



NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE
Humanities

DIVISION OF PUBLIC PROGRAMS

**DIGITAL PROJECTS FOR
THE PUBLIC**

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

1. Humanities content and advisers

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.”

What are “humanities themes”?

A theme is a brief interpretive assertion about a topic that shows the educational direction that a project will take. More than a topic, a theme considers the relevant humanities scholarship and offers a broad conceptual framework for understanding material. For example, “Women in the Civil War” is a topic. It describes a subject but does not reveal what the interpretive approach to it would be. On the other hand, “Women played important economic roles during the Civil War” is a theme. It identifies a topic and also suggests what audiences might learn about it.

What is a humanities scholar?

Someone who has an advanced degree in a discipline of the humanities is generally considered a scholar. Scholars can provide context for a project and identify relevant humanities themes and ideas.

When should I start consulting with scholars about a project?

As a general rule, the earlier scholars are involved in a project, the better. Projects recommended for funding are usually ones in which scholars have helped shape the project's conceptual framework. Discovery grants are designed to support scholarly involvement from a project's outset.

Is it okay to rely on a single scholar for a project?

Projects that depend on input from a single scholar are not competitive. Working with a number of scholars allows projects to explore a diverse range of interpretive possibilities.

How do I find the right scholarly advisers for a project?

There are many ways to find scholars for your project. Check with your local college or university to see if any faculty members have relevant expertise or could suggest the names of other scholars. You can also peruse bookstores (either real or online), libraries, and Web resources to see who has published on topics related to your project. [State humanities councils](#) often maintain lists of scholars who have participated in public programs. You can also contact professional associations or consult published directories of scholars.

How much should I pay scholarly advisers?

There is no set fee for scholars and other professionals working on your project. Some projects pay scholars a flat honorarium, others pay a daily rate. Discuss your project with the scholars, including the work that you expect from them, and negotiate a fair rate.

2. General information on digital grants

What advice do you have for applicants to strengthen their applications?

The project must fall within the fields of the humanities and accord with the [purpose and goals of NEH](#). NEH does not give general support for digital platforms exclusive of content but instead seeks to fund projects that will best bring humanities content to public audiences.

What are the most common mistakes that applicants make?

Applicants often fail to provide as much information as evaluators expect. Applicants must discuss the project in considerable detail, articulating clearly their concept for the project and the humanities issues that the project deals with, even when the proposal is for a Discovery grant. Applicants should have done considerable research on the subject and consulted with scholars about their ideas; they should also explain the scholars' contributions in the proposal.

In addition, applicants sometimes propose projects that fit poorly with the aims of the Digital Projects for the Public program. For example, the program does not fund projects that primarily seek to produce digital archives or online repositories for materials. All projects must present a clear interpretive framework and analysis that incorporates recent scholarship. They must also present this content so as to interest and attract a general public audience.

What advice do you give applicants who have less digital experience but have worthy humanities projects?

Less experienced applicants frequently find it advantageous to form a partnership with a more seasoned digital team. Discovery grants can help to support these partnerships from the earliest stages of a project, whether they are in the form of consultations with well-established digital media teams or collaborations that result in the sharing of platforms or code.

What distinguishes Discovery, Prototyping, and Production grant applications from one another?

Discovery grant applications outline the initial work to be done on a project, ranging from early-stage consultations with humanities scholars and digital experts, to content research and narrative development and platform design, to audience evaluation and platform selection. This is the stage at which the humanities ideas and technology should come together. In order to be successful at the Discovery level, the project team members should have a solid grasp of the content and collections with which they will work (and should be looking for a platform to engage the content). Alternatively, the project team members should have chosen a subject and a platform (and should be looking to interpret the humanities content). In both cases, the project team must include both content experts and media experts. The culmination of a [Discovery grant](#) (PDF) is the production of a [design document](#) (PDF) that describes both the humanities content itself and the technical and creative details of the platform(s) that will support it.

[Prototyping grant](#) (PDF) applications, by contrast, require a full [design document](#) (PDF) as *part of* the application package. Prototyping grant applicants will have already refined and vetted the humanities content of the project with their scholarly team, and chosen a specific digital approach to the content that best suits the audience's needs. Prototyping grants culminate in the testing and creation of a proof-of-concept digital prototype that best displays the key features and humanities content of the project.

