Program Overview – National Leadership Grants for Museums

National Leadership Grants (NLG) for Museums support 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.

Distinguishing features of all National Leadership Grants for Museums projects are:
- *Broad Impact:* Projects should show the potential for far-reaching impact beyond the applicant institution and influence practice across one or more disciplines or specific fields within the museum profession.
- *In-depth Knowledge:* Proposals should reflect a thorough understanding of current practice and knowledge about the subject matter and an awareness and support of current strategic initiatives and agendas in the field.
- *Innovative Approach:* Projects should employ novel approaches or techniques new to the project area to strengthen and improve museum services to benefit the audiences and communities being served.
- *Collaborative Process:* Projects should incorporate audience, stakeholders and/or other partners to demonstrate broad need, field-wide buy-in and input, access to appropriate expertise, and sharing of resources.
- *Shared Results:* Projects should generate results such as models, new tools, research findings, services, practices, and/or alliances that can be widely used, adapted, scaled, or replicated to extend and leverage the benefits of federal investment.

There are four project categories within the NLG-Museums grant program:

Advancing Digital Assets and Capacity
Recognizing the dynamic nature of digital technology and its far-reaching benefits for the museum sector, IMLS welcomes applications to fully explore, understand, and optimize the use of digital technology in museums. IMLS encourages innovative approaches that allow museums to further their educational missions, engage effectively and in relevant ways with their communities, and increase capacity to share collections and information in a complex connected world. IMLS supports the creation, use, presentation, and preservation of digital resources and shared platforms as well as the development of tools and networks to enhance access, optimize use, and sustain the management of digital assets.

Projects may include, but are not limited to, the following activities:
- Adoption and development of emerging educational trends, such as open education resources (OER), massive open online courses (MOOCs), blended and flipped classroom models, gaming, and project-based learning labs that use new media technology and assess for enhanced learning outcomes.
- Building and strengthening learning partnerships via shared digital platforms that make museum resources accessible online and otherwise, in support of school curricula and state and national standards.
- Development of new and innovative methods for addressing community challenges and needs through partnerships, services, processes, or practices. These may range

from analysis, modeling and visualization of data to inform work on community wellbeing to researching and testing the role of new media communication tools in fostering audience engagement, learning, and conversations.
- Demonstration of expanded access to collections through the adoption of proven technologies such as 3D objects visualization, digital archiving or crowd-sourcing models.
- Development of multi-institutional digital strategies to leverage big data, linked data and open data resources in a scalable and sustainable manner.
- Needs assessment and gap analysis research that can aid in understanding the capacity of the museum sector to utilize digital strategies and identify existing digital technologies, tools and approaches that can support adoption by the museum sector and enhance access to various publics and users.

Diversity and Inclusion

IMLS supports the work of museums in engaging with communities and providing inclusive services to people of diverse geographic, cultural, and socioeconomic backgrounds and to individuals with disabilities. IMLS encourages museums to deeply understand the current status and future trends in the demographics of their communities and to address it in their programs and services. IMLS seeks innovative projects that help museums work with community members and community-based organizations to broaden opportunity and access.

Projects may include, but are not limited to, the following activities:
- Developing collaborative models of fellowships, internships and mentoring programs to attract diverse and inclusive emerging professionals. This includes engaging in community outreach and engagement strategies such as immersive experiences through community-based fellowships.
- Developing programs that raise early awareness about museum careers with middle and high school students in diverse communities.
- Development and implementation of recruitment and retention program models in collaboration with community or educational partners (e.g., webinars, workshops, or outreach materials) designed to attract and retain a diverse and inclusive workforce.
- Development of a collective-impact model for the museum sector that designs institutional models and templates which can seamlessly incorporate diversity and inclusion objectives into strategic plans, interpretive plans and/or collections plans.
- Research into any topic relating to diversity and inclusion, the findings from which will inform museums' work in this area.
- Creation of frameworks, models, tools, and resources to increase community cohesion and tolerance, encourage civic discourse and for the engagement of diverse or underserved audiences such as individuals who are re-entering the workforce from periods of stress such as veterans, formerly incarcerated individuals, New Americans, or those in retrenching economies.

Collections Care and Access

IMLS supports the exemplary management, care, and conservation of, as well as broad access to and use of museum collections. Investments designed to contribute to the long-term preservation of materials and specimens are complemented by skill-building and capacity-expanding programs for museum staff, volunteers, and interns. IMLS welcomes applications for projects that help the museum field 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. We welcome projects that demonstrate cross-sector and cross-disciplinary collaboration with libraries, archives, and other collecting institutions.

Projects may include, but are not limited to, the following activities:
- Development, implementation, and dissemination of new tools or services that enhance collection digitization strategies, facilitate digital access, and aides in the management, preservation, sharing, and use of museum collections. This includes: digital infrastructure development and efficient, shared service approaches, scaled application of existing platforms, and use of linked open data standards and protocols.
- Development and implementation of training and professional development programs, tools, or resources that impact the ability of museum staff and/or volunteers in multiple institutions to improve the stewardship of and access to collections.
- Research focusing on any broadly relevant aspect of the management, conservation, preservation, use of and/or digital access to collections including methods that increase engagement among community groups with special interests, affinities, and needs.
- Building or strengthening coalitions and networks to enhance collections care and digital access across the spectrum of institutional sizes, discipline, mission, and locations.
- Providing new avenues for gathering and incorporating collections information from stakeholders such as community members and scholars to create community based archiving and collective memory projects.

