



Director's Letter: 50th Meeting of the National Museum and Library Services Board

Tuesday, December 10, 2024

## Introduction

Dear Members of the National Museum and Library Services Board:

On behalf of the staff of IMLS, it is my pleasure to be writing to you in preparation for the 50<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the National Museum and Library Services Board (NMLSB) on December 10, 2024, at the Kellogg Conference Center at Gallaudet University in Washington, D.C. This meeting comes at a pivotal time of many transitions for the Agency, and we look forward to providing you with a summary of accomplishments and lessons learned from our grantmaking activities in FY 2024 and the innovations in motion for FY 2025, all in service of our mission of empowering the nation's museums, libraries, and archives.

Of particular importance to the Agency's overall context and the work of this body are two items: Agency leadership and the timeline for review and recommendations for the 2025 National Medals for Museum and Library Service.

- **Agency Leadership:** Upon the expiration of IMLS Director Crosby Kemper's term in March 2024, the Deputy Director of the Office of Library Services, Cyndee Landrum, became Acting Director of the Agency. In accordance with the Federal Vacancies Reform Act, her interim term ended on October 22, 2024, and I took on service as the Senior Official Performing the Duties of the Director effective October 23, 2024. I will remain in this position until a candidate for IMLS Director is presented to the Senate by the President OR January 20, 2025 (Inauguration Day), whichever comes first. At either of these times, Cyndee will return to service as Acting Director. These transitions have been seamless, due to the healthy culture and teamwork of the IMLS staff.
- **2025 National Medals for Museum and Library Service:** One of the major responsibilities of the NMLSB is to review nominations and provide recommendations to the IMLS Director for the National Medals for Museum and Library Service. This year's proposed scheduled for NMLSB review is as follows:
  - December 11, 2024 – January 27, 2025: NMLSB Review of Nominations
  - January 29 & 30, 2025: NMLSB Jury Meetings
  - February 6, 2025: NMLSB Recommendations to IMLS Director

Details on process and timing will be discussed during our December 10th meeting.

Of course, IMLS's work extends beyond research and grantmaking to the field, and this document provides updates on other relevant agency matters to help contextualize the overall operations of the Agency for your reference.

Laura Huerta Migus, Senior Official Performing the Duties of the Director

## Legislative and Financial Updates and Reporting

### Legislative and Financial Updates

#### Reauthorization

The Museum and Library Services Act (MLSA) (20 U.S.C. § 9101 *et seq.*) sets forth or “authorizes” the duties, priorities, and functions of the IMLS programs, organizational structure, and responsibilities.

**Reauthorization** is an opportunity for the Agency, Congress, and the Administration to review the statute in its entirety and possibly recommend changes to the purpose and scope of agency activities. The IMLS reauthorization is anticipated to take place in 2025.

#### FY 2025 Budget Request

In March of 2024, President Biden released the Administration’s **FY 2025 Budget Request to Congress**, which recognizes and builds upon the Agency’s critical programs that have worked to sustain museums, libraries, and American communities, and advances the priorities of the Biden Administration. The Request includes \$280 million for IMLS, which is a 5% reduction from FY 2024 enacted funding levels and impacts all programs and administrative line items.

The Agency’s **current lease at 955 L’Enfant Plaza** expires in March of 2026. We are actively engaged with the General Services Administration (GSA) to secure a new lease that meets the Agency’s future office requirements. The new location is expected to be known by the end of FY 2025. GSA is currently in the process of approving the agency requirements in advance of initiating the formal acquisition process. Of note in the FY 2025 administrative budget line is a one-time request for \$2.5 million to fund the expenses associated with the relocation of the Agency’s office and construction required at the new location. The [FY 2025 Congressional Justification is available on our website here](#).

#### Annual Reports to the Office of Management and Budget

IMLS continues to produce two annual fiscal year-end reports to describe and report on our activities: The [FY 2024 Annual Financial Report \(AFR\) is posted](#) and outlines our award activity by program and financial expenditures for FY 2024. Underlying the Agency’s many programmatic achievements are its commitment to organizational excellence and its sound financial management. IMLS has a fiduciary and stewardship responsibility to manage its Federal funds effectively and efficiently and comply with Federal financial management guidance. The FY 2024 Annual Performance Report (APR) is being prepared and will be posted on the Agency’s website early in 2025. The APR showcases IMLS’s progress on performance management and highlights how the Agency continues to carry out its strategic plan.

