Digitizing Hidden Collections: Amplifying Unheard Voices

**Initial Applicant Webinar: Q&A**
**August 27, 2025**

Links mentioned:

- Program Homepage
- Core Values
- Apply for an Award
- Native land
- Initial Application Guidelines (view only)
- Initial Application Guidelines (make a copy, Google account required)
- DLF's Digitizing Special Formats wiki
- Guidelines on Letters of Support
- Projects funded through Digitizing Hidden Collections, 2015-2020 and DHC: Amplifying Unheard Voices, 2022-2024
- Webinar Survey

# Questions and Answers

The following questions and answers are grouped based on general headings to better assist you in navigating the document. Consider using the "Find" feature in this document to search for a word or phrase to find a more specific question topic.

All questions asked in chat and via the Q&A box during the live webinar are copied below. The below questions were answered live during the August 27, 2025 webinar. Any questions answered live may include additional references or clarification. If you have any other questions, email the CLIR Grants team at hiddencollections@clir.org.

## Jump to a topic:

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## General

**Q:  If one of the collections holders is not a 501(c)3, is a fiscal sponsor acceptable? Can multiple collections holders apply if only one is a 501(c)3?**
A: All applying organizations must meet all eligibility requirements. It is not just limited to the lead applicant, it has to be true for all collaborating organizations. If your organization does not meet the program's eligibility requirements because it does not have an IRS designation or is not a governmental or tribal unit (whose purpose and normal function is collecting, preserving,

and sharing rare and unique materials with the general public), your organization is not eligible to apply under a fiscal sponsor.

**Q: Does a different collection in the same archive count as re-submission?**
A: It is considered a resubmission if you applied in a previous cycle and your project was not funded, and you submit another proposal with essentially the same project, same materials, and cohesive theme. If you're submitting a new project with different materials to digitize, that is not considered a resubmission even if the materials are a part of the same larger collection.

**Q: Can doctoral candidates apply?**
A: Yes, as long as your organization is eligible. Doctoral candidates can serve as PIs on the project and you can name up to three PIs. Make sure your organization is involved and aware of the details of the application, as they will need to provide a letter of institutional commitment.

**Q: Can an organization submit more than one application in this round?**
A: Yes, you can. Proposals from the same organization should be nominating different materials for digitization. Further, it is important to note that you cannot have the same PI listed on multiple projects.

**Q: Are re-digitization projects possible if the prior digitizer (Google) introduced many limiting issues?**
A: Unfortunately, the program is not currently open to do digital reformatting or digitize previously digitized items at this time.

## Collections

**Q: Do oral histories qualify as rare materials? Can we apply to collect oral histories as well as archival materials?**
A: Oral histories can qualify, but the focus of this regranting program is digitization and not collection. If you have a currently existing oral history collection in an obsolete format, such as cassette tapes, and you want to digitize that collection, those materials could qualify. The program is not designed for you to go out and create new collections (such as collecting oral histories by doing interviews), original research, or intellectual works.

**Q: In the context of this grant, is "collection" understood in the meaning used by archivists, or can it include multiple groups of materials in the same repository but with different archival provenance?**
A: Given these projects are open to multiple collaborating organizations, we see a broad range in collections, but you will find there is a cohesive theme pulling those materials together. It is important to clearly outline the theme, how the materials fit together, and the broader story you are trying to tell. The panel will be looking for this cohesion. If there is a reason to put materials together and you can tell a competitive narrative, you can definitely do that. An example is a funded project that consisted of 26 different newspapers across the Midwest.

## Rights, Ethics and Re-Use

**Q: Are there examples of how previous projects engaged communities or increased access when there are legal/ethical concerns on making materials fully available online?**
A: We have seen a couple groups where they will do a form of in-person community access, for those materials that they are not willing to make publicly available. If they have less sensitive items in the collection, they will have broader public access for those. In this case they have a tier system of mitigated access. Other times, we see archives where they provide the full metadata for researchers to find the materials, but the actual files are not available online. They have a protocol for individuals to request the materials so they can make sure they will be used appropriately, and only the metadata is broadly available.

