Sparks! Grants for Libraries Program

FY2016 Field Reviewer Handbook

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Introduction

Thank you for agreeing to serve as a Sparks! Grants for Libraries program field reviewer. We have selected you to review this year's applications because of your expertise in one of the competitive categories of funding for libraries and archives.

The staff at the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) has prepared this handbook to ensure fair and candid review of all eligible applications. It provides you with the procedural information you need. Please use it in conjunction with this year's *Sparks! Grants for Libraries Program Notice of Funding Opportunity* available on our website at: https://www.imls.gov/nofo/sparks-ignition-grants-libraries-fy16-notice-funding-opportunity

Even if you have reviewed for other IMLS programs in the past you should read through this booklet, since we make changes each year that may impact your reviews.

We greatly appreciate the tremendous amount of time and effort you commit to being a reviewer. By participating in the peer review process, you make a significant contribution to the grant program and provide an invaluable service to the entire museum, archives, and library communities.

Thank you!

Purpose and Scope of the Sparks! Grants for Libraries Program

The Sparks! Grants for Libraries Program (Sparks Grants) are a special funding opportunity within the IMLS National Leadership Grants for Libraries program. These small grants encourage libraries and archives to prototype and evaluate specific innovations in the ways they operate and the services they provide, resulting in new tools, products, services, or organizational practices. Applicants may propose activities or approaches that involve risk, but the project results – be they success, failure, or a combination thereof – must offer valuable information to the library or archives fields, promise an impact beyond the applicant's institution and provide the potential for improvement in the ways libraries and archives serve their communities.

Grantees are required to submit a short white paper, which will be publicly posted and shared. Previous Sparks Grant white papers can be accessed through IMLS's Awarded Grant Search:
https://www.imls.gov/grants/awarded-grants

To maximize the public benefit from federal investments in these grants, the Sparks program will fund only projects with the following characteristics:

- *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 library or archival profession.
- *In-depth Knowledge:* Projects 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 new approaches to strengthen and improve services to benefit the audiences and communities being served.
- *Shared Results:* Projects should generate results that can be widely used, adapted, scaled, or replicated to leverage the benefits of federal investment. Grantees are required to submit a short white paper to be publicly posted and shared with the field.

There are no specific project categories within the Sparks Grants program. Examples of activities that may be funded by this program include but are not limited to the following:

- Rapid prototyping and testing of new ways to engage learners
- Offering innovative new types of services or new service options
- Exploring the potential of highly original, experimental collaborations
- Implementing new workflows or processes with potential for substantial cost savings
- Addressing community challenges through new types of partnerships, services, processes, or practices
- Developing and testing new tools or services that facilitate access, presentation, management, preservation, sharing, or use of library and/or archival collections

The award amount for Sparks grants are between $10,000- $25,000.

Application and Review Process

1. Applicants submit their full proposals using Grants.gov.
2. IMLS receives the applications and checks them for organizational eligibility and application completeness.
3. IMLS identifies a pool of available field reviewers with appropriate expertise and assigns reviewers to evaluate each application. Field reviewers receive access to the

full applications, evaluate them, and complete their reviews and scores through the online reviewer system.

4. IMLS staff may hold phone calls to discuss scores and rankings with reviewers.
5. IMLS staff members review the financial/accounting information and the budget sheets of each potential grantee.
6. IMLS staff members provide a list of applications recommended for funding to the IMLS Director for approval. By law, the Director has the authority to make final funding decisions.

General Review Information

Verify access to applications online

You will use two online systems:

1. **Dropbox:** An online file sharing system used to download proposals and supporting materials. You do not need a Dropbox account to access proposals.
2. **IMLS Online Reviewer System:** A system to enter your evaluative comments and scores for each proposal. See Appendix II and Appendix III for additional information about this system.

You will be sent a list of assigned proposals via email with the relevant links. Please alert IMLS staff immediately if any applications are missing or you cannot open them.

Time required

Experienced reviewers estimate that it takes two to three hours to evaluate one application. If you are a first time reviewer you may need more time. We recommend the reviewing process outlined on the following pages.

Confidentiality

The information contained in grant applications is strictly confidential. Do not discuss or reveal names, institutions, project activities or any other information contained in the applications. Contact IMLS if you have any questions concerning an application. Do not contact an applicant directly.

Conflict of interest

Once you begin reviewing your assigned applications, if you discover any previously unidentified potential conflict, contact us immediately. Please see the Reviewer Conflict of Interest Statement included as **Appendix I** of this handbook. A conflict of interest would arise if you have a financial interest in whether or not the proposal is funded, or if for some reason, you feel that you cannot review it objectively.

