

Introduction

0:01

Welcome to an informational webinar about the Landmarks of American History and Culture and Summer Institutes program. My name is Julia Nguyen, a senior program officer in the Division of Lifelong Learning. Over the course of the webinar, we will explain key features of the program—including a significant change—discuss project development, provide an overview of the application process, explain the review process, and provide a few application tips.

About the Program

0:36

The Landmarks of American History and Culture and Summer Institutes program supports humanities education through professional development for K-12 teachers or higher education faculty. Landmarks and Institutes are residential professional development programs that convene educators from across the nation to deepen their understanding of significant topics in the humanities and enrich their capacity for effective scholarship and teaching. Institutes can engage any topic in the humanities, while Landmarks workshops must investigate a topic in American history or culture through historic sites.

1:17

What can you do with a Landmarks or Institutes grant? These images are taken from previous projects and show just a little of the range of possible topics. Previous directors, for example, have immersed educators in study of 20th century architecture, the plays of William Shakespeare, the history and cultures of the Mississippi Delta, the history and literary output of California's immigrant cultures, early modern European manuscripts, and African history. But this is just a small sample. Again, an Institute can deal with any topic in the humanities, including history, philosophy, languages, and literatures, art history, and so on. And Institutes do not need to focus only on the American experience, they can be drawn from anywhere in the world. Landmarks projects, on the other hand, must use historic sites and place-based learning to examine an event, era, significant figure, or theme in American history or culture.

New this Year

2:24

There is one very big change this year. For the current competition cycle, rather than offering just one summer program, successful applicants will offer two. They will convene the same Landmarks workshop or Institute in summer 2028 and summer 2029, recruiting a different group of participants each summer.

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So, what are the outlines of the program? Funding is tied to the length of the professional development program. For a one-week project, the maximum award amount is \$300,000. For two weeks, it is \$410,000. And for three weeks, it is \$460,000. Remember, those award amounts are to offer the program twice. Projects must be offered for an audience of either K-12 teachers or higher education faculty members. So, you can't mix the two different audiences in the same project. And you would apply to offer your project in both summer 2028 and summer 2029 for a different group of participants each summer. Who is eligible? Eligible organizations include 501(c)3 nonprofits, accredited U.S. public or private institutions of higher education, state or local governments, or federally-recognized Tribal governments.

3:57

The deadline for applications is December 9, 2026. This is a firm deadline and except for the very rare cases covered by NEH's late submission policy, NEH will not consider applications submitted after the deadline. We anticipate that award notification will take place in July of 2027. The period of performance will begin November 1, 2027 and projects will run summer 2028 and summer 2029.

Project Development

4:33

What kinds of activities are supported? This program supports professional development projects that vary in length from one to three weeks, offered in two consecutive summers. You would offer the same program each summer for a different group of participants each time. We do not privilege longer or shorter projects but be sure that your topic is well calibrated to the number of weeks that you choose. All projects must be in-person; there is no virtual or online option. Participants do receive a stipend which varies in amount based on the length of the program, and that stipend helps defray travel, housing, and food costs for participants. You can choose any number of participants between 25 and 36, but you must target a national audience. All projects must also create a website that will be used for recruitment, for communication with participants, and for dissemination of project outcomes. All of these activities are common to both Landmarks and Institutes. However, keep in mind that while Institutes can study any topic in the humanities, Landmarks projects must engage participants in place-based learning of American history and culture at historic sites.

5:51

Looking at it another way, what are the outputs and outcomes of a Landmarks of American History and Culture and Summer Institutes grant? The output is simple: one to three weeks of sustained engagement with a humanities topic for 25 to 36 participants. And again, you would offer the project twice for a different group of participants each summer. The outcomes are deepened participant understanding of significant topics in the humanities and enhanced capacity for effective humanities scholarship and teaching.

6:27

As you are planning your activities, think also about the people that 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 they make sure that you do what you said you would do in your application. The project director or co-directors must be established humanities scholars with expertise in the project's topic. Each project should also designate a replacement director in case the project director is unable to finish the project for whatever reason. Projects for K-12 teachers should also have a K-12 specialist on board who will participate in planning the project and then lead sessions helping participants reflect on what they have learned and providing strategies for teaching the new content. The K-12 specialist might be an experienced classroom teacher, an education faculty member, a curriculum developer, a museum educator, or an educator with experience facilitating professional development. Successful projects generally have a range of visiting faculty members who can offer multiple perspectives on the project. Who are the people who have the subject matter expertise that your project needs? These would generally be humanities professors, but might also include museum staff, archivists, independent humanities scholars, and others. Finally, running a successful Landmarks workshop or Institute is a lot of work. These projects are intense and logistically complicated. A good project coordinator is crucial.