**Q: To clarify, if an applicant owns/has rights to a collection, but the collection is physically held by another organization, the holding organization must be listed as a collaborator?**
A: In order to be a collaborative project, the lead and all the official collaborating organizations must meet the eligibility requirements. Any named partner must have sustained responsibilities for and interest in the project, and represent an authentic partnership. You can also have partner organizations that are not listed as official collaborators because they are not going to play a significant role in the project. If a collection is held by a collaborating organization, they may want to be listed as the lead applicant. However, if you are working with another organization, such as an affiliate group or library, and they are physically storing a collection you own and you could remove the collection at any time, they may not truly "hold" the collection in the legal sense. Rather, they could be simply storing it for you. If both organizations are eligible, a collaborative application might be the easiest way forward. You are welcome to email us to provide more details so that we can better assess your question.

**Q: If we are working with members of a descendants community to digitize and share photos and documents that they are willing to share with us would that qualify for this grant**
A: That really depends on the community and the status of those materials. If you are talking about an eligible tribal community, then likely yes. If they are privately held, then likely no. We would need to know more about the descendant community and who owns and holds the materials.

**Q: Re. the requirement that the metadata needs to be public-facing- can the digitized materials be grouped into categories, or does each individual item need to be individually cataloged?**
A: We do not have a specific requirement for how you do your metadata requirement, but we ideally want materials to be findable from a research perspective. Organizations handle metadata in a variety of ways. It depends on your project and your institutional needs. If it is sensitive information, such as PII, or there are ethical considerations, the metadata can be simplified and not include this kind of information.

**Q: What does it mean for materials to be owned and held by an eligible organization? We often tell those sharing their materials that those materials are always theirs, and if they want them removed from the archive, they can request this.**
A: The application includes a Rights, Ethics, & Re-use section. You are going to have to address any legal or ethical concerns related to the materials and how that impacts access. We want materials publically available, when it is possible. Any rights and ethical concerns that will influence community centered access, which is one of the core values of the program, should be addressed in this section. Reviewers will want to know if there are rights concerns or restrictions that will prevent you from sharing those materials publicly. So we say you must own and hold the materials, so you are protected and so the materials remain accessible.

**Q: Is there any guideline or policy to follow for sensitive materials that are going to be digitized through this grant but not published online?**
A: We don't have a specific set of guidelines regarding this. Typically this is specific to your project and the collections you're working with. For instance, materials from a National Native American Boarding School were included in a previously funded project. For a project like that, you need to be familiar with NAGPRA. We had another funded project out of Northeastern that was a Trans BIPOC project and they built their own guide for ethics around their project because they were the best ones to assess what was appropriate for that community. Because we work with such a wide range of materials, we don't have a guide we use, but we expect you to thoughtfully put together your plans to address any ethical or privacy concerns.

## Budget and Finance

**Q: You mention that projects can fill description gaps for collections. Is archival processing (descriptive inventory) a qualifying expense, to prepare materials for digitization?**
A: This will depend on what you are proposing. When you apply, you want to have an idea of what's in your collections and what you want to nominate for the digitization process. We do expect as you uncover or send items off for digitization or to your vendor, through the process you are going to see find things you didn't expect to be in your collections. So we do expect some expenses necessary to prepare your nominated materials for the digitization process.

> **Q: To clarify. If required for digitization, can we request funding for description and cataloging of the collection?**
> A: Yes, there is a metadata requirement for this program. You need cataloguing and description work to prepare the metadata. We do require that the metadata be made publicly available, unless there are issues of cultural or ethical sensitivity where materials will need limited/vague metadata, and that does not necessarily need to happen prior to digitization in all projects.

**Q: Are materials included in the budget? For instance transferring VHS into digital form?**
A: If you are using an outside vendor, transferring VHS into digital form would fall into the budget category Services. You can use funds to purchase equipment/supplies; however, keep in mind there is a limit of $15,000 and some disallowed costs. For example, permanent furniture

costs are disallowed. You can use funds to purchase things like scanners, re-housing and storage supplies, and dedicated software and hardware. Items in this category should be one-time purchases. Further breakdown of allowed and disallowed costs can be found under equipment, supplies, and materials in [Appendix A: Budget in the Application Guidelines](#).

