

Digitizing Hidden Special Collections and Archives: Amplifying Unheard Voices

**Initial Application Q&A Webinar:
September 25, 2025**



Links mentioned

- [Apply for an Award](#)
- [Initial Application Guidelines \(view only\)](#)
- [Initial Application Guidelines \(make a copy, Google account required\)](#)
- [DHC:AUV Cohort 3 Initial Application Webinar Q&A Doc](#)
- [Webinar Survey](#)

Questions and Answers

The following questions and answers are organized into 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. Some questions answered live may include additional references or clarification. If you have any other questions, email the CLIR Grants team at hiddencollections@clir.org.

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General

Q: Do we need to choose between applying for DHC and applying for Recordings at Risk?

A: No, you can apply for both.

Q: Would a Canadian non-profit, who does not have charitable status, be eligible to apply?

A: You can email us at hiddencollections@clir.org, and we'll double check that your organization does qualify, but it sounds like you do.

Q: Is this Limited Submission Opportunity?

A: You can submit more than one application from the same organization during a call for proposals, but they cannot share the same PIs.

Q: Is the digitization of Indigenous art collections and other cultural objects allowable? Is the digitization of Indigenous art collections and other cultural objects allowable?

A: It is an allowable format. If you mean, is it culturally allowable, that would depend on who owns and holds the material and would need to be thoroughly explained in your proposal. However, those formats are appropriate and it sounds like it fits the programmatic theme, as well.

Q: Would it be okay for a nonprofit to own a portion of the full collection if it is only that portion that is being digitized for this specific grant?

A: Yes. More broadly, if there are materials that you don't own and you are not digitizing them, you don't have to tell us about them.

Q: I wanted to seek clarification about funding metadata creation for pieces of the collection that have already been digitized through a different grant, but descriptions took longer to do than originally thought. (We were able to fund digitization of a chunk of our magnetic tape collection— 500 magnetic tapes digitized and 200 of them have been described — but it would be beneficial to have the remaining 300 cataloged with the remaining mini-DVs to be digitized.) Does this fall out of scope as a previous project or can it be tied in?

A: I would recommend you email us at hideencollections@clir.org with more information. If the materials are already digitized, the metadata creation related to them will probably not be an eligible use of funds.

Q: Do we have to specify just one particular collection or can we include multiple collections to be digitized through this project?

A: You can use multiple collections. We see this happen frequently. Your proposal needs to tell a cohesive story around the collections and tie in to the five core values. This is especially true for collaborative projects. There may be collections across organizations that are connected and have a connective story that binds them together. You will need to describe the connections between all the collections.

Q: Our proposal would consist of the documentation of wall murals interior to a maximum security prison. The “collection” would consist of artworks across multiple yards. I am wondering if this stretches the definition of collections beyond the frame of the grants? The pieces are original artworks on walls that would need to be digitally documented.

A: We've funded a project with murals in the past. If this prison is one entity; it depends who's trying to do this digitization. We need more information about the eligibility and the entity, but this doesn't necessarily stretch the parameters of “collection.” We've also done incarceration projects and state institution projects across multiple sites in the past. For this kind of project, you will want to think about the rights, ethics, and re-use questions. If you email us with more details, we can better respond to your question.

Q: If the undigitized collection is located in the National Archives in Washington DC, do you require that the applicant have official approval from NARA? Or is it sufficient to articulate the current policies on public access for research and usage restrictions?

A: Historically, we have not required official approval from NARA. We have had other projects that use Library of Congress materials and have not required official approval for those either. It may be possible that some of our protocols around federal materials will change if we see consistent hurdles to access arising. However, at this time, we do not make that a requirement.

Rights, Ethics, and Re-use

Q: Mountain Messenger Newspaper Publisher has written an MOU for the Historical Society President to have the 150 year old broadsheets for the digitization project and store as many of them as needed in the Messenger offices until they can provide suitable storage otherwise. Do you think that MOU is appropriate documentation for the grant application?

