DIVISION OF **PRESERVATION AND ACCESS**

HUMANITIES COLLECTIONS AND REFERENCE RESOURCES

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

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 direct support to foreign institutions or organizations. However, American institutions may apply for cooperative projects involving U.S. and foreign organizations; subcontracts to such organizations are permitted. 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. Please use the "History of Grants" section of the application to list any support that you have already received for this specific project. (You need not include grants from other sources for funding unrelated to the proposed project.)

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 may 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. More details about NEH's review process are available here.

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 (for example, 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.

How important is it for my project to involve collaboration between institutions?

Applications may address the holdings or activities of a single institution or may involve collaboration between institutions. *However*, even in the case of single-institution projects, working with specialists in other offices or departments or colleagues in other institutions often helps 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 in which an institution

holds important humanities material but lacks the capacity to undertake the project by itself; support for this type of collaboration is addressed in the "Partnership/mentorship opportunity" at the *Foundations* level. Collaboration is also vital for almost any type of reference resource.

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 separately. 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.

As part of my project, may I translate materials to provide wider access to relevant audiences?

Yes, so long as this work is being conducted *in the service of* an effort to create access to humanities collections or to produce reference resources. Projects focused solely on translation are not eligible for support. Those seeking funds to translate and to annotate humanities works should consult the Scholarly Editions and Translations program in the Division of Research Programs.

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

Yes. It is not mandatory to set up a board of advisers. Nevertheless, many projects benefit from early consultation with scholarly advisers and technical experts to plan for implementation. Such planning is a major thrust of *Foundations* grants. The collaboration of highly qualified and experienced individuals makes it more likely that evaluators will endorse an application.

The guidelines refer to several kinds of dissemination activities. Will HCRR support this work?

Yes, your HCRR budget may include staff time and other eligible expenses related to disseminating the grant product. However, please bear in mind that the main purpose of this grant program is to preserve and increase access to significant humanities collections and to create humanities reference resources. In many cases the dissemination work to be accomplished during the grant period will be preparatory and developmental; larger-scale dissemination work would more likely occur after the project concludes. Applicants seeking to disseminate project results through exhibits or other public humanities programs should consider grant opportunities offered by the Division of Public Programs.

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

Foundations grants 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 requesting an implementation grant?

No. You do not have to progress from a *Foundations* grant to an implementation grant. 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 ensuring 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.

Are there examples of *Foundations* grants?

Yes. The [program resource page](#) includes several sample narratives from successful *Foundations* proposals. In addition, here are some hypothetical scenarios that further illustrate possible uses of these grants:

- A metropolitan historical society holds significant library and archival collections that have not been made accessible in accordance with current professional standards. The institution's staff has recently undertaken a basic, institution-wide preservation assessment and other remedial steps to improve its ability to care for the materials, but the collections have never been individually assessed to document their humanities research value, to gauge the size of potential user audiences, to document the

relationship to materials elsewhere, and to note conservation concerns and processing and cataloging needs. To assist in developing a blueprint for action, the historical society consults with a noted urban historian, as well as the curator of a nearby special collections center. With information gathered by graduate students from an area university's archival education program, the historical society's staff and consultants evaluate the contents and condition of the collections and create a strategic plan for addressing its preservation and access needs. In the process, the historical society also prepares brief descriptions of several of the individual archival collections for inclusion on its website.

- A team of librarians, archivists, and humanities faculty from a mid-sized university plan to conduct an institution-wide assessment of thousands of audiovisual materials scattered across libraries, archives, research centers, and departments. Thanks to relatively complete basic inventory records, staff knows that the school holds significant humanities collections of sound and moving-image recordings of unique artistic performances, oral histories, guest lectures, films, field recordings, historic scientific data, and raw documentary footage located in its Special Collections and University Archives; its Music, Theater, and Visual Arts Libraries; and its Department of Linguistics. The diversity of media formats, combined with the varying risk level and reformatting costs for each, necessitates a comprehensive approach to manage and preserve the materials for the long term. Staff hires a consultant with audiovisual preservation expertise to join in it in conducting an in-depth study focusing on the research value of the recordings in conjunction with the risk that they might deteriorate and become obsolete. The project team uses these findings to prepare a plan that prioritizes preserving and ensuring access to the recordings and identifies options for stabilizing and digitizing them.

