



NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE HUMANITIES

DIVISION OF EDUCATION PROGRAMS

# SPOTLIGHT ON HUMANITIES IN HIGHER EDUCATION

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

(Updated July 15, 2024)

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This document covers a variety of queries regarding the Spotlight on Humanities in Higher Education program. Answers reference specific sections of the Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO), available on the [Spotlight program resource page](#). NEH staff are available to answer further questions [spotlight@neh.gov](mailto:spotlight@neh.gov).

## Eligibility and General Information

### 1. What are the humanities and how do I know if my idea is appropriate for Spotlight?

Under [Section 3\(a\) of the National Foundation on the Arts and the Humanities Act of 1965](#), as amended, “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 the 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.”

Humanities programs vary greatly among institutions. Some institutions include all humanities courses in a single department, others have specific departments (e.g. a department of philosophy and a department of religious studies), and still others offer both humanities majors (English, history, etc.) and majors in interdisciplinary fields like African American studies or health humanities.

NEH encourages you to explain the humanities at your institution, and how your project would help students from underserved populations gain access to and benefit from the humanities. If your project includes writing and composition, foreign languages, workforce development, and/or programs of study that lie outside traditional humanities disciplines, you should explain their relationship to the humanities.

You may email [spotlight@neh.gov](mailto:spotlight@neh.gov) to discuss whether your project focuses on the humanities and if it is appropriate for Spotlight.

## **2. How do I know if my institution is eligible for Spotlight?**

You can find Spotlight's eligibility criteria in section C.1 Eligible applicants of the Notice of Funding Opportunity.

If your institution is a college or university, the undergraduate enrollment must be less than 10,000 (see #3 below for establishing this number via [NCES College Navigator](#)). In addition, your institution must meet *at least one* of the following criteria. You must:

- be a community college;
- be a Minority-Serving Institution (MSI) as defined by the U.S. Department of Education. Eligible MSI categories include Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander Serving Institutions (AANAPISI); Alaska Native and Native Hawaiian Serving Institutions (ANNH); Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSI); Native American Serving Non-Tribal Institutions (NASNTI); Predominantly Black Institutions (PBI); Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU); and Tribally Controlled Colleges and Universities (TCCU).
- have an enrollment of more than 40% Pell grant recipients. You may use either the percentage of full-time beginning undergraduate students or the percentage of all undergraduate students.
- be a rural college or university. You meet this criterion if your [NCES locale classification](#) ("campus setting") is "rural," "town: remote," or "town: distant."

If you are a nonprofit or a state, local, or tribal government, you must include Attachment 2, explaining how you will partner with one or more eligible colleges or universities. If you know them in advance, you will list them in the attachment. If you have not yet determined the specific partners (for example, if you plan to hold a workshop or symposia for faculty), explain how you will select institutions to partner with and how you will ensure that project partners meet Spotlight's eligibility criteria. See D.2. Content and Form of Application Submission.

If your institution is not eligible for Spotlight, you may wish to consider other NEH funding opportunities. You can find brief information about several other programs (including [Humanities Initiatives](#), [Humanities Connections](#), and [Preservation Assistance Grants](#)) under Related Funding Opportunities in section H of the NOFO and full information for all our funding opportunities through the [Grants](#) section of the NEH website.

## **3. My institution is a college or university. How do I find my enrollment, Pell recipient percentage, and campus setting?**

You should consult the [NCES College Navigator](#) to determine undergraduate enrollment, locale classification (“campus setting”), and percentage of Pell grant recipients.

Search College Navigator for your institution. Enrollment and campus setting are listed at the top of the page: use the number for undergraduate enrollment that is listed in parentheses after “Student population.” To view the percentage of Pell grant recipients, open the “Financial Aid” drop-down menu. You may use the percentage either of full-time beginning undergraduate students or of all undergraduate students. See the screenshot below for an example.

**Coastal Carolina University**  
 103 Tom Trout Drive, Conway, South Carolina 29526

**Campus setting:** City, Small

**Student population:** 10,339 (9,794 undergraduate)

**Student-to-faculty ratio:** 16 to 1

**FINANCIAL AID**

**UNDERGRADUATE STUDENT FINANCIAL AID, 2021-2022**

**Full-time Beginning Undergraduate Students**

TYPE OF AID	NUMBER AWARDED AID	PERCENT AWARDED AID	TOTAL AMOUNT OF AID AWARDED	AVERAGE AMOUNT OF AID AWARDED
Any student financial aid <sup>1</sup>	2,502	100%	—	—
Grant or scholarship aid	2,207	88%	\$23,415,874	\$10,610
Federal grants	765	30%	\$3,995,648	\$5,223
Pell grants	765	30%	\$3,825,148	\$5,000
Other federal grants	140	6%	\$170,500	\$1,218
State/local government grant or scholarships	1,094	44%	\$7,313,425	\$6,685
Institutional grants or scholarships	1,465	58%	\$12,106,801	\$8,264
Student loan aid	1,597	64%	\$17,374,911	\$10,880
Federal student loans	1,533	61%	\$8,738,966	\$5,701
Other student loans	418	17%	\$8,635,945	\$20,660

<sup>1</sup> Includes students awarded Federal work study aid and aid from other sources not listed above.