A: As you describe, having not read it, this sounds like what you would need to upload as your additional documentation under our Rights, Ethics, and Re-use section. Under this section, we have an additional upload space to upload these types of documents (i.e. MOUs, deeds of gifts, etc.) to prove you have the rights to embark on the proposal. Questions regarding rights will be reviewed by our IP reviewers.

Q: We would like to know if our nonprofit organization owns the materials to be digitized and the archiving process is one of our main programs with the original filmmaker as part of that program - she is an elder in the community so time is crucial but her original org is not a nonprofit - would we still be eligible?

A: Email us a more clear description of the circumstances. We will need to know a bit more to make sure we are understanding the question properly. If materials were privately created but have since been gifted to the applying nonprofit, then they are eligible. You'd need to upload the deed of gift to demonstrate the materials have been gifted and you have the right to digitize the materials.

Q: Is it important for any digitized files to be made publicly available online in order for the project to be competitive?

A: Not necessarily. There's a requirement that the metadata is shared. We look for appropriate access levels for the materials and for the community they relate to. You may have materials that are heavy with PII or related to HIPAA or deal with sensitive topics for people still living, and they might be best served by a restricted access model. As long as that is explained in your application, the panel would rather see a well-considered approach tailored to the materials than broad access that doesn't consider rights and ethics.

Budget and Finance

Q: The museum is looking at having an on-site archive server, in addition to the larger organization's IT department keeping active backups on its own infrastructure. The vendor quote is significantly over the \$15,000 allowed in the Equipment budget line. Is

this something that could be included in Other Costs, as server time? Or would it be considered a shared cost for the museum?

A: This is probably a shared cost for the museum. "Other costs" typically refers to when you're using an outside vendor and they're using some kind of digital delivery system or storage system or you're paying some kind of online platform costs for the length of the grant. Something like a server falls under equipment and supplies, and anything over \$15k would be a cost-share the museum is responsible for.

Q: Can we use this funding to develop a website for the digitized collection as a way to make it accessible? What restrictions would be on that use, and in what category in the budget narrative would it go?

A: Yes, you can. I would recommend putting this under "Services." If it's over \$5,000, you'll need a quote or estimate for this work.

Q: Can CLIR funds be used to match IMLS funds for digitizing our archive?

A: We'll need more information about your project to answer this; please email hiddeencollections@clir.org. You'd want to make it clear in your proposal that the nominated materials are not being digitized elsewhere. What percentage of this collection is being proposed for this project? Be clear that anything you include in the budget is not being covered elsewhere. This is a regranteeing program from the Mellon Foundation. It's not a federal grant.

Q: Can we use the funding to not only digitize, but to create an AR augmented reality digitalized representation of the content, so that it can be accessed using a phone on site, as part of tour (for example, photographs showing what the place looked like can be overlaid over the physical place), or the contents of a letter can be recorded and played at the place.

A: The primary focus of this grant is the digitization of materials that have not previously been digitized. We typically recommend that at least 50% of your budget be focused on digitization. You'd have to make a compelling argument in your budget narrative for spending a significant portion of your digitization on something like an AR representation. It's not necessarily disallowed, but it sounds like it would be relatively expensive. You would need to make a compelling case in your proposal and in your budget narrative. Most likely, it would not be the most competitive application without a strong argument.

Q: We have lots of elder talks/wisdom/oral history tapes we'd like to organize and digitize to share the knowledge with the broader community. Can funds be used for this? And, can funds be used to house the then digitized old tapes?

A: There is not a ton of space in the grant for preservation, but there is room for rehousing if that is what you mean. You would need to cover ongoing storage costs/fees, but materials such as boxes for rehousing are allowable within the program guidelines.

Q: Applying on behalf of a federally recognized tribe, we have been informed by our accounting department that any private grant funds we are awarded cannot be delivered by electronic transfer due to internal policies. If we are awarded a DHC grant, would it be

possible to request that the grant funds be delivered via paper check?