## Agency Engagement with the White House, the Field, and PCAH

### White House Engagement

#### National Strategy to Counter Antisemitism

As part of IMLS’s commitments to the **U.S. National Strategy to Counter Antisemitism**, the Agency partnered with the Council of American Jewish Museums to host a summit in March 2024 for museums, libraries, and archives on countering antisemitism. The summit focused on building cross-community solidarity, sharing model resources for educators on teaching about histories of antisemitism and Jewish American heritage, and developing a collection of materials and toolkits on countering antisemitism that can be used by community educators and organizations. Final edits to the toolkit are pending and publication is imminent.

IMLS also committed to ensuring that the Federal Information Literacy Taskforce created toolkits to help Americans understand, evaluate, and discern the reliability and accuracy of information.

[InformationLiteracy.gov](https://www.informationliteracy.gov) launched in June of 2024; please see the next section for more updates.

## Field Engagement

### Information Literacy

In response to a Congressional mandate, [InformationLiteracy.gov](https://www.informationliteracy.gov) formally launched in June 2024, offering strategies and tools to support the American people in developing the skills they need to find, understand, evaluate, and share information. The website helps to empower community members to navigate today's complex information environment and make informed decisions, providing information on Federal and non-Federal initiatives, programs, grants, publications, and materials. New updates to the site include:

- A [Science Literacy](#) page launched in late September; other dedicated literacy pages include those on [Information Literacy](#), [Health Literacy](#), [Financial Literacy](#), and [Digital Literacy](#).
- [Resource Evaluation Criteria](#): To model the transparency that information literacy is all about, the site features high-level descriptions of the five criteria the Agency uses to evaluate all the resources that go on the site.
- More [Community Spotlights](#), which highlight the important efforts of local organizations that are working to build information literacy in their communities. We also launched a [Learn About Community Spotlights](#) page describing how we collect spotlights, and how users can suggest an organization for consideration.
- The [Get to Know InformationLiteracy.gov](#) page, which features:
  - a recording of website training webinars from September that provided an overview of the trainings and resources available on [InformationLiteracy.gov](https://www.informationliteracy.gov) and how these tools can support information literacy needs in communities throughout the country; and
  - short navigation videos on literacy topics, the site's comprehensive [Resource Database](#) where users can filter all of the resources on the site by literacy area and resource language; the [Community Spotlights](#), and the [Journey to Information Literacy](#) page.
- And finally, site-level and page-specific surveys to gather data from user feedback that we will be using to adjust and continue to improve the site.

We also held two half-day knowledge sharing meetings in late August and early September with 19 experts in the museum and library fields from 16 States, Washington, D.C., and Puerto Rico. The goals of these sessions were to have participants:

- Learn from and integrate peers' experiences (e.g., success stories, challenges) to inform and enhance their own information literacy programming;
- Explore the landscape of information literacy resources and tactics available at the Federal and local levels;
- Use [InformationLiteracy.gov](https://www.informationliteracy.gov) to find resources relevant to their own community's information literacy needs.

## America250

PBSBooks is working with schools to implement a learning curriculum related to the content of the [“Visions of America”](#) series to be shown and discussed in classrooms into 2026. Learning Guides, music playlists, and curated booklists are also included on a [special Visions of America Resource page](#). The series explores not only remembered historic events in our country’s development but also reflects on lesser-known stories and American sites. These historic and compelling stories and places complete and create a true history of America.

In October, Laura Huerta Migus and Cyndee Landrum attended a kick-off event for one of our [Museums for America grantees](#): Center of Science and Industry (COSI) at the Statue of Liberty. COSI distributed their **America 250 “learning lunchbox” kits** to students and provided an interactive demonstration of several experiments.

