

IMLS Grant Media FAQs

1. **What role has The Institute for Museum and Library Sciences (IMLS) previously played in the funding or initiatives of The Filson Historical Society?**
 - a. This was the Filson’s first grant from IMLS, though not its first federal grant. Specifically, the work plan for this grant built on the findings of a 2019 Preservation Assistance Grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) that identified unprocessed manuscript material as the most significant stewardship priority for increasing access to our collections.

2. **What was the original grant award amount and need?**
 - a. The original amount was \$130,133, awarded for activities from September 2023 to December 2025 to establish physical and administrative control of its unprocessed manuscript collections, meaning preparing donated collections of paper materials for cataloging, research, and exhibition. The Filson’s IMLS grant provided for one part-time position and a significant percentage of the salary and benefits of a senior curatorial position. This federal amount was matched dollar-for-dollar with Filson resources devoted to the same project.

3. **What is the funding amount IMLS is canceling?**
 - a. \$35,152 is the remaining “balance” of our original contractual grant award. Payment requests to draw from this balance were submitted on March 20 and 21 and approved by IMLS. The Filson is awaiting payment of these approved requests, totaling \$10,667 and hopes to receive that approved amount by April 22.

4. **How much work has been completed and funded?**
 - a. The Filson has conducted more than three-quarters of the planned project work, including the matching investment of more than 1,500 Filson staff hours not funded by IMLS.

5. Is there a process for appeal?

- a. Yes, and The Filson will appeal this termination. The terms of the grant provide the option to appeal by May 12. This appeal must be reviewed by a committee of at least three IMLS staff members. The status of many IMLS employees is uncertain, [having been placed on administrative leave at the end of March.](#)

6. Describe the work undertaken thanks to the grant. Why is it important to the mission of The Filson and our broader community?

- a. The goals for this project include improved administrative control and tracking of unprocessed manuscript collections, strategic prioritization of unprocessed manuscripts within the cataloging queue, and increased access to unprocessed material.

Project outcomes so far include the digitization of manuscript accession ledgers dating back to 1889, uploading more than 5,700 acquisition entries into the Past Perfect database, and migrating administrative data for more than 6,700 cataloged manuscript collections into Past Perfect. In addition, Filson staff have created administrative data for nearly 800 manuscript collections, fully cataloged 20 manuscript collections, identified 10 previously hidden collections that directly address African American history in the Ohio Valley, and flagged 22 high-priority collections for cataloging.

As a result of this work, the Filson is able to provide increased access to manuscript collections to in-person and remote researchers, programming audiences, and community members who engage with the Filson. In addition, our curatorial and access teams are able to more effectively allocate institutional resources and ensure that the most significant and relevant manuscript material becomes fully accessible to patrons and researchers.

7. Is the termination notification clear on next steps?

- a. No. The termination actually includes language that notes “all obligations continue to apply” and that “an audit may be conducted by IMLS after the termination of the agreement.” This language is vague but could imply that IMLS will continue to exercise oversight of a program they are no longer funding and supporting, as well as the opportunity to exercise oversight of Filson spending and operations related to this program after their withdrawal of support.

8. On what grounds did the IMLS terminate the Filson’s grant project?

- a. The Filson’s termination letter used language that went out to multiple grant recipients. It informed the Filson and these other institutions that the project “no longer serves the interest of the United States.”

Anonymous peer reviewers at the time of application did not share that conclusion, highlighting the project’s alignment with community needs and IMLS objectives. “The project falls squarely within both the program and project categories and is a well-established priority across multiple strategic goals.” Another reviewer noted that the Filson project showed “deep commitment to its collections and to its varied and diverse audience.” “It’s an excellent project in its design and well

worth funding,” wrote another. One reviewer noted the responsiveness of the work to the Filson’s community, saying that it would “put forth voices that have been underrepresented by giving them high priority in the processing and addressing current social interests and needs of the community.”

9. Is this IMLS funding going to be repurposed?

- a. The termination letter stated that “IMLS is repurposing its funding allocations in a new direction in furtherance of the President’s agenda.” [The New York Times reported on April 10](#) that some reallocated arts and humanities funding could be directed to a planned “Garden of Heroes.”

10. Beyond the Filson, why should this change in policy concern our community?

- a. These grant terminations will have significant local impact, particularly in cutting off support for projects that directed resources towards identified community needs, amplifying the impact of small federal investments. The [Kentucky Department for Libraries and Archives distributes significant IMLS funding](#) every year to projects in county public library systems. In Indiana, cuts to IMLS funding are coupled with a state bill to reduce property taxes that support most public libraries across the state. Directing funds away from locally significant projects into those mandated by the administration will reduce the number of citizens benefiting directly from IMLS and other funding by moving dollars away from the use of state and local decisionmakers.

Other Kentucky museum projects that are impacted included the Speed Art Museum’s multi-year “Louisville’s Black Avant-Garde” series of exhibitions, programs, and publications. The Filson had been supporting this project with research and collections loans. The Kentucky Museum at Western Kentucky University has an ongoing quilt rehousing project to preserve priceless local textiles. The Capital City Museum in Frankfort, also, was in the midst of a collections rehousing project, with significant upgrades including mold mitigation. Appalshop in Whitesburg, KY, was awarded \$750,000 to recover from the catastrophic 2023 floods that submerged 80% of their collection of audiovisual material. The Filson has supported this recovery by funding the time of curatorial staff to assist in recovery efforts through its employee Volunteer Time Off program. Filson staff have lent their professional expertise to the flood recovery efforts of both Appalshop and Hindman Settlement School.