

Introduction

0:02

Welcome. This webinar will provide general information about applying for the National Endowment for the Humanities' Media Projects program from the Division of Lifelong Learning. The application deadline is June 25th, 2026. I am Tricia Brooks, I am the deputy director of the Division of Lifelong Learning, and you can reach us with your questions at learning@neh.gov.

0:43

This webinar is going to include five sections. The first section, "About the Program," will provide the basic outline of the types of projects supported, application eligibility, and the funding levels that are available. The "Project Development" section will cover what you need to have in place before you are ready to apply, including the necessary composition of your project team and your scholarly advisors. And then the third section, "Applying," will address the components of an application and the process for submitting your proposal. The fourth section on the review process will look at how applications are evaluated and what to expect after you submit your application. Finally, we'll provide some application tips, helpful resources for preparing an application, and some important notes on things to keep in mind when preparing your application.

About the Program

1:47

So, this first section, let's start with "About the Program." And I'm going to provide some general information about who we are at the NEH and what this program entails. So, first off, it's critical to understand the National Endowment for the Humanities. The National Endowment for the Humanities was founded through the National Foundation on the Arts and Humanities Act of 1965. The Act resulted in the establishment of both the National Endowment for the Arts and the National Endowment for the Humanities. The mission of the National Endowment for the Humanities is to serve and strengthen the United States by supporting high quality projects and programs in the humanities and by making the humanities available to all Americans.

2:50

So now we need to understand what are the humanities. So, the humanities are academic disciplines such as history, art history, philosophy, anthropology, linguistics, literary criticism, and other fields that apply critical thinking and analysis to the study of human history and culture.

3:20

The Media Projects program supports the development and the production of documentary films and radio programs or podcasts that engage general audiences with humanities ideas in creative and appealing ways. Projects must be grounded in humanities scholarship and demonstrate an approach that is thoughtful, balanced, and analytical.

3:49

This is a really key point, because before applying to the NEH, it's important to consider this question: does my project have a humanities focus? Our first concern is content and our first question about any project is: is this project grounded in scholarship from the humanities? Is it using ideas from humanities disciplines to analyze critical questions about this topic? We are looking for projects that offer multiple perspectives on the subject, provide new insights into familiar subjects, invite reflection

on important questions about human life, and provoke discussion and foster deeper understanding of analytical ideas.

4:47

Media projects do this through the vehicle of these formats that are supported in this program, which are standalone documentary films that are longer than 40 minutes (so basically, a broadcast hour). For example, “Hannah Arendt: Facing Tyranny” is a film exploring the life of the political philosopher that aired on American Masters. We also support, through this program, podcast or radio series, and the episodes in these series can be of any length. So, for example, we supported “Division Street Revisited,” which was a limited series of seven episode podcasts with also a one-hour public radio special that was produced by PRX, and it examined U.S. social history from the 1960s to today, through oral histories from Studs Terkel's book “Division Street America.” For either film or radio or podcast projects, we will also support one or more episodes of a series or segments within an ongoing series. So, for example, we have the forthcoming episodes to air as part of the “Craft in America” series on PBS, we funded four of these episodes that are a special subset of this series called “Handwork: Celebrating American Craft.” Or another example would be, from the radio and podcast side, from the Roy Rosenzweig Center for History and New Media at George Mason University, we supported the second season of an ongoing podcast series about the history of the American Revolution called “Worlds Turned Upside Down.”

7:00

While the primary focus of a project submitted to this grant program must be one of those formats of a film, or radio, or podcast program, you may include secondary formats as well, and these secondary formats would be things that extend project content, provide additional interpretation, offer a wide access to resources on the subject, or enhance engagement with project ideas. A few examples of those would include something like a website that may provide further interpretation about the project, or access to various types of resources related to the story that you're telling, the development of materials to be used in school programs, or hosting public screenings and discussions about the project.

8:08

This program accepts applications from organizations that are based in the United States, so they must be a nonprofit organization with tax-exempt status, a public or a 501(c)3 accredited institution of higher education, a state or local government agency, or a federally recognized Native American Tribal government agency. Individuals, foreign organizations, and for-profit organizations are not eligible to apply in this grant program. Applicant organizations also must make a substantive contribution to the project. They may not solely function as a pass-through entity that is accepting the funds and then passing them on to others to complete the project. So, what does that mean in terms of providing some substantive input into the project?