**Q: In feedback on a past final application, reviewers had questions about the rate of pay we proposed for various roles included on our team/in our budget. We based the budget/compensation on both compensation provided for other projects we had successfully completed recently and a market scan (consulting both other employers (including institutions) and job postings/pay scales publicly available). Can you please advise on specific sources you recommend we use to inform our proposed compensation rates to ensure they are consistent with your expectations?**
A: We typically point to the MIT living wage calculator, but it sounds like you may already be doing your due diligence in determining your pay rates. You might need to provide more explanation as to how you determined your rates based on the position, work to be completed, hours, region, etc. For example, we sometimes see there is not enough explanation for reviewers in regard to student worker rates at public universities. Sometimes these rates are set and they cannot be changed, but the reviewers do not know this and only see the rate and think it is too low. This could be a case where more explanation is needed in your budget narrative.

**Q: Since all of our requests are related to vendor costs, could you confirm whether we need to include quotes from the vendor? Or would it be better to add one to support our budget request with more concrete information?**
A: Services quotes are not required in the first round, but competitive applications will demonstrate that they have done their research and know about how much it will cost to digitize based on the type of materials, the quantity, the condition of materials, the service being performed, etc. If you have an opportunity to include estimates/quotes from potential vendors, you can and we know that can be difficult at this stage in the process.

**Q: Is it possible to see an example full budget from the final application of a project that received funding? I have seen the preliminary budget sample on your website but am hoping for more granular detail on comp specifically.**
A: We do not have current samples on the website right now, but we are working on getting new DHC:AUV samples posted to our [Apply for an Award](#) page. We hope to have those up on the website within the next couple of weeks. We are also considering doing some mockup samples to be able to provide a broader range of scenarios, because these projects really do vary based on the organization size, whether you are digitizing in-house or using a vendor, whether it is a collaborative project or a single organization applying, etc.

**Q. Can part of the funds be used to make the digitized collections publicly accessible through a digital platform (such as the Quilt Index www.quiltindex.org)**
A: Yes, that is allowed.

**Q: The records we seek to digitize are from long-closed African American congregations, so there are no existing direct community members to engage in the process related to digitization and publishing. We can identify and engage, in effect, proxies from, e.g., still open African American churches in the diocese or possibly descendants of the church members. Can you talk about:**
**a) specifically how you wish to see community members engaged in the project for which grant funding is sought (i.e., specific roles they might play/work they might perform) and**
**b) what CLIR wishes to see in terms of compensation from grant funds to individuals or perhaps the organizations they represent? That is, is there a preferred stipend or hourly rate to community members engaged in a consultant role?**
A: Regarding community member engagement, it sounds like you're looking in the right direction. Engaging other churches in the diocese and potential descendents of church members. I'd also encourage you to reach out to scholars in this subject area. For competitive applications, reviewers want to see that your materials have not just local but national and transnational appeal. As far as compensation, we don't have a preferred stipend or hourly rate because it depends how engaged they're going to be in the process. For example, you will want to consider how much you're going to use them and in what capacity. We want to ensure you're not going into communities, benefitting from their expertise and labor, and treating them as an afterthought; we want to see you engaging them along the way and valuing their time and contributions.

**Q: Do you have a list or FAQs for allowed and disallowed costs?**
A: Yes, there is a list of allowed and disallowed costs in [Appendix A: Budget at the end of the Application Guidelines](#). It lists budget categories, including allowed and disallowed costs for each category.

**Q: Does this grant cover the collection costs of the materials/resources?**
A: If you don't already have the materials and are requesting funds to collect them, that's not eligible. This is not a collecting grant in any way.

**Q: Question re: collaborations and allowable financial costs. If someone at Organization A needs to travel to Organization B to train people at Organization B to do a portion of the digitization (because materials are held by Organization B), can those travel costs be a line item for the application?**
A: Absolutely, yes. Project travel is eligible.