A: We typically distribute funds via the bill.com platform. However, CLIR can distribute grant funds via check if necessary.

Q: Can we use funding for maintaining a digital repository for completed oral histories related to digitized collections?

A: If the oral histories are the materials being nominated for digitization, funds can cover costs associated with the digital repository during the grant period. Any ongoing costs following the grant period would be the responsibility of the organization.

Q: We receive funding from Mellon. Are we able to apply for the CLIR funds?

A: Yes, you are able to apply for CLIR funds, as well.

Q: In the guidelines the oral history question was elaborated a little. It says that CLIR won't provide funding for oral history interviews, "except when essential to provide contextual metadata for digitized collections." Can you help clarify that caveat? We planned to record the owners of the collection describing the materials, and then preserve those recordings and make them publicly accessible.

A: What you're describing is probably allowable within the scope of the program and is specifically what we've funded in the past. For example, with tribal communities when a limited advisory group of elders is familiar with the materials, the interview process is more of a metadata collection than the creation of a new oral history project, which is permitted. The core of this program is digitization and if the interviews support that metadata creation, it will be allowed. We see very many applications that are really aiming to create new oral history collections, and that is not what this program is for. But if the core of your project is digitization, and this is a supplemental activity needed to contextualize the materials you are digitizing appropriately, then it can be allowable.

Q: Can funding be used to support the production (including associated expenses like travel, lodging, etc) of digitized interviews of individuals connected to the subject material that we intend to digitize? These interviews would provide context that would then be aggregated into a publicly available public archival platform.

A: Again, you'll need to strike the balance between "is this metadata work that provides context for what we're digitizing" or "is this creation of separate works." If you're including associated expenses like travel and lodging to conduct digital interviews, I'm concerned about the balance of your funding request. Digitization should be the primary focus of these awards. The metadata component should be secondary and shouldn't be outsized in the financial ask.

Q: Other than the primary cost of reformatting, can costs include vendor outsourced non-English language cataloging/metadata? What about rights review for potential to publish (where ethics or rights are in question)?

A: We do not pay for rights reviews or copyright consultation. You can include translation, transcription, non-English language cataloging, or metadata. You can do that through a vendor,

in-house, or if you need a translation, you can hire a contractor. All of those would be allowable except for the rights review.

Q: We are a university. Can we hire a Graduate Assistant who specializes in digitization to do the work?

A: Absolutely. Make sure when you do that you're offering an equitable pay wage for the work to be completed and for the area. Reviewers pay close attention to that and it's a high priority for them.

Q: You mentioned there is a rough "50/50" rule that at least 50% of the grant budget should cover the actual digitization work. Would that 50% include the costs for metadata, cataloging, and any staff costs for the above? We're trying to incorporate some programming and outreach to raise awareness of the collection in the community, but want to strike the right balance in the budget to make sure it's still digitization-focused.

A: We consider staffing, metadata, cataloging, sustaining, and preparing materials for digitization all to be part of the digitization process. This looks like you're focusing on the right balance.

Q: Can our budget include the cost of storage? (Storing digital materials through cloud for example)

A: Yes, you can include cloud storage in your budget. You can purchase physical storage software as a one-time cost. All expenses need to be expended during the grant period.

Q: Would cloud storage costs beyond the scope of the project be permitted?

A: No, all expenses need to be expended during the grant period.

Q: If we're doing in-house digitization and need a larger scanner for certain materials, would that kind of equipment be eligible?

A: Yes, you can use funds to purchase equipment, such as a scanner. However, there is a limit of \$15,000 for equipment and supplies. Anything beyond this amount would need to be covered by a cost share.

Q: Do you require matching funds?

A: No, we do not.

Project Design

Q: Do we get to choose the technical specifications for the digitization, e. g. file types or such, or does CLIR have specific technical guidelines?

