

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 three project categories within the NLG-Museums 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 teaching and inquiry-focused institutions within today's formal and informal learning ecosystem. Successful projects will help the museum field 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:

- Development, implementation, and dissemination of model programs that create engaging learning opportunities, leveraging and creating synergy between digital media, new media communications tools, and in-person experiences
- Development and adoption 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 computer aided design (CAD) and 3D printing;

- Building and strengthening learning partnerships that make museum resources accessible online and otherwise in support of school curricula, and state and national standards;
- Research on the role of museums in engaging learners and how “multi-dimensional” learning happens in museum settings
- Development and implementation of training and professional development programs, tools, frameworks, or resources that are informed by research and can be beneficial for the entire museum sector

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. 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 envision museums to be highly collaborative, 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:

- Development of new and innovative methods for addressing community challenges and needs through partnerships, services, processes, or practices. These may include: researching and testing the role of new media communication tools fostering audience engagement, learning, and conversations, and models that help museums provide products and services based on specific audience interests, demographics, and economics
- Development and implementation of training and professional development programs, tools, or resources that build the knowledge, skills and abilities of museum staff and/or volunteers to meet the needs of their communities, through proactive and sustained community outreach and engagement strategies
- Research focusing on the role and value of museums as community anchors and catalysts
- Building capacity in the museum field to support engagement with other community-based organizations in collective impact efforts

Collections Stewardship

IMLS supports 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 to enhance collections care and digital access across the spectrum of institutional sizes, discipline, and mission

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. [Click here](#) to learn 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.