

Digitizing Hidden Collections: Amplifying Unheard Voices



Session 5: Final Application Q&A Panel
March 31, 2026

Links mentioned:

- [Program Homepage](#)
- [Core Values](#)
- [Apply for an Award](#)
- [Native land](#)
- [Application Guidelines \(view only\)](#)
- [Application Guidelines \(make a copy, Google account required\)](#)
- [DLF's Digitizing Special Formats wiki](#)
- [CLIR's Guidelines for Letter Writers](#)
- [Guidelines for Grant Proposals Involving Subcontractors or Consultants](#)
- [CLIR's Indirect Cost Policy](#)
- [Projects funded through Digitizing Hidden Collections, 2015-2020, and DHC: Amplifying Unheard Voices, 2022-2025](#)
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Questions and Answers

The following questions and answers are grouped under general headings to help you navigate 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 submitted in the chat and via the Q&A box during the March 31, 2026 webinar are copied below. Questions 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: Is it too late to add a collaborator at this final stage of the grant?

A (Program Officer): No, we've definitely had people who are working on building out the relationships during the initial application phase, which solidifies what they're doing and who they're doing it with. It's fine to add a collaborator for the second round if you can fit it within the original project scope and project timeline but also, get everything official by the time you submit your final application. Keep in mind that official collaborating organizations need to meet all the eligibility requirements.

Q: Regarding letters of support, if we get a letter of support from an organization, but then we have a person from the organization on the advisory council is that allowed?

A (Program Officer): Yes, if the letter is from the organization this is okay. If the individual writing the letter is on the advisory council and receiving an honorarium this would not be allowed. External letters of support cannot come from anyone being paid on the project. You can find more information and guidance on external letters of support and letters of commitment in the [Application Guidelines](#) and in CLIR's [Guidelines for Letter Writers](#).

Q: Would it be a conflict of interest (or discouraged) to get a letter of support from someone who is a CLIR grant reviewer?

A (Program Officer): If a member of the review panel provides a letter of support, they would not be able to review your application because it would be a conflict of interest. This would not be encouraged.

Q: How do you choose people to write letters of support?

A (Program Officer): Remember, if they are getting paid, they cannot write an external letter of support for you. There's the letter of commitment, which comes from inside your organization; then there are external letters of support which come from those outside your organization and outside your project. You can find more information and guidance on external letters of support and letters of commitment in the [Application Guidelines](#) and in CLIR's [Guidelines for Letter Writers](#).

A (CK Ming): When I review, I agree with Ida on the importance of centering the researcher. The strongest letters I've received are from scholars in the field who can point to why digitization is necessary. There's a strong research foundation to this material that people can't currently access because the materials are not digitized. That's who writes the strongest letters.

A (Dr. Ida Jones): There's a vertical hierarchy in a university. I aim to get the second highest person, such as a provost, to provide a letter of commitment. It is very helpful, because we are competing in the humanities with the hard sciences, as so when they see humanities projects, it provides visibility. We're all competing for resources and attention. You want to make your application sing and look like wow, you're doing exciting work. The provost on my campus is a chemist, but has been very supportive of our library grant applications. Go as high as you can in your organization for the letters of commitment to show your organization's support for the project.

A (Sandra Aya Enimil): As a reviewer, something that I remember was very helpful in review panel discussions about an application that involved a particular community was a letter from the community or a community representative. This letter of support told the story of the project, maybe a bit better than the applicant, what was going on and their interest in having this content

digitized. The reviewers found it really useful to hear that community voice offering support for the project.

Q: We received feedback to make our main vendor a collaborating organization. Unfortunately they are not able to, due to that precluding their own grant apps opportunities. Is another option to list them as a "consulting partner"?