Required paperwork

You will receive via email a Peer Reviewer Services Agreement, a Direct Deposit Form, and a Conflict of Interest Statement and Certification. **Please complete these forms and return them to your IMLS contact by the review deadline (June 1, 2016).**

Managing records

Keep your applications and a copy of your review sheets until **December 1, 2016,** in case there are questions from IMLS staff. Please maintain confidentiality of all applications that

you review. After December 1, 2016, or destroy the applications and related materials. IMLS may instruct you to destroy your records at an earlier date, after the review and award process has concluded.

Review Process

Reading applications

Your thorough reading and understanding of each application will be the key to providing both insightful comments and an overall rating for the application, ensuring that your comments are a reflection of your overall score. Before you review proposals, please read the Sparks Notice of Funding Opportunity at https://www.imls.gov/nofo/sparks-ignition-grants-libraries-fy16-notice-funding-opportunity .

Review criteria

The IMLS Online Reviewer System will require you to provide summary evaluative comments for each of the review criteria. You will be asked to address four areas in the Reviewer System. Below are the areas you must address, as well as some example questions you should consider for each area:

1. **Project Justification**
   - Is the project clearly explained?
   - Is the need, problem, or challenge clearly identified and supported by relevant evidence?
   - Are the people who will benefit from the project clearly identified and have they been involved in project planning?
   - Are the intended results well formulated and achievable?
   - Does the project address current needs of the museum, library, or archive field and/or have the potential to advance practice in the museum, library, or archive profession?
   - Does the project meet the Sparks Grants requirement of demonstrating broad impact and significant innovation?

2. **Project Work Plan**
   - Are the proposed activities, technology and/or methodologies informed by appropriate theory and practice?
   - Do the technical details include all information required in the IMLS Requirements for Projects that Develop Digital Content in the Sparks Notice of Funding Opportunity, provided for projects generating digital content?
   - Do the identified staff, partners, consultants, and service providers possess the experience and skills necessary to complete the work successfully?
   - Is the schedule of work realistic and achievable?

- Are the time, personnel, and financial resources identified appropriate for the scope and scale of the project?
- Does the institution provide evidence of its capacity to carry out the project activities?
- Is a clear methodology described for tracking the project's progress and adjusting course when necessary?
- Is there an effective plan for communicating results and/or sharing discoveries?

3. **Project Results**
   - Are the project's intended results clearly articulated?
   - Are the measures of success in achieving results appropriate for the project? Refer to Evaluating your Project section in the Sparks Notice of Funding Opportunity.
   - Will the proposed project generate results such as models, tools, services, practices, and lessons learned that can be broadly used, adapted, scaled or replicated in the museum, library, or archive profession?

4. **Application Overview**
   - Provide brief summary comments in support of your numeric score.

Review criteria for each section are outlined in the Notice of Funding Opportunity: https://www.imls.gov/nofo/sparks-ignition-grants-libraries-fy16-notice-funding-opportunity

The Online Reviewer System will not allow you to submit blank comment fields. If a review section is not applicable to the application being reviewed, please note "This section is not relevant to this application", or similar, in the system.

Writing comments

Draft comments for each of the required comment areas. **We strongly recommend that you draft your comments using word processing software, and paste the comments into the Online Reviewer System form**.

- Use your professional knowledge and experience to assess the information objectively.
- Judge the application on its own merits. Do not base your evaluation on any prior knowledge of an institution.
- If you question the accuracy of any information, call IMLS to discuss it. Do not question the applicant's honesty or integrity in your written comments.
- Do not contact the applicant directly.
- Consider whether the applicant has the resources to successfully complete the project.
- Analyze the narrative section of the application in your comments. Summarizing or paraphrasing the applicant's own words will not help the applicant.

Characteristics of constructive and effective comments:

- Presented in a constructive manner
- Concise, specific, easy to read and understand
- Specific to the individual applicant
- Reflect the professionalism of the reviewer
- Correlate with the rating that is given
- Acknowledge the resources of the institution
- Reflect the application's strengths and identify areas for improvement

Characteristics of poor comments:

- Make derogatory remarks. (Offer suggestions for improvement rather than harsh criticism.)
- Penalize an applicant because you feel the institution does not need the money. (Any eligible institution may receive funds, regardless of institutional need.)
- Penalize an applicant because of missing materials. (If you believe an application is missing required materials, please contact an IMLS staff member immediately.)
- Question an applicant's honesty or integrity. (You may question the accuracy of information provided by the applicant, but if you are unsure how to frame your question, contact IMLS.)
- Offer or ask for irrelevant or extraneous information. (Your comments should concern only the information IMLS requests of applicants.)
- Offer limited explanation or detail for the score provided.