## Native Community Engagement

IMLS’s inter-departmental Nation-to-Nation team continues to coordinate engagement efforts with Tribal Nations and Native Hawaiian communities in alignment with the Agency’s **Tribal Consultation Plan**. Leadership and staff conducted a Native Communities Listening Session on September 24, 2024, which was attended by 62 non-IMLS participants. Program Officers conducted additional targeted outreach and engagement throughout the year through participation and attendance at workshops, conferences, meetings, and direct counseling calls.

The IMLS Office of Research and Evaluation is wrapping up a three-year **evaluation of IMLS’s four Native-serving grant programs**. Designed to help IMLS understand how it can better align with Indigenous values through its library and museum services grantmaking, this effort is the Agency’s first comprehensive evaluation of these long-standing programs. A report of the findings is expected to be published in December 2024.

We continued our support of the **Association of Tribal Archives, Libraries, and Museums (ATALM)** annual conference to serve the professional development needs of current and emerging staff of Indigenous archives, libraries, and museums. The ATALM 2024 conference took place November 12–14 in Palm Springs, CA, with over 1,700 attendees, surpassing the previous attendance record of 1,500 set in 2023. IMLS staff presented technical assistance workshops, informational sessions, and staffed a booth in the exhibitor hall. As part of a first-time initiative to create opportunities for broader inclusion, IMLS also supported a delegation of 21 Pacific Islander representatives from American Samoa, Guam, Commonwealth of Northern Mariana Islands, Marshall Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, and Palau.

## The President’s Committee on the Arts and the Humanities

The **President’s Committee on the Arts and the Humanities (PCAH)**, administered by IMLS, has spent the past year building on its 42-year legacy of bipartisan leadership by pursuing work that positively impacts community well-being, economic development, education, and civic engagement. As a Federal advisory body, PCAH provides recommendations to the President, collaborating with over thirty federal entities to advance national initiatives in the arts, humanities, and museum and library services. In the past year, PCAH has fostered cross-sector collaboration, helped to launch eight nationwide programs, and coordinated fourteen upcoming convenings, alongside three major multi-year, collaborative pilot projects. These projects address urgent needs in disaster recovery, repatriation and ethical returns, and workforce development. Through this strategic work, PCAH continues to uplift the power of arts and humanities to drive creativity, innovation, community resilience, and cultural preservation.

## Committee Activities

PCAH is mandated to hold two official committee meetings per year. The committee more than doubled that, holding five committee meetings to date—three virtual and two in person in Washington, D.C. These meetings have been instrumental in building a shared vision and recommending strategic priorities with our Federal partners, including IMLS, NEA, and NEH among others. Our most recent committee meeting was held in D.C. in August of 2024, where members met to discuss updates to our priority areas, learn about how recommendations were being implemented, brainstorm on ways to get involved in the work, and brief the First Lady at Camp David.

## Strategic Priorities

The committee has identified and voted to advance recommendations across a number of thematic areas vital to the arts and humanities, with active and deep collaboration involving nine Federal agencies. Below are some of the key areas of focus:

### *Ongoing Initiatives*

- **Artists for Understanding:** Launched as a joint initiative with IMLS, NEA, and NEH, this program aims to harness the power of the arts and humanities to counter all forms of hate and foster understanding through art in communities around the country. The initiative has hosted 4 virtual programs, and by the end of January will have hosted seven in-person convenings in New York City, Dearborn, Minneapolis, San Jose, Houston, and Denver.
- **Convenings on the Non-Profit Theater Sector:** The first convening was hosted in the Catskills, New York, at the end of October, and a second convening is planned for 2025. These convenings are designed to bring non-profit theater leaders and funders together to develop cross-sector policy recommendations and guide future programmatic efforts to uplift the sector.

### *Upcoming Initiatives*

- **Libraries & Placemaking:** A pilot project in collaboration with IMLS that supports libraries as responsive community spaces, blending traditional services with innovative placemaking activities specific to community-based needs.
- **Rapid Response & Recovery Pilot:** A coordinated effort with federal partners including IMLS, PCAH, NEA, NEH, DOI, FEMA, HENTF, and Smithsonian to support cultural organizations in disaster preparedness and recovery.
- **Convening on Repatriation and Ethical Returns for Museums:** IMLS and PCAH, in collaboration with the Department of the Interior (DOI), will host “Facilitating Pathways: A Convening on Repatriation and Ethical Returns,” on January 9–10, 2025, in Washington, D.C., to align Federal agencies and private foundations around a shared commitment to repatriation efforts. We are working on a second convening with the Smithsonian, tentatively slated for later in the spring.

