Timed Transcript for IMLS Office of Museum Services Webinar: National Leadership Grants for Museums Fiscal Year 2023 Applicant Information Session

0:03

Welcome to the Institute of Museum and Library Services Webinar, National Leadership Grants for Museums, Fiscal Year 2023 Information Session. My name is Helen Wechsler, and I'll be hosting this webinar.

0:17

Our goal in this presentation is to provide specific information about the National Leadership Grants for Museums program and make some recommendations that you may wish to consider when preparing your application.

0:30

Since this is a pre-recorded webinar, and you won't have the opportunity to ask questions, feel free to contact me or other staff at the Office of Museum Services to seek answers to your questions, or to discuss a project idea. The staff contact slide will be shown later in this webinar.

0:56

This is one in a series of webinars designed to help you find the information you need to create a competitive application for IMLS museum funding.

1:06

Choosing a Funding Opportunity for 2023 is available as a recording and as a PDF of the slides, along with their transcript on our website, at the link that's on this slide. That webinar covers the IMLS vision, mission, and strategic plan with an emphasis on how they influence our grantmaking.

1:27

We also address institutional eligibility, provide a quick overview of all of our funding opportunities, discuss how to find information on our website, provide tips to help you complete an application, and we cover the places with which you must be registered in order to apply for IMLS funding.

1:47

There are also individual webinars for each of the museum grant programs.

1:55

In this presentation, we'll be addressing the following topics: Where to find information; a program overview for National Leadership Grants; eligibility criteria; characteristics of successful National Leadership Grant projects; important dates; how much and how many, meaning how many applications you can apply with; NLG for Museums program goals;

application components; review criteria; some tips on applying; a timeline; and contact information.

2:34

Before we jump into the details of the NLG for Museums program, I want to provide some numbers from the last two cycles. As you can see, this is a fairly competitive grant program. We were able to fund about 20% of applications received in FY 21 and 35% in FY 22.

2:54

FY 22 is a bit of an anomaly because of the low application numbers. My guess is that the pandemic created challenges to applying for grants and the numbers will probably bounce back this year.

3:06

With that in mind, this webinar will help you determine if your project is right fit for the NLG program, which is an essential thing before putting in the effort to prepare an application, and it will give you tips for creating the most competitive proposal possible.

3:24

I also want to make sure to point out where the application process begins, which is on our website.

3:31

If you use the Grants drop-down menu and choose Apply for a Grant, you'll click through a list of grant programs and choose the National Leadership Grants for Museums program.

3:45

These guidelines, or Notice of Funding Opportunity, which you can see on the right, are downloadable as a PDF. These NOFOs, as we call them, will walk you through the application process and they contain most of the information I will provide today.

4:06

You can be 1 of 3 types of organizations to be eligible to apply to National Leadership Grants for Museums.

4:13

If you are applying as a museum, you need to certify that you have a professional staff; you're organized on a permanent basis for essentially educational or aesthetic purposes; you own or use tangible objects; care for these objects; and exhibit these objects to the general public on a regular basis, at least 120 days a year, and conduct these activities in facilities that you own or operate.

4:40

Regarding the 120 day rule during our current COVID-19 normality, you are free to count these 120 days in either the year preceding the application due date;

4:53

The year preceding your first shutdown due to COVID-19, and this may be helpful if your locale has had on and off closures throughout the pandemic; or you can use the calendar year preceding this current one, so 2021.

5:10

You can also be eligible for NLG for Museums if you are an organization or association that engages in activities designed to advance the well-being of museums and museum profession, or if you are a college.

5:30

Let's now discuss the purpose of this grant program.

5:33

NLG supports 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.

5:47

NLG is all about meeting the needs of the museum field, our institutions, and our professionals. We invest in institutions and partnerships that understand the challenges and opportunities facing the field, and devise plans to move the field forward through the development of resources or tools for use by multiple institutions and or groups of museum individuals, museum professionals.

6:17

Making sure your projects shares the characteristics of successful NLG projects is an important first step to preparing an application. We're looking for projects that are designed intentionally to produce results that can be used by the field to advance and improve practice to better serve the American public. We're looking for tangible results, such as models, tools, curriculum, resources, research findings, or new services that can be used by a segment of the museum field.

