Welcome to the Institute of Museum and Library Services’ webinar, “IMLS Museums Empowered Fiscal Year 2023 Information Session.”

My name is Mark Isaksen – I’m one of the program staff in the Office of Museum Services – and speaking on behalf of rest of the staff, we are glad that you are interested in preparing an application for the IMLS Museums Empowered grant program.
Here are the topics we will cover in today’s webinar:

- Where to Find Information
- Program Overview
- IMLS Funding Eligibility Criteria
- Program Goals
- Project Activities
- Allowable and Unallowable Costs
- Application Components
- Narrative Review Criteria
- Where to Learn More
- Application Tips & Next Steps
This is one of a series of webinars designed to help you find the information you need to create a competitive application for IMLS museum funding.

“Choosing a Funding Opportunity for FY2023” is available as a video and as a PDF on our website at the link identified here. In that webinar, we cover the IMLS vision, mission, and strategic plan. We also address institutional eligibility for applicants, provide a quick overview of ALL our funding opportunities, show you how to find information online with a focus on our website, and we cover the places you must be registered in order to apply for an IMLS grant.

In addition to this webinar about Museums Empowered we are making available on-demand webinars for all our museum grant programs, which are available on our website.
The IMLS website is an important place to find information

When you go to the website you will see a drop down menu for GRANTS on our home page. Click on the section titled “Apply for a Grant.” This section of our website is for you.
Each grant program has a landing page on the IMLS website. Here you will find a brief overview of the grant program along with contact information for the IMLS staff assigned to this grant program. Our contact information includes a link you can use to directly schedule on our calendar a 30 minute counseling call with a program staff person. Counseling calls are an opportunity for you to discuss your project ideas and raise any questions you have about the application process. We encourage you to use this link to schedule a time to talk with one of us. We know that applying for a federal grant can be a complex and time-consuming process, and we want you to feel confident in moving forward with an application.

Also on the grant program landing page you will find a link to the PDF of the Notice of Funding Opportunity. The Notice of Funding Opportunity (sometimes referred to as the NOFO) is the official instructions and guidance for how to prepare, complete, and submit an application for funding.

The text and information I am using in this webinar derive from the instructions and guidance found in the Notice of Funding Opportunity. A NOFO is available for each of the grant funding opportunities.

Now let’s discuss the Museums Empowered grant program in more detail.
Museums Empowered is a special initiative of the Museums for America grant program. It is designed to support projects that use the transformative power of professional development and training to generate systemic change within museums of all types and sizes. Projects are expected to involve multiple levels of staff, leadership, and volunteers in a set of logical, interrelated activities tied directly to addressing a key need or challenge; reflect a thorough understanding of current practice and knowledge about professional development; and generate measurable results.
We are often asked about numbers of applications in a particular grant program so here are the figures for the just completed Museums Empowered grant cycle. In FY 2022 we made 20 awards for a total of $4,299,396.

**Summary of 2022 Grant Statistics**
- Number of applications: 49
- Number of grants awarded: 20
- Average Award amount: $214,970
- Total dollar amount awarded: $4,299,396

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>2022 #</th>
<th>2022 %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Digital Technology</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diversity &amp; Inclusion</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluation</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizational Management</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Applications</td>
<td>49</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Awards</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Funding eligibility criteria for the Museums Empowered program are detailed in the Notice of Funding Opportunity, but I will try to summarize here. All IMLS grant applicants must be either a unit of state, local, or tribal government or a private nonprofit organization. In addition to be eligible for funding as a "museum," an organization must also:

- use a professional staff – defined as having at least one staff member, or the full-time equivalent, paid or unpaid, primarily engaged in the acquisition, care, or exhibition to the public of objects owned or used by the institution.
- be organized on a permanent basis for essentially educational or aesthetic purposes;
- own or use tangible objects, either animate or inanimate;
- care for these objects;
- exhibit these objects to the general public on a regular basis, at least 120 days a year;
- conduct these activities in facilities that it owns or operates.