## Engagement and Outreach

We invite you to visit our updated webpage [PCAH.gov](https://pcah.gov) for an overview of these recommendations turned initiatives. Additionally, PCAH has expanded its online presence, offering resources and updates on our activities through our social media channels. For instance, in celebration of National Arts and Humanities Month, we coordinated a social media engagement campaign with IMLS, NEA, and NEH, highlighting the importance of arts and humanities across the country.

We're also proud to share that PCAH Co-Chair Bruce Cohen and PCAH member Dr. Pauline Yu received National Arts and National Humanities Medals, respectively, in recognition of their outstanding contributions to the fields.

Our member Dr. Horacio Sierra published an article in the inaugural issue of Cambridge University Press's *Public Humanities* journal titled, "[An Interview with National Leaders in the Arts and Humanities.](#)" Dr. Sierra's article features interviews with PCAH members Bruce Cohen, Chair Lowe of the National Endowment for the Humanities, and Amanda Phingbodhipakkiya. The article highlights their personal and professional journeys within the arts and the humanities while spotlighting PCAH.

## Office of Grants Policy and Management (OGPM)

### Federal Grant Regulations

The **2 CFR 200** (or Title 2 of the Code of Federal Regulations, Part 200) is the primary regulation governing grants and cooperative agreements issued by the U.S. Government, including, of course, those made by IMLS. This "Uniform Guidance" was recently revised with substantial changes that became effective on October 1, 2024, and which focused on reducing administrative burden, increasing efficiency, and increasing the clarity and conciseness of the guidance. Major areas of importance and specific deliverables for implementation were detailed in an accompanying implementation memo (M-24-11 Reducing Burden in the Administration of Federal Financial Assistance), and included:

- Simplifying Notices of Funding Opportunities (NOFOs) to improve accessibility, readability, clarity and design; eliminating unnecessary provisions and application components; standardizing structure across the government; and reducing applicant burden.
- Standardizing assistance listings for the new Federal Program Inventory to make it easier for potential applicants to find programs and to provide additional transparency.
- Increasing the accessibility and flexibility of Federal funding and support programs for Tribal Nations.

IMLS completed all deliverables on time in preparation for the effective date of the revisions. In addition to required OMB deliverables, IMLS:

- Simplified 13 NOFOs for discretionary programs to incorporate plain language, remove unnecessary content, and improve design.
- Provided reference resources, handouts, and guidance to help applicants and grantees prepare for the revisions.
- Held open forums with grantee groups to provide an overview and clarity around the revisions.
- Conducted agency-wide Uniform Guidance staff training.
- Joined two working groups under the Council of Federal Financial Assistance (COFFA) to participate in ongoing efforts to improve effectiveness and efficiency in grant applications and Federal grants data.

Additionally, IMLS continues to update award terms and conditions, assurances and certifications, policies and procedures, and other documents and resources impacted by the revisions.



## Office of Library Services

For more details on IMLS's FY 2024 grantmaking for the Office of Library Services, please see pp. 8–11 of the [FY 2024 AFR](#).

### Grants to States

#### Planning and Reporting

The Grants to States program (G2S) worked with the IMLS Office of Grants Policy and Management (OGPM) and the Office of General Counsel (OGC) to provide a summary of **major 2 CFR 200 regulatory changes** that will affect the states in their grantmaking. Following a September update at the G2S conference, the three offices held a virtual forum in November for states to ask additional questions about the changes.

#### Grants to State In-person Activities

G2S program officers finished the year's **site visits** in September 2024, conducting compliance and monitoring activities in Arkansas, Colorado, Delaware, Hawaii, Iowa, Kansas, Maine, Mississippi, Montana, Nevada, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Wisconsin.

G2S trained 52 in-person attendees and 45 virtual attendees at this year's G2S **All-States Conference**, September 18–19, 2024, in Milwaukee. The annual two-day training, co-hosted by the IMLS Office of Research and Evaluation (ORE), prepares State libraries for their critical role as pass-through entities in administering the formula program.

