



NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE HUMANITIES

DIVISION OF EDUCATION PROGRAMS

SPOTLIGHT ON HUMANITIES IN HIGHER EDUCATION

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

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This document covers a variety of queries regarding the Spotlight on Humanities in Higher Education program. NEH staff are available to answer further questions spotlight@neh.gov.

Eligibility and General Information

1. What are the humanities, and how should they be incorporated into our proposed project?

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.” Your project must focus on the humanities, including those projects that engage with writing and composition, foreign languages, workforce development, and/or programs of study that lie outside traditional humanities disciplines.

2. Is the Spotlight on Humanities in Higher Education (Spotlight) program a good fit for our institution?

NEH designed the Spotlight program for small and medium sized colleges and universities (undergraduate enrollment below 5,000 for two-year institutions; below 10,000 for four-year

institutions) and for nonprofit organizations whose work advances the humanities at these institutions and among their faculty and students. The program especially aims to benefit community colleges; minority-serving institutions; rural colleges and universities; colleges and universities enrolling a majority of students receiving Pell grants; and institutions that have not received funding from the NEH Division of Education Programs since 2018. For specific information on intended applicants and on eligibility, see sections A1 and C1 in the Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO). You will describe your institution in the “Institutional Context and Benefit” section of the application narrative and in Attachment 2: Organizational profile. For specific instructions, see section D.2 of the NOFO.

During the review process, peer reviewers will consider the appropriateness of the Spotlight program for your institution or organization and the needs it addresses, among other review criteria. NEH staff will also consider the program’s purpose and intended audience when making funding recommendations. For more information see section E1. Review Criteria and E2. Review and Selection Process in the NOFO.

If Spotlight is not an appropriate program, 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. How do I know if a college or university is small or medium-sized?

To determine whether a college or university is small or medium-sized, find the institution using the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) [College Navigator](#). Two-year institutions with an undergraduate enrollment below 5,000, and four-year institutions with an undergraduate enrollment below 10,000 are considered small or medium-sized. These numbers align with the [Carnegie classification](#).

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

The Department of Education designates several categories of minority-serving institutions (MSI): Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU); Predominantly Black Institutions (PBI); Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSI); Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander-Serving Institutions (AANAPISI); Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCU); and Alaska Native-Serving and Native Hawaiian-Serving Institutions (ANNH), and Native American-Serving Nontribal Institutions (NASNTI). To determine a college or university’s MSI status, consult the Department of Education’s eligibility matrix, a spreadsheet which can be accessed here: <https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ope/ides/eligibility.html>. When viewing the spreadsheet, be sure to select the tab that corresponds to the institution’s minority-serving designation.

5. How do I know if a college or university is rural?

To determine whether an institution is a rural college or university, find the institution using the [College Navigator](#). Institutions whose campus setting is designated “rural,” “town: remote,” or “town: distant” meet this criterion. NCES’s [locale classifications](#) rely on standard designations defined by the U. S. Census Bureau.

6. How do I know if a college or university enrolls a majority of students receiving Pell grants?

To determine the percentage of Pell grant recipients, find the institution using the [College Navigator](#). Under the “Financial Aid” tab, find the “Percent Receiving Aid” in the Pell grants row. Institutions with more than 50% of students receiving Pell grants meet this criterion.

7. How do I know if my institution has received funding from the NEH Division of Education Programs since 2018?

To determine prior NEH grants awarded to your institution, use the Funded Projects Query Form on the NEH website: <https://securegrants.neh.gov/publicquery/main.aspx>. Enter your institution under “Organization name” and select “Education Programs” from the drop-down list under “Division/office.” If your institution has received no awards with a start date after 12/31/2018, your institution meets this criterion.

8. 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 devote 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.

9. 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.

Project content and design

10. What first steps should we take in developing a Spotlight grant 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 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.

11. 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.

For short summaries of potential projects, you may also see the "Sample projects" under section A1. Purpose in the NOFO.

