and provide inclusive and accessible learning opportunities.

Community Anchors

IMLS promotes the role of museums as essential partners in addressing the needs of their communities by leveraging their expertise, knowledge, physical space, technology, and other resources to identify and implement solutions. By strengthening museums' capacities for civic engagement, these projects contribute to the creation of livable, sustainable communities. IMLS welcomes applications for projects that empower museums to transform their roles in their communities from being community resources to being community catalysts. Museums have a role to play providing civic and cultural engagement, facilitating lifelong learning, promoting digital inclusion, and supporting economic vitality through programming and services. We encourage projects that demonstrate collaboration, adopt co-creating strategies, and engage with a wide variety of cross-sector stakeholders to accomplish a sustained collective impact goal.

Projects may include, but are not limited to, the following activities:
- Creating environments for community learning, debate, and dialogue
- Community-driven and co-created exhibitions, programs, and events
- Audience development and community outreach
- Community-focused planning activities
- Audience-focused studies and evaluation
- Training for staff, volunteers, and interns in proactive and sustained community outreach and engagement strategies

The Performance Goal associated with projects in this category is:
- Strengthen museums as essential partners in addressing the needs of their communities.

Collections Stewardship

IMLS supports exemplary management, care, and conservation of, as well as broad access to and use of, museum collections. We invest in the long-term preservation of materials and specimens as well as skill-building and capacity-expanding programs for museum staff, volunteers, and interns. IMLS welcomes applications for projects that address state-of-the-art collections care and collections-information management, curation, preventive conservation, conservation treatments, database creation and enhancement, digitization, and the use of digital tools to facilitate discovery and deepen engagement with museum collections.

Projects may include, but are not limited to, the following activities:
- Planning for management, care, and conservation of collections
- Cataloguing, inventorying, documenting, and registration of collections
- Developing and enhancing collections databases to improve collections management and/or to facilitate access and discovery
- Digitization activities, including creating digital tools and platforms that allow expanded access to and use of the museum's collections

- Conservation surveys
- Conservation treatment
- Rehousing collections
- Environmental improvements (non-construction) for museum collections storage and exhibit areas
- Training of staff, volunteers, and interns in collections management, care, conservation, and in using technology to broaden access and expand use of collections

The Performance Goals associated with projects in this category are:
- Broaden access and expand use of the Nation's content and collections.
- Improve management of the Nation's content and collections.
- Improve preservation, conservation, and care of the Nation's content and collections.

Funding Levels
There are two funding levels in Museums for America, and they differ in cost share requirement.

- Requests between **$5,000 and $25,000** must not include a cost share. If an applicant includes cost share in the budget, the application is rejected from further consideration.

- Requests between **$25,001 and $250,000** must include at least a 1:1 cost share. If an applicant does not include at least a 1:1 cost share in the budget, the application is rejected from further consideration.