8:13

Earlier I listed some of the activities that the program is designed to support, but there are other things that we cannot support. The Notice of Funding Opportunity, which we'll talk about a little bit later, 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 the rental of recreational facilities, or for any costs related to social events such as banquets or dinners, receptions, and entertainment. NEH funds cannot be used for activities performed by federal entities or personnel. This is especially crucial to understand for projects that might want to take participants to a historic site owned or administered by the National Park Service or another federal agency like the National Archives or the Library of Congress. It is absolutely fine to visit these sites, but you cannot use NEH funds to pay admission fees, rent facilities, or pay staff. Grant funds cannot be used for tuition fees for participants or for tuition remission. And we can't support projects centered on pedagogical theory and strategies or on research on educational methods, tests, or measurements. We have gotten some questions about this in the past. So, to clarify, how can you execute a project to improve the teaching of the humanities without discussing the teaching part? Of course, we expect that projects will include sessions where participants will discuss pedagogy and how they will bring content into the classroom. That's totally fine. However, the primary focus should remain on the humanities content.

10:00

And a note on food. NEH's policy is that participants should use their stipends to pay for travel, housing, and meals while they are at the Institute or Landmarks workshop. However, there are some rare instances where providing a budgeted meal may be necessary. If you think this may apply to you, be sure to consult the NEH policy on the allowability of food costs, which is linked in both the program guidelines and the general application guide. Keep in mind also that as a matter of programmatic policy, meals for Landmarks and Institutes participants are allowable only if vendors are inaccessible during the scheduled program, such as during a field trip at a remote location.

Applying

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So, you've planned out your project and you're ready to apply. What are the steps to take? There are two key resources to consult as you start to put your application together. The first is the General Application Guide for Awards to Organizations which can be found on the program landing page. As you can see from the table of contents screenshot here, it walks you through how to create and submit your application and provides useful guidance about budgets and other common application elements.

11:30

The second key document is the Notice of Funding Opportunity, also referred to as the NOFO or the guidelines. This document will walk you through program specific application requirements. So, the general application guide walks you through requirements that are general across NEH. The NOFO will deal with requirements that are specific to the Landmarks and Institutes program. On the Landmarks and Institutes program page on the NEH website you will find resources including the application instructions tab. If you click on that tab, expand step one. That's where you will find the Notice of Funding Opportunity. Read this carefully. It will tell you exactly what information we want you to include in your application, and it also includes the questions that reviewers will be asking of your application as they are assessing it. On that same page you will also find some other useful resources such as sample narratives, a sample budget, contact information. That's also where you can find a link to the general application guide. So, take some time to explore that page and really take a look at all the different resources that are there.

12:50

Your application is essentially a series of attachments, and in the NOFO on page 8 you will find a table that lists all of them. 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 space pages, and that is a hard limit. Other attachments include the work plan, resumes, letters of commitment, reading lists, an academic schedule for your Institute or Landmarks workshop, participant evaluations (if you have offered a project in the past), subrecipient budgets, your indirect cost rate agreement, and an explanation of federal debt. Some of these attachments, such as the participant evaluations, subrecipient budgets, and explanation of delinquent federal debt, may not be applicable to every application.

14:02

The table on page eight will spell out which attachments are required of all applicants, which attachments are conditionally required of applicants under certain conditions—so for example, the explanation of delinquent federal debt. If your organization is delinquent in the payment of any federal debt, you need to explain why and attach evidence of a payment plan with the IRS. However, if your institution is not delinquent, then you don't have to worry about that. Finally, there are some elements that are conditionally required of awardees that can be submitted at the time of application. That would include, for example, the Certification Regarding Lobbying. You don't have to attach it at the time of application, but you may if you wish.

14:52

So what attachments are required for this program? For this program, the required attachments start with the narrative, which, as I mentioned, is a comprehensive description of your proposed Landmarks workshop or Institute, and remember that it has a firm 10-page limit. The narrative has several sections, and the NOFO will explain exactly what information you should include in each section.

You also will be required to include a detailed work plan that describes the activities that will take place during the period of performance for your grant. This explains how you will execute your project. You should use a timeline that includes each activity and identifies responsible staff. And explain how outcomes from one activity will carry over into the next. You should include resumes for project personnel in your project. If a person has a role that is described in the narrative and the work plan, their resume should be included in the attachment. We suggest a length of two pages per person, although that is merely a suggested length. You should also include letters of commitment from individuals and institutions who are involved with the project.

A reading list is also required. This would include books, articles, primary sources, films and videos and other materials that participants would work with before and during the workshop or institute. Be sure to indicate whether participants must complete any readings before the start of the program.

Finally, provide a detailed schedule for the sessions of your Institute or Landmarks workshop that includes: a daily sequence of activities, including when and how each day will begin and end; meals and breaks; the resources, readings and other materials that participants are likely to use each day; the presenters for each day and their topics; questions that will frame sessions and organize discussion activities; when you have scheduled time for reflection; and sessions for participants to develop materials or plan activities for their own teaching and scholarship.

17:21

Once you've put all of your application elements together, it's time to submit, and the application is actually submitted through Grants.gov. When you reach the grant opportunity page at Grants.gov, you will see an apply button that will let you start a workspace for your application. It's circled here, you can see it's a gray button for me because I'm not signed in to Grants.gov when I took the screenshot. It should be a red button when it's active and ready for you to apply. The Grants.gov listing for the project also includes some helpful information about eligibility and where you can get more information from NEH. So, it will have a link to the grant resource page on the NEH site, as well as the contact email for the Division of Lifelong Learning.

