



NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE  
**Humanities**

**DIVISION OF PRESERVATION AND ACCESS**

**HUMANITIES  
COLLECTIONS AND  
REFERENCE RESOURCES**

**FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS**

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**What are the humanities?**

According to the 1965 National Foundation on the Arts and the Humanities Act, “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 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.”

**May a non-U.S. institution or organization apply for a grant?**

NEH does not provide support to foreign institutions or organizations. However, American institutions may apply for cooperative projects involving U.S. and foreign organizations. If you are interested in submitting an application for a project involving international collaboration, please consult beforehand with the staff of the division.

**If I receive NEH funding, may I also accept money from other sources?**

Yes. Applicants are encouraged to seek other financial support. We do ask that you tell us about proposals to other funding sources, so that we can better understand the project’s financial picture.

**If I intend to request additional NEH funding to continue my project, do I have to describe the project anew or will evaluators have access to the earlier grant proposal?**

NEH treats all applications as new applications. Evaluators will not have access to the previous application; therefore, proposals for renewed funding must discuss the project anew. Be sure to describe the work accomplished with previous NEH funding and be clear about the specific activities and products of the new grant.

### **Who will read my grant application?**

Outside evaluators will usually include a mix of professionals such as museum curators, librarians, archivists, and administrators of cultural organizations, as well as scholars who use the kinds of collections or reference resources that are the focus of your project. NEH staff also comments on matters of fact or on significant issues that otherwise would be missing from the reviews of outside evaluators and then makes recommendations to the National Council on the Humanities. The National Council meets at various times during the year to advise the NEH chairman on grants. The chairman takes into account the advice provided by the review process and, by law, makes all funding decisions.

### **What should I consider in discussing my project's significance to the humanities?**

Do not assume that the project's significance to research, education, or public programming will be evident to readers. For projects to preserve and make humanities collections accessible, provide specific examples of important documents or artifacts in the collections and describe how the collections have been used or could be used once they are made accessible. If you are proposing a reference work or research tool, discuss the need for the product and give examples of studies or activities that would be served by it.

### **What kind of detail should be included in the work plan?**

Explain the tasks for the project's staff and provide a schedule for the completion of the work, which may be presented as a narrative or a chart. Depending on the project, the description of the work plan may be organized by type or duration of activity (e.g., three- or six-month intervals). The plan should be presented in enough detail to demonstrate that you have thoroughly considered each step of the project and that you are ready to begin. By describing in detail the responsibilities of the project's personnel, you will justify the corresponding allocation of staff time, as shown in the project's budget, and the qualifications and experience required of the project's staff, as reflected in résumés and job descriptions.

### **Where can I find further information about "standards" and "best practices"?**

Applicants may find the following links helpful in planning the execution of projects. Because NEH does not prescribe specific methodologies or standards, our guidance in this regard is only indicative.

- [\*Audiovisual Self-Assessment Program\*](#) (University of Illinois Library, 2010)
- [\*Capturing Analog Sound for Digital Preservation: Report of a Roundtable Discussion of Best Practices for Transferring Analog Discs and Tapes\*](#) (Council on Library and Information Resources, "CLIR Report," 2006)
- [\*Cataloging Cultural Objects: A Guide to Describing Cultural Works and their Images\*](#) (Visual Resources Association, 2006)

- [\*Digital Preservation Management: Implementing Short-Term Strategies for Long-Term Solutions\*](#) (Cornell University/University of Michigan, ICPSR)
- [\*A Framework of Guidance for Building Good Digital Collections\*](#) (National Information Standards Organization, 3rd edition, 2007)
- [\*Meeting the Challenge of Media Preservation: Strategies and Solutions\*](#) (Indiana University, Media Preservation Initiative Task Force, 2011)
- [\*Moving Image “Guidelines, Manuals, Q & A’s, and Fact Sheets”\*](#) (Association of Moving Image Archivists)
- [\*The NINCH Guide to Good Practice in the Digital Representation and Management of Cultural Heritage Materials\*](#) (National Initiative for a Networked Cultural Heritage, and the Humanities Advanced Technology and Information Institute (HATII), University of Glasgow, 2002)
- [\*Preservation Leaflets\*](#) (Northeast Document Conservation Center)
- [\*Sound Directions: Best Practices for Audio Preservation\*](#) (Indiana University Digital Library Program, updated April 2008)
- [\*Standards at the Library of Congress -- resource description, digital library standards\*](#) (LC, updated December 2008)
- [\*Taking Stock and Making Hay: Archival Collections Assessment\*](#) (OCLC Research, 2011)
- [\*TEI Guidelines\*](#) (The Text Encoding Initiative Consortium)

### **How important is it for my project to be “collaborative”?**

Applications may address the holdings or activities of a single institution or may involve collaboration. *However*, inter- and/or intra-institutional partnerships often help ensure that proposed activities are achievable and will have maximum impact for the humanities. Collaboration can be crucial in providing the appropriate mix of humanities content and methodological expertise and can help broaden the scope of, and audiences for, proposed collections or reference resources. It can be especially important in cases where an institution holds important humanities material but lacks the capacity to undertake the project by itself. Collaboration is also vital for almost any type of reference resource.