6:48

We seek proposals for projects with the potential to influence practice across one or more disciplines within the museum field, not just benefiting a single museum, but multiple museums and museum professionals.

7:01

Projects should reflect a thorough understanding of current practice; knowledge about the subject matter; deep familiarity with previous work on the project topic; and an awareness of and support for current strategic priorities in the field.

7:16

We encourage new perspectives and approaches, and expect collaboration, because it demonstrates broad need, field-wide buy-in and input, and access to appropriate expertise.

7:28

Finally, we seek to fund projects that generate results that can be widely used, adapted, scaled, or replicated to extend the benefits of the federal investment.

7:41

There are three funding options for your project.

7:45

Option one is for full projects that result in robust results for the field.

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These can request anywhere from 50,000 to 750,000.

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There is a 1 to 1 cost share requirement. And when I talk about cost share, I mean contributions that could be in the form of cash, staff, or volunteer time, other grantee contributed costs, or third-party contributions.

8:14

The one caveat is that it may not be funds from another federal source. Option two is for research projects, from 50,000 to 750,000, which do not require a cost share, and we'll talk about research projects a little bit later.

8:31

Option three supports one-year, rapid prototyping projects budgeted between 5,000 and 50,000 with no cost share required.

8:41

If you have an idea for an innovative solution to a field wide challenge, that requires some funding to rapidly develop, test, iterate, and retest. This funding level is for you. Remember, whether you succeed, fail, or come out somewhere in between, we want you to report your results to the field: tell others what worked, what is promising, what needs more tweaking, and what they shouldn't try at home.

9:05

The second question is: how many applications you may submit.

9:12

There's no limit on the number of applications your museum may submit to NLG for Museums.

9:18

However, as you consider the option to submit more than one application, we urge you to think about the capacity of your organization to prepare multiple applications and to manage multiple federal awards at once.

9:36

Now I want to talk about the three program goals for NLG for museums. Your project must align with one of the three program goals and a set of corresponding objectives.

9:48

Goals and objective choices should be identified clearly in the Narrative, and this is described in Section D2c of the Notice of Funding Opportunity.

10:00

Goal 1 is the Lifelong Learning goal. Its objectives correspond to the types of projects NLG supports. For example, a project that takes a successful STEM education program with Head Start centers and adapts, tests, and scales it for use by other museums across the country with their local Head Starts, fits within objective 1.1.

10:23

A statewide series of evaluation workshops for museum educators would meet Objective 1.2 and, say, research on the impact of single visit field trips to art museums would fit within Objective 1.3.

10:44

Goal 2 is about museums' work to collaborate with and meet the needs of their communities. The three objectives are parallel to those we saw in Goal 1. They support the adapting and scaling up of models of community engagement so that others in the field do not have to re-invent the wheel. That's objective 2.1.

11:04

Professional development for museum professionals on topics that increase their ability to work with their communities is Objective 2.2.

11:13

And Objective 2.3 is what you would use if you wanted to answer a research question about the important work museums do in their communities.

11:27

And, finally, Goal 3 offers the opportunity to be ever-better stewards of the nation's collections. The objectives, again, are parallel to the other goals, offering opportunities to scale up models for care, access, and management of collections, say, a new database project in Objective 3.1.

11:44

Training and PD on stewardship issues, like perhaps training the staff of small historical societies on how to make their own hat mounts, that would fit under Objective 3.2.

12:00

And then research on management and care of collections, like testing methods to mitigate the degradation of plastics would fit under Objective 3.3.

12:15

IMLS offers a few ways to find examples of funded projects. On the left are results using the Search Awarded Grants feature of our website. You can see the filters I selected on the left panel.

12:30

We have the dates, FY 22, 21, and 20, checked across the top.

12:39

And then, at the bottom, we selected the National Leadership Grants for Museums.

12:45

We've also posted the abstract, narrative, and schedule of completion for a cross-section of successful NLG for Museums applications. The proposals posted present a variety of project types, meet the overarching goal of the NLG for Museums program, and were considered to be clear and well written by reviewers. Looking at these exemplary proposals might help you clarify your thinking about your own application.

