



# Panel Reviewer Handbook

Museums for America

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Office of Museum Services  
Fiscal Year 2024

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## Welcome!

Thank you for agreeing to serve as a peer reviewer for this year's Museums for America grant program. We hope you find this to be a rewarding experience and draw satisfaction from helping museums across the country create engaging learning environments, address the needs of their communities, and serve as trusted stewards of the collections they hold in trust for the public. Your contribution of time and expertise will be invaluable to IMLS and to the applicants who will receive your comments.

In this handbook, you will find the information you need to carry out panel review, including information about the program, tips for writing effective comments, and three appendices with important reference material. Instructions for using eGMS Reach, IMLS's grants management system, are accessible in the [How to Review Applications in eGMS Reach](#) job aid.

If you have any questions about this material or the processes described, please do not hesitate to contact your panel chair at any time.

Once again, thank you for the service you are about to render to museums and communities throughout the nation.

# Museums for America Program Overview

## Introduction

Museums for America (MFA) grants support museums of all sizes and disciplines in strategic, project-based efforts to serve the public through exhibitions, educational/interpretive programs, digital learning resources, professional development, community debate and dialogue, audience-focused studies, and/or collections management, curation, care, and conservation.

Projects are expected to:

- Focus on a key goal identified in the institution's strategic plan;
- Reflect a thorough understanding of current practice and knowledge about the subject matter; and
- Generate measurable results that tie directly to the need or challenge addressed.

## Museums for America Program Goals and Objectives

Museums for America has three program goals and three objectives associated with each goal. Each applicant should align their proposed project with one of these three goals and one or more of the associated objectives. Program goal and objective choices should be identified clearly in the Narrative ([see Section D2c of the Notice of Funding Opportunity](#)).

### **Goal 1, Lifelong Learning: Empower people of all ages and backgrounds through experiential and cross-disciplinary learning and discovery.**

- Objective 1.1: Support public programs, adult programs, family programs, and early childhood programs.
- Objective 1.2: Support exhibitions, interpretation, and digital media.
- Objective 1.3: Support in-school and out-of-school programs.

### **Goal 2, Community Engagement: Maximize the use of museum resources to address community needs through partnerships and collaborations.**

- Objective 2.1: Support equitable engagement and inclusive collaboration with diverse and/or underserved communities.
- Objective 2.2: Support efforts to improve access and eliminate barriers to museum services for all audiences.
- Objective 2.3: Support community-centered planning, civic engagement, and resource sharing to address community needs.

### **Goal 3, Collections Stewardship and Access: Advance the management and care of collections and their associated documentation.**

- Objective 3.1: Support cataloging, inventorying, and registration; collections information management; and collections planning.
- Objective 3.2: Support conservation and environmental improvement and/or rehousing; conservation surveys; and conservation treatment.
- Objective 3.3: Support database management, digital asset management, and digitization.

## **Funding Amounts**

Museums for America requests for IMLS funds may range from \$5,000 to \$250,000, including both direct and indirect costs, and must be matched with at least a 1:1 cost share from non-federal sources.

# Step-by-Step Instructions for Reviewers

At this stage, IMLS has screened applications only for institutional eligibility and application completeness. Field reviewers have assessed the proposals based on the review criteria in the [FY 2024 Notice of Funding Opportunity](#). We are counting on you to determine how good a job each applicant does in:

- meeting the goals of the Museums for America grant program, and
- presenting a clear justification for the project, detailing the project workplan, and articulating the project results.

## Step 1: Sign in to eGMS Reach and Create Password

eGMS Reach is IMLS's platform that you will use to access and review applications. To access eGMS Reach, users are required to have an account through Login.gov to securely access information. You will receive an email with the subject line "eGMS Reach Account Information," that includes a link to the reviewer portal. If you do not receive such an email, please check your junk folder. If you still do not see the email, contact [imls-museumreviewers@imls.gov](mailto:imls-museumreviewers@imls.gov).

Once you have the email, please visit <https://grants.imls.gov/Reach/> and follow the instructions located in the [How to Use Login.gov to Access eGMS Reach](#) Job Aid to create a Login.gov account or link your email to an existing Login.gov account.