A (Program Officer): You can send us an email with more specifics about your situation. It's typically fine to have a vendor who's just a vendor. If you were advised to add them as a collaborating organization because they own or hold some portion of the materials or because they will be providing long-term access, that's a more complicated situation to give advice on. We'd need to know why you were advised to make them a collaborating or consulting partner. Typically it's ok to have a vendor that's just a vendor. We recommend you send an email to hidencollections@clir.org with more detailed information.

Assessing Collections

Q: What advice do you have for those of us digitizing materials on a specific subject from multiple collections? What should we consider when selecting materials for digitization?

A (Dr. Ida Jones): What should drive any digitization project is researcher interest. The traffic you have from researchers, institutionally and at large, helps bring visibility to your institution and the subject matter itself. For example, if you think about the sesquicentennial, everything military from the revolutionary war up to Operation Desert Storm is popular right now and would be of interest to researchers. It's also the 50th anniversary of Alex Haley's *Roots* so if you have anything genealogical that could be of interest, as well. You want to make sure your materials match rising trends and that the materials are available to researchers at your institution and beyond.

Q: Are we allowed to add tapes of the same full collection to be digitized for this 2nd round if tapes have been digitized at this point since the first round was due?

A (Program Officer): Any nominated materials cannot have been previously digitized. Do not put any tapes in the application that have been digitized. It should be the same collection, but you can only add materials that are not born-digital and have not been previously digitized. You can amend your materials if needed for the second round of the application.

Q: One reviewer questioned why the limited scope of digitization (11 cubic feet out of nearly 200 feet)? But in last year's application comments, a reviewer questioned a larger proposed number? We thought this would be more practical for 2 years of focusing on digitizing one subcollection. What is the sweet spot in terms of how much is practical to digitize—what is too much for you as reviewers and what is too little?

A (CK Ming): In terms of tapes, I would say 10,000 tapes in two years would not be feasible, but at the same time 500 tapes in two years seems too little. There is a sweet spot, but it depends on the content, the materials, what you're trying to achieve with your project, and what story you're trying to tell.

A (Dr. Ida Jones): This will depend on the nature of the subcollection and what it means to either the larger collection or the research being done. What's the quality of the information?

What's the value to the researcher? Also what are your human resources? Who is going to maintain these things? Digital files require a whole level of stewardship and vigilance than analog files. Can we sustain these files? For institutions that don't have much bandwidth, I can see why a small subcollection of a larger collection could make sense as a beta test. I don't know the larger context around your collections. As a researcher, I want to know what's in there.

A (DeLisa Minor Harris): As a reviewer and someone who has experience working with digitization projects, item-level knowledge is so important. It will inform your timeline and the amount you can tackle with the staff you have in place. Even if you're thinking in cubic feet, you may have to drill down a little bit more in the description and item number. You also want to consider how you are scanning or capturing them, as well, and explain this in your proposal.

Q: Can you speak to the sweet spot for the amount of materials proposed to digitize for materials that are not tapes and not documents. Such as art, posters, zines, t-shirts, and other ephemera.

A (DeLisa Minor Harris): If you are proposing a one year grant period, maybe you are filling out a larger collection or digitizing a subcollection. Again, it goes back to the timeline and if you already have people on board to do the work or if you need to hire people to do the work. This is all interconnected. For a 2 or 3 year project, the consideration is much larger. For our project, we had to go down to page number. That gave us a sense of how many pages, front and back, we were going to have to scan. It helped us to shape our work plan, and gave us our timeline. This kind of pre-work matters and helps you decide what to include. Lean on your inventories if you have them. Expand it more, get as much information you can on what is inside of those boxes. I think we completed close to 11,000 pages in two years with the project digitizing Fisk's publications. For other types of materials, I would recommend researching. Dive online where people have talked about how to select for these kinds of projects and what is needed for your materials.

Designing a Digitization Plan

Q: What are common challenges or disruptions you see in digitization projects? Do you have any recommendations for how to plan for the unexpected as we develop our work plan?