18:16

When you or your institutional grant administrator starts your application workspace in Grants.gov, there are several required forms that go along with your application. 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, and the budget justification. There's also the attachments form where you will upload all of the application elements we just discussed. One thing to keep in mind: your narrative, your work plan, all of the application elements (resumes, letters, everything) must be uploaded in the attachment form as PDFs. If they are not PDFs, your application will be kicked back. So, make sure everything is a PDF before you load them into the attachments form.

And one note about these forms especially: get in touch with your sponsored research office. They can help you with these forms and, depending on the institution and the personnel involved, they may prefer to open the workspace and fill out the forms themselves (with your input). And remember, it is actually the institutional grant administrator who is usually someone in a sponsored research office, who actually submits the application. So, 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 and review the budget, review the application for completeness, and conduct other checks. So, you really want to get to know your sponsored research office and make sure everyone is on the same page with your application.

Review

20:19

Once you've submitted your application, what happens? The NEH review process is a multi-stage process designed to ensure that every application receives a full and fair review. Once applications are received, they are sorted into panels by topic, activity type, sometimes institution type as appropriate. The goal is to make sure that similar proposals 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. So, the reviewers will be looking at the same review criteria that we include in the Notice of Funding Opportunity. Those are the criteria that they will be using to assess your proposal. After all of the panels have met and provided their assessments, division staff then use those ratings and comments from the panelists 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 the Chairman makes all funding decisions. Once funding decisions are final, awards are announced. As I mentioned earlier, we anticipate that awards for this program will be announced in July of 2027.

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As I mentioned on the previous slide, NEH does use 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 have a large number of proposals to direct projects on, say, topics in European art history, we would be sure to recruit art historians to serve on the panel. The panels that review projects for K-12 educators will also include K-12 teachers as part of the panelist group. This slide just shows you what a hypothetical panel might look like. But every panel is going to be different based on the proposals that we receive.

22:47

Your proposal will be reviewed against the review criteria stated on pages 13 and 14 of the Notice of Funding Opportunity. For the Landmarks of American History and Culture and Summer Institutes program, there are three primary criteria. The first and most important is always the intellectual quality and significance, which includes the intellectual significance of the topic and approach and the expertise of the project team. The second is program design and feasibility, which includes the quality of the schedule and the personnel, and any collaborating institutions. And then the third is impact, which includes the project's potential to strengthen participants' capacity to teach the proposed topic and any post-project engagement. Returning projects will also be evaluated on how they have incorporated feedback from previous projects to make improvements.

23:49

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. Currently all panels take place online and there is a modest stipend for service.

Application Tips

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Finally, here are a few application tips. First read the NOFO. Read it more than once. The NOFO should be your guide as you are drafting your application. It will tell you exactly what information should be in your application and it will tell you the criteria reviewers will be using to assess it. As I think I've mentioned multiple times, contact your sponsored research office early in the process and work closely with them. They should be your partners throughout your application process. Don't wait until the last minute to involve your sponsored research office.

Next, make sure you include all required materials in your proposal. Every cycle we receive applications that are declared ineligible because they are missing one or more required elements. You do not want that to happen to your application and we don't want that to happen to your application. So, make sure that you consult the table on page eight of the NOFO and that you include everything that is required.

Address the review criteria. As I mentioned, these are the elements that reviewers will be using to assess your proposal. So, you want to make sure that your proposal demonstrates your project's intellectual quality and significance, its design quality and feasibility, and its potential for impact on teaching and learning in the humanities.

And next, make the strongest possible case for your project. Reviewers are not mind readers, so don't assume that they will read between the lines or fill in any gaps in your proposal. Also make sure that your application is specific and concrete. It's not enough to simply tell reviewers that your topic is important. Make a strong argument to demonstrate that your topic is important.

26:10

Next, know your audience and your funder. High-quality humanities content is at the core of what we fund, and your application should reflect that. On the program resource page, we provide some sample proposals. These are selected portions of funded proposals that can give you an idea of how successful applicants have put their applications together. Read them. But also remember that every project and every proposal is different. Remember especially that the samples on the current page will not reflect this year's structural change.

Draft your application early and get feedback. Currently, NEH staff cannot read draft applications, but many of your colleagues may be willing to do so. Feedback from an outside eye can be incredibly valuable.

And finally, contact the division of Lifelong Learning if you have any questions. As I just mentioned, we can't read drafts, but we can answer questions or have a conversation with you about your project. You can email your questions or a request for a meeting to learning@neh.gov.

27:22

And finally, there will be a live Q&A on Microsoft Teams where NEH staff will answer questions about the Landmarks of American History and Summer Institutes program. This will take place on Tuesday, October 20th at 2:00 pm Eastern. You can find the link for the Q&A on the Landmarks and Institutes program pages. It doesn't matter whether you use the link on the K-12 page or the Higher Ed page, it will be the same link. We hope to see you there.

27:52

This concludes the webinar. Thank you so much for viewing. We look forward to receiving your questions and ultimately your applications.