Instructions for navigating eGMS Reach are available in the [How to Review Applications in eGMS Reach Job Aid](#), which is accessible on the IMLS website here: <https://imls.gov/grants/peer-review/reviewer-resources/museum-reviewer-resources>

## Step 2. Consider Panel Review Criteria and Read Applications

We recommend that you begin by reviewing the Museums for America [FY 2024 Notice of Funding Opportunity](#), which guided applicants in creating their applications. This document is also available in the "Shared Files for all Panel Participants" section of the Files and Forms tab in eGMS Reach. Then read the applications, keeping in mind the panel review criteria listed below. You do not need to reference each bullet point in your comments, but these questions should guide your thinking about the strengths and weaknesses of each application.

### Panel Review Criteria for Museums for America

#### Goals

Does the project meet the purpose of the Museums for America (MFA) funding opportunity to strengthen the ability of an individual museum to serve its public?

Does the project meet one of the goals of the MFA program?

- Lifelong Learning projects: Empower people of all ages and backgrounds through experiential and cross-disciplinary learning and discovery
- Community Engagement projects: Maximize the use of museum resources to address community needs through partnerships and collaborations
- Collections Stewardship and Access projects: Advance the management and care of collections and their associated documentation

## Implementation

Is the project poised for successful implementation?

- Demonstrates thorough understanding of relevant issues and current practices
- Addresses an identified need
- Allocates resources for the successful completion of the project
- Connects goals and objectives to appropriate activities and intended outcomes

## Results

If funded, will the project achieve its intended results?

- Tracks, measures, and adapts in order to achieve desired outcomes
- Generates continuing benefits for applicant and/or audience served

## Step 3. Draft Comments

For each application you review, we ask you to write a constructive and substantive comment for each of the panel review criteria: **Goals, Implementation, and Results**. All three areas have equal weight and are equally important in identifying the overall strengths and weaknesses of an application.

You may wish to prepare your comments in a separate document for later copying and pasting into the eGMS Reach evaluation form.

When drafting your comments...

- Take all the review criteria questions for each section into consideration. It is not necessary to restate the review criteria questions in your comments.
- Use your professional knowledge and experience to assess the information objectively.
- Judge the application on its own merits, and do not base your evaluation on any prior knowledge of an institution.
- Make sure your comments justify the scores you provide. A highly complementary comment does not remove the sting of a low score, and a negative comment does not even out a high one. Comments and scores must complement each other and make sense as a whole.
- Review new and resubmitted proposals using the same criteria.

## Characteristics of effective and poor reviewer comments:

Effective comments...	Poor comments...
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• are presented in a constructive manner.</li><li>• are both substantive and easy to read and understand.</li><li>• reflect the resources of the institution.</li><li>• are specific to the individual application.</li><li>• reflect the numeric score assigned.</li><li>• highlight the application's strengths and identify areas for improvement.</li><li>• are directed to applicants—not IMLS or panel reviewers—for their use.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• simply summarize or paraphrase the applicant's own words.</li><li>• make derogatory remarks.</li><li>• penalize an applicant because you feel the institution does not need the money.</li><li>• offer or ask for irrelevant or extraneous information.</li><li>• compare the application to others in the review group.</li><li>• make vague or overly general statements.</li><li>• question an applicant's honesty or integrity.</li></ul>

See Appendix C for examples of effective comments, as they appear to applicants.

### What should not be considered in your reviews

Sometimes reviewers ask about or mention characteristics that are outside the scope of the MFA review criteria. This is a list of commonly identified factors that you should NOT consider when reading proposals:

- An institution's financial or staffing needs
- Whether a project is innovative
- Whether a project is new or a resubmission
- The size or age of an organization
- An institution's indirect cost rate. IMLS honors indirect cost rate agreements that an institution has negotiated with another federal agency, or accepts the 10% rate in the absence of a negotiated agreement

### Bias in the Review Process

Everyone has biases, which are informed by our own experiences as well as our cultural and social environments. Recognizing this is an important step in mitigating the effects of bias in your reviews. The chart below shows different types of bias that commonly happen in the review process. Think about what may feel familiar as you review applications.