A (CK Ming): One of the biggest challenges is timeline. This is especially true with magnetic media, which is taking longer to digitize because of having to bake it. Baking is now taking one to two weeks in order to get a good transfer. It is important to pad your schedule for a month or two to account for those potential delays. You also want to work in time if materials need to be conserved, for example if there is mold. Also, if applicants are receiving digital files from a vendor, they don't always allow enough time to do quality assurance on their end to ensure the digital files have integrity and that there was a good transfer. If you have hundreds of files coming back, unless you have a team of people to do quality control, you aren't going to finish that in two weeks. I have had things come back from vendors that are not correct, and vendors do not keep your files forever. You will want to check to see how long they are going to have your files, make sure you have enough time to do file checking, and ask your vendor if they can keep the files longer if it is not feasible to do that amount of file checking in the allotted time frame.

Q: If we intend to digitize internally, would you recommend QCing preservation files as they are created, and not as a bunch? Same with making access master & access files?

A (CK Ming): I think that really depends on the amount. I think quality control (QC) at the time can catch errors in your digitization process early, especially if you have to clean or bake a tape for example. There are also ways to automate QC. If you are doing hundreds of tapes, you may want to check for errors in the tape on the back end right after digitization. I would also recommend doing access files at the end. Again there are ways to automate the process, so you are not waiting on your computer and slowing it down as it creates an access MP4.

Q: If we find that our project may take longer than we originally anticipated, can we amend the timeline as long as it is within the funding window? (for Part Two)

A (Program Officer): If you need to amend your timeline from your initial round application to your final application, you can do that. For your final application, you want to make your timeline as solid as possible. If you make changes to your timeline, be sure that all your grant activities will still take place during the grant period.

Q: We got a note that our project doesn't seem to make it available beyond Hawai'i (where we are located) It is part of our plan and focus is to make the metadata accessible to all as part of our transfer into the State Archive but our programming of screenings and sharing footage is mostly focused sharing with Native Hawaiian communities as these tapes are relevant, precious and most valuable to them. Would you suggest that we are sharing the metadata and footage beyond our state archives and the many communities here?

A: (Dr. Ida Jones): A good question in regards to the metadata. It's important that we think about how not just the institution, but the interests of the researcher applies to this. With the technology we have, we should all have some digital presence. If you have some information out there, even just a hearty crumb, scholars, researchers, lay researchers will find their way to you. Spend the money and time to get the benefits on the back end. Over time, it'll be a return on your investment.

Yes, if you can make the metadata more accessible, along with the footage, there are possible connections beyond Hawai'i. The genealogical community and other local historians are making connections to how small the 20th century world was, especially with the international community from Asia and Pacific rim communities during wartime and peace time when businesses invaded spaces.

Rights, Ethics, and Re-use

Q: From your perspective as an IP Reviewer, if some of the materials we are nominating for digitization contain personally identifiable information, would we be penalized for restricting access to those materials?

A (Sandra Aya Enimil): For me as an intellectual property (IP) reviewer and someone who's looking at cultural heritage considerations or ethical considerations, I would consider it a plus. If you are looking at your content to digitize and realize there is personally identifiable information

(PII) or other information that shouldn't be made publicly available, you want to consider if these materials should be restricted in some capacity. I would count it as a bonus if you have clearly considered your subject matter and are making sure you have a plan to address PII or ethical/privacy issues.

Q: Many reviewers commented on vulnerability concerns of the community we service. Would flushing out more description of our 4-tier access policy - specifically restrictive access - make good use of time in discussing ethics of care of materials and sensitive content?

A (Sandra Aya Enimil): Yes, without having details on what those four tiers are, for me and for other reviewers, having information regarding the areas of concern and to see that the applicant is noting those concerns is huge. There may still be reasons the application doesn't make it through to funding. However, showing you're cognizant of any concerns or issues and you have a strategy about providing access or not providing access, is a bonus for me as an intellectual property (IP) reviewer.

