INSTITUTE *of*
Museumand**Library**
SERVICES

National Leadership Grants

2006 Panelist Handbook

THE NATIONAL LEADERSHIP GRANTS REVIEW PROCESS

Thank you for agreeing to serve as a National Leadership Grant panelist. 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/or museums.

The staff at IMLS has prepared this handbook specifically for panelists to ensure fair and candid review of all eligible applications. It will provide you with the procedural information you need. Please use it in conjunction with this year's *National Leadership Grant Application and Guidelines*. Even if you are an experienced reviewer, you'll need to refresh your memory and note any changes.

THE NLG PROGRAM

The National Leadership Grant (NLG) program provides Federal grants through an annual, competitive process. In the NLG program:

- Applications are evaluated by peers;
- Evaluations are based on the application's strength in proving that the applicant:
    - Meets applicable evaluation criteria as outlined in the *NLG Guidelines*; and
    - Addresses the priorities for this funding cycle as explained in the *Guidelines*

THE NLG PROCESS

1. Applicants review the *National Leadership Grant Application and Guidelines* and submit proposals to IMLS.
2. IMLS receives the grant applications, checks them for eligibility and completeness.
3. IMLS chooses panelists and matches grant applications to those with appropriate expertise.
4. Panelists review the applications and complete evaluation comments.
5. Panels meet to discuss proposals and make funding recommendations.
6. Staff conducts administrative review.
7. Overview Panel considers recommended proposals.
8. IMLS Director makes final funding decisions.
9. IMLS staff notifies successful applicants.
10. IMLS provides feedback to all applicants.

I. First Steps

This handbook outlines an approach to help prepare for the panel review process. Contact IMLS at once and notify the appropriate staff contact if you have questions after reading the following information.

QUALITIES OF A GOOD PROPOSAL

A good NLG proposal should:
- Demonstrate National Impact as defined in the *Guidelines*
- Successfully address each criterion
- Address priorities for the appropriate category (Refer to the section on priorities in the *Guidelines*.)

TIME REQUIRED

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

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

Read the "Conflict of Interest Statement" carefully as presented in the Online Review System. Then read your list of applications to see if there are any potential conflicts of interest. If there is a potential conflict, contact IMLS immediately. Once you have reviewed an application, you should *never* represent the applicant in dealings with the IMLS or other Federal agencies in regard to this grant application or award.

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.

APPLICATION COMPLETENESS

Check your applications to make sure that all required information is included. We only check the original application. We do not check every page of each reviewer copy for completeness. ***If any application appears to be incomplete, contact at 202/653-4644 or dlukash@imls.gov.***

SCHEDULE OF COMPLETION

The chart on the following page presents a week-by-week guide to completing the review process. You may want to use this chart as a model for your own schedule.

Four-Week Schedule of Completion

	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4
Activity 1	**1)** Upon receipt of panel materials, • Check each application for completeness • Contact IMLS with any problems • Read the Conflict of Interest Statement			
Activity 2	**2) Read** the *NLG Application and Guidelines NLG* and the *Panelist Handbook.*			
Activity 3	**3) Evaluate** applications: 1st read to understand range of responses.			
Activity 4		**4)** 2nd read-through: **write comments** for Preliminary Notes		
Activity 5				**5) Review** comments and make Preliminary Funding Recommendations.
Activity 6				**6) Prepare** brief outline to facilitate leading discussion of assigned proposals and "submit" on-line reviews.
Activity 7				7) **Prepare** all information to bring to panel meeting

II. Read Applications

Your thorough reading and understanding of each application will be the key to providing both insightful comments and an overall rating for the applicant and your thoughtful participation in the panel meeting discussions. If you feel the application is incomplete or there is a significant issue with the application contact Dan Lukash immediately at 202/653-4644 or dlukash@imls.gov.

Dan is also available to help you with specific questions or concerns you may have about any aspect of a particular project, such as a specific budget problem, understanding a proposed activity, structuring your evaluation comments, etc.

Evaluating Applications

On page 3.3 - 3.5 of the enclosed 2006 *National Leadership Grants Application and Guidelines* you find will details on the 6 evaluation criteria. Your analysis of each criteria and the application as a whole should encompass both the specifics of each of the six criteria as well how well the project meets the goals of the program as listed at the top of these instructions

Preparing Comments

Prepare preliminary comments and overall rating using the IMLS Online Review System.

The comments and overall rating will provide an initial evaluation of each application as we start the panel meeting. It will show where there is agreement or disagreement. Please see the enclosed instruction page for using the IMLS Online Review System.

The comments you provide for the 6 evaluation criteria and the overall comment will go back to the applicant without editing from IMLS, although they may be edited by you after the discussion at the panel meeting. This is the only written feedback the applicant will receive. Please be sure to state your views in a constructive manner. You should not hesitate to be critical nor point out any weaknesses, but be sure the tone does not block out the message.

After you have read, evaluated and provided written comments, we ask that you provide a single overall rating for the application. Five choices are provided;

5 (E) Excellent: Recommended for funding
4 (VG) Very Good: Highly recommended
3 (G) Good: Recommended, but not high priority
2 (SM) Some Merit, but not recommended for funding
1 (DNF) Do not fund

Please be sure the overall rating you select is reflective of your comments. This selection will be key in guiding our discussions of each application at the panel meeting.