AFFINITY BIAS	CONFIRMATION BIAS	CONFORMITY BIAS	CONTRAST EFFECT
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Favoring those like you</li> <li>Applicants who “speak the lingo” get less scrutiny and higher scores</li> <li>Seen as more believable/trustworthy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Focusing on information that aligns with preconceived notions</li> <li>Rejecting ideas or actions that challenge held notions.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Tendency to be swayed by the majority OR loudest voices</li> <li>Can lead to false consensus and dampening of multiple perspectives</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Evaluating quality and other characteristics relative to its surroundings (e.g., other applications in review group) rather than on its own merits</li> <li>Can result in unfair assessment of risk and capacity</li> </ul>

As you review, pay attention to your preferences—for example, a project may be well conceived and ready to implement even if the narrative is poorly formatted or has spelling errors. We all have biases, but staying aware of your preferences and what makes you feel comfortable can interrupt your bias and help ensure that every application is reviewed fairly.

#### Example Biased Comments

The following comments contain bias	Explanation
"I couldn't figure out what this project was about because the narrative was filled with spelling mistakes that were enormously distracting."	Comment demonstrates affinity bias.
"While it's important that museums connect with their communities, they should not be the lead for social service projects like a food bank in the museum. That type of work is not mission critical for museums."	Comment demonstrates confirmation bias.
The project timeline seems ambitious, especially since two key partners aren't identified/confirmed. That said, MUSEUM NAME is one of the top art museums in the US, and I'm sure they'll be able to make this happen.	Comment demonstrates conformity bias.
"The risks identified in the narrative were not as realistic and robust as those I read in other proposals."	Comment demonstrates contrast effect bias.

## Step 4: Assign Scores

Assign a single preliminary score for the overall project keeping all three areas of the review criteria in mind. Use a scale of 1 to 5, as described in the Scoring Definitions chart.

## Scoring Definitions

Score	Rank	Description
5	Exceptional	The application is outstanding and provides exceptional support for the proposed project.
4	Very Good	The application provides solid support for the proposed project.
3	Good	The application is adequate but could be strengthened in its support for the proposed project.
2	Some Merit	The application is flawed and does not adequately support the proposed project. The project proposal could be revised and strengthened for a future submission.
1	Poor	The application does not fit the program goals, is inadequate, or provides insufficient information to allow for a confident evaluation.

Strive to bring the same approach to all the applications you review. Evaluate each application using the criteria in the guidelines and in the Reviewer Resources—not against other proposals. It is theoretically possible for you to have been assigned all “Exceptional” proposals, or all “Poor” proposals, meaning that you could arrive at all very high scores or very low scores. You do not need to evaluate on a curve of any kind.

### Step 5: Review Your Work

IMLS is one of the few federal agencies that provides reviewers’ comments to applicants, directly and in their entirety without editing. We do this to make sure our process is as transparent as possible, and to provide anonymous feedback to applicants from their peers. If an applicant is unsuccessful, then they may use these comments to improve their proposal for resubmission. If they are successful, they may use the comments to improve their funded projects.

We hear repeatedly that getting your comments is one of the most highly valued things about IMLS museum grant programs, therefore, review your draft comments and preliminary scores. Adjust your scores, if necessary, to reflect your written evaluation more accurately. Scores should support comments, and comments should justify scores.

See Appendix C for examples of effective comments.

### Step 6: Enter Scores and Comments by the Evaluation Due Date

When you are ready to enter your scores and comments, visit <https://grants.ims.gov/Reach/> and sign in with your Login.gov account. Refer to the [How to Review Applications in eGMS Reach Job Aid](#) for instructions on completing comments and selecting scores.

Your reviews must be completed and entered in eGMS Reach by the **Evaluation Due Date** listed in the Panel Information tab in eGMS Reach.

Panel Information	
Date(s)	2/11/2022
Coordinator	
Chair	<b>Helen Wechsler</b> 202-653-4779 hwechsler@imls.gov
Evaluation Due Date	3/4/2023
Instructions	<p>Thank you for agreeing to serve as an IMLS peer reviewer for the FY22 Museums for America grant cycle.</p> <p>Guidance for reviewers is accessible under the Panel Files Tab below.</p> <p>Before proceeding to the Application Tab, you must:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Review the Conflicts of Interest Statement located under your Personal Files (to review the statement, click the paper icon); and</li><li>2. Certify that you have reviewed the Conflicts of Interest Statement and that you have no conflicts with the applications that have been assigned to you (to certify that you have reviewed the statement and have no conflicts, click the pen icon to access the click-through signature function).</li></ol> <p>The deadline for completing your reviews is Friday, March 4 at 11:59:59 PM EST.</p>

Screenshot: Panel Information tab illustrating where to find the Evaluation Due Date.