**All Undergraduate Students**

TYPE OF AID	NUMBER AWARDED AID	PERCENT AWARDED AID	TOTAL AMOUNT OF AID AWARDED	AVERAGE AMOUNT OF AID AWARDED
Grant or scholarship aid <sup>1</sup>	7,916	82%	\$81,910,079	\$10,347
Pell grants	2,979	31%	\$15,433,445	\$5,181
Federal student loans	5,701	59%	\$37,047,324	\$6,498

If NCES data does not accurately reflect your institution’s size, campus setting, or percentage of Pell grant recipients, provide an explanation in Attachment 6: Eligibility clarification. Providing this attachment does not guarantee your eligibility, but NEH staff will consider your explanation when determining eligibility. See D.2. Content and Form of Application Submission.

**4. How do I know if a college or university is a minority-serving institution (MSI)?**

The Department of Education publishes an [Eligibility Matrix](#) each year, listing the MSIs in each category. The Eligibility Matrix is a read-only Excel worksheet that lists data for postsecondary institutions. It is updated annually and some designations change from year to year.

To verify an institution, select from the options at the bottom of the screen. Find the institution and then look at column J (“Meets the [year and MSI] Definition”). If the column states “yes,” the institution is an eligible MSI.

If you are eligible for Spotlight because your institution is an eligible MSI, but the institution is not listed on the eligibility matrix, provide an explanation in Attachment 6. Providing this attachment does not guarantee your eligibility, but NEH staff will consider your explanation when determining eligibility. See D.2. Content and Form of Application Submission.

**5. Our institution plans to submit multiple Spotlight proposals, and/or a proposal to another NEH program at the same time. Will NEH fund only one? And must each application have a different project director?**

It depends. NEH evaluates each application on its own merits. NEH might fund all applications, some, or none. As a reminder, you may not include overlapping project costs in two or more applications for federal funding. In addition, individuals who are participating in multiple federally-funded projects must allocate their time between the projects. For instance, if an individual commits to devoting 60% of her time to work on one federal award, she may not propose to spend more than 40% of her time on another federal award.

The same individual may serve as project director for multiple proposed projects under this notice. If an individual will serve as project director on multiple applications, explain in the narratives how the project director would allocate time between the awards. You may not propose someone to serve as your project director if they will hold a full-time NEH individual award during the period of performance. Applicants interested in applying for more than one NEH award should consult with an NEH program officer.

See C.3 Other Eligibility Information in the Notice of Funding Opportunity.

**6. Our institution applied for an NEH award in the past and was unsuccessful. Will NEH hold this against us if we apply again? Is there anything we can do to increase our chances for success this time?**

NEH evaluates all applications as new applications. If you are revising a previous submission, you may find it helpful to request the reviewers’ comments on that application and to consult with an NEH program officer. To request the reviewers’ comments or to get in touch with an NEH program officer, email [spotlight@neh.gov](mailto:spotlight@neh.gov). See C.3 Other Eligibility Information in the Notice of Funding Opportunity.

## **Project content and design**

**7. What first steps should we take in developing a Spotlight grant proposal? What help is available for preparing the proposal?**

Read the NOFO carefully, including the program purpose in A. Program Description, the eligibility requirements in C. Eligibility Information, and the review criteria in E1. Review Criteria. You may wish to discuss your proposal with colleagues or consult with a grants officer at your institution, if one is available.

After this preparation, contact an NEH program officer for answers to questions, advice on the proposal, and review of draft application materials. Submission of draft material is optional, but you do not need to have a fully developed program idea or near complete application to submit materials for review and feedback. If you wish to submit a draft, consult D4. Submission Dates and Times in the NOFO for the deadline. Email [spotlight@neh.gov](mailto:spotlight@neh.gov) to reach NEH program staff.

Your organization must also register with the [System for Award Management \(SAM\)](#) and [Grants.gov](#). This process is described in D3. Unique Entity Identifier and System for Award Management.

### **8. Are sample narratives available from previously funded NEH Spotlight projects?**

Yes. We recommend that you consult the sample application narratives on the [Spotlight program resource page](#).

You may also find examples of previously funded projects by using the NEH's [Funded Projects Query Form](#). In addition, NEH staff are available to discuss your ideas and read draft proposals (see D4 in the NOFO for draft submission deadlines). Do not hesitate to contact us at [spotlight@neh.gov](mailto:spotlight@neh.gov).

