

BEYOND THE 50TH NEW DIRECTIONS AT NEH

A Report from Chairman William D. Adams | MARCH 2016

This year the National Endowment for the Humanities celebrates five decades of creative engagement with humanities scholars and organizations around the country. As we've recalled our diverse achievements, we've also been eager to turn our attention to the future. To that end, we've undertaken a comprehensive review of the agency's grantmaking programs. That review has been informed and enriched by extensive conversations with humanities leaders and organizations throughout the United States. These exchanges have affirmed the profound impact of NEH's work over time while revealing the changing landscape of humanities work both within and beyond the academic community.

As a result of our review, the Endowment is making some important changes to its grant lines, which we now wish to share with the humanities community.

Throughout this process, we've been mindful of three fundamental objectives. First, we want to make certain that our grantmaking is well aligned with current challenges and opportunities facing humanities scholars and organizations across the country; second, we want to ensure that NEH is encouraging underrepresented institutions and individuals within the humanities community to seek NEH support; and third, we want to make sure that we are providing meaningful and consequential support for the humanities ecosystem across the country.

Some of the most important challenges currently facing the humanities lie within the educational sector. At the graduate level, and in virtually every field in the humanities, new PhDs face an increasingly difficult job market, with fewer traditional teaching positions available to graduates. At the undergraduate level, many institutions are experiencing pressure on enrollments and majors in humanities subjects and disciplines. And, in secondary education, high school teachers and administrators are finding it harder to maintain robust programs and offerings in the arts and humanities.

These challenges arise from several sources. The lingering effects of the deep economic recession of 2008–09 continue to generate parental and student anxiety about job prospects for high school and college graduates. The recent developments in the STEM fields and the increasing importance of those developments in the American and world economies have fueled student migration to the STEM disciplines in colleges and universities. They are reshaping high school curricula as well. Stricter testing regimes in high schools have also contributed to the narrowing of offerings in the humanities.

At NEH we acknowledge these challenges and we wish to address them. At the graduate level, we will support and encourage doctoral programs that seek to prepare students for careers outside the academy, where greater opportunity resides. In the undergraduate realm, we will encourage innovation in the humanities curriculum, and particularly through initiatives that aim to integrate the humanities with STEM fields and professional programs.

Humanities communities and practices are flourishing in many places outside the educational sector. Museums and libraries and historic sites are more numerous and robust than ever, and the number of people benefiting from their programs continues to grow. These institutions are also discovering new forms of public engagement by taking their programs beyond their walls and out into public spaces. NEH will encourage initiatives that pursue these new forms of public engagement.

We also see important opportunities for the humanities to address the “grand challenges” that define this moment in American and, indeed, global history. For the truly important questions that we face are not essentially technical questions. Rather, they are questions that appear at the intersections of our history, culture, values, and ideas. The impact of technology on our lives and institutions is one such domain. Others include the stunning recent advances in gene-editing technology; the complex interplay between the need for security on the one hand and our commitment to liberty on the other; our relations with the natural world; race relations and immigration; and the legacies of war and conflict, including the important work of reintegrating veterans of recent wars into our communities.

We also know how vital the humanities are to American democracy. Democratic life and citizenship rest on a long tradition of political thought and aspiration. The central ideas and ideals of that tradition are not self-sustaining. They have to be engaged and reengaged, generation by generation, and fitted to the circumstances of the present day. And that requires engaging our history as well, for tradition is empty, or at best abstract, if it is not attached to the concrete ways in which it has been lived and tested and transformed over time. The democratic philosophical tradition and the complex history of American democracy are two sides of the same coin.

Democracy is also, and inevitably, about place—the country as a whole, but also the many specific places where American democratic life is realized and lived, in communities across the country. The humanities help us explore and understand the places we live in and where democracy is practiced.

And, so, even as we acknowledge the difficult challenges that currently confront the humanities, we are also impressed by the abundant opportunities that exist for demonstrating their relevance and continuing power. We believe that our grantmaking can make a difference in how fully we realize those opportunities. What follows is a brief summary of the most important recent changes to our grant lines. More detailed descriptions will be available in program descriptions and application guidelines posted on our [website](#).