## Step 7: Manage Your Copies

Keep your applications and any notes until **August 31, 2024**, in case there are questions from IMLS staff. Continue to maintain confidentiality of all applications that you review by keeping electronic and paper copies in a secure place. After August 31, 2024, delete electronic copies and shred paper copies of the applications and notes.

# Appendix A: Confidentiality and Application and Review Process

## ***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. Because AI generative tools rely upon the submission of substantial information, and because AI users are unable to control where the information they have submitted will be sent, saved, viewed, or used in the future, IMLS explicitly prohibits its peer reviewers from using AI tools to analyze and critique IMLS grant applications.

While funded applications become a matter of record, IMLS does not release information about applications that are not funded through our programs, nor do we share peer reviewers' names or other identifiable information. You may share that you have served as an IMLS peer reviewer, but do not share details about the program in which you're working or the applications you're considering. This applies to communications that are in person, in email, and through all forms of social media.

## ***Application and Review Process***

The success of IMLS grant programs depends upon the quality of its peer review process, through which hundreds of reviewers consider thousands of eligible applications fairly, candidly, and impartially in order to make recommendations for funding each year. Below is a summary of the process from application submission through award announcements.

1. Organizations submit their applications electronically using [Grants.gov](https://www.grants.gov), the central portal of the United States government for receipt of electronic applications.
2. IMLS receives the applications, and staff members check them for organizational eligibility and application completeness.
3. IMLS staff members identify a pool of available peer reviewers with appropriate expertise. Peer review takes place in one or two tiers, depending on the grant program: field review, panel review, or both. Each complete application submitted by an eligible organization typically receives between three and six reviews.
4. For the applications ranked most highly by peer reviewers, IMLS staff members carefully assess the budgets and past organizational performance.
5. IMLS staff members provide a list of applications recommended for funding to the IMLS Director.
6. The IMLS Director makes all final funding decisions.
7. IMLS notifies all applicants whether they have received an award. With their notifications, all applicants receive anonymous copies of the field and/or panel reviews. IMLS also sends notification of the awards to each participating reviewer.

## Appendix B: Complying with Ethical Obligations and Avoiding Conflicts of Interest

As a Reviewer for IMLS, you perform a vital role in ensuring the integrity of the IMLS's peer review process and must carry out your duties in accordance with government ethics rules. Before you evaluate applications, we ask that you review the following *General Principles of Ethical Conduct* and *Summary of the Conflict of Interest Laws*. You will be asked to certify compliance with the IMLS Reviewer Conflict of Interest Statement and Certification. IMLS allocates up to one hour of your reviewer time for you to consider these materials.

If, at any time in the course of performing your duties at IMLS, you believe you may have a conflict of interest, please contact the IMLS program officer coordinating your review process. Other questions about the ethics rules and responsibilities may be directed to IMLS's Designated Agency Ethics Official at [ethics@imls.gov](mailto:ethics@imls.gov); (202) 653-4787; 955 L'Enfant Plaza North, SW, Suite 4000, Washington, DC 20024-2135.

### General Principles of Ethical Conduct

1. Public service is a public trust, requiring you to place loyalty to the Constitution, the laws, and ethical principles above private gain.
2. You shall not hold financial interests that conflict with the conscientious performance of duty.
3. You shall not engage in financial transactions using nonpublic Government information or allow the improper use of such information to further any private interest.
4. You shall not, except pursuant to such reasonable exceptions as are provided by regulation, solicit or accept any gift or other item of monetary value from any person or entity seeking official action from, doing business with, or conducting activities regulated by IMLS, or whose interests may be substantially affected by the performance or nonperformance of your duties.
5. You shall put forth honest effort in the performance of your duties.
6. You shall make no unauthorized commitments or promises of any kind purporting to bind the Government.
7. You shall not use public office for private gain.
8. You shall act impartially and not give preferential treatment to any private organization or individual.
9. You shall protect and conserve Federal property and shall not use it for other than authorized activities.
10. You shall not engage in outside employment or activities, including seeking or negotiating for employment, that conflict with official Government duties and responsibilities.
11. You shall disclose waste, fraud, abuse, and corruption to appropriate authorities.
12. You shall satisfy in good faith your obligations as citizens, including all just financial obligations, especially those – such as Federal, State, or local taxes – that are imposed by law.
13. You shall adhere to all laws and regulations that provide equal opportunity for all Americans regardless of race, color, religion, sex, national origin, age, or handicap.
14. You shall endeavor to avoid any actions creating the appearance that you are violating the law or the ethical standards.