### **9. Should I apply at the Exploration level or the Development level?**

If you have not yet begun working on the project and would use a Spotlight award to get started, you should apply at the Exploration level. If you have taken steps (even small steps) to begin your project and would use a Spotlight award to make additional progress, you should apply at the Development level.

### **10. May we use a Spotlight award to pursue independent research?**

No. However, NEH offers support for independent research in the humanities through its [Public Scholar, Fellowships, Fellowships for Advanced Social Science Research on Japan, and Summer Stipends](#) programs, as well as the Awards for Faculty [at Hispanic-Serving Institutions, at Historically Black Colleges and Universities, and at Tribal Colleges and Universities](#). NEH also supports independent research indirectly through the [Fellowship Programs at Independent Research Institutions](#) program.

### **11. May the project director also serve as the institutional grant administrator?**

No. As a matter of NEH policy, the project director and primary contact/grant administrator must not be the same person.

## **Budget**

### **12. What types of costs may we include in our application budget?**

Your budget should include costs directly related to the proposed project. For example, a budget could include compensation for faculty and/or staff time spent on grant activities, based on their involvement in and contributions to the project.

You could also use funds to provide small stipends for workshop attendance; for travel and/or honoraria for guest scholars and visiting consultants; for books and other materials; or for modest purchases of computer equipment directly related to the project.

The application budget should not include costs listed in the NOFO in section D6. Funding Restrictions.

### **13. Can our project budget include course releases for participating faculty?**

Yes. In your budget, list compensation for key personnel as a percentage of annual salary, based on how much time they would spend on the project. If NEH selects your project for funding, it will pay the award funds to the applicant organization, which may provide course releases or other compensation consistent with its own policies and practices.

## **Application assistance**

### **14. What help is available for preparing the proposal?**

We encourage you to email [spotlight@neh.gov](mailto:spotlight@neh.gov) to discuss your project ideas or submit draft application materials; consult section D4 in the NOFO for the draft deadline. NEH staff cannot review drafts submitted after this deadline. Drafts do not need to be fully developed program ideas or near complete applications to be submitted for review and feedback.

Staff comments and responses to draft proposals are not part of the formal review process and have no bearing on the outcome of the proposal, but previous applicants have found them helpful in strengthening their applications.

### **15. Does our institution need a grant writer to prepare an application?**

No, but you must assign an institutional grant administrator to oversee the award. NEH staff members are available to answer your questions and assist you as you prepare your proposal. Please contact us at [spotlight@neh.gov](mailto:spotlight@neh.gov).

## **Submitting your application via Grants.gov**

### **16. When is the deadline for submitting the application?**

Applications for NEH Spotlight grants must be submitted through and validated by Grants.gov by the deadline stipulated in Section D4 of the NOFO. Grants.gov will date- and timestamp your application after it is fully uploaded. Applications submitted after that date will not be accepted, except for limited situations covered by the [NEH late submission policy](#).

NEH suggests that you submit your application at least 48 hours prior to the deadline. Doing so will leave you time to contact Grants.gov Applicant Support at 1-800-518-4726, should you encounter a technical problem. You can also send an email message to [support@grants.gov](mailto:support@grants.gov). Always obtain a case number when calling for support.



## **17. How will we know if we have submitted our application successfully?**

It is your responsibility to confirm that Grants.gov and subsequently NEH have received your application. [Check your Grants.gov application status.](#)

When NEH receives your application, the agency will assign it a tracking number beginning with ASA- or ASB-. A tracking number does not guarantee that your application is free of technical problems (such as missing attachments or failure to convert attachments to PDFs). If your files are not correctly formatted, eGMS, NEH's electronic grants management system, will reject your application and notify you by email. eGMS cannot detect other errors such as missing components or excess pages.

NEH recommends you submit your application at least 48 hours prior to the deadline so that you have time to correct any technical errors eGMS has notified you of or that you have discovered. It is your responsibility to correct any errors prior to the deadline.

## **Review and notification**

### **18. How will NEH review our application?**

NEH uses a peer review process based on the evaluation criteria in section E1 of the NOFO to review applications. Teachers and scholars in the humanities will convene in panels to read and rate the applications. NEH staff will compile a slate of recommended applications based on the panelists' comments and ratings and taking into account the program's purpose and intended audience. The National Council on the Humanities will review the recommendations and provide additional insights. All advice—from the panelists, staff, and National Council—will be sent to the NEH Chair. By law, the Chair has the sole authority to make final funding decisions. [Learn more about the NEH review process.](#)

### **19. When will NEH notify us of the outcome of our application?**

NEH will notify applicants of funding decisions by email by the date listed in E4 of the NOFO. See section F1 of the NOFO for additional information.