NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE HUMANITIES

DIVISION OF PUBLIC PROGRAMS

Public Humanities Projects

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

(Updated May 9, 2024)

Humanities content and advisers

1. What are "humanities themes"?

A humanities theme is a brief interpretive assertion about a topic, based on relevant humanities scholarship and offering a broad conceptual framework. For example, "Women in the Civil War" is a topic. It describes a subject but does not reveal the interpretive approach to it. On the other hand, "Women played important economic roles during the Civil War" is a theme. It not only identifies a topic but also suggests what audiences might learn about it.

2. How much should we pay scholarly advisers?

There is no set fee for scholars and other professional consultants and interpretive experts working on your project. Some applicants pay scholars a flat honorarium, others pay a daily rate. Discuss your project with the scholars, including the work that you expect from them, and negotiate a fair rate. See 2 CFR § 200.459.

General information about Public Humanities Projects (PHP)

3. How do I know whether my organization's project is more appropriate for the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) or the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH)?

If your project involves the creation of musical compositions, dance, painting, poetry, short stories, novels, or if it focuses on arts performance or training, you should apply to NEA. NEH supports projects that provide an analytical, reflective, or historical perspective on the arts and other subjects.

4. How do we know which level of funding is right for our project?

You are ready to apply for a Planning level award if you:

- are planning an exhibition or historic site interpretation (Humanities Discussions are not funded at this level);
- have conducted preliminary research, including introductory discussions with scholars, and are able to articulate major analytical ideas about your subject that you seek to explore more deeply;
- have a group of scholars from outside your organization who are committed to collaborating with you on development of the project; and
- can articulate a vision of possible interpretive techniques and potential project elements that you would like to investigate or test with audiences (for example, ideas about the use or display of certain objects, specific concepts for an interactive activity, or ideas about the utilization of a particular space).

You are ready to apply for an Implementation level award if you:

- have conducted significant research and collaboration with scholars outside your organization that resulted in highly developed, thoughtful and articulated analysis of your subject;
- have designed and planned the interpretive elements of your project, such as interactive activities, panel discussions, or living history presentations, and can fully describe how audiences would engage with them;
- have design drafts for various project elements, such as exhibition elevation designs, floor plans, docent or facilitator training, label text, site signage, tour scripts, or discussion agendas; and
- are ready to begin putting these plans into action to "go live" before a public audience.

5. Our organization is implementing a museum exhibition that will be accompanied by a website and a short film. Should we apply to Digital Projects for the Public, Media, or to Public Humanities Projects?

Many PHP projects include multiple formats. You should consider how you will use grant funds and staff resources in order to determine the primary format for which to request support and then apply to the most appropriate NEH program.

In the example above, the exhibition is the primary grant product; the other components enhance and broaden its content. You should probably apply to PHP and follow the PHP Notice of Funding Opportunity for describing the exhibition and related components.

6. What if we want funding only for a single format, such as a museum exhibition?

NEH welcomes projects with a single format. All projects are judged on their own merits.

7. Must our organization apply for a Planning grant before we apply for an Implementation grant?

No. You may apply for the level that is appropriate for the developmental stage of your project.

8. To which program should our organization apply if we want to focus on our local community?

If you are a small or mid-sized cultural organization with a project intended to meet your local community's needs by expanding the scope, reach, and excellence of your public programs, you should apply to the [Public Impact Projects at Smaller Organizations](#) program. NEH especially encourages first-time applicants to apply for this program.

9. Do you fund digital projects in this grant program?

If your primary project format is digital such as websites, mobile applications and tours, interactive touch screens and kiosks, games, and virtual environments, the most appropriate program is [Digital Projects for the Public](#).

10. Can our organization apply to this program to produce a documentary film or podcast?

If your primary format is a radio program, film, television series, or podcast for broad regional or national distribution over broadcast media, the most appropriate program is [Media Projects](#).

11. What are the most common mistakes that applicants make?

Applicants often fail to provide as much information as evaluators expect. You must discuss the project in considerable detail, clearly articulating your concept for the project and the humanities issues that the project deals with, even when the proposal is for a Planning project. In order to be competitive, you should have done considerable research on the subject and consulted with scholars about their ideas; you should also explain the scholars' contributions in the proposal.