12. I would like to create a new course in my humanities discipline. Would the development of this course be a strong basis for a Spotlight on Humanities in Higher Education project?

During the review process, peer reviewers will consider how your project meets institutional or organizational needs and how it would benefit students, faculty, the institution or organization, and/or the community. Creation of a single course could suffice as the focus of a Spotlight on Humanities in Higher Education project as long as it fulfills those criteria.

13. What distinguishes an Exploration proposal from a Development proposal?

Exploration-level grants of up to one year support preliminary work necessary to develop a future project and can include activities such as meetings and consultations within the institution or organization, and with outside experts and community members, in order to identify institutional needs and create plans to address them. Exploration proposals do not necessarily involve carrying out planned activities. Exploratory proposals should provide a reasonable amount of detail in describing your projected activities and the anticipated results.

Development-level proposals should include concrete plans, including a timetable and work plan, to advance a focused project over a period of up to two years.

14. What constitutes a good title for my project?

Your title should be brief (not exceeding 125 characters, including spaces and punctuation), descriptive of the project, and free of specialized language that might not be understood by the general public.

Avoid using a main title that requires clarification by the subtitle. For example, “Chaucer’s Canterbury Tales” is clearer than “Following the Pilgrims: Chaucer’s Canterbury Tales.”

Do not use the name of your institution or the name of the grant program to which you are applying in your title. For example, “Developing an Interdisciplinary Environmental Humanities Minor” is clearer than “George Washington University Humanities Connections Project.”

Use words and phrases that are informative and specific rather than puzzling or intriguing. For example, “The Civil Rights Movement in the United States, 1954-1968” is clearer than “Foot Soldiers for Liberation: The American Freedom Struggle.”

Omit technical terms, jargon, and unfamiliar words. For example, “Health and Disease in the Middle Ages” is clearer than “Paleopathology and Textual Analysis: Interrogating Medieval Epidemics.”

NEH reserves the right to re-title funded projects that do not follow agency guidelines. Award recipients, however, are permitted to use their preferred title for any award products.

15. May we continue the work of a currently funded project with a subsequent NEH award?

Yes, a project that has received or is currently receiving NEH support may apply for support for a new or subsequent stage of that project. NEH will not give these proposals special consideration and will judge them by the same criteria as others in the current competition. In addition, you must substantially update your project and must include a description of proposed activities and a new budget justification.

The [Humanities Initiatives](#) and [Humanities Connections](#) programs may be especially appropriate to fund further stages of a Spotlight project. See “Related Funding Opportunities,” under H. Other Information in the NOFO.

16. 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](#), [NEH-Mellon Fellowships for Digital Publication](#), [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.

17. 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. The grant administrator (also called the “institutional grant administrator”) functions as the representative of the recipient organization. This individual should have authority to act on the organization’s behalf in matters related to the administration of the award. The institutional grant administrator must sign or countersign financial reports and prior approval requests such as budget revisions, extensions to the period of performance, and changes in key personnel. NEH will address official correspondence (for example, the offer letter or Notice of Action) to the institutional grant administrator and copy 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 percent reduction in the time devoted to the project) requires prior written approval from NEH.

Budget

18. What types of costs may we include in our application budget?

You must only include costs in the budget that are directly related to the proposed project and allowable indirect costs. 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. List compensation for key personnel as a percentage of annual salary.

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. For example, you cannot use funds for travel unrelated to the project, or to promote a particular political, religious, or ideological point of view.

19. Can our project budget include course releases for participating faculty?

Yes, however, you must present them as compensation for the faculty contributing to time spent on the project rather than payments for replacement instructors. In your budget, list compensation for key personnel as a percentage of annual salary. 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

20. What help is available for preparing the proposal?

We encourage you to email spotlight@neh.gov to discuss your project ideas or submit draft proposals; 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.

21. 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.

Submitting your application via Grants.gov

22. 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. Always obtain a case number when calling for support.

23. 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

24. 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.

25. 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.