A: Our independent review panel is made up of a mix of intellectual property reviewers, technical experts and subject experts, or both. The technical experts evaluate if the technical specs you are planning for are current and appropriate for your project. However, we don't prescribe what that is because there is such a broad range of allowable formats in this program. The [FADGI guidelines for digitization](#) could be a good resource as you are determining your technical specifications.

Q: If you have 1000 documents and want to request to digitize 200, do you have to provide the specific 200 documents you want to digitize - so long as we don't spend any of the grant on the selection and can describe what we want to digitize?

A: That could be appropriate if you are stating deliverable quantities and you can appropriately describe what you are planning to digitize, without having made those selections ahead of time. Ultimately, you will want to do some of that beforehand. As long as you don't use grant funds towards the selection process and it is clear to the review panel what you will be digitizing in a way the review panel can understand, we don't require specific documentation at the item level.

Q: What are thoughts about a Canadian org (us in Montreal) using a NY based vendor for digitizing and hosting an online collection?

A: I don't see any problems with that. The digitization vendors will be very specific to your materials, condition of the materials, organization, etc. so this is a very individual decision based on your project.

Q: Can the digitization be done in house?

A: Yes. Unlike *Recordings at Risk*, there's no requirement to use an outside vendor. You can do it in-house or hire staff to do it for the duration of the project or hire a vendor. You can also use a combination of these options if you have multiple formats and you need specific expertise to get specific formats done. This is not dictated, and it can be decided based on the project needs and organizational capacity.

Q: Does CLIR co-house the digitized collections as backup and/or to support public dissemination?

A: No, we don't co-house the digitized collections. We don't function as a digital repository for these projects. We list them on the funded projects page, but we don't house them. That is why sustainability is one of the five core values. We want projects to demonstrate forward thinking strategies for long-term availability, discoverability, and accessibility of the digitized content.

Q: Do you have any preference for PIs that are university based? Or do you have recommendations for community-based archives that are not based at an academic institution?

A: We are always looking for a range of application types. We want community archives, historical societies, volunteer-run organizations, and universities all to apply. We like to see a range and our funded organizations run the gamut. There isn't a preference and we are not necessarily pushing for applicants to only partner with academic organizations or for PIs to be university based. Community and independent organizations have been funded in every round.

Q: The collection which I want to use for my application is connected to an institution that is slated to close in July 2026 for about two years of renovations and construction as part of a master plan. Does not having a traditional "on the ground" space impact feasibility?

A: This is a matter of your access to the materials. During COVID we saw creative approaches to doing digitization off-site and implementing different workflows. You'd want to address that in your application and explain how this will work, but it won't be disqualifying.

Q: How does the digitization of material currently located outside the US and Canada affect application? Can funding be used to transport material to the US for digitization?

A: The materials nominated for digitization are required to be in the geographic range of eligibility (US and Canada) so you cannot use grant funds to get the materials here. The expectation is that the materials are here already, and that the work would take place here.

Collaboration

Q: Do different entities within the same university need to be listed as separate collaborators?

A: Typically, no. Sometimes we'll have a department within the university working with the library; they're considered part of the same institution. You wouldn't list them as separate collaborators unless they have different EIN numbers. Sometimes two universities with separate campuses will apply as a collaborative project (e.g. UC Santa Barbara and UC Irvine, or a university and a medical school). In this case, you may want to list them as collaborators, especially if they have different EIN numbers.

Q: Do collaborators have to nominate collections to be digitized as well as the lead institution?

A: If you mean: Do you have to hold materials to be a collaborator? No, in some cases collaborators are appropriate community organizations that are partnering to provide consultation, knowledge, or community outreach related to the materials, not necessarily to digitize their materials. If you are proposing digitizing someone else's materials, they must be included as an official collaborator on the project. You can also have community partners that aren't necessarily listed as official collaborating organizations.