Museums as defined here may stand alone as independent organizations, may be nonprofit organizations responsible for the operation of a museum, or they may be administered by a governing body, such as a college, university, or a state or local government.
Your application to the Museums Empowered grant program should align with one of the four programs and associated objectives. The four Museums Empowered program goals are:

**Goal 1:** Provide museum staff with the skills to integrate **digital technology** into museum operations.

**Goal 2:** Support museum staff in providing **inclusive** services to people of diverse geographic, cultural, and socioeconomic backgrounds and to individuals with disabilities.

**Goal 3:** Strengthen the ability of museum staff to use **evaluation** as a tool to shape museum programs and improve outcomes.

**Goal 4:** Strengthen and support museum staff as the essential part of a **resilient organizational culture**
So let’s take a look at each goal in a little more detail.

Goal 1 supports projects that provide museum staff with the skills to integrate digital technology into museum operations. This might involve activities that support staff learning and integration of digital communication platforms and social media tools to enhance audience engagement and community outreach; or activities that support staff learning and integration of digital tools and services that enhance access to museum collections. The emphasis here is on staff learning and integration of these new tools, not just on the acquisition of the new tools.
Goal 2 focuses on diversity and inclusion and supports projects that help museum staff in providing inclusive services to people of diverse geographic, cultural, and socioeconomic backgrounds and to individuals with disabilities.

This might involve activities that create training and learning opportunities that increase cultural competency of museum staff and enhance relevancy of museum programs; or activities that develop and implement inclusive fellowship, internship, and mentoring programs to increase support for emerging professionals from diverse communities entering the museum field.
Goal 3 supports projects that strengthen the ability of museum staff to use evaluation as a tool to shape museum programs and improve outcomes.

This might involve activities that increase staff knowledge of program evaluation methods and the usefulness of evaluation reports, tools, data and metrics; or activities that provide museum staff with the tools and strategies to adapt evaluation methods to address a specific audience or institutional need.
And goal 4 is about organizational management and is intended to support museum staff as the essential part of a resilient organizational culture.

This might involve activities that help you to develop and implement comprehensive organizational learning opportunities that address one or more emerging priorities facing a museum; or activities that help you develop and implement programs that address the specific learning and growth opportunities identified by staff needs assessments.
Sometimes it’s tough to choose a goal, so here are a few strategies to help you select one that aligns best to your project:

1. Think carefully about what is “in the center” of your project. Who or what will benefit from your work? What will be improved once you’ve finished your project?
2. Decide who you want to review your application. What kind of skill set and experience do you want them to have?
3. List all the activities you plan to carry out and assign each to a goal. Which goal gets the most? Where will most of the resources be spent?

Why is your decision about which goal to choose so important? Because it impacts the review process. Your application will be reviewed by museum professionals who have experience and expertise in aligned with that goal. In addition, your application will be competing against others who have chosen the same goal.

Our advice is to choose one program goal and write your proposal accordingly.
We’ll turn now to allowable and unallowable costs for your project. Be very careful in preparing your proposal and include only allowable costs in both the IMLS grant funds and the cost share part of your budget.

We’ll go through some common expenses that are allowable and unallowable, but for details, please see Title 2, Subtitle A, Chapter II, Part 200 of the Code of Federal Regulations covering Uniform Administrative Requirements, Cost Principles and Audit Requirements for Federal Awards, or “2 CFR 200” for short.

The regulations are available online in a searchable format on the U.S. Government Publishing Office website listed on the screen.
In the Museums Empowered Notice of Funding Opportunity, we provide a partial list of the most common examples of allowable costs as pictured here.

These costs may be part of what you ask IMLS to pay for and/or what you will pay for as part of your cost share. The rules about allowability apply equally to the entire budget – in other words whether a cost item is on the grant funds side of the budget or the cost share side of the budget, the same rules of allowability apply to all line items in the budget.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Allowable Costs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• personnel salaries, wages, and fringe benefits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• travel expenses for key project staff and consultants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• materials, supplies, software, and equipment related directly to project activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• third-party costs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• staff and volunteer training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• internships/fellowships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• indirect or overhead costs</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
We also provide a list of generally unallowable costs, again both for IMLS funds and for cost share. These costs may NOT be part of what you ask IMLS to pay for, NOR can they be part of what you will pay for as part of your cost share. In fact, unallowable expenses can’t show up anywhere in your proposal.