- Staff from libraries, archives, and museums with related holdings on world cultures have formed a cooperative network and seek to preserve and make accessible their most significant humanities materials online. To plan for this collaborative digital resource, the staff enlists the assistance of an advisory team comprising leading humanities scholars and technical experts. The team establishes priorities for content selection and sets the protocols for descriptive and administrative metadata, content management, data interoperability, and other technical components that will ensure digital preservation and access. In the process, a small set of previously digitized and newly reformatted sources from several of the cooperating institutions is submitted to a major national digital repository to test the protocols and to develop estimates for larger-scale efforts. A report documenting the outcomes of this effort will serve as the basis for guidelines, goals, and objectives for the next stages of the consortium's digitization initiative.

- Two leading humanities scholars have established an initiative to create an online encyclopedia. They have assembled a preliminary editorial advisory board, which has produced a conceptual précis, including a prospective outline of contents. However, they have not yet produced editorial guidelines or draft essays, nor have they fully established the administrative and technological foundation to ensure the project's long-term viability or to reach potential audiences as effectively as possible. To advance this initiative, the team expands its advisory group to include leaders of several cultural heritage institutions holding relevant humanities collections, along with technical specialists from an area university library and educators. The team identifies a set of

content themes for model essays and engages the services of knowledgeable humanities scholars to prepare the essays. As a result of this planning and piloting work, the team prepares a set of editorial policies and procedures, a summary of key cultural heritage sources that could be included in the encyclopedia or used in researching essays, a detailed statement of technological requirements, plans for ensuring the long-term sustainability of the encyclopedia, and an outline of measures for disseminating the resource to specified humanities audiences through multiple means.

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, and 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). If you are claiming indirect costs, please attach a copy of your institution's current federally negotiated indirect-cost rate agreement to the Budget Narrative Attachment Form (also known as the Budget Narrative File—see the instructions for this form in the Application Checklist at the end of the program guidelines). Most nonfederal entities that have never received a negotiated indirect-cost rate may elect to charge a de minimis rate of 10 percent of modified total direct costs, which may be used indefinitely.

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. Similarly, sample entries, records, the results of specific database queries, etc., enable evaluators to 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 a number of 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.** Also, be sure to include the most essential information about your project in the narrative, rather than relegating it to the appendices. 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.

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.

- *ARSC Guide to Audio Preservation* (PDF, Association of Recorded Sound Archivists, Council on Library and Information Resources, and National Recording Preservation Board of the Library of Congress, 2015)

- *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)

- *Code of Best Practice in Fair Use for Academic and Research Libraries* (Association of Research Libraries, 2012)

- *Community + Museum Guidelines or Collaboration*, Indian Arts Research Center, School for Advanced Research

- *Digital Preservation Management: Implementing Short-Term Strategies for Long-Term Solutions* (Cornell University/University of Michigan, ICPSR)

- *Digitization Cost Calculator* (Digital Library Federation)

- *Digitization Guidelines* (Federal Agencies Digitization Guidelines Initiative)

- *A Framework of Guidance for Building Good Digital Collections* (PDF, National Information Standards Organization, 3rd edition, 2007)

- *Guides to Good Practice* (Archaeology Data Services and Digital Antiquity, 2011)

- *Meeting the Challenge of Media Preservation: Strategies and Solutions* (PDF, Indiana University, Media Preservation Initiative Task Force, 2011)

- *Preservation Leaflets* (Northeast Document Conservation Center)

- *Preserving Moving Pictures and Sound* (PDF, Digital Preservation Coalition, 2012)

- *Protocols for Native American Archival Materials* (First Archivists Circle, 2007)

- *Self-Guided Curriculum for Digitization*, a series of presentations developed in conjunction with the Public Library Partnership Project of the Digital Public Library of America:
  Planning for Digitization
  Selecting Content for a Digitization Project
  Understanding Copyright
  Using Metadata to Describe Digital Content
  Digital Reformatting and File Management
  Promoting Use of Your Digital Content

- *Sound Directions: Best Practices for Audio Preservation* (Indiana University Digital Library Program, updated April 2008), which includes the Field Audio Collection Evaluations Tool (FACET)

- *Standards at the Library of Congress --* resource description, digital library standards (LC, updated December 2013)

- *Taking Stock and Making Hay: Archival Collections Assessment* (PDF, OCLC Research, 2011)

- *TEI Guidelines* (The Text Encoding Initiative Consortium)

- *Toward a Community of Practice: Initial Findings on Best Practices for Digital Encyclopedias*, NEH grant white paper (PDF, Internet Digital Encyclopedia Alliance, 2011; click on "[White paper]")