Q: Can collaborators be added to the full application if invited to complete one? For example if conversations about a partner organization's role progress over the next few months and formal collaboration on the project makes more sense?

A: Yes, we do see changes in the proposals that are invited back to the final application round. It is not required that you have the same application. If you are working on developing a relationship with a collaborator and you would like to add a collaborator to the project, you can. Similarly, if something falls apart you can remove an organization as a collaborator in the final application round.

Q: Do you look for a certain number of collaborators?

A: First, we (CLIR staff) don't look for anything. We use an independent review panel and they make the funding decisions for this program. They don't specifically look for collaborators, or a certain number of collaborators. The program emphasizes authentic partnerships, but that doesn't mean they need to be official collaborators on the project. We have had more single organizations funded versus multiple organizations. We have had projects with up to 20

collaborators and that can be a lot to manage. There is no competitive preference between a collaboration or single organization.

If you are an organization digitizing materials from a tribal organization you are not a part of, you may pull together an advisory board to determine access levels for the materials you are nominating for digitization. This could be an example of authentic partnership, but you can see that authentic partnership does not require you to build a collaborative project.

Q: Can you please explain the typical roles of a collaborator?

A: Usually collaborative projects are organized around a theme. For example, we had one project that was digitizing U.S. periodicals along the Mexican-American border. Every collaborator was a small collection holder who came together to comprise a larger themed collection. This is the most typical role we see collaborators assume. They have a portion of a collection, and an organization is trying to build a larger proposal around a particular theme.

Review Process

Q: What is the overall funding pot? How many organizations do you plan to fund?

A: We have \$4 million USD to give away. We would love to fund everyone and we can't. Our independent review panel makes all funding decisions and the program typically funds 15-20 organizations with our current funding cap at \$300,000. It depends on the number of applications and the size of their requests. If we have some lower requests, we can typically fund more.

Q: To what extent would letters of support help with this first stage of the application?

A: Letters of support are not included in the initial application and only can be included in the final application. If you upload a letter of support, we will take it out of your application and it won't be sent to the review panel. Similarly, if you include documents outside of the page limits, the documents will be truncated and the review panel will not be able to see the pages outside the page limits.

Q: How is your review panel selected?

A: We have a mix of subject specialists, technical specialists, and IP reviewers. We have a form on our website when we have openings on the panel for people to express interest. We typically look for specific areas of expertise to ensure we are well rounded. Our review panel from last cycle is on our website, and we will be updating the review panel for this cycle soon.

Q: Is story telling important for the application?

A: Yes, I would say telling a compelling story about the collections, the nominated materials, and why digitizing the materials and making them accessible to the public will impact the communities represented on a local, national, and international level is very important. You want to draw the reviewers in and to have them excited about the importance of digitizing these materials.

Q: In your answer about storytelling and local, national, transnational context, are you saying that scholarly interests are prioritized?

A: Yes and no. Projects should propose materials that represent underheard voices. Not just scholarly, but community focused as well. Why is the project important to the humanities, and to the communities represented? Sometimes applications include hyper local materials, and have a hyper local conception of impact. Sometimes this is because the broad impact is not obvious to applicants because their content is so local, or it is so obvious that they aren't speaking to the broad impact in their proposals because they think of it as a given. Proposals should speak to the broader impact. Including hyper-local materials doesn't mean the materials aren't eligible, it just means you need to tell the story of those broader connections. They don't necessarily need to be only scholarly in focus.

Q: Do you balance funding allocations between Canada and the US equally?

A: No. However, the review panel does factor in geographic distribution as part of the award process. Because the program expanded to Canada more recently, we typically get a much higher number of US applicants. We don't award equally because the application volume is not equal.

Q: Would you be open to reviewing a project summary in advance of submitting?

A: No. We can answer specific questions via email regarding requirements and questions about what generally makes applications more competitive, but we can't offer direct feedback on the text of your application.