[Production grant](#) (PDF) applications require a working prototype from the project that best demonstrates how the humanities content will be conveyed to an audience. Production applications also need to detail the steps that the applicants will take to build from the prototype, complete the project, and make it available to the public. Production grant applicants should therefore discuss late-stage user testing, de-bugging, and design, as well as audience outreach, public programming, and publicity for the project.

Do I need to use innovative or experimental technology for this program?

Not necessarily. A competitive application in the Digital Projects for the Public grant program will utilize platforms and approaches that best serve the chosen content and reach their targeted audiences in an accessible and engaging manner. Innovative technologies are encouraged only insofar as they serve this goal; we do not fund projects that seek only to develop or produce platforms. (Please see the [Digital Humanities Advancement Grants](#) program if your project primarily involves content-agnostic platform creation.)

What is a “transmedia” project?

A transmedia project utilizes multiple platforms—from games to film to mobile applications—to create narrative experiences that are impossible to replicate in any one technology. For a transmedia project to be successful, it must be planned as such from the outset, with each platform’s unique content and features contributing to a coherent whole. The term “transmedia” designates an approach to content and its distribution that combines multiple platforms as a creative palette for engaging an audience more deeply than could be done through a single platform.

Will this grant fund resources for students and teachers?

Projects should be geared mainly for public audiences, and the project budget and activities should reflect this focus on producing programs for general public audiences. However, a project can include resources that help students and teachers explore the humanities content and themes central to the project. Such resources might include classroom-specific hands-on activities, lesson plans, scholarly essays, maps, and/or timelines.

3. Submitting an application

Must I submit my application through Grants.gov?

Yes, you must submit your application through Grants.gov.

Be sure to read the [document](#) (PDF) that explains how to confirm that you successfully submitted your application. It is your responsibility as an applicant to confirm that Grants.gov and subsequently NEH have accepted your application.

If I am an individual producer unaffiliated with a nonprofit organization, may I still receive Digital Projects for the Public grant?

No. Digital Projects for the Public grants are awarded only to U.S. nonprofit, 501(c)(3) tax-exempt organizations, state and local governmental agencies, and federally recognized Indian tribal governments. But many cultural organizations, media arts centers, public radio stations, public television stations, and universities serve as sponsors of the projects of independent producers and may be willing to sponsor your project. Independent producers who wish to apply for NEH funding must have obtained sponsorship by an eligible organization before submitting an application. Please contact a program officer for a list of recent grantees, which includes examples of nonprofit organizations that were awarded grants. For further information on the specific responsibilities of sponsorship organizations, please see [Requirements for Grant Recipients that Serve as Sponsors of Projects](#).

May the same project director or producer submit an application for two different projects at the same time?

Yes. In each application clearly explain how you would allocate your time if you were awarded more than one grant.

May the same project director apply for funds two years in a row?

Yes. Applicants may even revise and resubmit a proposal that was not recommended for funding. All applicants may request the evaluators' assessments of their proposal. This information is useful as you continue working on the project and decide whether to resubmit.

When I apply through Grants.gov, how should I submit my sample (and, for a Production application, my prototype)?

Please refer to the instructions in the guidelines under "How to submit samples (and, for Production applications, prototypes)" in Section III, "Submitting your Application."

How do the application deadlines work? Are they receipt or postmark?

All deadlines are receipt deadlines. ALL supporting materials must arrive at NEH or be entered into Grants.gov by these dates.

4. Budget and grant funds

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

Yes. We encourage applicants to approach a range of funders, as it is unlikely that NEH can support the full costs of a single program or series of programs.

Do I need to have already raised money from other sources in order to be competitive for an NEH grant?

No.

5. Distribution

What expectations does NEH have for the distribution of a project?

NEH-funded projects should be offered for broad distribution to the widest possible audience. For Digital Projects for the Public grants, this means that the project's technologies/ platforms/ approaches should be accessible to a wide audience. Projects that make use of technologies, platforms, or approaches that require significant audience investment are discouraged. Furthermore, as a taxpayer-supported federal agency, NEH endeavors to make the products of its awards available to the broadest possible audience. Our goal is for scholars, educators, students, and the American public to have ready and easy access to the wide range of NEH award products. All other considerations being equal, NEH gives preference to those projects that provide free access to the public and employ the most accessible technologies.