Remember that successful and unsuccessful applicants use your comments to help improve their projects or future applications.

Assigning scores

After you have read, evaluated and provided written comments, please provide a single numeric score for the application that reflects your opinion of the proposal's overall quality and your recommendation of whether it should be funded this year. A score of 3 or above is typically considered "fundable".

SCORE DEFINITIONS

5 – Excellent: The applicant's response is outstanding and provides exceptional support for the proposed project.

4 – Very Good: The applicant's response provides solid support for the proposed project.

3 – Good: The applicant's response is adequate but could be strengthened in its support for the proposed project.

2 – Some Merit: The applicant's response is flawed and does not adequately support the proposed project.

1 – Inadequate/Insufficient: The applicant's response is inadequate or provides insufficient information to allow for a confident evaluation.

IMPORTANT: To help applicants understand and benefit from your reviews, make sure that your scores accurately reflect your written comments.

Ranking proposals

Rank the proposals in order from most to least competitive. This information cannot be entered into the Online Reviewer System. Please send this list to your assigned Program Officer via email when you submit your comments and scores.

Submitting reviews

All reviewers will use the IMLS Online Reviewer System to submit comments and scores for each application. *IMPORTANT:* Instructions and tips for using the Online Reviewer System are in **Appendix II and Appendix III** of this handbook.

For all questions about reviewing, either technical or programmatic, please contact an IMLS program staff member directly. Please do not use the link on the Online Reviewer System page.

Review your draft comments and preliminary scores. A review with even one missing comment or score cannot be accepted by the Online Reviewer System. Adjust your scores, if necessary, to more accurately reflect your written evaluation. **Scores should support comments, and comments should justify scores.**

Once you have completed assigning scores and providing comments for each application assigned to you, we recommend that you keep a digital copy of your completed reviews until told to destroy it by IMLS. Then click on the submit box to send the entire review to IMLS. Following your submission, email your IMLS Program Officer to indicate your ranking of the proposals.

Once you submit your reviews, you cannot go back in to make revisions. If you feel you need to make a change, you must contact an IMLS staff member, and we will authorize your re-entry into the system. However, prior to submitting your reviews, you may repeatedly enter and exit the system without losing your information.

The deadline to submit reviews via the Online Reviewer System is Wednesday, June 1, 2016.

Appendix I: Reviewer Conflict of Interest Statement

As a reviewer or panelist for the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS), you may receive for review a grant application that could present a conflict of interest. Such a conflict could arise if you are involved with the applicant institution, or in the project described in the application, as a paid consultant or through other financial involvement. The same restrictions apply if your spouse or minor child is involved with the applicant institution or if the application is presented on behalf of an institution with which you, your spouse, or minor child is negotiating for future employment.

A present financial interest is not the only basis for conflict of interest. Through prior association as an employee or officer, you may have gained knowledge of the applicant that would preclude objective review of its application. Past employment (generally more than five years) does not by itself disqualify a reviewer so long as the circumstances of your association permit you to perform an objective review of the application. If you believe you may have a conflict of interest with any application assigned to you for review, please notify us immediately.

You may still serve as a reviewer even if your institution is an applicant in this grant cycle or you were involved in an application submitted in this grant cycle, as long as you do not review any application submitted by your own institution or any application in which you were involved. However, if you believe that these or any other existing circumstances may compromise your objectivity as a reviewer, please notify us immediately.

If an application presents no conflict of interest at the time you review it, a conflict of interest may still develop later on. Once you have reviewed an application, you should never represent the applicant in dealings with IMLS or another Federal agency concerning the application, or any grant that may result from it.

It is not appropriate, for your purposes or for the purposes of the institutions or organizations you represent, for you to make specific use of confidential information derived from individual applications that you read while you were serving as an IMLS reviewer. In addition, pending applications are confidential. Accordingly, you must obtain approval from IMLS before sharing any proposal information with anyone, whether for the purpose of obtaining expert advice on technical aspects of an application or for any reason.

If you have any questions regarding conflict of interest, either in relation to a specific application or in general, please contact IMLS immediately.