Last year we announced a new initiative called **The Common Good: The Humanities in the Public Square®**. Under the rubric of this program, and across the spectrum of NEH programs and humanities disciplines, NEH is urging scholars, educators, and organizations to take up the challenge of connecting the insights of the humanities with the pressing concerns of public life in our democracy—from the meaning of citizenship to the ethical dilemmas posed by new technologies and the impact of recent wars on American life and the lives of veterans. In the words of NEH’s charter legislation, “democracy demands wisdom and vision in its citizens.” Fifty years after its founding, NEH remains deeply committed to supporting projects that engage Americans in productive thinking and dialogue about where our country has been, who we are as a people, and where we are headed in the future. These dialogues are necessarily shaped by the humanities—by the study of history, culture, ideas, and values.

The humanities community, including especially the state humanities councils, has responded to the launch of **The Common Good** with enthusiasm and creativity. We are also enormously pleased by the ways in which our existing grant programs have been able to incorporate the purposes of **The Common Good** into their work. We are hopeful that future Congressional appropriations will give us additional resources with which to pursue the work of **The Common Good**.

Humanities research has been fundamental to NEH’s mission. It will continue to be a core commitment and key priority at NEH, and our **Division of Research** will continue to respond creatively to changes in humanities fields and to encourage humanities scholars to address areas of new opportunity. Early last year, NEH announced the **Public Scholar Program**, which supports well-researched projects in the humanities intended to reach a broad readership. The first round of that program was very successful, and we look forward to making awards in the second round in July of this year. We’re also proud to announce a new collaboration with the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, **NEH-Mellon Fellowships for Digital Publication**, aimed at encouraging and supporting individual scholars’ research projects designed primarily for digital media—so-called born-digital projects.

This digital research initiative complements efforts we’ve been making in our **Office of Digital Humanities** to encourage digital innovation in humanities research, preservation, and now publication. Last year, the division partnered with the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation in launching **Humanities Open Book Program**, which is designed to make outstanding out-of-print humanities books accessible to a wide audience. By taking advantage of low-cost e-book technology, the program will allow teachers, students, scholars, and the public to read humanities books that have long been out of print, free of charge. The Office of Digital Humanities is also exploring a new **Digital Culture Institute** that would take place in the summer of 2017.

Humanities research knows no boundaries, and American scholars are increasingly doing their research in collaboration with peers from around the world. In order to help promote international research, NEH has joined the **Trans-Atlantic Partnership (T-AP)**, a group of humanities and social science funders from 12 nations. T-AP’s goal is to bring the best researchers from around the world together to work on cutting-edge projects. For 2016, NEH’s Office of Digital Humanities is working with T-AP to expand a longstanding NEH program,

the **Digging into Data Challenge**, to all 12 T-AP nations. NEH anticipates contributing about \$750,000 to this program, which will leverage about \$9,000,000 in contributions from our international partners. This will enable U.S. researchers to participate in major international projects that could not be funded solely by NEH.

Since early in our history, NEH's **Division of Education** has been deeply invested in professional development opportunities for college faculty and high school teachers through our Summer Seminars and Institutes program. We know from surveys, staff visits, and program directors' meetings that these programs have been on the whole enormously successful. But we also know that the professional demands and lives of faculty and teachers are changing, and we believe that our **Summer Seminars and Institutes** program must keep pace with that change.

In the interest of stimulating broader participation in these programs, Summer Seminars and Institutes may now be as short as one week (two weeks was previously the shortest period), and the longest programs will be limited to four weeks (five weeks was previously the longest period). Additionally, seminars for college and university faculty must now include three or more non-tenure-track/adjunct faculty members; institutes for college and university faculty must now include five or more non-tenure-track/adjunct faculty members.

In an effort to reach new audiences of both faculty and students, NEH recently launched a program supporting **Humanities Initiatives at Community Colleges**. Over half of all students in higher education in the United States are now enrolled in community colleges, and, according to recent statistics published by Humanities Indicators, the community college sector is the only sector in American higher education where humanities concentrations are growing. NEH intends to invest more heavily in this sector, beginning with grants that will be announced in late March of this year.

Using historic sites to address central themes and issues in American history, government, literature, art, music, and related subjects in the humanities, NEH's **Landmarks of American History and Culture** program supports a series of one-week workshops for K-12 educators. In an effort to accommodate teachers who may not have the flexibility to travel far from their home institutions, applicants may now propose workshops in which one of the weeks serves a national audience and the other week serves local participants who commute.

To help address the worrisome recent trends in the number of undergraduates enrolling in humanities courses and majoring in humanities subjects at colleges and universities across the country, NEH will launch a program this month supporting curricular innovation in the humanities in undergraduate institutions. Grants made through this program, tentatively titled **Humanities Connections**, will encourage cross-disciplinary and inter-disciplinary initiatives, including initiatives integrating the humanities with STEM fields and professional programs.