9:25

Organizations that are serving as the applicant organization may provide substantive involvement in the project through a number of means. A few examples of those are things like coordinating logistics (such as coordinating scholar meetings), assisting with research, analysis, and interpretation of the content that will be used in the project, providing advice or mentorship to members of the production team, providing feedback on various stages of the project (so, for example, the script, the rough cut or on other elements of the project), assisting in the development of the ancillary resources like the websites, the curriculum development, the screening programs (or maybe being responsible for producing those elements), or assisting with outreach and public engagement. So, an applicant organization may not be involved in all of these things. They may be involved in different aspects of the project, but whatever that substantive contribution that is being made by the applicant

organization, you must explain it in the application. There's a section of the narrative where you will explain it and describe the involvement of the organization, and you should also represent the applicant organization throughout the application, and their involvement in the project throughout the application in aspects like the work plan and the budget.

11:16

There are two funding levels available. So, the first funding level is development. This level is for early stages of a project. And it offers awards of up to \$75,000. The period of time to complete the project is between six and 12 months, and this is available only for film projects. So, radio programs and podcasts may not apply at the development level. The final product of these awards would be things like a script or detailed treatment, scholarly advisor convenings (where the content of the project and the analysis is fleshed out and fully developed), or something like preliminary distribution and outreach plans. The intended outcome here is that at the end of the period of performance, the project has a strengthened humanities framing and is ready for production and has defined some clear ways and clear plans for the distribution of the project so that it can reach a wide audience.

12:45

The other level of funding is production. Production is for projects that are ready, things are all worked out, the project is ready to film, to record. It's in post-production. Things are very well established. So, this provides up to \$700,000 for documentary-film projects and up to \$350,000 for radio programs or podcasts. And the period for completing the project is between one and three years. Ultimately, at the end of the project, you should have a final cut of the film or fully produced podcast or radio program that is ready for distribution. So, at the end of this you must have a completed project ready for distribution through streaming, through television broadcast, through festival distribution, on a streaming service over the Internet, whatever your distribution method is. The ultimate outcome here should be broad public engagement with humanities ideas and improved public understanding and discourse around the subject of the project.

14:24

One very important heads-up to keep in mind for those of you who are applying for production, it is critical to be aware that if the costs to complete the project are greater than the amount of an NEH award, you must obtain commitments from donors, or grants, or other sources for the funds necessary to cover all the project expenses before you will be able to access the funds from the NEH award. So plan that accordingly. That might mean including in your work plan fundraising plans, which we do ask about in the narrative. It's also good to know that you may be able to draw up to 20% of the NEH funds before you demonstrate that you have raised all of the remaining funds. And these funds can be accessed if you need to support some immediate critical activities. So, for instance, maybe you need to create a demo reel so that you can go out there and do some fundraising. Maybe there's an event coming up, that is central to telling the story that you're planning to tell, and you want to film it. Or you have some time-sensitive interviews that need to be filmed. You may be able to access up to 20% of the award to do that.

Project Development

15:58

Let's talk a little bit about what you need to do to develop your project before you apply for this grant program. So, how do you know which funding level is right for you and what do you need to have in place before you apply at that funding level? The development level is for earlier stages of a project. We are awarding taxpayer dollars, however, so we do need to know certain things and understand certain things about your project before we can support it. And that means that to be able to explain that to us, you may have to do quite a bit of development work before you can apply for what we call

a development award. So to be ready to apply for this level, you should have surveyed the scholarship on your subject and understand what resources are available. For example, what archival collections might yield valuable materials for your project? And also, who might be significant people that you will want to interview for your project? In the application narrative, you will outline the intended analytical themes. At this stage they do not have to be fully fleshed out or finalized, but you must be able to provide a sense of the direction the analysis is heading in at the time of application. So that means you should have had some preliminary conversations with scholars about the subject. And you must provide letters from some of those scholars stating their commitment to work on the project. So, we'll talk a little bit more about the project team in a moment, but you have to identify both scholars and also similarly, you must have media team members identified and committed to the project. To be ready to apply for the production stage, you should, as I said before, be ready to start work, ready to film, ready to do post-production work. So, for this stage you should have conducted extensive research into the subject, including archival research and preliminary interviews, if applicable. You must be able to provide fully articulated analytical themes in your application that demonstrate the scholarly grounding and the input of your scholarly advisors and other experts. Your work plan should demonstrate the ongoing collaboration that you have with your scholarly advisors and that will continue throughout this production period. And you must submit a script and a detailed treatment, and that should reflect the contributions of your team of advisors. And then lastly, while you do not have to have a solid commitment for distribution, you will have to describe your plans for securing distribution and demonstrate that you plausibly will be able to obtain distribution and to reach a wide audience.