Remember to focus your budget – and the cost items you include there – on expenses that will occur during the period of performance (the duration of the grant award) and on expenses that are directly related to the activities in your proposed project.

As you prepare your application, it’s a good idea to compare your list of proposed expenses against these lists of allowable and unallowable costs and against the appropriate set of cost principles. If after that you have specific questions, please contact us and we’ll be happy to help.
Now that you have some basic framework on the amount of funding and the allowable costs for your project, let’s review the multiple parts of the grant application that you will need to prepare. The application components are a series of documents you will upload in Grants.gov that together make up your application.

These application components fall into three categories. The first is that of Required Documents. All applications must include these. Omission of even just one can result in the exclusion of your application from further consideration.

The second group is that of Conditionally Required Documents. Some applications must include these. It might depend on the nature of your institution or some aspect of your project. In either case, omission of even just one can result in the exclusion of your application from further consideration.

The third group of application components are Supporting Documents. These are completely optional. Include only those that supplement your narrative and support the activities described in your application.
Your application will consist of a series of individual documents, and it’s very important to make sure you prepare and submit everything necessary to complete your application.

All applications must include the 12 required documents listed on this slide.

The 8 documents listed on left side of this slide are created by you, using a word document, and then saving this as a PDF. Instructions for all of these required documents are found in the Notice of Funding Opportunity. Many of these have page limits, and if you exceed the page limit specified in the Notice of Funding Opportunity, we must remove the extras before your application goes out for review. Make sure your content fits into the page limits specified and make sure the number of pages holds when you convert your document to a PDF.

The 4 required documents on the right side of the slide include the Application for Federal Assistance, the IMLS Supplementary Information Form, and the IMLS Museum Program Information Form which are online forms you complete in the grants.gov environment. The IMLS Budget Form is a fillable PDF.
The second category of application components is that of **conditionally required documents**. Some applications must include one or all of these, and it’s your job to figure out which are required for yours.

- If you are applying as a nonprofit, then you must include your proof of nonprofit status issued by the IRS.
- If you are using a federally negotiated indirect cost in your budget, then you must include a copy of your final rate agreement.
- If you will create digital products during the course of your project, then you must complete and submit a Digital Products Plan. The term “digital product” includes (1) digitized and born-digital content, resources, or assets; (2) software; and (3) research data. If you are creating any of these types of materials, you must include the plan with your application.
The third group of application components is supporting documents. Supporting documents are completely optional. This is not the place to introduce new information.

Some common items in this section might be letters of support from key stakeholders and project participants, executive summaries from studies or reports that have helped to shape your project design and bolster the project justification, or simply just a bibliography of references and related documents.

For example, an essential supporting document might be a letter of commitment from a consultant that you identified in the project work plan, with information that further describes their methodology or approach to the proposed project, or with a detailed cost estimate that further justifies their associated costs in the budget. Another example might be a letter of support from a key project partner – perhaps a community organization or other entity outside of the museum that will be an important part of the project activities. A letter describing their support of the project and providing background on the relationship between the partner organization and the museum would help reviewers understand the context in which the project will be implemented.

We also recommend that you be respectful of your reviewers’ time so include what is important and helpful ... and stop there.
Let’s turn to two specific documents that that are very important and about which applicants seem to have the most questions.

First is a strategic plan summary. IMLS wants to help you achieve your goals, and one of the characteristics of a successful Museums Empowered project is addressing a key need or challenge that faces your museum and is identified in your strategic plan. We ask for a summary of your plan—no more than two pages—so that reviewers will be able to understand how your proposed project’s activities will further your institutional goals and objectives. We also ask that you indicate when and by whom the plan was approved. For some institutions this might be the Board of Trustees. For others it might be someone or a group representing the authority for a division or a department.