Q: We are a Tahltan (Indigenous) archives and have proposed to digitize materials that we possess, but do not technically own (note that we also propose to digitize materials that we own in a Western legal sense). It is very common for Indigenous archives (at least in Canada) to possess copies of materials where the originals are held by other institutions. As the subject of these materials are specifically Tahltan people, culture, language, etc., we are inclined to assert our right to digitize, describe and make accessible these materials. Would CLIR see these materials as eligible to digitize under this grant?

A (Program Officer): This is tricky. You do have to own and hold your collections. I suggest you only propose the materials you have clear ownership over going forward.

A (Sandra Aya Enimil): I can't speak to Indigenous law or Canadian law, but I can speak to ownership considerations. In the US specifically, a lot of archives are in the same position, where they are not IP rights holders, but they are physical holders of that content. US law makes allowances for us to do a number of things to preserve that content and provide access to that content. You may want to look into Canadian law and relevant Indigenous customs or laws, and see if there is anything that might restrict how you are able to interact or provide access to the content. As far as physical ownership in the US context (again you might want to see how this applies to Canada), having physical ownership does provide you rights to preserve, in particular, and in certain circumstances provide access, as well.

Staffing & Budget

Q: If we're applying for a multi-year grant, should we add in annual cost-of-living (COLA) pay increases for each staff member?

A (DeLisa Minor Harris): There are a couple of factors to consider. First, consider CLIR's requirements for salaries and wages, and review their [Guidelines](#). If the guidelines do not specifically say it is not allowed, what has been the practice or standard at your organization? What is typical for staff at your organization? What is typical for your region? I'm in Nashville, where the cost of living increases every year as more people move into our area. Therefore, it

was a serious consideration for us. In your narrative, be really clear in your narrative why you are including COLA pay increases, and be sure to cite your regional practices and institutional practices.

Q: Is including a budget allocation/stipend for community desirable?

A (Program Officer): I think you are referring to a community advisory board or community members assisting you with the process of this project, either with metadata or including them in the process of determining which materials are made available. One of the program's core values is community centered access. Reviewers like to see fair pay for staff and equitable honorariums for those working on your project, including advisory board members or community consultants.

A (DeLisa Minor Harris): We've included stipends before for our advisory board or subject matter experts. It is important to include stipends or honorariums for people helping you to ensure your metadata is non-problematic, thoughtful, accessible for your audience, and overall, what you're looking to do as you make these materials available. The [final application guidelines](#) provide instructions on what budget category to use. Think about the amount, do some backup research, talk to your institutional grants office or others at your organization, and find out what the standard practice is for these payments. You don't want to risk having your institution deny a payment.

Program Officer Note: You cannot receive a letter of support from any person who is being paid by the project. You can only request administrative support funds if your project is a collaborative project. Reviewers will want to see that consultants on your project are being paid fair and equitable wages. Please note in your budget narrative how you arrived at your amount.

Q: Due to inflation, vendor estimates may have changed since the initial application phase. Is there an acceptable range of variation from the initial budget in the final application phase?

A (Program Officer): We expect to see budgets change between the initial and final application phase. We don't have an accepted range of variance as long as your budget still falls within the program guidelines and the budgetary balance that indicates your focus is on digitization.

Q: Can part of the salary be covered by the organization and the other part covered by CLIR to assist with cost of living?

A (DeLisa Minor Harris): For CLIR, this is a straightforward budget. Cost share is not required, but in the case that your organization is supplementing a salary for this grant, you can notate that in the cost share section of the budget narrative. Consider that a salary being covered by grant funds is term-limited, for however long the project lasts. I think it could be good to have the university or organization supplement salaries, because they might then be able to continue funding the position after the grant. In your budget narrative, make it clear what will be covered by grant funds and what will be included as a cost share so reviewers can understand your budget.

Q: We are exploring Digital Asset Management systems - if there are costs with this system (such as PastPerfect online), can these be included in the budget? Also, can we include web development costs for the digital portal, and for a digital exhibition?

