



NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE HUMANITIES

Frequently Asked Questions:

Office of Challenge Programs
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FAQs – Climate Smart Humanities Program

This document addresses frequently asked questions related to the Climate Smart Humanities Program funding by the Office of Challenge Programs.

Purpose and Background

1. What is the Climate Smart Humanities Organizations Program?

The Climate Smart Humanities Organizations Program strengthens the institutional base of the humanities by funding assessments and strategic planning that sustain and protect historical, cultural, educational, intellectual, and physical assets from the risks of climate change. It offers federal matching funds to support comprehensive organizational assessments and strategic planning projects so that humanities organizations can mitigate their impact on the environment and adapt to extreme climate events. Organizational assessments and strategic plans must convey direct, tangible benefits to the applicant institution.

2. How can I determine if our organization works in the humanities?

According to the 1965 National Foundation on the Arts and the Humanities Act, “The term ‘humanities’ includes, but is not limited to, the study of the following: language, both modern and classical; linguistics; literature; history; jurisprudence; philosophy; archaeology; comparative religion; ethics; the history, criticism and theory of the arts; those aspects of social sciences which have humanistic content and employ humanistic methods; and the study and application of the humanities to the human environment with particular attention to reflecting our diverse heritage, traditions, and history and to the relevance of the humanities to the current conditions of national life.” In your application, please describe how your organization engages with these humanities topics through collections, exhibitions, programing, or other

activities.

3. Where can I find examples of humanities organizations doing Climate Smart Strategic Planning?

NEH offers sample narratives on our Program Resource Page. These samples will give you models that can help you compose your application and see what other successful applicants have proposed. NEH also offers a resource page with links to outside resources, and you can search for a full list of awarded Climate Smart Grants at “Search All Past Awards” at (<https://apps.neh.gov/publicquery/main.aspx>)

4. Should we have consultants committed before we apply?

While identifying outside consultants is not a requirement of application, many projects benefit from early consultation with technical experts to plan and ensure budget accuracy. The collaboration of highly qualified and experienced individuals makes it more likely that evaluators will endorse an application.

5. What project stages and deliverables does the Climate Smart Humanities Organizations Program support?

The Climate Smart Humanities Organizations Program only supports planning efforts that result in an actionable climate action or adaptation plan. Mitigation planning focuses on reducing your institution’s environmental impact and energy costs; adaptation planning prepares for and adjusts to actual and expected climate change scenarios to protect humanities-focused institutional assets and facilities. Proposed projects will result in one or more strategic planning documents and a prioritized list of climate smart actions that includes targets, timelines, and required resources.

6. Can I use Climate Smart Humanities Program funds to complete a construction project?

No. Climate Smart funds are intended for the creation of comprehensive plans for climate-related mitigation and adaptation measures for humanities organizations, not for the implementation of those plans.

Implementation activities proposed in the final climate smart strategic plan must be pre-decisional; that is, they do not commit the organization to a particular plan of action beyond the period of performance of the NEH award. Rather, as with all strategic plans, the implementation activities are considered iterative and set intentions - but not final policy - for future organizational behavior.

Similarly, building or site renderings and preliminary design documents developed as part of climate smart strategic planning must also be pre-decisional. That is, they can inform opportunities identified in the final climate smart plan, but not commit the organization to a particular course of action. No element of the final climate smart plan may restrict the subsequent consideration of alternatives to avoid or minimize adverse effects on historic properties or sites. Advanced schematic design and construction documents, including those intended to be used for procurement and/or financing, and planning solely

intended to inform future construction or renovation are not allowable in this program. See [Related funding opportunities](#).

If your application includes activities that would require review under [Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 and National Environmental Policy Act of 1969](#), NEH will remove those from the scope of the project prior to issuing an offer or award. Removal of these activities may result in a corresponding budget reduction.

Funding & Matching

1. How much funding can an organization apply for?

Organizations may apply for up to \$300,000 in matching funds for projects with budgets up to \$600,000 (1:1 match ratio).

2. If awarded funding, when does my organization have to raise the matching funds?

Applicants are strongly encouraged to certify gifts with their application. If you do not certify gifts with the application, you must certify at least 25% of the required match prior to beginning project activities. All gifts must be certified by March 31, 2026. NEH funding is released for draw-down as gifts are certified.

What counts towards matching funds?

Gifts must be raised from third-party, non-federal sources. They may not originate from the recipient institution itself (i.e., from your institution's general operating budget). You may not shift or reallocate internal funds for matching purposes. This restriction also applies to superordinate multi-campus college and university systems. For details see [Federal Matching Funds Guidelines](#).

3. When is the period of performance?

The period of performance must start between May 1, 2025, and September 1, 2025. Applicants should propose a project start date; however, you will not be issued an award or final period of performance until 25% of the required 1:1 match is certified and approved by NEH. Your period of performance can last up to 24 months (2 years).

Eligibility

1. What organizations are eligible to apply to the Climate Smart Humanities Organizations program?

Eligible applicants include U.S. nonprofit organizations with a 501(c)(3) tax-exempt status, public and 501(c)(3) accredited institutions of higher education, state and local governmental agencies, and federally recognized Native American tribal governments.

Individuals, foreign and for-profit entities are not eligible to apply.

2. Are local/tribal governments eligible to apply?

Yes, local/tribal governments are eligible to apply if they are applying on behalf of one or more humanities-based subunits, such as a library, archive, or museum. The strategic planning document that results must be specific to the subunit(s) named in the application. Local/tribal governments may not submit applications for projects that do not focus exclusively on humanities-based subunits.