Use a narrative format for your strategic plan summary. Our reviewers tell us they find a well-constructed, thoughtful, written summary the best way to see the connection between your museum’s strategic plan and your proposed project.
The federal government recently added a new requirement to all federal awards. Agencies are now required to measure the performance of awardees. This Performance Measurement requirement is different from Project Evaluation, which is typically included in your project proposals.

Performance Measurement tells us how good a job you did as a federal awardee. It helps IMLS understand, manage, and improve our grant programs and the assistance we provide to applicants and awardees.

Project evaluation, by contrast, is all about your project intended results or outcomes. Project evaluation will be covered in the narrative part of your application, following the questions we ask in the NOFO, such as what need you are addressing and what associated results do you want your project to have, how you will track progress toward achieving your intended results, and how the knowledge, skills, behaviors, and/or attitudes of your target audience will change as a result of your project.

But for now, let’s turn now to our focus on performance measurement and how we will ask you to plan for it and report on it.
In the Notice of Funding Opportunity, we provide a sample chart which applicants may, but are not required to use. On the left side of the chart are four commonly used Performance Measures that IMLS has adopted for this effort:

- **Effectiveness**: The extent to which activities contribute to achieving the intended results
- **Efficiency**: How well resources (e.g., funds, expertise, time) are used and costs are minimized while generating maximum value for the target group
- **Quality**: How well the activities meet the requirements and expectations of the target group
- **Timeliness**: The extent to which each task/activity is completed within the proposed timeframe

Across the top are the information points we’re asking you to use in your statements with examples of each. For instance, with “Data We Will Collect” are listed counts such as, costs, weights, percentages, and hours, as well as qualitative measures such as observations, opinions, and feelings.

For each performance measure, we provide a couple of examples addressing issues that might turn up in museum projects. The blank space is where we suggest you write your own performance measure statements. We are looking for one statement for each required performance measure. You may provide more than one statement per measure, if you wish. Keep in mind the performance measurement plan is limited to two pages.
Among the required components of your application, the Narrative is the section that reviewers are likely to spend the most time reading. So let's examine the narrative section of the application. In the Museums Empowered grant program the narrative is limited to 7 pages and is divided into three sections:

- Project Justification
- Project Work Plan
- Project Results

The questions we ask you to answer and the review criteria by which your application will be judged are posted in the Notice of Funding Opportunity on the IMLS website.
Project Justification

In this first section of the narrative, you should lay out the reasoning for your project. Tell us in the clearest terms possible what you propose to do; what need, problem, or challenge you expect to address; who or what will benefit; how your project will enhance the capacity of your institution; and how your project will address the goals of the Museums Empowered program – using professional development to generate systemic change within the museum.

In this section of the narrative, you will notice a distinction is made between “target group” and “beneficiaries”.

- “Target group” refers to those who will be most immediately and positively affected by your project. Identify the number of individuals in the target group or in each target group, if you identify more than one.

- “Beneficiaries” refers to those who are likely to be aided in the long-term by your project. They may or may not be the same as your “target group.” Identify the number of individuals who will benefit from your project in the long term, if reliable and defensible counts are possible. Otherwise describe the characteristics of the beneficiaries you expect to be served eventually by your project.
Reviewers will evaluate your proposal on how well you explain your project; how well you’ve identified the need, problem, or challenge you will address and how well you’ve supported that with relevant evidence; whether you’ve clearly identified who or what will benefit from the project, and if this involves an audience of some kind, whether they’ve been appropriately involved in the planning.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reviewers will look for:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Has the applicant selected an appropriate program goal/project category and one or more associated objectives of Museums Empowered?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Are the ways in which this project advances the institution’s strategic plan specific and measurable?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• How well has the applicant used relevant data and best practices to describe the need, problem, or challenge to be addressed?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Are the project activities designed to use professional development and training to generate systemic change within the museum?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Has the applicant appropriately defined the target group(s) and beneficiaries, as applicable, for this work?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Have the target group and other project stakeholders been involved appropriately in planning the project?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Because the need, problem, or challenge is foundational in your application, keep these points in mind.