13:12

The image on the right shows the Sample Application page, and you'll need to scroll down the page to find the National Leadership Grant Program for Museums examples.

13:26

Next up are the documents that make up your application and that you will upload into Grants dot gov as part of your proposal.

13:34

These application components fall into three categories. The first is Required Documents. All applications must include these required documents.

13:46

The second group is Conditionally Required documents. Some applications must include these. It might depend on the nature of your institution or some aspect of your project. For example, if you're a non-profit organization, you must include your proof of non-profit letter from the IRS.

14:04

If your proposal is about producing a digital product, you must include a Digital Product Plan.

14:12

If you meet the condition, any of these conditions, omission of any one can result in the exclusion of your application from further consideration.

14:23

The third group of application components are Supporting Documents. These are completely optional. You may submit some or none. Think about including only those that supplement your narrative and back up statements that you may make. You may refer to these materials in your narrative so that your reviewers know where to look. For example, if you're basing your project on successful work you've done in your museum, you may want to indicate that an evaluation report is included as supporting material.

14:55

This is not the place to introduce new information and, as you decide how much supplemental material to attach, be respectful of your reviewers' time.

15:10

In the NLG for Museums Notice of Funding Opportunity, you will find a Table of Application Components. We recommend that you use this as a checklist to keep yourself organized. It is divided into Required, Conditionally Required, and Supporting Documents. The middle column tells you about document formats and the third column tells you how to name each document. Note that deviating from the naming convention, or uploading a document that is not a PDF, such as a Word or Excel document, will result in an error and or the system thinking that the document isn't there.

15:49

The table also provides links to instructions and forms.

15:57

Now, let's talk about the narrative of your proposal. You have 10 pages to cover these three sections.

16:04

First section is Project Justification. In this section of the narrative, you should lay out the reasoning for your project. Tell us in the clearest terms what need, problem, or challenge you expect to address; how you identified it;

16:20

Who or what will benefit from your work, which should be some segment of the museum field; and how your project will address the goals of the NLG for Museums program.

16:31

Remember, that core to NLG for Museums is the desire to support projects that strengthen the field. Show the reviewers how this all fits together.

16:42

Note that reviewers have prompts that correspond to these questions. You'll find this information in Section E1 of the Notice of Funding Opportunity.

16:52

For this section of the narrative, reviewers will consider how well you've defended the need, problem, or challenge you will address; how well you've identified who or what will benefit from the project; and how good a job you've done in involving them in the planning.

17:09

Reviewers also value external needs assessments or research that can support and validate your need. They'll look at who particularly will benefit and how the museum field will benefit. And they will weigh in on your demonstrated understanding of current research and practice in the area.

17:33

The next section of the narrative is the Project Work Plan.

17:38

This is the part of the narrative in which you explain what you will do; how you plan to address risks that may be present;

17:45

Who will do the project, when, and using what resources. The reviewers will look for evidence that you know what you're doing, have the right people at the table, that the project is realistic, that there's room to change course, if needed, and for research projects, they'll look for appropriate research design and answers to the questions outlined in the guidance on effective research proposals, which we will go through.

18:15

Here they are.

18:16

So, speaking of research, the questions outlined and explained in the Guidance for Research Applications within the NLG Notice of Funding Opportunity are listed on this slide. To submit a competitive research proposal, your narrative should answer these questions. We sometimes see projects submitted as research that don't answer these questions, or that don't fit the research category. This could be in order to avoid cost share requirements, and either way, it's not a winning strategy to present a competitive proposal. Think carefully about these questions, and if they do not make sense for your project, you likely don't have a research project. If you do submit a research project, note that a Data Management Plan becomes a required document.

19:11

The final section of the narrative is Project Results.

19:19

What specific results do you intend to achieve in your project and what will change as a result?

19:25

Tell us about the tangible products that will result from your project, if you have any.

19:30

And last but not least, tell us how you will sustain the benefits of your project beyond the lifespan of this particular work.

19:39

In other words, when the federal funding goes away, how will the benefit to the field be sustained? Reviewers will register their thoughts about how likely it is you will deliver on the results that you've proposed; how useful the tangible products you plan to create will be; and whether your plan for sustaining the benefits of the project is reasonable and practical.