In 2014, NEH launched **Standing Together: The Humanities and the Experience of War**. As part of this initiative, NEH recently announced a new grant opportunity in the **Education Division** titled **Dialogues on the Experience of War**. The program supports the study and discussion of important

humanities sources about war in the belief that these sources can help U.S. military veterans and others think more deeply about the issues raised by war and military service.

For many years, NEH has sponsored **Challenge Grants** that fortify programming and fundraising capacity at humanities organizations through grants for capital projects and endowment. After careful review, we have decided to make a number of fundamental changes to this program.

In recent years, we've learned that humanities PhDs pursue careers in many different professions—both inside and outside the academy. Yet most humanities PhD programs in the United States still prepare students primarily for tenure-track teaching positions at colleges and universities. The increasing shortage of such positions has changed students' expected career outcomes. Through the new **Next Generation Humanities PhD Planning Grants** and **Next Generation PhD Implementation Grants**, NEH will assist universities and graduate programs in devising new models of doctoral education, which can both transform the understanding of what it means to be a humanities scholar and promote the integration of the humanities with the public sphere. Both of these programs expect to make their first awards in July of this year.

The **Office of Challenge Grants** will make awards in two additional new programs this fall and early next year. **Creating Humanities Communities Grants** will provide matching endowment-building grants to help stimulate humanities programming in states previously underserved by NEH's grantmaking. **Humanities Access Grants** will support capacity-building for humanities programs that focus on youth, communities of color, and economically disadvantaged populations. These new programs will replace current Challenge Grants offerings.

NEH's Division of Public Programs continues to bring the best of the humanities to broad public audiences through its support of cultural institutions and media productions. The robust response to our recent call for proposals for **Humanities in the Public Square** tells us that communities across the nation are hungry to come together to discuss the critical issues that are facing them as citizens and neighbors. Building on the success of this grant competition, the Public Programs Division will announce a new program to support projects that engage diverse residents in creatively addressing community challenges, guided by the perspectives of the humanities. Funded projects will draw on the power of the humanities to offer useful perspectives on difficult and complex questions facing Americans as members of communities and as citizens.

NEH's **Division of Preservation and Access** is committed to preserving and sharing the country's cultural heritage and legacy. As part of the agency's **The Common Good** initiative, a new Preservation and Access program, **Common Heritage**, will push our preservation efforts into new terrain. America's cultural heritage is preserved not only in libraries, museums, archives, and other community organizations, but also in all of our homes, family histories, and life stories. The Common Heritage program aims to capture this vitally important part of our country's heritage and preserve it for future generations. Common Heritage will support both the digitization of cultural heritage materials and the organization of public programming at community events that explore these materials as a window on a community's history and culture. As part of the agency's

Standing Together initiative, the **Humanities Collections and Reference Resources** program within Preservation and Access is encouraging oral histories of veterans and their families.

Preservation and Access is also launching a new opportunity within the **Preservation Education and Training** grant program to support post-graduate fellowships for emerging preservation professionals. These fellowships are aimed at bridging the gap between completion of graduate training and full-time employment by providing specialized training in preventive conservation and preservation services.

The **Office of Federal/State Partnership** is reviewing the means by which it evaluates the work of the 56 state and jurisdictional humanities councils that receive federal funding through NEH. Through this review, we hope to strengthen the evaluation process and reinforce the outstanding work of the councils.

The number and scope of the changes described above would not have been possible without the concerted and thoughtful efforts of NEH staff, and especially the staff in our grantmaking divisions. Beyond these specific initiatives, the success of NEH since its founding is likewise a tribute to the many people who have ensured the rigor, relevance, and quality of our programs over time. The stellar reputation of the agency and the impact it has had on the humanities and on the country is the extraordinary legacy of these committed and talented individuals.

As we celebrate our past accomplishments, we are equally excited by the prospects for the future. And we are confident that NEH will remain a leading force in the preservation of the country's cultural heritage and in the full and productive engagement of the humanities with the circumstances of contemporary life. Keeping faith with the original charge in our enabling legislation—that “the humanities belong to all the people of the United States”—is the key both to our history and to our aspirations for the future.

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 National Endowment for the Humanities



Founded in 1965, the National Endowment for the Humanities is an independent grantmaking agency of the United States government, dedicated to supporting research, education, preservation, and public programs in the humanities.