### **Summary of Conflict of Interest Laws**

**18 U.S.C. § 201** – Prohibits you from acceptance of bribes or gratuities to influence Government actions.

**18 U.S.C. § 203** – Prohibits you from accepting compensation for representational activities involving certain matters in which the United States is a party or has a direct and substantial interest.

**18 U.S.C. § 205** – Prohibits you from certain involvement in claims against the United States or representing another before the Government in matters in which the United States is a party or has a direct and substantial interest.

**18 U.S.C. § 207** – Imposes certain restrictions on you related to your activities after Government service.

**18 U.S.C. § 208** – Prohibits you from participating in certain Government matters affecting your own financial interests or the interests of your spouse, minor child, general partner, or organization in which you are serving as an officer, director, trustee, general partner, or employee.

**18 U.S.C. § 209** – Prohibits you from being paid by someone other than the United States for doing their official Government duties.

### **Sample Reviewer Conflict of Interest Statement**

As a Reviewer or panelist for the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS), you may receive a grant application for review 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 prior to submission of the application) 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.

Pending applications are confidential. 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. 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 other reason.

If you have any questions regarding conflict of interest, either in relation to a specific application or in general, please contact the IMLS program officer who is coordinating the review process.

**Certification**

I acknowledge that I have reviewed the ethics training materials and the Conflict of Interest Statement above. To the best of my knowledge, I have no conflict of interest that would preclude my service to the Institute of Museum and Library Services.

Note: Once you have reviewed this document, return to eGMS Reach to affirm that you have approved its contents.

## Appendix C: Example Peer Reviewer Comments

The following samples are the anonymized comments made available to both successful and unsuccessful applicants after funding decisions are announced.



**Sample 1: Panel Peer Reviewer Evaluation**  
**Program: Museums for America**  
**Category: Collections Stewardship and Access**

**MA-123456-OMS - Name of Applicant Museum**

**Panel Reviewer 1**

**Goals:**

The museum proposes a three-year project to digitize its entire collection and make it accessible to scholars and the public. The underutilized resource of correspondence that document the creation of an art collection and an educational program is relevant across diverse disciplines and areas of study. Although the museum already has preserved, conserved, and provided appropriate storage for the collection, this proposal seeks to address the next step via digitization and increased accessibility. The project aligns with the museum's strategic plan and will address the needs of multiple and diverse audiences.

**Implementation:**

The project builds on previous activities relating to preservation, conservation, and cataloging as well as the implementation of a digital assets managements system. The project work plan is ambitious and proposes to scan the entire collection by the end of the first year. The remaining project years will be dedicated to the creation of portals for accessibility. Risks have been assessed including potential issues of copyright. The project has identified the highest priority areas for website presentation. Responsibilities for each project are clearly stated and involve the contributions of staff of diverse departments. The use of grant funds for a dedicated project assistant will help ensure consistency in the project and the use of a scanning vendor will enable the scanning component of the project to be completed at a much faster rate.

**Results:**

The project will serve audiences including the scholarly community, museum staff, museum visitors, and the public. Increased digital accessibility will allow for increased use and will minimize risks to the collection. At the completion of the project, a full year of programming is planned. Although the programming is not articulated as it is outside the scope of the proposal, the inclusion of this information would have been useful. The project leaders propose to sustain the project results through the creation of online exhibitions annually. Previous projects resulted in significant publications and catalogues. The project leaders anticipate that increased accessibility will have similar scholarly results. The museum will communicate the project via traditional and social media channels to its audiences and to the professional archival and library community.

**Overall Score**

**5**

**Sample 2: Panel Peer Reviewer Evaluation**  
**Program: Museums for America**  
**Category: Community Engagement**

**MA-123457-OMS - Name of Applicant Museum**

**Panel Reviewer 2**

**Goals:**

Your proposal provides a well-reasoned and data-supported rationale for the need for a re-envisioned, community-centered planning framework for developing new public programs at your museum. Your project meets IMLS Goal 2, Community Engagement, and aligns closely with objectives 2.1, 2.2 and 2.3. You also argue cogently that your museum's mission and the results of your project align with IMLS's strategic emphasis on projects that seek out diversity and engage community. Your project is an excellent first step toward building new audience for the museum.

