

## **Introduction**

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Welcome to an informational webinar about the Curriculum Development: Western Civilization program led by Geoff Burrows and Julia Nguyen, senior program officers in the Division of Lifelong Learning.

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Over the course of the webinar, we will explain key features of the program, discuss project development, provide an overview of the application process, explain the review process, and provide application tips.

## **About the Program**

0:46

Curriculum Development: Western Civilization grants strengthen the teaching and study of the humanities at institutions of higher education by developing or enhancing programs, resources, or courses that explore, interpret, and preserve the diversity of human cultures, ideas, and practices, past and present. Projects must be focused on the teaching and study of Western Civilization, American History, American government and civics, and/or the Great Books tradition. Projects may take a variety of approaches to the topics drawing on fields such as philosophy, history, languages and literature, political science, archaeology, and classics.

1:28

What kinds of topics might fall within Western Civilization, American History, American government and civics, and the Great Books tradition? The images on this slide provide a few clues. Western Civ projects might engage with the cultures of ancient Greece, or with the writings of Erasmus. American history projects could examine the enduring legacies of the Civil Rights movement, or the ways that the concept of Vast Early America is helping historians rethink colonial society. Great Books projects might focus on the significant contributions of George Eliot and other 19th century women writers, or the incisive social commentary of James Baldwin. But these are just a few ideas to help you think about the breadth and capaciousness of the topics. You will want to shape a project that would fit within your institution's curricular context and benefit your students.

2:22

What are the outlines of the program? These are relatively large grants, with awards of up to \$750,000 inclusive of direct and indirect costs. The period of performance can last up to three years, and projects must start between March 1st and June 1st of 2027. Only institutions of higher education are eligible, and further, only public or 501(c)3 private institutions of higher education are eligible.

2:55

The deadline for applications is June 25th, 2026. This is a firm deadline, and except for the very rare cases covered by its late submission policy, NEH will not consider applications submitted after the deadline. We anticipate that award notification will take place in December 2026 and as noted earlier, the period of performance will begin between March 1st and June 1st, 2027.

## **Project Development**

3:23

What is this program designed to support? We anticipate that successful applicants will use these awards to create or enhance humanities courses, including introductory or general education courses, capstone courses, humanities courses connected to non-humanities programs (such as business ethics) can be included here as well. Awardees might also partner with non-educational organizations such as libraries, museums, archives, and so on to develop teaching materials. And these materials might be in digital or physical form. You could develop or revise a major, minor, certificate or other type of program. You could provide faculty professional development. And finally, you can use grant funds to promote innovative humanities teaching by providing stipends to individual faculty members to develop new methods or materials. We also anticipate that many projects will combine some or all of these activities. For example, an institution might receive funding for a project in which they provide professional development to faculty members, who then develop new courses that would be incorporated into a new major. And of course, this list is not designed to be exhaustive.

4:45

Seen another way, what are the outcomes and outputs of a Curriculum Development: Western Civilization project? The outputs can be new or revised courses, programs, or curriculum materials to support humanities teaching, faculty development programs, partnerships with cultural institutions, and other tangible grant products. The outcomes will be stronger humanities programs at the awardee institution and an enhanced capacity to teach the humanities.

5:17

As you are planning your activities, think also about the people you will want to include on your project team. Every project must have one or more project directors. The director or co-directors are responsible for all of the project's programmatic activities, basically making sure that you do what you said you would do in your application. Because this program is intended to support curriculum development activities, it's important to have faculty closely involved from the start. We found from experience that top-down projects, where the administration tells faculty what they will do, are rarely successful. Also consider whether including librarians, archivists, or other personnel would enhance the project. Similarly, do you want to include administrators on your project team? The answer to this question will vary depending on institutional structure and processes, but it may be useful to have someone on your team who has a top-level perspective on curricular needs. Are there other support staff whose input and skills would help your project? Again, this will vary by institution and project goals. Finally, every project must have an institutional grant administrator who was responsible for grant administration and compliance. This person cannot be the same as the project director. Your institution-sponsored research office will usually designate the IGA.

