



Agency Brief

The [Institute of Museum and Library Services](#) (IMLS) is an independent grantmaking agency and the primary source of federal support for libraries and museums. The mission of IMLS is to advance, support, and empower museums, libraries, and related organizations through grantmaking, research, and policy development.

IMLS makes awards to American Indian Tribes, including Alaska Native villages, regional corporations, and village corporations. Like IMLS grants to other organizations, these awards are guided by three main goals: (1) To champion lifelong learning, (2) To strengthen community engagement, and (3) To advance collections stewardship and access.

IMLS was formed in 1996 and made its first Native American Library Services awards in 1998. IMLS began offering grants to American Indian Tribes in 2005 under the Museum and Library Services Act of 2003. Our working partnership has endured and continues today through three grant programs designed to support Tribal communities through the provision of library and museum services.

[Native American Library Services Basic Grants](#) are designed to (1) improve services for learning and accessing information in a variety of formats to support needs for education, workforce development, economic and business development, health information, critical thinking skills, digital literacy skills, and financial literacy and other types of literacy skills; and (2) enhance the skills of the current library workforce and leadership through training, continuing education, and opportunities for professional development.

[Native American Library Services Enhancement Grants](#) are designed to (1) improve digital services to support needs for education, workforce development, economic and business development, health information, critical thinking skills, and digital literacy skills; (2) improve educational programs related to specific topics and content areas of interest to library patrons and community-based users; and (3) enhance the preservation and revitalization of Native American cultures and languages.

[Native American/Native Hawaiian Museum Services Grants](#) are designed to support American Indian Tribes and Native Hawaiian organizations in sustaining heritage, culture, and knowledge through exhibitions, educational services and programming, professional development, and collections stewardship.

In 2020, IMLS distributed CARES Act funding to support museums, libraries, and Tribes in responding to the coronavirus pandemic. Funds were granted to Tribal libraries, archives, museums, and cultural centers to provide community assistance designed to help preserve jobs, train staff, address the digital divide, plan for reopening, and provide technical support and capacity building for digital inclusion and engagement.

This year, IMLS received additional funding for pandemic response under the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 (ARPA). As the coronavirus continues to take its terrible toll on communities, IMLS is exploring further ways to support Tribes in responding to the pandemic. For more information, please visit [imls.gov](https://www.imls.gov).

IMLS supports collaboration, capacity building, and engagement in several ways, in addition to the existing grant programs. In [2019](#), [2020](#), and upcoming in 2021, the agency was a key partner in the Tribal Broadband Summits, events which focused on how to bridge the connectivity gap in Indian Country and unlock the opportunities that broadband access can provide.

Also in 2019, IMLS held a special [Tribal Libraries Convening](#) to offer an opportunity for Native American Library Services grantees and federal partners to celebrate and reflect back on multiple milestones in funding for Tribal libraries, as well as to explore new needs moving forward.

Finally, the agency holds yearly meetings bringing together grantees from the Native American library and museum services programs, and has collaborated with the Association of Tribal Archives, Libraries, and Museums (ATALM) and the ATALM conference for over a decade.

Native American Library and Museum Services Grant Examples:

The following selection of blog posts feature grants awarded through the IMLS Native American museum and library services programs.

- [Filling in the Map: Presenting and Preserving Native Alaskan History](#)
- [Their Youngest Readers: A Washington Tribal Library Connects Children with the Community](#)

- [How the Colusa Indian Community is Bringing Youth Together Across the Digital Divide](#)
- [IMLS CARES Act State Library Spotlight: How Minnesota Supported Tribal Colleges and Digital Access](#)
- [Mukurtu Software Preserves Indigenous Digital Heritage through Technologies of Today](#)
- [Rediscovering History with Needles, Thread, and Caribou Skins](#)
- [Digitizing 30 Years of Alaskan Tribal Heritage](#)
- [Focus on the Nisenan - Building Collaboration to Develop Local Indian Resources for a Rural Community and Bring Recognition to their Indigenous Peoples](#)
- [Tribal Cohort Program Provides Resources for Digital Heritage Management](#)

IMLS also awards the National Medal for Museum and Library Service, the highest federal honor in recognition of outstanding service to communities. In 2019, two Tribal organizations received this honor: Jamestown S'Klallam Tribal Library in Sequim, WA, and the Barona Cultural Center and Museum in Lakeside, CA. Their stories can be found in the [2019 National Medals brochure](#).

IMLS also supported the “Digital Inclusion in Indian Country: The Role of Tribal Libraries” project and [associated publication](#).