



NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE

Humanities

OFFICE OF COMMUNICATIONS

---

## FACT SHEET: Digital Funding at the National Endowment for the Humanities

---

*With more than half of American adults and four-in-five young adults now estimated to play digital games on a regular basis, NEH's funding of games is increasingly important to our goal of providing strong humanities programming to a wide American public.*

-- NEH Chairman William D. Adams

---

### BACKGROUND

- To date, the National Endowment for the Humanities has invested more than \$2 million in digital games.
  - In a field dominated by STEM learning, humanities-based gaming has an emphasis on reflection, contextual understanding and situated learning environments.
  - These funds have supported a variety of independent projects from institutions as diverse as universities, small production houses and public broadcasters.
  - Games and other digital platforms such as mobile applications offer audiences a unique way to experience the humanities more directly and interactively
  - Many NEH-funded digital projects, especially games, have both on-site and on-line components.
  - NEH digital projects have received numerous accolades over the years, including several prestigious 'Best Of' awards.
- NEH is a federal agency established in 1965 that awards grants for humanities projects that advance understanding and appreciation of history, literature, philosophy and language.
  - The NEH awards humanities grants to museums, libraries, colleges and universities, archives, historical societies, filmmakers, radio and television producers, independent researchers, educators, game designers and others.
- The NEH has funded digital projects in the humanities nearly since the agency's inception.

- NEH's first grant to the field, awarded in 1967 to the University of Pittsburgh, was to explore the possibilities of applying computer science to the humanities.
- NEH grant support has gone to a wide range of tools and public-facing digital humanities projects, from websites to video games to mobile applications.
  - Many NEH-funded games bring with them often substantial materials and guidelines (including lesson plans) for their classroom integration and use.
- NEH has seen an increase in applications for digital projects -- including for humanities-based games -- because of the multiple levels of support NEH offers a project, from conceptualization to testing to production and distribution.
- NEH is the largest public funder of digital humanities projects and offers grants through the following programs:

**DIGITAL PROJECTS FOR THE PUBLIC\***

Project Stage	Description	Amount
Discovery	Small, early stage consultation grants	Up to \$30,000
Prototyping	Supports proof-of-concept work	Up to \$100,000
Production	Final stage completion and outreach	Up to \$400,000

\*The NEH Division of Public Programs also awards grants for supplemental support for: 1) digital components tied to a film, TV or radio show in the Media Projects grant line, and 2) for exhibit-related digital components in our Public Humanities Projects grant line.

**DIGITAL ADVANCEMENT HUMANITIES GRANTS\***

Level	Amount
Level 1	Up to \$40,000
Level 2	Up to \$75,000
Level 3	Up to \$325,000

\*The NEH Office of Digital Humanities awards these grants to support innovative and experimental projects that push the boundaries of humanities research and development

## GAMING AND THE HUMANITIES

- Gaming in the humanities, and in history in particular, can be challenging because it considers the ways that individual player agency can be brought to bear on interpreting a series of seemingly ‘fixed’ events.
  - But this individual player agency is also its strongest draw: when players are given the opportunity to explore historical contingency through their own choices in a game, deeper contextual understandings of the events emerge in the process.
  - Recent research into the efficacy of game-based learning and content engagement has shown that humanities subjects such as history outpace STEM learning in game-based environments because of the ability of games to provide contextual understandings (whereas most STEM games are goal or skill-based, such as learning algebra).
  - *Walden, A Game*, for example, is playable online but also on-site at Walden Pond itself, where there are multiple opportunities for the audience to experience the interplay between the virtual and the real.
  - *The Pox Hunter* works similarly through a partnership with The Mutter Museum of The College of Physicians of Philadelphia that installed the project on-site at the museum while also drawing artifacts directly from its collection for use in the game.
- Games like *Mission US* integrate scholarly research on different time periods with the intimate perspectives of the individuals involved, letting us see the many large—and small—choices that can influence the course of history.
  - *Mission US*’s success is a result of this dynamic: the game now boasts an audience of more than one million unique users and has substantial classroom penetration in all 50 states, with an additional growing body of casual and international players.
- NEH is also supporting a new generation of producers and designers through these projects, including Tracy Fullerton, winner of the prestigious 2015 Game Changer award from the Games for Change Festival and the 2016 Game Developers Conference Ambassador award.
  - NEH’s portfolio as a whole seems to upend larger industry trends: in an industry dominated by male producers, the majority of the lead producers/designers of NEH digital game projects are women.

# # #