A (Program Officer): Most of these are not disallowed costs, double check the guidelines to be sure. You can't have a software license that goes beyond the grant period. Generally, you can build out the digital infrastructure to make it accessible. You want the budget to be balanced and more money going to digitization.

A (CK Ming): The cost depends on the data. PastPerfect, don't know the exact cost, but it is not high. Definitely include it as a start, but also remember to include information about how you will sustain the subscription costs after the grant period ends.

Q: Can we add the transcriptions/translations digitization to our tapes proposal? Eg., tapes are in Yugtun, and we have the paper docs/Word docs for some. Not all the tapes are transcribed/translated. Can we pay for transcribers and translators to get the docs done and add this to the DAMsystem?

A (Program Officer): Yes, you can include transcription and translation. You want to look at the overall balance of your budget and you want a bulk of your costs going to digitization, but it's really important within this program to provide appropriate access. Part of assisting with accessibility is getting materials translated and the panel has a pretty good understanding of that.

Q: Regarding making items available without costs. If we traditionally charge reproduction or use fees, we would not be able to for the collections digitized?

A (DeLisa Minor Harris): At our institution we charge reproduction fees for archives. For the collections we chose for *Digitizing Hidden Collections*, we chose materials that can meet the IP requirements, and ones that we can provide open access for without charging fees. For example, we proposed the project on Fisk publications because Fisk is the publisher of those materials and there was a level of ownership from the university that we could provide the permission for them to be open access without fees.

A (Sandra Aya Enimil): Speaking to US copyright law, cost recovery is allowable. If it costs your institution to go pull something and make a copy and make it available to someone else, you are allowed to charge a fee to cover the cost of making the copy. I'm not sure if there are restrictions with the grant regarding fees.

A (Program Officer): If you are talking about materials that you are nominating for digitization, we require you to make the metadata publicly accessible. You're not allowed to impose restrictions on the digitized materials that don't already exist. Access is a component of the competition; for something like high resolution copies, or charging for commercial use, there is precedent for a fee schedule for things beyond just basic access. You will want to explain your already existing policy and any fee schedules for access in your application.

Panelist Closing Reflections

Dr. Ida Jones: Stay encouraged, know your project is valuable regardless of the outcome, and you have to articulate that as well as possible. You can think everyone sees the passion when you're so close to it, but you need to demonstrate it in your application. Make it clear to someone who doesn't already know about your materials or organization so they can sense the value in the project, the humane value of the project. What will it add to the human story? It's not just about an ethnic group or a region of the world, but the human family. This is what I find most interesting about the application - the human interest. Take your time and really communicate that emotion in your application, why it matters and how others will be enriched by it. You will want your external letters of support you collect and the letters of commitment from your institution to communicate that value too.

CK Ming: I would recommend applicants take a look at digital sustainability. How will you maintain long-term preservation of your files? Especially with moving image and recorded sound preservation files, that can be a lot of data you'll end up with. If you're part of a larger institution, can you avail yourself of something that's already there? If you're a small organization, what might you need to put in place to ensure your digitized files live on?

Sandra Aya Enimil: Speaking from my experience as an IP reviewer, I want to see that you have a plan to address any ethical, privacy, cultural heritage, or intellectual property issues or concerns. I'm not saying you would be restricted to move forward if that's not all resolved, but for myself, I like to see a plan to address some of these particular issues and that you have a strategy in place. There are a number of ways to address it. A red flag for me is when the application says nothing about potential concerns. So, my advice is to find a way to talk about it and have a plan or a strategy to address it.

DeLisa Minor Harris: Make sure you're following the instructions and reading the details in [CLIR's Application Guidelines](#). Be specific and detailed in your budget narrative. Make sure you triple check and have someone else check your math to verify everything is in order with your numbers. Make sure you're reaching out to folks for letters of support and you're being specific and detailed about your capacity and thinking ahead about the future.