### **If I am applying for a grant to process a collection and put the finding aid on the Internet, do I need to mark up the finding aid using Encoded Archival Description (EAD)?**

No, but applicants who do not intend to use EAD should explain why. EAD facilitates the searchability and interoperability of archival information on the Internet. NEH has supported the development of EAD and encourages applicants to use it in creating Internet-accessible archival finding aids.

**May I combine activities to arrange and describe a collection and to digitize portions of it?**

Yes, this is permissible, as is proposing to do these activities individually. Whether or not a hybrid approach is best will depend on many factors, including the volume of the materials, their format and condition, their current state of intellectual and physical control, and, of course, their significance for humanities use. Be sure to explain the rationale for your approach, taking care to demonstrate that the proposed outcomes will meet identifiable user needs.

**Should I have consultants and a board of advisers set up and committed before I apply?**

Yes. Many projects require early consultation with scholarly advisers and technical experts to plan for the implementation. This is a major thrust of the new *Foundations* opportunity. The collaboration of highly qualified and experienced individuals makes it more likely that evaluators will endorse an application.

**We would like to seek a *Foundations* grant. Must we engage advisers outside our own institution?**

This grant program seeks to support planning, assessment, and pilot projects that bring together a variety of experts, including humanities scholars, archivists, curators, librarians, preservation specialists, and digital curation/preservation experts, as pertinent to your goals. Although the most important consideration is to assemble a qualified team appropriate to the project, panelists tend to look favorably on teams that include experts from both within and beyond your institution.

**Is completion of a *Foundations* grant project a prerequisite for a larger request in this grant program?**

No. You do not have to progress from a *Foundations* grant to a standard HCRR project. But implementation projects should always be based on sound planning. Support for that planning might come from NEH, from other federal or foundation grants, or from an institution's own funds.

**I see that *Foundations* awards require awardees to submit a “white paper.” What is this?**

The white paper is intended to serve as an opportunity to share widely any best practices and lessons learned from your project. As such, please keep your colleagues in related humanities fields and preservation and access communities closely in mind as you prepare it. There are no requirements for length; be guided by the scope and scale of the project itself. Appendices and links containing pilot products are critically important for assuring the broad impact and utility of your case study. Further information on the nature of these and other grant reports can be found in the NEH directive on [Performance Reporting Requirements](#).

**I understand that NEH supports preservation planning through another grant program, Preservation Assistance Grants for Smaller Institutions (PAG). How does NEH differentiate planning supported through PAG from *Foundations* grants?**

PAGs offer up to \$6,000 to support basic planning for preservation, including a general preservation assessment—the survey that starts an institution on a sound path toward preserving its collections. PAGs also support the establishment of environmental monitoring programs, the purchase of dataloggers and light meters, and small-scale rehousing projects. By contrast, *Foundations* awards support assessments of humanities collections that focus on evaluating the intellectual significance of the material and identifying the next steps to be taken to make collections more fully available. This process often incorporates documenting the conservation needs of particular collections so as to establish such plans, but not as its exclusive focus. As a general rule, *Foundations* grants are best suited for more multifaceted projects that require a team of specialists.

### **What are indirect costs?**

These are costs that are incurred for common or joint objectives and therefore cannot be readily assigned to a specific project or activity of an organization. Items that would be regarded as indirect costs include the salaries of executive officers, the costs of operating and maintaining facilities, local telephone service, office supplies, and accounting and legal services. Indirect costs are computed by applying a federally negotiated indirect-cost rate to a distribution base (usually the direct costs of the project). Please attach a copy of your institution's current federally negotiated indirect cost rate agreement to the budget form.

### **Should I submit sample materials as an appendix to the application's narrative?**

Yes. Samples of descriptive records greatly assist evaluators in assessing the quality of a project's bibliographic product. A lengthy finding aid should not be included in its entirety, but it is advisable to include a scope and content note and several pages of folder level descriptions. Several sample catalog records or other relevant bibliographic items should be appended, as appropriate. Sample entries, records, the results of specific database queries, etc., can let evaluators draw conclusions about the significance of a proposed reference work or resource, the accuracy of the information presented, and the quality of editorial work. Reviewers will be reading several applications, so you are urged to make the appendices as short as possible, by including only material that is directly relevant to the proposed activity. Because evaluators receive all applications in electronic form, you may wish in some cases to use hyperlinks to relevant websites within the body of the narrative.

### **Whom should I ask to provide letters of support?**

Letters of support should come from persons who can objectively assess the importance of the project to the humanities. Writers may include people who know or have used the collections in question and who can attest to the need for the proposed reference work or research tool. They should not be project participants or employees of the applicant institution. Also, the letters should be submitted to the project director (not separately to NEH) and submitted with the application.

### **My application was unsuccessful. Is there anything I may do to increase my chances for success next time?**

You may request copies of the comments by evaluators. A revised application should take into consideration the issues that they raised. However, a resubmitted application will be reviewed by persons who will not have knowledge of or access to the previous application file.