- The federal government wants its investment to result in SOMETHING getting better.
- Articulate what will get better as a result of your project as precisely as possible.
- Identify why it is important that this change happens.
- Present data that support your problem definition.
The Project Work Plan is the part of the narrative in which you relay who will do what when and using what resources.

We ask you to tell us what specific activities you will undertake; who will plan, implement, and manage your project; when and in what sequence your activities will occur; what financial, personnel, and other resources you will need to carry out the activities; how you will track progress toward achieving your intended results.
Reviewers will evaluate your proposal on how well your activities are informed by appropriate theory and practice; whether the goals, assumptions and risks clearly stated.

Reviewers want to see that the team you’ve put together has the experience and skills necessary to complete the work successfully; and that your schedule is realistic and achievable. In this section you want to show how the project team is structured, is it equitable and mutually beneficial to those involved? Reviewers want to see how the project team organized to support engagement of all participants.

They’ll also be looking at whether the time, personnel, and financial resources identified are appropriate for the scope and scale of the project. They will consider if you’ve described a clear methodology for tracking your progress and adjusting course when necessary.
Your work plan will be built on activities, so it’s important to be clear about just what an activity is.

An activity is something that someone does. It has a beginning and an end (just like projects), and you know when you’ve finished it because it doesn’t need to be done any more. It is no longer on your To Do List.

An activity is NOT a goal, a result, or an outcome. Rather it is something you do as part of striving to achieve those.

Aim for a reasonable level of detail in identifying your activities. Not too much, not too little, but rather just right.
Tell us:

- What are your project’s intended results and how will they address the need, problem, or challenge you have identified?
- How will the knowledge, skills, behaviors, and/or attitudes of the target group change as a result of your project?
- What products will result from your project?
- How will you sustain the benefit(s) of your project beyond the conclusion of the period of performance?

**Project Results**: The final section of your narrative should be devoted to articulating the impact of your project.

What specific results do you intend to achieve in order to address the need, problem, or challenge you have identified? Something will get better. Tell us what that is. Tell us about the tangible products that will result from your project, and how will you sustain the benefits of your project beyond the lifespan of this particular project?
Reviewers will give us their opinions on how well you’ve designed a feasible plan for collecting and reporting data; how likely the improvements that you’ve proposed will be realized; will the tangible products you plan to create be accessible to the target audience you identified; and whether your plan for sustaining the benefits of the project are reasonable and practical.
Let’s think back to the questions we referenced a couple of slides ago when we talked about defining the need, problem, or challenge that your project is addressing. Now is the time to answer the question “What will be better as a result of this work?"

If you said someone will learn something, how will you know? If your problem related to segments of your museum staff being better able to work together, how will you know when that has been achieved?

All of your results should tie back to your need, problem, or challenge.

A logic model is a useful tool to help explain your intended results and your plan for achieving them. Many reviewers appreciate seeing a logic model included as a supporting document in an application.
In summary, considering all the components of your application, there are four general characteristics of successful Museums Empowered applications that reviewers will look for. As you prepare your application, keep these characteristics in mind.

First, **Institutional Impact**: Your project should use the transformative power of professional development to generate systemic change within a museum.

Second, **In-depth Knowledge**: Your proposal should reflect a thorough understanding of current practice and knowledge about the subject matter.

Third, **Project-based Design**: Your work plan should consist of a set of logical, interrelated activities tied directly to addressing the key need or challenge identified in your application.

And fourth, **Demonstrable Results**: Your project should generate measurable results that tie directly to the need or challenge it was designed to address.

An application that has all of these four characteristics, will stand out in the review process, and will have the best chance of success for funding.
We want to share with you, the places to look for more information, such as the IMLS website, where you can find the awarded grants search to learn more about the projects we have funded through the Museums Empowered program.