20:11

When preparing your proposal, be careful to include only allowable costs in both your IMLS request and your cost share. To do otherwise can hurt your chances of getting positive reviews and being recommended for funding.

20:26

We'll go through some common expenses that are allowable and unallowable, but for details, please see two CFR Part 200. This is the part of the Code of Federal Regulations covering Uniform Administrative Requirements, Cost Principles, and Audit Requirements for Federal Awards.

20:46

Fortunately, the regulations are available online in a searchable format on the US Government Publishing Office website and the link is listed on the slide. Of particular interest will be Subpart E on costs.

21:04

In the NLG for Museums Notice of Funding Opportunity, we provide a partial list of the most common examples of allowable costs for this grant program.

21:15

These include things like personnel salaries, wages, and fringe benefits; travel expenses for those involved in the project and consultants; materials, supplies, software, and equipment related directly to the project activities; third-party costs, which could be program evaluation, software development. You can also include honoraria, stipends, or other compensation for project participants. For example, community members and advisors.

21:47

Training for staff and volunteers that impact multiple museums; paid internships are welcome; indirect and overhead costs are allowable. So, 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 if one is required.

22:09

Unallowable costs include general fundraising costs, such as development office staff or other staff time devoted to general fundraising; contributions to endowments; general operating support, and that's because these costs are typically part of what is calculated in an indirect cost rate, so, that's already covered through indirect cost.

22:34

You can't pay for acquisition of collections with IMLS funding; general advertising or public relations that aren't related to the specific project that you're focusing on are not allowed;

construction or renovation of facilities are not allowed, however, fabrication and other types of work can be allowable and you may want to check with us about those expenses.

22:59

Social activities, ceremonies, receptions, or entertainment are not allowed, but note that sometimes food can be allowable, for example, when you need to feed kids or teens during programming, or during working lunches at training workshops.

23:15

So, 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 project cost share.

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In fact, unallowable expenses can't show up anywhere in your proposal.

23:34

Now, for some tips. First on the list is register early. You must have an active SAM dot gov registration and know your Unique Entity Identifier, UEI, which is generated through your SAM account.

23:51

You must also have a current and functional Grants dot gov registration. You must have an active Grants dot gov registration and know your Unique Entity Identifier number in order to register with Grants dot gov. And you must have a functional Grants dot gov registration in order to submit an application to IMLS. So, check to see whether your Grants dot gov registration is associated with a former staff member whose password is a mystery to you, and please leave time to deal with these eventualities. It's also crucial to remember that your SAM dot gov registration expires each year, and you must renew it. You can log in to SAM dot gov at any time to find out your status.

24:42

Important things to know.

24:44

We make grants only to eligible applicants that submit complete applications, including attachment on or before the deadline, which is November 15th, 2022. So, please, start early. Do your background research. Revisit the Notice of Funding Opportunity frequently so that you are using the guidance that it provides. When you're writing your narrative, avoid generalities, jargon, or acronyms that your reviewers might not know. They will be experts in the field, but may not be experts on your particular activities.

25:23

Check your spelling, grammar, and math. Always important.

25:27

Ask a colleague to review everything with fresh eyes before you submit, and be sure your application is complete.

25:34

Pay close attention to required documents, to their format, and to their naming, and submit through Grants dot gov early, so that if there are any errors, you have time to resubmit.

25:52

We want to remind you of important dates for NLG applications. They are due by 11 59 PM Eastern Time on November 15th, 2022, and Grants dot gov system generates a time stamp, so that's what we see.

26:09

Staff reviews applications for completeness and institutional eligibility before they are sent for review, which will happen from February through June.

26:19

There will be two tiers of review during that time.

26:23

This year, NLG for Museums awards will be announced in August of 2023, and all NLG projects must be scheduled to start on September first of 2023.

26:38

Thank you very much for your interest in IMLS and the National Leadership Grants Program for Museums. We hope you have found the information in this webinar helpful. Here's a list of some names, e-mail addresses, and direct phone numbers for myself and my colleague, Jeannette. There is also a list of staff on the NLG for Museums page of our website with contact information. We encourage you to contact us with any questions you might have, and we'll be very happy to help.