

Historical and Cultural Museum Assistance Program

Virtual Meeting

Monday, October 6, 2025

MINUTES

Members present: Vic Rezendes, Dave Shackelford, Natalie Shores, Kari Saavedra, Gabriella Cantelmo, Briayna Cuffie

Staff present: Nell Ziehl, Brenna Spray

Call to Order: The meeting was called to order at 2:32 PM. Nell Ziehl welcomed attendees and reviewed the agenda. All participants consented to recording for internal MHT purposes.

BUSINESS ITEMS

Overview of Historical and Cultural Museum Assistance Program

Ms. Ziehl presented an overview of the Museum Assistance Program, noting its establishment in 1990 following the *Maryland's Best Kept Secrets* report and its reactivation with FY26 funding. She outlined eligibility requirements, funding uses, and the program's emphasis on operational support for Maryland museums.

Members discussed the definition of eligible nonprofits, confirming that organizations recognized by the state and in good standing for three years may qualify. The panel agreed that funding should prioritize operational support over capital improvements due to the limited appropriation and administrative burden associated with capital projects.

The panel reached consensus to prioritize operational funding for the FY26 round.

Overview of Review Panel Responsibilities

Ms. Ziehl reviewed the statutory composition and responsibilities of the panel, which advises on program policies, reviews applications, and makes grant recommendations to the MHT Board and Secretary of Planning. She noted that the Secretary makes final approvals, following precedent in other MHT-administered programs.

The anticipated timeline includes opening the application period by late October, keeping it open for at least 60 days, and bringing funding recommendations to the MHT Board in March.

Feedback for FY26 Round

While no formal votes were taken, panel members discussed several program design elements:

- **Funding Approach:** Unanimous support for operational funding for FY26.
- **Match Requirement:** Consensus not to require a match, recognizing administrative and equity concerns for smaller organizations.
- **Application Format:** Consensus to implement word-count limits on application to ensure concise responses.
- **Grant Size:** Members expressed support for a funding range of \$5,000–\$20,000, without strict minimums or maximums, to maximize distribution of the \$300,000 allocation.
- **Budget Requirements:** Consensus to require a simple budget form with a mandatory budget narrative; 990s may be provided as backup.
- **Equity Considerations:** Members discussed collecting demographic and geographic data to inform future rounds, but agreed that equity data should not yet be scored until baseline information is established.

Members also discussed the proposed \$500,000 organizational budget threshold. While smaller museums were identified as a priority, consensus favored allowing flexibility with potential tiering by organization size.

Next Steps

Ms. Ziehl thanked members for their input and outlined next steps:

- Revise the draft application, guidelines, and rubric based on meeting discussion.
- Consult with counsel as needed.
- Circulate final drafts for review and comment before release.

The panel will reconvene as needed to review applications once the FY26 round opens.

With no other business for discussion, the meeting was adjourned at 4:13 PM.