6:47

Earlier I listed some of the activities the program is designed to support, but there are other things we cannot support. The Notice of Funding Opportunity has a full list of funding restrictions, but I thought I'd highlight a few that are specific to this program. First, grant funds cannot be used for tuition fees for participants, or for tuition remission. We can't support projects centered on pedagogical theory and strategies or research on educational methods, tests or measurements. We have gotten some questions about this, so to clarify: certainly, we expect that a project dealing with curriculum development will deal with pedagogy to a certain extent. After all, how can you execute a project to improve the teaching of the humanities without ever discussing the teaching part? However, the primary focus should remain on the humanities content. Finally, this program cannot support individual research. If that's what you want to do, head over to NEH's Division of Research.

## **Applying**

7:50

So, you've planned your project and you're ready to apply. What are the steps to take? The first thing is to consult the Notice of Funding Opportunity (or guidelines), which will walk you through how to put your application together. We also refer to this document as the NOFO. On the curriculum development program page on the NEH website, you will find resources including the application instructions tab. If you click on that tab, then expand step one, you'll find the Notice of Funding Opportunity. Read it carefully. It will tell you what information we want you to include in your application as well as the questions that reviewers will be asking of your application.

8:34

Your application is essentially a series of attachments, and in the NOFO, on pages five and six, you will find a table that lists them all. The first and most important is the narrative. This is where you make the intellectual, educational, and practical case for your project, and it is generally the application element that reviewers spend the most time on. The narrative is limited to 10 single-spaced pages, and this is a hard limit. Other attachments include the work plan, resumes, reading lists, letters of commitment from project participants, and letters of support, other supporting documentation (which also has a mandatory 10-page limit), sub-recipient budgets, your indirect cost rate agreement, and an explanation of delinquent federal debt. Some of these attachments, such as the supporting documentation, sub-recipient budgets, and explanation of delinquent federal debt, may not be applicable to every application.

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The table will spell out which attachments are required of all applicants, and which are conditionally required of applicants under certain conditions, such as the explanation of delinquent federal debt. If your organization is delinquent in the payment of any federal debt, for example, you will need to explain why and attach evidence of a payment plan with the IRS. But if your organization is not delinquent, then you don't have to worry about that. Some attachments are not required, but optional. The other supporting documentation attachment, for example, is optional. If you have information to include that would support your narrative, this would be the place where you attach it. However, if you don't have any additional documentation, then you would skip that one. Other supporting documentation, for example, could be a sample syllabus or the program of study for a faculty professional development series. Just keep in mind that this attachment has a mandatory 10-page limit. Finally, there are some elements that are conditionally required for awardees that can be submitted at the time of application. These include, for example, the certification regarding lobbying.

10:51

So what attachments are required? For this program, the required attachments are the narrative, a comprehensive description of your proposed project with its 10-page page limit. The narrative has several sections, and the NOFO explains what information you should include in each section. Also, a detailed work plan that describes the activities that will take place during the period of performance to achieve each of the proposed objectives you laid out in your narrative. Use a timeline that includes each activity and identifies responsible staff. Explain how outcomes from one activity will carry over into the next. You should include resumes for key personnel in your project. If they have a role described in the narrative and work plan, their resume should be included in this attachment. We suggest a length of two pages per person. A reading list is also required. This would be relevant readings and resources for the project, which could include books, articles, primary sources, films, works of art, etc. This list should convey the humanities content that informs your curriculum. You may also list texts that might be included on syllabi, serve as the basis for faculty development, or be featured in the project in other ways. Again, we suggest a two-page limit for the reading list. Finally, submit letters of commitment and support from individuals and organizations named in the narrative and work plan.

12:21

The application is actually submitted through Grants.gov. When you reach the grant page at Grants.gov, you will see a red “Apply” button that will let you start a workspace for your application. The Grants.gov listing for the project also includes important information about eligibility and where to get more information from the NEH, the grant resource page on the NEH site, as well as the Lifelong Learning e-mail.