Appendix II: How to Use the Online Reviewer System

All reviewers will use the IMLS Online Reviewer System to create and submit reviews. Below are the general steps for using the system. We recommend that you review these steps before you get started.

Logging In

You will receive login information and a link to the Online Reviewer System from IMLS. Please contact IMLS staff if you need to have your password reset.

Accessing the Online Reviewer System

- Once you have logged into the system, an **E-Review Security Screen** will appear. Read this page and click **OK**.
- After you have created a new password, your review assignment will appear. To access the list of applications, click **VIEW**.
- Before you can begin to review any of the applications, you must complete a Conflict of Interest Statement. If you have no conflicts of interest with any of the applicants on the list, click **SUBMIT CONFLICT OF INTERESTS STATEMENT** (bottom of page) and proceed. If you think that you may have a conflict of interest with an applicant, **do not** check the conflict box. Instead, contact an IMLS staff member.
- Now you are ready to begin. Simply click **REVIEW** beside any of the applications.

Entering Comments and Scores

We encourage you to record your comments in a Word document, and then cut and paste your text into the IMLS Online Reviewer System.

- **Comments** and **Scores**: You must submit comments for each **Review Criterion** for each application. Be sure to save each set of comments by clicking **SAVE** before you move onto to the next criterion. You will only need to provide one overall numeric score for each application you are assigning to review. Click **Application Overview** to submit an overall score.
- Note: **Funding Priorities** does not apply. Please ignore this.
- Once you have completed an application review, click the **SAVE & CLOSE** box at the bottom of the screen. This will return you to the **Applications List** and allow you to choose another application to review.

Revisiting the Online Reviewer System

- With your e-mail address and your new password, you will be able to re-enter the Online Reviewer System and complete or edit your reviews as often as you wish.
- Once you have logged in, the Security screen will appear again. Click **OK**.
- Once your review assignment appears, click **VIEW** in order to access the **Applications List** and proceed with the review process.

Completing Your Online Reviews

- Once you have reviewed all applications assigned to you, the Application Review Status column should read **COMPLETE** beside each application.
- Please **PRINT** each review for your records.
- Once you have completed all your reviews, click **I AM READY TO SUBMIT THIS REVIEW TO IMLS** at the bottom of the screen.

Online Reviewer System FAQs

Background

This system was created several years ago with a Microsoft-based platform. While state-of-the-art at the time of development, it has not been updated. The system still works, but it can be frustrating at first. Once you have a few reviews underway it should prove an efficient process for managing and submitting your reviews. Below are some common user questions.

Do any of the buttons for assistance work? What if I forget my password?

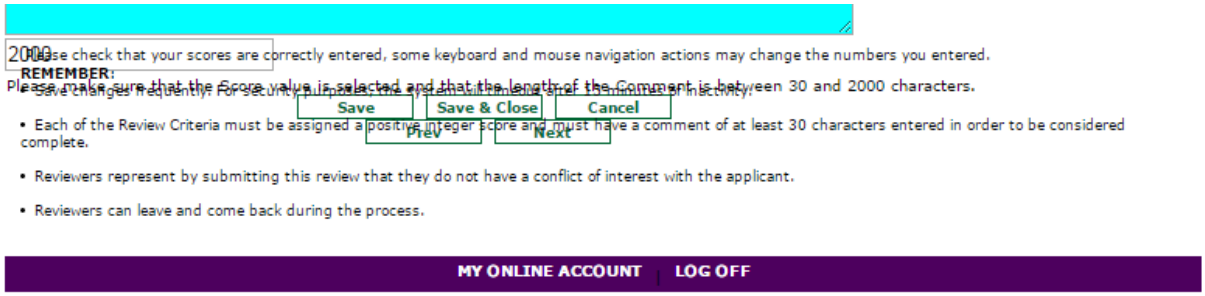
No. Please contact IMLS staff for help if you need your password reset or have any other problems.

What is the best way to get started or comfortable with the system?

Shortly after receiving your packet, try logging into the system and entering some practice remarks to get a feel for the set up and information display. Then, as your deadline approaches, you can focus on the substance of your reviews rather than the process of entering information. Test out the system early and try to do it between 9:00am and 5:00pm so we are available to assist you.