**Q: Is it acceptable to use a portion of the funds to train staff in digitization work (say, digitizing the cassettes in the collection described in the application) so that digitization can happen in-house more easily in the future?**
A: Yes, as long as it is related to the project, you can use funds towards training and consultants. You can bring in consultants to do on-site digitization training. You can review [Appendix A: Budget](#) for more guidance on allowable expenses.

**Q: Would creation of a virtual or physical exhibit (based on digitized materials) be eligible for funding?**
A: The primary focus of this program is digitization so most of your funds need to go to preparing your materials and digitizing materials, and any outreach would be second or third priority. If you want to create an exhibit as part of your outreach, you can as long as you don't include disallowed costs, and as long as the focus of the application is clearly on digitizing and making the nominated materials accessible.

## Project Design

**Q: I have two separate questions about oral histories. The collection of oral histories is noted as a disallowed cost "except when essential to provide contextual metadata for digitized collections." Is it acceptable to do recorded oral histories focused on sharing undocumented histories/untold stories about items being digitized? Is it acceptable to conduct recorded oral histories in order to create and archive openly accessible digitized stories to be used as educational materials?**
A: DHC:AUV is not a collecting grant. It is a digitization grant for obsolete materials that have not been previously digitized. The program is not to create new collections (such as collecting oral histories by doing interviews), original research, or intellectual works. If you have a set of oral histories on tapes, reel to reel, VHS, etc. and you want to digitize them, and they haven't been previously digitized, that could qualify.

We also often see people use advisory boards to get context for the metadata of certain projects, particularly those related to Indigenous communities where there are a small number of elders left who can speak to the collection the project is working with. Their purpose is more providing context and outreach to the community than building an oral history, and it's usually a more minor portion of the project expenses.

**Q: Can we use materials we are collecting from the community for an exhibit that highlights unheard voices and fills a gap to qualify if it is being used for a virtual exhibit?**
A: I don't think the issue is that it's a virtual exhibit. The issue is around the creation of new materials. It is important to note that this is not a collecting grant. If you qualify as an organization, and you own and hold the materials, and they are not born-digital and haven't been previously digitized, then possibly. If you're in the process of collecting now, it may be difficult to create a cohesive project that includes our five core values.

**Q: Are we allowed to hire an outside specialist to complete the digitization? Also, we have a special collections website already, however not all of the collection is digitized and that is why we want to apply. Do we still qualify?**
A: Yes, and yes. This program allows you to digitize in-house if you have the capacity or use outside vendors. If you have a mix of materials in your collection, you can select multiple vendors to do the digitization work. We work with very large organizations and often, these organizations don't have all their collections catalogued or digitized. It's important that the collection fits the program scope and it is okay to have collections beyond those nominated materials that are not digitized.

## Collaboration

**Q: Are cross-border collaborations allowed, assuming both collaborators are eligible organizations? (one in Canada and one in USA)**
A: Yes, you can do this as long as both organizations meet the eligible requirements.

**Q: The MSU Museum has 3 discrete collections that we feel would fall under CLIR guidelines. Might we partner with Matrix: Center for Digital Humanities to make them publicly accessible after the MSU Museum digitizes them? Could Matrix be the lead applicant even though the collections are held by the MSU Museum.**
A: Assuming the organization that owns and holds the collection is eligible, they should be listed as the lead organization. We would need to know more about Matrix: the Center for Digital Humanities to answer this question in detail. Is Matrix a part of MSU? If Matrix and MSU Libraries are a part of the same organization, they wouldn't be an official collaborator and you could apply as MSU. If Matrix is acting as a vendor, they would not be considered a collaborating organization and would be paid as a service vendor. If Matrix is indeed a separate entity and wouldn't be acting as a vendor and they will be heavily involved in the project and meet the eligibility requirements, you could include them as an official collaborating organization. You can read more about collaborating organizations in the [FAQ section](#) on the [Apply for an Award](#) page.