**Implementation:**

Although your project identifies the need for a community-centered planning framework, it fails to provide evidence of a review of or familiarity with the extensive literature for visitor-centered and community-centered program planning. Evidence of this front-end research during the pre-grant period would strengthen the proposal. Relying on the AAM Belonging Survey Toolkit is good, but a literature review would also inform the work during the grant period.

A very significant strength of this proposal is the inclusion of experienced and highly qualified consultants to assist museum staff in developing the community-centered planning framework. You provide convincing evidence, in the form of work plans and letters of commitment, that these consultants are appropriate for assisting this project.

The budget is appropriate for the scope and work of the planning project described and the budget justification adequately explains costs and cost share. A key position in this project is the Outreach Coordinator to be hired. The need for this new position is well justified and the job description adequately describes the Outreach Coordinator's role.

The project's Performance Measures are appropriate. Furthermore, you have made provision for appropriate internal project evaluation.

The narrative and budget justification state that Social Media Coordinator is part of the project team and will devote part of their time assisting the consulting firm in creating the proposed communication roadmap, a key project component for helping the museum connect with new audiences. However, the Social Media Coordinator does not appear on the list of key project staff nor is there a resume for this person. This is a serious omission if the Social Media Coordinator has a key role in the project.

Also missing is a Digital Products Plan, a required component that would be necessary since the project clearly will generate digital products such as a digital communication strategy and an archive of survey data. I also have a concern for data confidentiality.

Because of these weaknesses, this project is not yet poised for implementation.

**Results:**

Your project results are clearly articulated and directly address the challenge of engaging broader audiences in museum programs. The survey reports and other tools this project will produce could help the museum staff better serve new and existing audiences.

One of your key products, the Communication Roadmap, described as a key strategy for cultivating sustained engagement with underserved audiences, is jeopardized by the confusion over who is responsible for its development. There seems to be potential for the museum providing insufficient staff support for the consulting team tasked with developing the road map.

**Overall Score**

**3**

**Sample 3: Panel Peer Reviewer Evaluation**  
**Program: Museums for America**  
**Category: Lifelong Learning**

MA-123458-OMS - Name of Applicant Museum

Panel Reviewer 3

**Project Justification:**

This is a project that seems to fit both its Museums for America objective (1.3) and the mission of the organizations involved in project execution. The area to be served is also in clear need of more access to quality STEM education, especially if the project builds in cross-curricular connections as stated. Without, however, enlisting specific partner schools prior to submitting the proposal, it's hard to know how wanted/needed it is for the actual intended audience. While the generalities are solid and the project appears to have a strong foundation in research and educational theory, that is all potentially moot if prospective partners fail to become actual partners should the award be granted. The structure of the project and the breadth of its reach is good, but as written is it far too vague.

**Project Work Plan:**

This proposal would be much stronger had the museum already reached out to their identified partners in the school districts to be served and gotten their buy-in. This reflects a general vagueness in the proposal. Because the museum hasn't actually contacted their prospective partner schools yet, they also don't have specific grade levels or content in mind. The example of a potential life science curriculum is strong, but it would be much better if there were more concrete plans. The budget also suffers from this sort of cart-before-horse issue. Is the cost-share really there if it depends on leveraging the grant dollars? That said, the budget is mostly realistic, though it is not entirely clear in the breakdown or the budget justification what the scholarship funds for various schools will be used for. It seems like it is the teacher stipends, but this isn't explicit. Should these issues be resolved, the outreach field trip model of program would be wonderful.

**Project Results:**

Early in the project narrative, the museum identifies questions that might be on post-program surveys that teachers will be asked to fill out. These surveys and some annual focus groups identified in the Performance Measures are the only evaluation strategies mentioned in the proposal. For a project this big, simply requesting teachers fill out a survey and holding an annual focus group likely isn't sufficient to establish that the project's goals have been met. Additionally, no specifically measurable goals are included. There are plenty of qualitative projected results, including the information collected on teacher surveys, which is good, but a solid evaluation plan should have some quantitative data in it as well. The goals in the proposal are often vague and nonspecific, e.g., "provide some of our most vulnerable students with engaging, exciting content" and "learning opportunities will not only set the students up for future success but will provide them with a feeling of accomplishment and overall confidence in the material." As to the first, how does one measure "engaging" and "exciting?" As to the second, student confidence is measurable, but how exactly it will be measured is left unsaid.

**Overall Score**

**1**