12. What are Positions in Public Humanities, and how are they related to PHP?

Positions in Public Humanities provide additional funding to hire a one- or two-year entry-level staff person to work with the proposed project. Implementation applicants are eligible to apply for this support; Planning applicants are not. Implementation applicants may request up to an additional $50,000 for a one-year position or $100,000 for a two-year position to support the hiring of a recent graduate of an MA or PhD program in a humanities discipline relevant to the project, including museum studies and public history. The individual must have graduated in the last five years, and they must be a U.S. citizen or a foreign national who has been living in the U.S. or its jurisdictions for at least three years prior to the PHP application deadline. The candidate selected to fill the position would be expected to strengthen the interpretive and public aspects of the PHP project by incorporating fresh ideas and perspectives. More information is available in the NOFO.

13. Does this program fund resources for students and teachers?

You should target projects to the general public, and the project budget and activities should reflect this focus. However, an Implementation project can include resources that help students and teachers explore the humanities content and themes central to the project. Such resources might include classroom-specific hands-on activities, lesson plans, scholarly essays, maps,

and/or timelines. Projects intended primarily for students in formal learning environments are not allowed in this program.

14. Are program officers available through phone or e-mail to answer questions?

Yes. We encourage you to contact us to discuss applications prior to their submission. Draft proposals are voluntary, but we are happy to review those submitted by the dates in section D4 of the NOFO, and to share samples of previously funded projects. You can reach the staff at publicpgms@neh.gov.

15. If I am an individual scholar, community member, or curator unaffiliated with a nonprofit organization, may I apply for a Public Humanities Projects grant?

No. Individuals are not eligible to apply. Nevertheless, many cultural organizations, arts centers, and universities may be willing to partner with you and participate in your proposed project. The partnering organization is responsible for submitting the application to NEH. If the application is funded, the partnering organization is the recipient of record and assumes all programmatic, financial, and legal responsibilities of the award. The partnering organization may not function solely as a fiscal agent.

Submitting an application

16. Must our organization submit our application through Grants.gov?

You must apply online, using either Grants.gov Workspace or your organization's system-to-system software.

17. May our organization submit an application for two different projects at the same time?

Yes, you may submit more than one application, however, overlapping project costs between two or more applications for federal funding and/or approved federal award budgets are not permitted.

Per 2 CFR § 200.403(f), you must not include the same project costs in more than one application for federal funding or approved federal award budget. If one application to NEH is pending, a second application for the same project costs, even if to a different program, may be ruled ineligible. However, you may submit multiple proposals for complementary aspects of the same overall project. If you are submitting complementary proposals to other NEH programs or government agencies, specify when and to whom in the Supplementary Cover Sheet for NEH Grant Programs. NEH may disallow costs or reject applications that include overlapping project costs. An individual's level of effort cannot exceed 100% across multiple active federally funded awards.

18. I applied but wasn't successful. Can I resubmit the proposals for the next round?

Yes. Unsuccessful applicants may revise and resubmit proposals that were not previously funded to future application deadlines. All applicants may request the evaluators' assessments of their

proposals. This information is useful as you continue working on the project and decide whether to resubmit.

19. May the project director also serve as the institutional grant administrator?

No. The project director may not serve as the institutional grant administrator. The role of the project director must be distinct from that of the institutional grant administrator, who functions as the representative of the recipient organization with authority to act on the organization's behalf in matters related to the administration of the award. All financial reports and prior approval requests, such as budget revisions, extensions of the period of performance, and changes in key personnel, must be signed or countersigned by the institutional grant administrator. Similarly, official correspondence from NEH to a recipient (for example, an offer letter, the award document, an extension, a supplement or amendment) is addressed to the institutional grant administrator and copied to the project director. The project director is the person directly in charge of the conduct of the funded project. Because the project director's involvement in the project is normally critical to its success, the replacement of the project director or the co-director or a substantial reduction in the level of their effort (for example, an unanticipated absence for more than three months, or a 25 % reduction in the time devoted to the project) requires prior written approval from NEH.