19:52

So, let's talk a little bit about the team that's necessary to apply. The people who you must have identified in your application and who must be committed to your project before you apply. So, first of all, the media team: at the development stage, you should have at minimum for your media team, you should have a director and writer. At the production stage, for a film project, in addition to the director and the writer, you should have a producer. For podcasts and radio projects (which are not available again at the development stage), but at the production stage, a podcast or radio project should have at least a producer identified. For both types of projects, for both film and audio projects, if possible, where applicable, you should also identify (we recommend that you identify) if you have an on-air host, who is that going to be? Editor, director of photography, and, if you're applying for some supplemental digital format (like a website), then you should also identify the digital designer.

21:23

You also will have to have humanities scholars. We define these as individuals who have an advanced degree in a humanities field, and who demonstrate their expertise in that field through experience teaching at the post-secondary level, and/or through scholarly publication. You must have people on your project who fit that description. We are looking for projects that explore multiple perspectives. So generally speaking, having just one person on your project who fits that scholar description is not going to be sufficient. But the number of scholars you will need depends on your project. You need to make sure that you have a team that can address all the necessary aspects of the analysis that you're proposing. So that varies from project to project. Your project may also necessitate other types of experts, like culture bearers or community members.

They may not fit the description of humanities scholars, but they may be necessary for your project. While we don't have a requirement that all projects include these other experts, for projects where these perspectives are important, it can be a significant issue if you do not have them. So don't neglect that aspect of your project.

Applying

22:57

Ok, now we're going to talk a little bit about applying. And we're going to talk about where to find information to apply and what the components of your application will be. So, if you visit our website and you visit the landing page for the Media Projects program, which you will find at NEH.gov, forward slash "Program," forward slash "Media" dash "Projects," you will click on application instructions and when you click on application instructions, what you will see is what is on the left half of the screen here. You can then click on step one, "Review your Application Package," that will expand that section of this page. And so underneath that will appear what you see on the right-hand side of the screen, which as you can see circled here in yellow are "Application Materials." There are two essential documents that will guide you through the application process and I want to highlight for those who have past experience applying to NEH that this is new. You must read both documents. It's new that it's two separate documents, so be aware of this. So, the first document is the Notice of Funding Opportunity. This provides details about what is funded in this program and the program-specific application requirements, including instructions for creating and completing the mandatory application documents. The second document is the General Application Guide for Awards to Organizations. This provides detailed instructions for completing the required federal forms, attaching the documents that you created from the instructions in the Notice of Funding Opportunity to those forms, and submitting your proposal. You must read both of these documents to obtain all the information that's necessary to properly submit a complete application.

25:21

So, in that Notice of Funding Opportunity, you will be directed to create certain application documents. Here I have listed out all of the required application documents and all of the required federal forms that every application must submit. There are other documents and other forms that you may need to submit, or you may wish to submit depending on the situation of your application, but these are the ones that are required for every single application. So, first you have the application documents that you will create based on the instructions that are provided in the Notice of Funding Opportunity. The first one is the narrative. In that you will provide information on the humanities content of the project and the scholarly grounding of that content, the creative approach that you're planning to use, you'll provide information about the project, team, the history of the project. This is kind of like a behind the scenes document that explains your project goals and your intentions and how you plan to put the project together and carry out this project. In the work plan, you will provide a month-by-month outline of the activities to be conducted to complete the project and who is responsible for each task. Your script or your detailed treatment is like the proof in the pudding. So, where the narrative is kind of the behind-the-scenes document, the script or the treatment is the demonstration that that project will effectively do what you claim in the narrative, in that you will fully illustrate what people will see on screen and hear in a film project, what people will hear for an audio project. Your work sample must be a previously completed work, so not something based off of this project, but something that was completed in the past by members of the media team. Ideally, it should demonstrate the ability of the team to communicate humanities ideas to general public audiences, and preferably it will do that while it's illustrating the team's skill at employing creative approach elements that you are proposing to use in this project. So, if you're proposing to use animation, preferably you will include a sample that shows how you've used animation or reenactments, or talking head scholars, etc. We ask that you limit your bibliography (so that's the next piece on this list) to two pages. So, what we're looking for here is not a comprehensive list of all of the research that you've done for this project, but a list that focuses in on the core elements that are informing the project. For your biographies and letters of commitment, what we are asking is for each member of your media team, for each member of the project team who works at the applicant organization, for all of your scholars and other expert advisors: we want to see a CV, a resume, or a bio of each of these people. And we want to see a letter of commitment where they state they're going to participate in this project. Those letters can be emails, that's perfectly fine. And you can also provide (sometimes it's helpful to do so) a template for people to use to create the letter. That might speed up the process of getting the letters from them, but if you provide a template, be sure to

encourage them to add their own thoughts on why they will participate and how their skills or expertise will contribute to the project.

