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FY17 PERFORMANCE MEASURES WEBINAR

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>> SANDRA TORO: Hi. Good afternoon. My name is Sandy Toro, and I'm the program officer in the Office of Library Services at the Institute of Museum and Library Services or IMLS. Thank you so much for joining us today. I'm here with Aly DesRochers and Stephen Mayeaux -- I'm sorry, Stephen is new, and I just butchered his last name -- and they are behind the scenes helping with the webinar and can also answer questions in the chat as we go.

So today we're going to share information about the relatively new IMLS performance measures and how they can fit into your evaluation plan.

The next set of deadlines is coming up, and we want you to be aware of what you need to know.

So first we will look at the broader context in terms of available IMLS evaluation resources and successful proposals. We'll also look at a blog post that was initially posted when we first had to come up with the performance measures.

Then we'll move into demonstrable results and talk about the program information sheet and the Performance Measure statements and information that you need to take care of on your end.

We'll take a step back and talk about developing your evaluation plan and I'll briefly mention some new resources we'll have on our website in the future, and then we'll have time for questions about any proposal-related issues you might be having and anything we covered in the webinar, and I'll end with information about contacts and who you can get in touch with for more information about specific kinds of proposals.

So before I dive into what the new performance measures are and how you need to make use of them, I want to point out that on our current website, you'll find a page devoted to research and evaluation, and in the Evaluation Resources section there are a number of web links you can click on that can help you think about which kind of evaluation approach you might want to take for your funded project and how to talk about your approach in your National Leadership Grants or Laura Bush 21st Century Librarian Program proposal.

In Evaluation Resources, if you scroll down, you'll find a section on project planning tools for Museum and Library Services. This section has links to other websites that focus on outcome-based evaluation, the inspiring learning framework, a framework for broadening the impact of outreach efforts, and others.

There's also a section on common evaluation methods and terms from the Harvard Stanley Research Project. In this case, we've pulled out key terms and brief descriptions of them that might be helpful for you to get an overall view of different kinds of approaches to gathering information that can help you figure out if you're meeting your project's different goals, including experimental versus nonexperimental design, using interviews or focus groups, and doing secondary reviews of data.

It's important to keep in mind that at IMLS we are not prescriptive. We don't require one particular kind of evaluation or, in many cases, that you hire an external or outside evaluator, but we do require, in most cases, that you have an evaluation plan and that in your proposal you describe your plan. Later in this presentation, I'll talk about what should be included in your plan.

Along these lines, we believe that successful evaluations start with strong evaluation plans and successful project proposals. To put together a successful proposal, you must first make sure that you address an agencywide goal like learning or collection stewardship and a program-based category like the National Digital Platform or Community Anchors. You can find a copy of the IMLS Strategic Plan, and there's a screen shot of our web page on the left on our website, and you can also find on our site in our Up Next blog a series of recent posts that talk about the current program categories for both the National Leadership Grants or NLG and the Laura Bush program or LB21. It's important to remember that agency-level goals, as shown in the strategic plan, are tied to that plan, while performance goals reflect a measurable change or an outcome that you intend your project to achieve.

The latest of the performance goals, a performance statement, which we'll talk about more in a bit, describes what success will look like, and those statements help IMLS document the collective achievements of the projects we fund.

Other tips for writing successful proposals are make sure your proposal includes information up front that shows you're familiar with other projects that are happening in your area of interest, including both research and education projects we funded. Go to our website and use the Awarded Grants database search function to find similar projects. I'll mention that sometimes you have to be creative with the key words you use to search for projects, so, for example, if you are looking for math projects that have to do with early learners and public libraries, you might have to search using math, STEM, children, youth, families, et cetera. So be mindful that your project can be implemented for a local community, but it must have potential as a national model that can be replicated and adopted by other organizations, so this means you have to think about how other people can do similar work without receiving a grant from us.

In addition, you have to be certain that everything that's created by you and your project team is open source and accessible, since we require that you share all digital work, and you'll be asked to fill out a Digital Stewardship form when you put together your full proposal. Try to work with other professionals to develop practical, collaborative responses that are well situated in the available research and practice.