Professional Development

IMLS supports proposals to create models across multiple institutions and that are applicable field wide for professional development of museum staff, volunteers, and interns, and ensure the highest standards in all aspects of museum operations. This includes, but is not limited to, creating opportunities to encourage a more inclusive and diverse museum professional and volunteer workforce, and building the skills of museum staff at all levels, with emphasis on the development of the next generation of museum professionals.

Projects may include, but are not limited to, the following activities:

- Development and implementation of multi-institution and cross-sector networks and coalitions of professional development and staff-capacity building opportunities that optimize trainers and practitioners to improve staff practices in the area of programs, services, collections, and operation of museums.
- Dissemination of content and skills-based information and sharing of collective knowledge to museum professionals through innovative and nimble techniques, leveraging online "community of practice" models as well as technology tools that allow reaching a broader pool of professionals.
- Focusing professional development training models on relevant sector needs such as digital technology, diversity and inclusion, evaluation, and organizational management.
- Longitudinal research on museum studies or other emerging professional preparation programs that can benefit the sector with valuable needs assessment and gap analysis data.
- Development of innovative and collaborative courses, internship exchange models and museum placement plans to broaden the opportunities for leadership development of emerging professionals.
- Models and frameworks to organize, develop, and deploy staff skills and competencies to support catalytic work in communities within a collective impact approach.

There are three funding levels available:

Non-research grant, $50,000–$1,000,000 with 1:1 cost share required
Projects of one to three years 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.

Research grant, $50,000–$1,000,000 with no cost share required
Research projects of one to three years that investigate key questions important to museum practice and that have the potential to advance the profession so that museums can improve services for the American public. See page 5 for more about the elements of an effective research application.

Rapid prototyping grant, $5,000–$50,000 with no cost share required
Projects of one year that prototype and evaluate specific innovations in the ways museums operate and the services they provide. Project results, both successful and unsuccessful, should offer valuable information to the museum field and the potential for improvement in the ways museums serve their communities.

Guidance for Research Applications

Please note that research and information collection is subject to applicable law, including but not limited to 45 C.F.R. pt. 46 (Protection of Human Subjects); see also the IMLS Assurances and Certifications.

An effective research application should answer the following questions in the project narrative.

What are the specific research questions your project will attempt to answer?

List the question or questions that will drive your proposed activities. Research questions should be clear and concise to help reviewers understand what you wish to learn.

What is our theoretical framing?

What are the concepts, assumptions, expectations, beliefs, and/or theories that support and inform your research and guide your approach to data collection and analysis? If you are proposing to conduct research that will build theory, explain why.

What is the relevance of our proposed research for current practice?

Discuss how your proposed work builds on existing projects or efforts, including those funded by IMLS. Provide information about how your research can lead to improved museum or library practice and demonstrate you are familiar with current scholarship, including empirical work, in your area of interest.

What research methods will you use to conduct the research?

Detail the methods you will use to collect and analyze data. Say why they are the most appropriate for addressing the question(s) at hand. Your methods must be replicable and based on current practices.

What type of data will you gather?

Describe the type of data you will collect and any measures you will take to ensure its validity and reliability. Detail the methods for collecting information along with any potential privacy or human subjects concerns that may arise. List potential challenges in gathering data and explain how you will address them. As noted above, research and information collection is subject to applicable law, including but not limited to privacy requirements and 45 C.F.R. pt. 46 (Protection of Human Subjects), see also the IMLS Assurances and Certifications.

How will you analyze and use the data?

Describe how you will analyze the results of your research and relate them to your research questions. If applicable, outline an analysis plan that links a set of testable hypotheses to the proposed research question(s). Identify the variables of interest that are key to the investigation, and explain how you will deal with alternative explanations for the observed phenomena.

How will you report the information?
Address how you will communicate the results to a variety of target audiences with different levels of expertise, especially practitioners.

How will you manage the research data and make it available for future use (as applicable)?

Explain how you will manage, share, preserve, and document the information and research products you will create during the project. To do this, complete the Digital Product Form (PDF, 45 KB) and include it as part of the application to IMLS.

Data sharing is an essential component of research and expedites the translation of research results into new knowledge and practices. If your project involves the collection and analysis of data, we expect you to include, as part of your application, a data management plan (Part IV of the Digital Product Form (PDF, 45 KB)) that provides for long-term preservation and access. We expect you to deposit data resulting from IMLS-funded research in a broadly accessible repository that allows the public to use the data without charge no later than the date upon which you submit your final report to IMLS. The data should be deposited in a machine-readable, non-proprietary digital format to maximize search, retrieval, and analysis.

Your project budget may include the costs of preparing the data for public release and for making the data publicly available. In your final report to IMLS, you will be required to identify where your data has been deposited and can be accessed by the public.

We recognize that data sharing may be complicated or limited in some cases by institutional policies; local Institutional Review Board (IRB) rules; and local, state, and federal laws and regulations, including those protecting confidentiality and personal privacy. The rights and privacy of people who participate in IMLS-supported research must be protected at all times. Thus, data intended for broader use should be free of anything that could lead to disclosure of the identity of individual participants. You should identify and explain the reasons for any limitations in your data management plan.

For the purposes of this section, "data" is defined consistent with OMB guidance (please see 2 C.F.R. § 200.315). We reserve a royalty-free, nonexclusive, and irrevocable right to: (1) obtain, reproduce, publish or otherwise use the data first produced under a grant; and (2) authorize others to receive, reproduce, publish, or otherwise use such data for federal purposes.