29:57

The list of items in the next section are the federal forms that are required. Again, there are some other federal forms that you may submit depending on the situation of your project, but these are the basic required forms. So, the instructions for completing these, again, are in the General Application Guide for Awards to Organizations. Read the instructions for completing the budget and budget justification carefully. They're long, but they're thorough, and you want to follow them closely. The last form on the list here is the attachments form. That's the form that you're going to use to attach all of those application documents that are listed in the first section on this screen to the proposal that you submit.

30:56

All applications must be submitted via the Grants.gov system, which is the federal government-wide online portal for posting federal funding opportunities and submitting grant applications. So, to submit on Grants.gov, there are some things that you have to have in place first. You're going to have to have first off a Login.gov account. Login.gov is a secure sign-in service used by the public to sign in to participating government websites. So, you have one login that you can use on multiple sites. It takes a few minutes to set up an account. Once you have a Login.gov account, you will need to register on SAM, the System for Award Management. To receive federal funds, you must be registered in this system. This process, though, can take a few weeks to complete, so you want to start early. You will be assigned a Unique Entity Identifier by SAM, and this is a number that's unique to your organization so the government can identify and follow the funds that have been received by your organization. Once you have that Unique Entity Identifier or UEI, you will then register for Grants.gov. And this is where you will prepare your application and submit it.

Review Process

32:38

Alright, so now we're going to talk a little bit about the review process and what happens after you submit your application. So, first of all, you're going to submit your application, it will arrive at NEH, and NEH staff will then form panels out of all of the applications, grouping similar projects together. For example, a panel might be consisting of all projects that focused on literature, or a panel of projects on the history of the American West, or there could be a panel of all projects that are podcasts. Each panel will generally be comprised of five people. Typically, three will be subject area experts with knowledge of the content of applications and the scholarship around the applications, and two people on the panel will be media experts who have relevant experience (depending on what that panel is) as film makers, as producers of film and radio projects, podcast producers, etc. These panelists will apply the review criteria. You can find the review criteria on page 14 of the Notice of Funding Opportunity. So, these review criteria will be used by the panelists, they will be used by the staff, they will be used by the National Council on the Humanities, and by the Chair of the Agency to evaluate and assess your project. The first criteria is the humanities content and the significance. So, this looks at how will the project contribute meaningfully to public understanding of the chosen topics. We will ask for an assessment of the quality of the scholarship and the analytical perspectives that inform the project. Then we have the creative approach, the script, and the resources, and this looks at the potential to effectively and engagingly convey humanities content. Consideration will be given to the quality of the script or treatments as well as the archival materials and other resources that you intend to use to bring that project to life and to include in your project. The project personnel section is an assessment of the qualifications and the expected contributions of the advising scholars, the key staff from the organization that is applying for funding, and the media team (and any additional experts). Your work sample will be used to assess the quality of the past work of the media team. It will be reviewed to demonstrate the media team's capability to successfully produce the

proposed project. The work plan, budget, and likelihood of success criterion looks at the likelihood of achieving the project's goal, the feasibility of fundraising, the appropriateness of the costs, the pace of the work plan. Is it reasonably paced? Then finally, audience reach and distribution is an evaluation of the estimated audience size, the potential for broad appeal and the quality of the project's distribution plan.

36:39

So, the application deadline of June 25th comes. You submit your application, then what happens is the application goes into peer review with the criteria that I just reviewed and that will take place between July and October 2026. The National Council on the Humanities will meet in November 2026. The staff will present to them the applications that were submitted and the perspectives that the reviewers provided on those applications. The National Council on the Humanities will then advise the Chair of the of the agency about funding recommendations. So, during that meeting in November, they will advise the Chair. The Chair will take that advice under consideration, but as provided by statute, the NEH Chair will make the final funding decisions. All applicants will be notified in December of those decisions and then awarded projects will begin work sometime between March 1st and September 1st, depending on how you structure your work plan in your application.