Identify project directors and partners and ask them to serve as advisors or partners who can bring their expertise to your project and give you feedback on promising strategies.

So if you find a project of interest on our website, you can reach out to a program officer for more information about the project, such as who the project director is.

Once you've situated your proposed work in what's already been done and what we already know, outline your proposed work plan and make sure you have an approach that makes sense for your team in terms of measuring potential impact and value to your organization, the local community, and other beneficiaries and the broader field. When you talk about relevance to one of the program categories, talk about potential impacts in terms of your projected outcomes.

Finally, provide some information to show that you can manage an award, including an estimated budget that shows you're aware of what's doable and realistic and that you're familiar with allowable and unallowable costs. You can find examples of successful proposals on our website or, again, get in touch with program staff and we can help you directly.

Something that you'll see discussed in the Notices of Funding Opportunity or the NOFOs for NLG and Laura Bush is the idea of demonstrable results. So as of the 2016 fiscal year, IMLS is now required to report back to the Office of Management and Budget the results of projects that we've funded. Because we've funded so many libraries and museums to do a variety of programs, this is an incredible challenge. We needed a way to show results across all programs for both libraries and museums; hence, an internal team of IMLS staff came up with a very basic performance measures requirement that could be used by all awardees regardless of type of institution, program, or project type. An Up Next blog post by Connie Bodner, who's in the Office of Museum Services, first introduced the idea of performance measures to applicants in the fall of 2015.

As you can read in the post, all projects funded by IMLS are now required to measure performance. By measuring performance, we mean the gathering of information or data that addresses how well your project meets any goals presented in your proposal for funding.

So in the next few slides, I'll walk you through what that looks like for you as the applicant. And as Connie notes in her post, you need time and resources to measure your performance, so incorporate both into your narrative, your work plan, your schedule of completion, and your budget. And I'll also mention that Connie has a great list of links to other websites that have resources to help you learn about evaluation in general.

Before you start your project, you have to select one agency-level goal and one performance goal on the IMLS Program Information Sheet, which is linked to from every NOFO.

This is question 4 from the Program Information Sheet. It says, Select one of the following three IMLS agency-level goals: Learning, Community, or Content and Collections. Then select at least one of the performance goals listed beneath it. For Learning you can choose: Train and develop museum library professionals, support communities of practice, develop and provide inclusive and accessible learning opportunities. For Community you can pick: Strengthen museums and libraries as essential partners in addressing the needs of their communities. And for Content and Collections you can pick: Broaden access and expand use of the nation's content and collections; Improve management of the nation's content and collections; or Improve preservation, conservation, and care of the nation's content and collections.

And for questions specifically about Content and Collections, I'm going to ask you to get in touch with Emily Reynolds or Trevor Owens, and I will provide their contact information at the end.

For projects that have to do with Learning or Community, we provide a link to specific Performance Measure statements and information.

So, for example, if you choose: Train and develop museum and library professionals, your statement there would be for the (audio cut out) survey respondents, if you choose to have a survey; My understanding has increased as a result of this program or training, and the respondent can choose strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, or strongly disagree. You can also have: My interest in this subject has increased, or I'm confident I can apply what I learned in this program or training.

Then in the last column you'll see what's the data to be collected that gives you some insight into whether or not there was any change. So you want to collect how many people participated, the number of people -- or the number of responses you got, which may be differ -- which might differ from the number of participants. You might have number of responses per answer option, and number of nonresponses, so if you look at the different statements we have, the kinds of responses from the participants, and the type of data to be collected, it's actually quite simple, and I'll talk a little bit more about how you can incorporate this kind of information into your plan.

So over the course of your project, if it's longer than one year, you'll have to submit interim and final reports, so in addition to describing what happened in the narrative including describing any lessons learned and next steps, you can use charts like these to tell us which activities were proposed, which activities were completed, and if there were any changes, what they look like. And I'll just mention that we're archiving this webinar so you can have access to all this information.