12:48

When you or your IGA start your application workspace in Grants.gov (more on this later) there are several required forms. These are the SF-424 application for federal assistance, the supplementary cover sheet for NEH grant programs, the project performance site location form, the research and related budget form, the budget justification, and the attachment form, where you will upload all of the attachment elements we just discussed. One thing to keep in mind, your narrative, work plan, and all other application elements must be uploaded as PDFs. And one note about these forms: get in touch with your sponsored research office. They can help you with the forms, and depending on the institution and personnel involved, may even prefer to open the workspace and fill the forms out themselves with your input. And remember, it is actually the IGA -- who is usually someone in the sponsored research office -- who actually submits the application. Get in touch with them early in the process so that you and they are all on the same page. Some institutions, for example, have internal deadlines, which may be a week or more before the NEH deadline, so that the sponsored research office can prepare or review the budget, review the application for completeness, and conduct other checks.

## Review

14:14

Once you submit your application, what happens? The NEH review process is a multi-stage process designed to ensure that each application receives a full and fair review. Once applications are received, they are sorted into panels by topic activity type and/or institution type as appropriate. The goal is to make sure that like applications are reviewed together as much as possible. Then panels of peer reviewers are convened to assess the quality of the proposals against the stated review criteria. After all of the panels have met, division staff use panelists ratings and comments to make funding recommendations based on the availability of funds. These recommendations are presented to the National Council on the Humanities, which reviews them. The NEH chairman considers the recommendations of the staff and the Council, and by law, makes all funding decisions. Once funding decisions are finalized, awards are announced. As I mentioned earlier, we anticipate that awards for this program will be announced in December 2026.

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NEH uses a peer review process, so the panelists will be scholars, educators, and administrators like you. We try as much as possible to match the experience and expertise of the panelists to the topics and activities of the applications under review. So, for example, if we had a large number of proposals that are asking for funds to revise an American history minor or certificate program, we would be sure to recruit U.S. historians to serve on that panel.

15:58

Your proposal will be reviewed against the review criteria stated in the NOFO. For Curriculum Development: Western Civilization there are three criteria. The first is intellectual quality and significance, which includes the significance of the topic and its relation to Western Civilization,

American history, government, and civics, or the Great Books tradition, the approach taken to the topic, and the expertise of the project team. The second is program design and feasibility, which includes the quality of the planned activities, personnel, and collaborators, and the evaluation plan. And the third is impact, which includes the project's potential to improve teaching and understanding of its proposed topic, as well as plans for dissemination.

16:48

This might lead you to ask: how can I volunteer to serve on a panel? There is a sign-up form on the NEH website where you can enter your information. It goes into a database that NEH staff can search when looking for panelists. Serving as a panelist is a lot of work, but our panelists have told us that it is often fulfilling work. Currently, all panels take place online and there is a modest stipend for service.

### **Application Tips**

17:17

Finally, here are a few application tips. First read the NOFO. In fact, read it more than once. This is really your guide to putting together a strong application. Next, contact your sponsored research office early in the process and work closely with them. Third, make sure that you include all required materials in your proposal and make sure that your proposal addresses the stated review criteria. Fourth, make the strongest possible case for your project. The reviewers are not mind readers, so don't assume that they will read between the lines, fill in the gaps, or just magically know the importance of your project. Make sure that you state it clearly in your application. Next, know your audience and your funder. High quality humanities content is at the core of what we fund. Sixth, draft early and get feedback. Currently Division of Lifelong learning staff cannot read draft applications, but many of your colleagues may be willing to read a draft and give you some feedback on it. So definitely take advantage of that. And finally, contact the Division of Lifelong Learning if you have any questions, you can e-mail us at [learning@neh.gov](mailto:learning@neh.gov). This concludes our webinar. Thank you so much for viewing. We look forward to receiving your questions and ultimately your applications.