



# INDIANA HISTORICAL SOCIETY COLLECTIONS ADVISOR

A RESOURCE FROM IHS LOCAL HISTORY SERVICES

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## FIVE TIPS FOR COLLECTIONS CARE GRANT PROPOSALS

Jamie Simek, fundraising educator, IHS Local History Services

We are taking a quick break from our digitization series to bring you some information regarding grant proposals dealing with collections care in plenty of time to prepare and submit grants with spring and summer deadlines...like IHS's [Heritage Support Grants](#)! Enjoy the tips below from our very own fundraising educator. ~Karen



[Grant Family on the Porch.](#) (Indiana Historical Society)

Let's face it - collections are expensive. Staff time and expertise, collections space in your facility, cataloging processes, and archival storage materials all cost money. But how do you get the attention of funders when it comes to the oftentimes invisible, behind-the-scenes work of collections management? Without the flash of a new exhibit or the glamour of a special event, fundraising for collections care often requires a different approach. Your best opportunity to make a good case for support may come in the form of grants from local, state and national organizations and foundations. However, identifying a potential funder is only half the battle. When you find an opportunity to submit a collections care grant, how can you be sure you're



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(Eugene R. Tempel,  
Timothy L. Seiler, and  
Dwight F. Burlingame,  
editors)

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webinar.

#### [Thinking Outside your Box: Museums on the Go](#)

May 15 - Association of  
Indiana Museums

making the most of your proposal?

Even the best plans can fall short if you leave grant reviewers with too many unanswered questions. Consider these five tips to help you make the most of your collections care grant proposals:

**Use professional standards.** History and museum standards ensure best practices, professional conduct and characteristics of excellence. Grant reviewers want to see that organizations, even small museums and local historical societies, are using evidence-based best practices. As you consider your projects, remember that they should adhere to or help the organization meet these accepted professional standards. The links below offer guidelines and resources for meeting standards in collections care:

American Institute for Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works

- [Codes of Ethics and Guidelines for Practice](#)
- [Caring for Your Treasures](#)

National Park Service

- [NPS Museum Handbook, Part I: Museum Collections](#)

**Provide collection details.** You may know your collection inside and out, but grant reviewers only know what you tell them. Proposals must include information about the collection that will help reviewers appreciate both your priorities and your challenges. Details such as the size of your collection, the status of catalogued and stored items, information about special collections, and your current collections focus are all critical pieces of information for funding decisions. This information provides context for grant reviewers to help them understand both the scope of the proposed project, as well as likely outcomes.

**Include your collections care policy.** According to the [American Alliance of Museums](#), a comprehensive collections management policy should be used to guide a museum's stewardship of its collection. If you have an up-to-date collections care policy, consider including a copy in your attached documents, or at the very least, refer to it in your grant narrative. It's important for grant reviewers to understand what guides an organization's decisions about the use, acquisition, care and deaccession of collections pieces. A good policy also demonstrates that the organization takes seriously its responsibility to hold that collection in the public trust.



Historical Society donations and backlog.

**Address collections backlogs.** Whether a collections backlog has caused the problem presented in the proposal, or it's just a symptom of a larger need, proposal writers shouldn't shy away from addressing the situation. If an organization is dealing with a collections backlog, whether in terms

of processing or storage, it's best to identify the cause up front. Acknowledging how a backlog happened demonstrates that the organization has identified choke points in their processes. The next best step is to present a plan that systematically dismantles each obstacle to ensure better results moving forward.

**Consider training and capacity building.** Funders like proposals that build capacity and contribute to sustainability. In our [Heritage Support Grants program](#), we have seen time and again that reviewers like proposals that include training for staff and volunteers. A proposal to hire a temporary employee or intern to process a collections backlog might be a good idea, but one that also builds in training for staff and volunteers to ensure that backlogs don't occur in the future is even better. As you're making your case for grant support, ask yourself if you could make it even stronger if learning opportunities for personnel were included.

Bonus tip:

The number one piece of advice I give to organizations at our [Fundraising for Local History](#) workshops is this: **Have someone from outside your organization, and preferably outside your community, review your grant application before you submit it.** Ask this beta reader to note every single question he or she has about your organization, your collection and your proposed plan. Sometimes you're just too close to the project to completely identify all the information gaps. An unbiased reader may be just what you need to fill them.

For more information about collections care grant opportunities:

- Institute of Museum and Library Services and the Foundation of the American Institute for Conservation [Collections Assessment for Preservation](#) Grants
- The Conservation Center for Art & Historic Artifacts (CCAHA) [Preservation Needs Assessment Program](#)
- [Costume Society of America Grants](#)
- [Institute of Museum and Library Services Museums for America Grants](#)
- [National Archives and Records Administration Access to Historical Records Grants](#)
- National Endowment for the Arts [Art Works Grants](#)
- [National Endowment for the Humanities, Division of Preservation and Access](#)
- And don't forget state and local funding through state historical societies and community foundations

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[Local History Services](#)

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