The Awarded Grants Search gives you an opportunity to explore our archive of grants that we have awarded in past years, and you can search this database using a variety of criteria such as institution name, location, and keyword. Your search will retrieve basic information about the award and a brief description of the project. This can be extremely helpful as you put ideas together for your own project.
We have also posted the narrative and schedule of completion from six successful applications from 2022. To find these examples, go to the Sample Applications on the IMLS website and scroll down the page to find the Museums Empowered examples.
Each PDF contains a copy of the 7 page narrative and also the schedule of completion. Many of these samples were identified by our peer reviewers as good examples of well-written applications that provided all the essential information necessary for them to review the application. Looking at these proposals might help clarify your thinking about your own.
This is the general schedule of events to show what happens to your application once we receive it. IMLS staff will review it for completeness and eligibility, and you will hear from us via email if there are any problems.

From February through June, your experienced and knowledgeable peers will provide scores and comments based on the criteria outlined in the Notice of Funding Opportunity, and IMLS staff will examine your budget, your financials, and your track record with past and current grants. We then prepare materials for the IMLS Deputy Director for Museums and the IMLS Director. By law, the IMLS Director is charged with the authority and responsibility to make final award decisions, and this happens in July.

In August, we will notify you by email of the award decisions and provide the scores and comments created by the reviewers.

And on September 1, 2023, funded projects begin.
At this point, we'd like to share a few tips collected from our experience in working with applicants each year.

First on the list, is “Register early!” You must have an active SAM.gov registration to register with Grants.gov. And you must have a functional Grants.gov registration to submit an application to IMLS.

There is no cost to register on these sites, but it can take from several days to several weeks to get your registration established and validated. So pay attention to this requirement particularly if this your first time applying for a federal grant or if your SAM registration has expired or if you’ve have had a change in your point of contact for SAM – start that registration process as early as possible.

Your SAM.gov registration expires each year and you must renew it. You can log into SAM.gov at any time and find out your status. I would recommend doing that today.

Both SAM.gov and Grants.gov have their own help desks to assist you with resolving issues or tracking problems that might arise with your registration.
Here are some application tips to make sure you meet the deadline...

- Read the application guidelines (NOFOs) – we know it’s a long document, but it contains essential information on how to prepare your application components.

- Schedule a counseling call with one of our staff – we are available to answer your questions, these often come at the start of the process (general questions), and later you may have a very specific or detailed question about a particular component – you can email or call us to ask your questions.

- Describe your museum well and vividly and use recent, relevant data to make your point. Reviewers will look at the application to try to understand your museum, be sure to give them a good description.

- Follow the narrative outline in the Notice of Funding Opportunity and consider using the same headings to make it easy for reviewers to read.

- Avoid generalities, acronyms, and jargon. The people who will review your application are experts, but they may not be totally familiar with your particular field’s shorthand. Make it easy for them to understand what you mean.

- Ask a colleague to read the 7 page narrative with fresh eyes. Ask them to act like a reviewer who’s seeing this for the first time, do this well in advance of the submission deadline so you have adequate time to edit the narrative if necessary.

- Be sure your application is complete. Check it against the Table of Application Components to be sure you’re not missing any required documents.

- Submit to Grants.gov early so you can correct any errors before the deadline.
So to recap your next steps:

1. Visit www.imls.gov and read the Notice of Funding Opportunity carefully.
2. Check your organization’s registrations with both SAM.gov and Grants.gov.
3. Connect with us: Reach out to a program staff member and schedule a counseling call.
4. Prepare your application. Make sure it’s complete.
5. Submit before the deadline, November 15, 2022 (by 11:59 pm Eastern Time)
In closing our presentation today, I want to make sure you have the phone numbers and e-mail addresses for the program staff assigned to the Museums Empowered program. Don’t hesitate to contact either of us with questions or concerns.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mark Isaksen</th>
<th>Jeannette Thomas</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>202-653-4667</td>
<td>202-653-4766</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><a href="mailto:misaksen@imls.gov">misaksen@imls.gov</a></td>
<td><a href="mailto:jthomas@imls.gov">jthomas@imls.gov</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>