Again, for learning and community projects, we ask that you refer to the narrative that you submitted with your application and record the Performance Measure statement in the first column, so, again, if you picked: Train and develop museum and library professionals, you would talk about that particular type of performance there. And the survey respondent column, you'd specify from whom the survey results were obtained, who the program or project participants were, if they were community partners. Then for each Performance Measure statement you'd record the number of participants, the number of responses, the number of responses per answer option, and the number of nonresponses, and you can have one line of information for each Performance Measure statement.

So in general, these tables can help you keep track of what happened in comparison to what you thought would happen.

So how does that fit into your evaluation plan? First you have to think about what do you need to include in the plan? So your plan for tracking and measuring success and achieving the intended results is a significant element in the review process, and you should include specific and sufficient resources dedicated to the evaluation activities in your work plan, in your budget, and in your Schedule of Completion. Just to note, relative costs can include payments for consultants or qualified project staff, staff time for development of effective instruments and tools, and staff time for collection of information and analyzing project data. You should include the cost of evaluation, reporting, and sharing project results in your budget, and you can budget any of these costs as grant funds or cost share. And keep in mind that effective evaluation strategies often use multiple techniques, not just to measure and analyze the project outputs and outcomes, but also to help your project design as the project progresses.

So your evaluation plan should clearly link to the agency-level goal, so that's 1, 2, or 3, from the strategic plan. It should link to the performance goals identified in your application, as well as the related Performance Measure statement and the project-level results if you intend to measure to the project or program you're proposing.

So in a nutshell, you want to think about what are the changes or consequences that will occur and what data is going to tell you that there was a change; what methods are you going to use to analyze that data and judge effectiveness; who's qualified to do this kind of work and how do you know that; what are your plans for monitoring the effectiveness of any educational programs or interventions and then make corrections as you go; how will you use your results and how will you share your results.

So, for example, if we go back to a project that might have to do with teaching math to young children in a public library, what's the content that you hope participants will learn; how will you know that they learned it; will you embed a task kind of assessment in an activity or will you actually give them some kind of test; who's going to be doing the teaching; how will you know if the teaching was effective; how will you make changes over time; how will you share your results with your library staff; how will you share your results with the broader field; are you working with any community partners; how will you translate your findings so that those findings are useful for them?

In the future, in addition to providing links to other websites, we'll have resources on our site specifically designed to help you when you're writing your proposal. These resources have been developed by the Smithsonian Office of Policy and Analysis along with IMLS program staff and others. For now, you can check out the links that we've assembled for you that go to other websites, but, again, please feel free to reach out to an LLS Program Officer if you have questions about your project and how to approach evaluating it, and I'll share our contact information for all of the program officers on the next slide.

So here's a chart with all of our contact information. Each of us works on specific programs and project categories, so that's how we've broken it up, and if you're not sure who to contact, you can contact any one of us, and we'll steer you to the right person.

So I'm happy to answer any questions now. You can put them in the chat box, and you can ask questions that are specific to a project or you can ask broader questions, and I will do the best I can to help you figure out what approach to take.

So we see that a few people are typing, and I'll point out I just gave you one example in each instance, but I'm happy to talk more in-depth about specific performance statements or goals, if you have questions about those.

Okay. So the first question: In the two-page preproposal, how much detail should we include for the measures? Do you want to see tables like those you showed or is more narrative okay?

For the two-page preproposal, it's all narrative. In some instances, I've seen where tables are helpful for research projects in terms of sharing with reviewers what your question is, you know, what your research question is, what data you're going to collect, and how the data will help you answer that question, but you have to be conservative in terms of the amount of space you use for those tables. The tables I showed are specifically helpful when it comes to reporting back to us about what happened, so I think they're useful tools.

So I think they're useful tools in terms of helping you plan, but you shouldn't include that level of depth in the preproposal.

I hope that answers your question.

The next question is: On that last slide you showed information from the Smithsonian resources, I think. Where can we find those resources?