20. How do I know if I need to submit a subrecipient budget in my application package?

If your project includes subawards, you must provide a Research and Related budget and budget justification for each subrecipient. A subrecipient relationship exists when a pass-through entity (your organization) provides funding to a third party to perform a portion of the scope of work or objectives of the pass-through entity's federal award. See General Guidance for Pass-through Entities on Managing Subawards.

Federal award information

21. What are the differences between outright funds and federal matching funds? What is cost sharing?

Outright funds are awarded on a non-matching basis, which means they are not contingent on additional fundraising.

Federal matching funds require a recipient to obtain nonfederal gift funds from third parties before the matching funds are released. See NEH Federal Matching Funds Guidelines.

Learn more about different types of grant funding.

Cost sharing or matching is the portion of the project costs not paid by NEH funds.

This program does not require cost share unless you request federal matching funds. Applicants for Implementation of a permanent or traveling exhibition or historic places project may request an additional $50,000 in matching funds (for a total award of up to $450,000, or $550,000, if also requesting a Position in Public Humanities). Required cost sharing consists of third-party nonfederal cash contributions used to release federal matching funds. If NEH only awards you outright funds, you do not have any required cost sharing.

You may use voluntary cost sharing for projects in which the total costs exceed the amount awarded by NEH. Voluntary cost sharing includes cash contributions to a project by the applicant and nonfederal third parties, as well as in-kind contributions, such as donated goods and services and unrecovered indirect costs.

See B. Federal Award Information in the Notice of Funding Opportunity for more information.

22. If our organization receives NEH funding, may we also accept funding from other sources?

Yes. We encourage applicants to approach a range of funders. You may use voluntary cost sharing for projects in which the total costs exceed the amount awarded by NEH. As a reminder, overlapping project costs between two or more applications for federal funding and/or approved federal award budgets are not permitted.

23. Do we need to have already raised money from other sources in order to be competitive for a Public Humanities Projects award?

No.

24. What is the difference between a subrecipient, contractor, and consultant?

A subrecipient is a non-federal entity that receives funds from the recipient of a federal award to carry out part of a project. Subrecipients are programmatically involved in the project. If you are co-creating a museum exhibition with another (or several other) museums, who contribute expertise, man hours, and other programmatic input, the partner museums are subrecipients. Individuals cannot be subrecipients.

A contract is a legal instrument by which a recipient or subrecipient purchases property or services needed to carry out the project or program under a federal award. The contractor is the organization that carries out the service. If you are working with a private firm who is making exhibition cases, the firm is the contractor.

A consultant is an individual who is not employed the recipient or subrecipient who performs a service. A guest curator would be an example of a consultant.

2 CFR § 200.331 provides guidance on the characteristics of subawards and contracts. See General Guidance for Pass-through Entities on Managing Subawards.

25. Our budget includes a significant amount of funds for subrecipients, contractors, and/or consultants? Do we need to provide additional information?

Yes. If your budget includes a significant amount of funding to entities or individuals who are not associated with your organization, you should demonstrate that you are meaningfully engaged in the project and not functioning as a fiscal agent. In your narrative, describe your organization's programmatic involvement in the project. If you are receiving funding from other sources and would like to contextualize NEH's part, use the budget justification to describe the project as a whole. Do not include additional funding on the Research and Related (R & R) budget.

26. Can we use our NEH award to pay fees for Library of Congress or Smithsonian Institution staff advising our project? What about fees for using federal sites as exhibition host venues?

No. Your budget may not include any costs to support federal agencies or employees in any capacity (for example, fees paid to or travel expenses for Library of Congress or Smithsonian Institution staff), or expenses in support of federal sites as exhibition host venues.

You may use funds from, or sites and materials controlled by, other federal entities in your project. For example, you may record audio or video for your media project at historic sites operated or controlled by other federal entities. You may also conduct research and use archival materials housed in federal libraries and archives.

See section C.3 of the NOFO for additional information about federal entities.