

“We all have a very strong case for philanthropic support”
from the May 2013 Federal/State Partnership e-newsletter

Although information about the amounts of the General Operating Support grants to state humanities councils has finally gone out, we commend the good spirits and patience that councils have shown as they have waited over seven months past the start of the 2014 federal fiscal year to be able to finalize their own annual budgets.

In the meantime, the sense of we-can-do-it that has come from councils is inspiring. You may have already seen these emails on the various "hum" groups, but they tell a wonderful story when they're all put together, in a slightly edited version.

April 5: Chris Sommerich, [Nebraska Humanities](#), responding to Edie Manza's email "No details available yet on FY 2013 general support funding"

I am incredibly grateful to be in a situation where our state council is full speed ahead on all program fronts despite this delay of NEH funding. This is because of private donations, endowment funds, and the knowledge that we currently have 8 months of operating reserves built up over time from unrestricted donations. This all started way before me or anyone currently on our staff or board. It has been built up over nearly two decades, and now the culture of philanthropy we have nurtures itself and continues to grow.

My point here is that this situation with our NEH funding is just one more example of the need to take a hold of our destiny by raising private money and building other revenue streams. I'm amazed by the great work taking place in one form or another in all 56 councils, and in quite a few cases that includes impressive fundraising programs, so I don't for a second think Nebraska is a superior council. We all have a very strong case for philanthropic support and we ALL can get there!

April 15: Kathleen Gardner, [Utah Humanities Council](#)

I have the same question! I just think that corporations are taking care of corporations for the most part. Isn't it obvious in the national trends?

April 15: Rachel Dutcher, [Humanities Council of Washington, DC](#)

While it may appear that corporations are not interested in supporting nonprofits, the truth is that in a shaky economy they just have less dollars to go around. Corporate philanthropy offices are the first ones to be cut during a downturn and the last to be revived. Still, there are dollars to be had from this support.

Corporate support tends to be local and completely insular. The best way to gain corporate support is to go to your board. Leverage their contacts. What bank do they use? Do they have connections to construction firms? Do they work with consultants? Asking board members these key questions can lead to connections they have that you never knew about. Then you need the board member to invite that corporate contact to an event to see your organization in action, or to go with you to meet with this contact to solicit for funds directly.

April 16: Kristen Fuhs Wells, [Indiana Humanities](#)

Corporate support is always something we're working on here in Indiana as well and we've been able to find some success with sponsorship opportunities for events with niche audiences and our traveling exhibits or teacher toolkits, more so than a lecture series that

might appeal to broad audiences, for example. We agree with Rachel – for us it’s all about local companies and finding someone who knows someone to make an introduction if need be. We are very careful when “pitching” sponsorships to match companies up with specific initiatives that further their goals. Sometimes we find the perfect match!

Here are a few examples:

Farm Credit Mid-America sponsored a book tour for *Food for Thought: An Indiana Harvest* last fall which paid for travel expenses for the author and photographer. This was a true partnership that provided us with more than financial support. Their employees across the state embraced the book and the people highlighted in it by promoting and attending the events.

For our *Spirit of Competition* traveling exhibit, we received support as an “Innovation” sponsor of the exhibit by Eli Lilly & Company. This was a perfect match as the company (headquartered in Indianapolis) is focused on innovation, and innovation is one of 5 core elements of the exhibit. As a result of the sponsorship we included a piece in the exhibit about the founder – Colonel Eli Lilly – who was a natural fit for the exhibit anyway, and the company provided documents and artifacts from its museum.

In addition, a corporate sponsor of the exhibit’s accompanying teacher toolkits was a local utility company.

Our biggest success at recruiting multiple sponsors was a few years ago was when we held “A Conversation with Anthony Bourdain and Eric Ripert” in conjunction with our *Food for Thought* program. We received several sponsors at various levels – from law firms and architecture firms to a culinary school. We created a VIP event prior to the main event that they received tickets to, in addition to tickets for the actual event, ad space in a program, and more.

One of the things we try to do is over-communicate with our sponsors by providing updates on our progress (and a full report at the end of the sponsorship), inviting them to attend special events and thanking them throughout the sponsorship.

April 16: Kathleen Gardener, [Utah Humanities Council](#)

It sounds like many of you are having great success, and I appreciate your reports. I think the key IS having board members who are willing to help with corporate prospects.