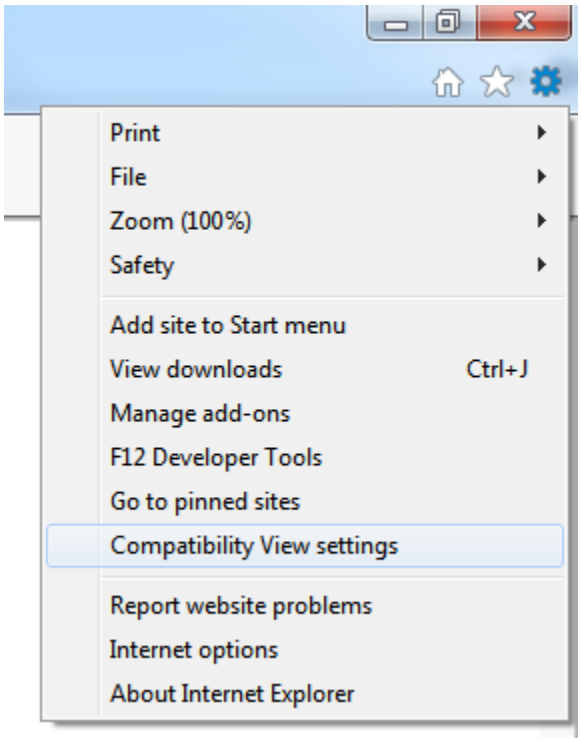
Appendix III: Online Reviewer System Troubleshooting

Many reviewers encounter an issue where the text displayed in the Online Reviewer System is superimposed on top of buttons or menus, making the buttons difficult or impossible to click. It may look like this:

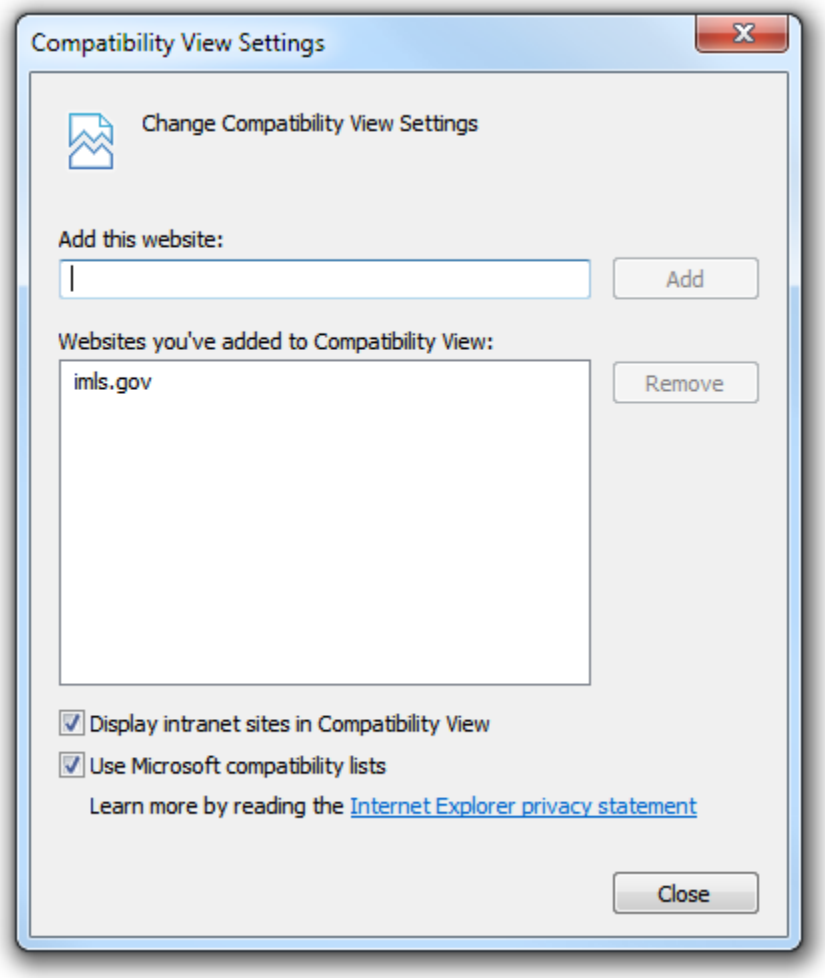


To resolve this issue, you must access the system **using Internet Explorer with Compatibility View (or Compatibility Mode) enabled**. In IE 11, this can be accomplished with the following steps:

1. Locate the Settings menu in the top right corner of the browser window and select *Compatibility View settings*.



2. Type "imls.gov" in the *Add this website:* dialogue box, then click *Add*.



If you are using another version of IE, please refer to help documentation for your version, or contact IMLS for assistance.