Completion of Comments
Your comments should be completed and "submit" in the On-line Review System by the corresponding date of your panel in the table below.

Panel Date	"Submit" On-line Reviews
March 28-29, 2006	March 26, 2006
April 5-6, 2006	March 30, 2006

Presenting at the Meeting
We need you meet this deadline so that we can analyze the scores before the meeting and have them organized for the panel discussion.

On your list you will note that you have been assigned to be a presenter for several applications. As you are completing your evaluations, please prepare some notes for the applications you will present at the panel meeting in Washington.

We will have copies of the applications at the meeting, although you may wish to bring your copy with annotations for your presentations.

For each application, the panelist assigned to present the application will give a brief synopsis of the project, their preliminary overall rating (i.e. excellent, very good, etc), and concise reasons to support that recommendation. Each summation should not take longer than five minutes. Then the application will be open for discussion by the entire panel.

When you are not presenting an application you will be expected to provide any additional comments you found in the application after the presenter has finished. Some applications will have consensus, others will evoke quite a bit of discussion. This is the reason we hold the panel meeting in Washington, to hear these differing views, and work through them so that IMLS can fund the projects that will lead the way in helping the museum community meet the needs of its audiences.

Panel Meeting Review Sheets
We will distribute a Panel Meeting Review Sheet to the presenter of each application during the meeting. You will use your Panel Meeting Review Sheet to record the final funding recommendations, and new information based on panel discussions. The presenter of each application will be responsible for summarizing the panel discussion and completing the final Panel Meeting Review Sheet. We have allowed time for this within the meeting schedule.

Your Final Word   When all final recommendations are completed, we will provide time for each panelist to complete their assigned Panel Meeting Review Sheet. A summary of the major points in the discussion and the final overall ratings of the five readers will be recorded on this sheet. If one or more panelists have a significantly differing opinions on an application, a separate sheet is provided to express these views.

We will quickly review all funding recommendations.

Staff will collect your Panel Meeting Review Sheet packets (final notes, preliminary notes). Your Panel Review Sheet will represent your final record for each application.

III. Sample Comments

The next section contains comments from field reviewers. Those comments labeled as "good" comments, based on evidence provided in the application, are substantive, tactful, and helpful to the evaluation. Remember that these are samples only. Feel free to use the good ones as models when preparing your own but DO NOT copy or paraphrase our samples. Each application is unique and deserves its own unique comments.

GOOD COMMENTS

Some of the characteristics of good comments are:
- 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 score that is given
- Acknowledge the resources of the institution
- Reflect the application's strengths and identifies areas for improvement
- Directed to applicants for their use

Remember: Successful and unsuccessful applicants use your comments to improve their awards or future applications!

Each of the sample comments listed below is followed by an explanation of its good characteristics.

National Impact: "This project provides a means by which libraries can move beyond only providing access to digitized collections. This project can provide a model that supports the incorporation of artifacts and library information sources utilizing multi-media for undergraduate courses. The Web site, with the images, library resources, and additional pieces to be added by students enrolled in the credit courses, should serve as a model for demonstrating how classes can be improved and collections enriched via application of the Internet." (Provides a good explanation of how this project serves as a model)

Budget/Contributions: "The budget is realistic for the number of trainers and trainees. Compensation of consultants and the number of hours for their assistance are reasonable for this project." (Provides specific information)

General Comments: "Addresses an area of critical concern for museums, but two major barriers exist: Not enough planning is in evidence in the evaluation and dissemination steps, and more evidence of institution support is required—their commitment is not clear in this application." (Identifies strengths and areas for improvement)

POOR COMMENTS

Listed below are "poor" comments from past reviews. Comments that are considered poor are vague, irrelevant, insensitive, or unclear. These comments actually hinder the evaluation process rather than help it.

To avoid making poor comments, DO NOT:

- Penalize an applicant because you feel the institution doesn't need the money— remember, any eligible institution may apply for and receive NLG funds, regardless of need.
- Penalize an applicant because of missing materials, unless you have determined that the materials are missing from the original application. If you are missing *required* materials, contact IMLS immediately.
- Make derogatory remarks—offer suggestions for improvement rather than harsh criticism.
- 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 raise your question, contact IMLS.
- Offer or ask for irrelevant or extraneous information—your comments should concern only the information IMLS requests of applicants.

Each of the sample poor comments listed below is followed by an explanation of why it is a poor comment.

Adaptability: *"The project is obviously attempting to make the work adaptable—good work."* (Vague)

Evaluation: *"Weakest part of the proposal. Could be strengthened."* (Vague)

Personnel: *"The project personnel seem to be well qualified, but this institution does not have a national reputation."* (Insensitive and irrelevant)

Budget: *"I might question some parts of the budget, but they probably know what they're doing."* (Not evaluative; vague, and irrelevant)

National Impact: *"Addresses issues of digitization crucial to most cultural institutions."* (Does not address how those issues are presented or what their impact is on the proposals—vague)