#### Discretionary Programs

The call for proposals (also known as Notices of Funding Opportunities or “NOFOs”) for the **National Leadership Grants for Libraries (NLG-L)** and the **Laura Bush 21<sup>st</sup> Century Librarian (LB21)** programs were announced in July 2024 and we received 187 preliminary proposals for NLG-L requesting \$46.8 million and 142 preliminary proposals for LB21 requesting \$35.9 million by the September 20, 2024, deadline. This was the first year for the Community–Centered Implementation (CCI) category in both programs. The CCI project category provides support for adapting existing practices, findings, models, tools, and/or partnerships to address community needs. NLG received 39 CCI proposals and 21 were submitted through LB21. Phase 1 panel review for both programs occurs in December 2024 and invitations to submit full proposals will likely occur sometime in January 2025.

The **Native American Library Services** grant programs saw an increase, doubling the size of the number of proposals received last year. An increase in proposals also requires an increase in the number of reviewers needed to evaluate and score grant proposals. With the increase in reviewers, IMLS decided to pilot holding in-person panels in Tempe, AZ, since many reviewers live in close geographic proximity to Arizona, significantly reducing travel time and cost.

## Office of Museum Services

For more details on IMLS's FY 2024 grantmaking for the Office of Museum Services, please see pp. 12–14 of the [FY 2024 AFR](#).

### Discretionary Grants

In FY 2024, OMS awarded a total of \$54 million across 298 awards in eight grant programs, including the re-launch of the **21<sup>st</sup> Century Museum Professionals (21MP)** program, and saw significant increases in applications to the **Native American/Native Hawaiian Museum Services** program and the **Inspire! Grants**

**for Small Museums** program. Preliminary results for FY 2025 application rates indicate a 20–30% increase in application rates across programs. Over the past three cycles, the number of applications to OMS programs has increased more than 50% (from FY 2023 to FY 2025).

## Cooperative Agreements

**Museums for All (M4A)**, a partnership between IMLS and the Association of Children's Museums encourages low-income families to visit museums and build lifelong museum habits. The initiative, which offers free or reduced museum admission to individuals and families experiencing financial need, reached a 10-year milestone of access welcoming more than ten million visitors in 10 years across 1,420 participating institutions.

**Museums for Digital Learning (MDL)**, a collaboration of IMLS, Newfields, the Field Museum, and History Colorado, provides a web-based platform bringing primary museum resources into the classroom for K-12 educators and students. MDL has 4,979 total users to date, with more than 10,600 views, and 4,878 engaged sessions.

## Policy Research, Analysis, Data Collection, and Dissemination

The Agency is wrapping up two important **evaluation studies** of its grantmaking endeavors in December 2024. The first concerns the independent investigation on the experiences of museums and libraries that received **emergency grant funds from IMLS** in mitigating some of the disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Additionally, IMLS is preparing to present an overview of the final findings and recommendations for the **comprehensive evaluation of its four grant programs serving Native American, Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian communities** at a public webinar scheduled for mid-December. This webinar follows up an earlier dissemination of this study's learnings at a presentation on November 13 at the annual Association of Tribal Archives, Libraries, and Museums (ATALM) conference.

More than 95 percent of the nation's approximately 9,200 local library systems continue to participate in the annual Public Libraries Survey, and all State Library Administrative Agencies continue to respond to the biennial SLAA survey. In addition, IMLS is set to launch the first annual collection of the **National Museum Survey (NMS)** in late January. The work has included validating and enhancing contact information for around 20,000 survey-eligible museums and refining questionnaire elements to make respondents' survey taking experience crisper and easier. Additional work includes performing user experience testing on an online data portal that will allow interested audiences to freely access, analyze, and visualize the field's first-ever statistically valid and nationally representative museum survey data set, which is expected to be available for access next summer.

In responding to Congressional directives, the Agency is conducting an independent assessment of the infrastructure needs of museums and libraries in underserved, rural, and disaster-prone areas across the United States. The study blends an array of data sources and methodologies. The Agency anticipates submitting this report to Congress later next summer.