3. Can arts institutions apply for the Climate Smart Humanities Organizations program?

Organizations dedicated to the creation or performance of art, such as arts centers and performing arts venues, are not eligible to apply for the Climate Smart Humanities Organizations program. They may participate as a consortium member but may not receive NEH award funds.

4. Can I apply for a Climate Smart grant if my organization already has an active NEH grant?

Yes. You may apply for the Climate Smart Humanities Organizations program if you hold a grant through a different division of the NEH, or if all of your Challenge matching gifts have been certified and approved by NEH.

5. Can applicants submit more than one application to the Climate Smart Humanities Organizations Program?

No. Your institution may apply to other NEH grant programs for which you might be eligible, but you may not submit more than one application to each round of Climate Smart. If you submit multiple applications, NEH will only accept your last validated submission prior to the deadline under the correct Grants.gov funding opportunity.

6. Can I revise and resubmit a previously rejected application?

Yes. You may revise and resubmit previously rejected applications. Resubmissions are subject to the application requirements and review criteria of the current competition.

Consortiums

1. What is a consortium?

If your organization is an eligible applicant, it may apply on behalf of a group of collaborating humanities organizations, known as a consortium. Your organization will function as the recipient of the NEH award and will be programmatically, legally, and fiscally responsible for the award. Your organization will be responsible for reporting and compliance requirements, certification of gifts to release federal matching funds, and subrecipient monitoring, if applicable. The recipient may not function solely as a fiscal sponsor; your organization must make substantive contributions to the success of the project.

2. How does an application for a consortium differ from an application from one institution?

Consortium proposals consist of two or more humanities organizations working together on strategic planning for climate change. In your application, you must identify the consortium organizations as subrecipients (see section F5 in the NOFO) and provide a letter of commitment from each organization that explains their role in the project. Subrecipients—consortium participants—must meet NEH eligibility requirements and provide a subrecipient budget. NEH will also require successful applicants to submit a formal Memorandum of Agreement signed by all consortium participants.

3. If my institution applies as part of a consortium, does my organization have to raise all the funds ourselves, or can consortium participants contribute to the match requirement?

Consortium participants may raise and contribute third-party, nonfederal gift funds to help meet your organization's match requirements. However, funds may not originate directly from the subrecipient organization (i.e., you may not use funds from Subrecipient A's operating budget to meet the match requirement, but Subrecipient A may raise funds from third-party, non-federal entities which would then count towards the match requirement). The applicant submitting on behalf of the consortium is responsible for certifying all gifts.

4. If my institution applies as part of a consortium, do we have to distribute NEH money to subrecipients/consortium members, or can we make alternate arrangements (i.e., paying a single consultant who then works for all the organizations)?

Consortium participants may either be subrecipients (receive NEH and/or matching funds directly) or a lead applicant can make arrangements with a consultant to be paid directly for work performed for all consortium organizations. In both cases, consortium members must be eligible for NEH funding according to the guidelines laid out in the NOFO. Nonprofit organizations whose work is not in the humanities, including performing and creative arts centers, may participate in consortium activities, and should provide a letter of commitment. However, they are not eligible to receive NEH funds.

5. What kinds of activities can a consortium undertake?

Consortiums may undertake a variety of activities, including, but not limited to: utilizing shared consultants or shared staff; establishing a mutual aid network for emergencies; planning for shared resources, such as shared alternative energy sources or collection spaces; initiating collective efforts to meet organization, state, or local climate targets, such as zero waste goals; establishing partnerships to facilitate reuse and repurposing of materials and/or supplies; and developing shared climate literacy efforts for staff, visitors, students, or others.

Application and Submission Information

1. Whom should we ask to provide letters of support?

Letters of support should come from persons who can objectively assess the importance of the project to the humanities. Writers may also include people who are community members and who can attest to the need for the proposed work. They should not be project participants or employees of the applicant institution.

Also, the letters should be submitted to the project director (not separately to the NEH) and submitted with the application.

2. Can NEH give me feedback about my application?

Yes, program officers will review one draft per project submitted by August 9, 2024 at 11:59 ET, as listed in section E.4 of the Notice of Funding Opportunity. Questions and drafts may be submitted to challenge@neh.gov.

3. Are there deadline extensions?

No.

Application and Review Information

1. How will my application be assessed?

Your application will first be reviewed for completeness, eligibility, and responsiveness by NEH staff. If your application has all the required components, it will move on to the peer review process. In the peer review process, external evaluators, who are experts in their field with knowledge and expertise relevant to the activities that the program supports, will review your application. NEH instructs peer reviewers to evaluate applications according to the review criteria included in the NOFO. Peer reviewers must comply with federal ethics rules governing conflicts of interest.

2. Who will review my application?

Knowledgeable persons will read each application and advise the NEH about its merits. Reviewers include a mix of professionals such as museum curators, librarians, archivists, and administrators of cultural organizations, as well as scholars and individual with experience in mitigation and adaptation activities. NEH program officers supplement the peer reviewer's comments to address matters of fact or significant points that the peer reviewers have overlooked. They then make funding recommendations to the National Council on the Humanities, taking into account the program's purpose and intended audience. The National Council meets at least twice each year to review applications and advise the NEH Chair. By law, the Chair has the sole authority to make final funding decisions. [Learn more about NEH's review process.](#)

3. How long will the review process take?

The review process can take up to eight months.

4. Where can I find the review criteria?

The review criteria can be found in Section E.1 in the Notice of Funding Opportunity.

5. Can I see the comments from the peer reviewers?

Yes. After the NEH's public announcement of funded projects, you may request copies of the peer reviewers' evaluations of your proposal by contacting challenge@neh.gov.