Application Tips

38:14

All right. So, let's talk about some tips and things to keep in mind when applying, and resources that are available to you. So first of all, some really helpful resources. We go back to that program landing page on our website at [NEH.gov forward slash "Program" forward slash "Media" dash "Projects"](https://www.neh.gov/Program/Media/Projects) and there again you will click on application instructions and you will see again, what is on the left-hand side of the screen. And if you click on step one, review your application package, to expand that section, you'll scroll down past the application materials that we were looking at previously and you will see the information that you now see on the right-hand side of this screen. So, first of all, you have, circled here in yellow, "Program Resources." And under program resources, the first thing you will find is "Frequently Asked Questions." So, this is a document that provides a lot of helpful information about questions that we hear all the time. Underneath that you will see two lists of recently funded projects. One of those lists is for development projects, the other is production projects. These can be helpful in gaining a better understanding of the types of projects that are competitive for this program. Then if you look down at the next header, there is sample application narratives. This is the goldmine; you have now struck gold. These are past successful application narratives and treatments and even where it does not indicate that the treatment is included, all of these include both the narrative and the treatment. And we have one list for development and one list for production. And these are incredibly helpful demonstrations of the characteristics of a competitive application, so they're very good to look at. Just as a point for those of you who are applying for radio or podcast projects, two of these samples are from audio projects. One is from Points South, the other is from Lost Highways. So, I just direct your attention to those if that's relevant to your project.

41:02

Now, finally, let's talk about some application tips. Read the Notice of Funding Opportunity and the General Application Guide for Awards to Organizations. Sounds obvious, but read them very carefully. These are absolutely essential. They provide you with the instructions that you need to know, and again, for those of you who are experienced with applying NEH, you need to know that it's two separate documents now that you need to look at. You must read both of these documents. Register early with [Grants.gov](https://www.grants.gov) and [SAM.gov](https://www.sam.gov). Remember that it is the applicant organization that must register, must have the [Login.gov](https://www.login.gov) registration, the SAM registration and the [Grants.gov](https://www.grants.gov) Registration, must be from the main applicant organization. They will be the ones submitting. Register early because, as I noted, it can take a few weeks for the SAM registration to be completed.

Also, if you have SAM registration and Grants.gov account already, remember that SAM has to be renewed annually and Grants.gov accounts will go dormant if they are not used for a certain period of time. So, you want to make sure that everything is up to date on those. Make sure that you are clear in stating the significance of your subject. Don't assume that "oh, this is about World War II, that's obviously significant." Part of an effective explanation of your analytical perspective is a case for the significance of the subject. You want to address what makes the topic relevant and what viewers or listeners will better understand about that topic through your project. The review criteria is your guide to exactly what we are looking for. So don't overlook paying close attention to that. Again, it's on page 14 of the Notice of Funding Opportunity. Know your audience. Remember that some readers of your proposal will not be expert scholars in the subject, and some will not be familiar with media production processes. So, avoid jargon and write for a general audience so that your project can be clearly understood by all. Also, know your funder. Remember who you are appealing to for support. Keep the mission of the NEH to support projects grounded in humanities scholarship, and the goal of this program to engage the general public in exploring ideas from that scholarship, as the central focuses of your application. Read some samples. Again, samples are extremely helpful in understanding what makes a competitive proposal. Don't wait until the deadline to submit your application and check your e-mail for a series of messages after you submit your application.

44:32

You reach the finish line and you've submitted your application. How do you know that it was submitted successfully? This is very important. You will receive a series of confirmation emails from Grants.gov. At any point in that process, you may receive a message that informs you of a problem with your submission. You can correct the error and resubmit the full application before the deadline. However, it can take several hours for your application to be fully transmitted and accepted into our system. So, if you submit on the deadline day, it's possible you could receive an error message after the deadline passes, at which point you would not be able to correct the error. So don't wait until the final day. Allow time for mistakes and the unexpected. We will accept as your official application the last complete copy of the application that we receive before the deadline. So after you've made it to this finish line, the way that you will know that your application was successfully submitted is one of the emails that you received (the last one that you receive in the series) will say the application was accepted by the agency. But also note that that means what you submitted was free of errors that are detectable by the automated system. Other errors like failing to include all the required attachments or submitting a proposal for unallowed activities can't be detected until the staff begins the review after the deadline.

46:24

If you experience technical issues with your Login.gov account, or with your SAM registration, or you have questions about these processes, contact the Federal Service Desk Monday through Friday between 8:00 AM and 8:00 PM Eastern Time at 866-606-8220. If you have technical problems with Grants.gov or need assistance with using that system, reach out to their 24-hour support line at 800-518-4726. And if you have questions about the content of your application, the application process or the review process, contact the NEH Division of Lifelong Learning at learning@neh.gov. I hope that you have found this information helpful. We wish you the best of luck with your application. Contact us with any questions that you may have and thank you for taking the time to review this webinar. And one final reminder: the application deadline is June 25th, 2026.