So that is in development right now and it should, we hope be up in the next few months. That's something we're really excited about and is really designed to help people who are less experienced with evaluations understand different methods, how to answer different kinds of questions, and how to tap into existing resources that are best suited to help you with your specific needs as more of a novice, so that's all I could share for now, but we are hoping that that will be available within the next few months, and so you can check in with me or keep looking at our website to check in for one.

The next question is: What is the most direct link in the IMLS website to find more information about performance measurements?

So the one that you posted is not the best one. I would go to News and Events, the Up Next blog, and if you scroll down in the archives to October 2015 -- scroll back up -- yeah, on the right-hand side you can just click on October 2015.

>> (Off microphone)

>> SANDRA TORO: I'm sorry, I'm looking at a screen that I thought you could see on your end. But if you go to the Up Next blog and go to the archives and click on October 2015, you will find that post by Connie Bodner, and that has the information that I shared about the performance measures.

If you can't find it, send me an email, and I will forward you that direct link. It's also going to be in the archived webinar, so you can just click on it from the webinar.

>> (Off microphone)

>> SANDRA TORO: Oh, thank you.

All right. So from what it says, it looks like the (Inaudible) referring to Community Learning projects, not to Community Anchors projects. Will there be specific guidance for Community Anchors projects?

I think that my understanding was they are one and the same for now, but that's a question I have to check in with our office of research and planning group, so I will ask our evaluation officer if there will be updated guidance, so thank you for that question.

The next question is: If I submit a planning grant, should I also include the same set of evaluation plan?

I believe you would check with the program officer to find the specific type of content but for planning grants. Because there is only one year, the expectations are somewhat lower, I would say, because you're not really tracking progress with people in the same way. You might have evaluation goals that are specific for certain kinds of activities, so if you include in your planning grant that you'll be meeting with community partners to come up with research -- you know, research agenda questions or come up with a strategy to address an issue that you're facing as a community, you want to think about how can you gauge progress amongst those group members.

Often with planning grants we see something like a white paper that will be generated or a grant proposal that is the product, so if you have a specific goal for your planning grant, you want to think about how will you know that you've met that goal, and with planning grants, I think the threshold is somewhat lower, but I would check in with the program officers in your specific program categories to get a better sense of the kinds of things you might want to include for a planning grant.

So those are all the questions we have so far. I'm happy to answer any others you might have.

Well, while people are thinking of questions, I'll mention that in the blog post that Connie wrote, one of the resources that she points to at the end of the post is from the Center for Advancement of Informal Science Education or CASE, and that's available at informalscience.org. There's a document called the PI Guide to Managing Evaluation, and I think sometimes people are put off by it because it focuses on stem, but I think there's some really useful information in there to help you think about how to come up with evaluation questions and how to work with an external evaluator from the beginning instead of only at the end, so if you have questions about that resource or need the link to it, you can link to it from that Up Next blog post that I talked about earlier or you can send me an email with any questions you might have.

Okay. I'll take a moment and mention one other thing. So you'll see on this contact page that you can reach out to me if you have questions that are specifically about research grants. One issue that often comes up for us in terms of the two-page preproposal is that often evaluation questions will get conflated with research questions, and we're happy to kind of help you keep those apart before you submit your preproposal, so if you have questions about how to think about evaluation, if you're doing a research project, we've wrestled with those kinds of questions many times and are happy to help you distinguish between the two, but that is something that reviewers will pick up on, and they will take points off if they think that your evaluation is conflated with your research project.

Okay. I'll give folks a couple more minutes, see if they have any questions.

All right. So we're not seeing any more questions being typed, but I'm happy to work with you through email or by phone, and, again, please feel free to reach out to us. We're happy to talk with you before you submit your proposal as well as after, but we find it's often more helpful to talk with you about your preproposal before you submit, and we're always available to help you once you get your reviewer comments in terms of thinking about resubmission.

If you have any questions about the application process, we're happy to help with those as well. You can get in touch with Aly or Stephen specifically, and they have the expertise to address any technical questions, but thank you again for joining us today, and we look forward to seeing your proposals in the very near future.

Thanks. Bye.

(End of session at 3:30 p.m.)

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