

Introduction

0:03

Peter Fristedt: Hello and welcome to an informational webinar about NEH's Public Humanities Projects grant program, led by me, Peter Fristedt, and my colleague Jill Austin. We are senior program officers in the Division of Lifelong Learning at NEH. Over the course of the webinar, we will explain key features of the program, including funding levels and supported activities. We'll provide an overview of the application process, we'll explain the review process, and we will provide some application tips.

About the Program

0:39

Jill Austin: Hello, everyone. I'll provide the overview here. Public Humanities Projects program opportunities support the planning and implementation of museum exhibitions, historic site interpretation, and then public lectures and discussion programming. Projects must be grounded in humanities scholarship and demonstrate an approach that is thoughtful, balanced, and analytical, in addition to being appealing overall for broad public audiences. The program ensures scholarly grounding, rather, by requiring that each project be advised by a group of humanities scholars with expertise in the areas addressed by your project.

1:20

What's new this year? A special encouragement. NEH especially encourages applications exploring these areas: Western civilization and America's place in it; great works of literature, history, philosophy, and theology, and their relevance to contemporary questions; the 250th anniversary of the American Revolution; and civic education, civil discourse, and cultural literacy, and the practice of close reading. Be aware of a certain distinction. Exhibitions and historic places applications may choose to address these interest areas; this is optional. For public lectures and discussion forum applications, you must address at least one of them.

2:08

And now some examples of projects. What kinds of things can you do with a Public Humanities Projects grant? Some previous funded projects consider topics like the West Virginia Mine Wars history, or the history and global impact of the Declaration of Independence, Indigenous history and culture in the American Southwest, and European women artists from 1400 to 1800.

2:33

Peter Fristedt: What types of projects does Public Humanities Projects support? Project categories in this grant program are exhibitions—these awards support permanent, temporary single site, and traveling exhibitions. Note that traveling exhibitions have to take place at a minimum of two U.S. venues, one of which is the originating institution. Traveling shows may appear at non-U.S. venues, but costs associated with them can't be supported by an NEH grant. Historic Places awards support interpretive programs available for at least three years at historic sites, houses, neighborhoods, or regions. Public lectures and discussion forums awards support lecture series, symposia, panels, reading and discussion programs, and other in-person experiences for public audiences. As mentioned, these projects have to address one of the special interest areas, and those again are Western civilization and America's place in it; great works of literature, history, philosophy, and theology, and their relevance to contemporary questions; the 250th anniversary of the American Revolution; civic education, civil discourse, cultural literacy, and the practice of close reading.

3:50

The funding available in this program is planning grants are available in exhibitions and historic places for up to \$75,000 to support work over a period of performance of up to 24 months. Implementation grants are available for permanent or traveling exhibitions, historic site interpretations, and public lectures and discussion forums for up to \$500,000. The period of performance for this level is between 12 and 48 months. Implementation grants are also available for single site temporary exhibitions for up to \$100,000. And Chairman's Special Awards are large grants intended for projects of exceptional significance and impact in any of the three funding streams. These have to address one of the special encouragement areas mentioned earlier. So, while a regular exhibitions or historic places implementation project can be about any topic in the humanities, if you're requesting a Chairman's Special Award for an exhibition or an historic site interpretation, they must address the special encouragement areas.

4:59

Jill Austin: Now for important dates. The deadline for applications this season is December 16th, 2026, at 11.59 p.m. and that is one minute before midnight. This is a firm deadline, and except for the very rare cases covered by NEH's late submission policy, we will not consider applications submitted after the deadline. We anticipate that award notifications will take place in July 2027. Applicants may select their own period of performance start dates to occur between November 1st, 2027, and March 1st, 2028. Any start date that you choose must be on the 1st of the month within that window.

Project Development

5:45

Who can apply? Eligible applicants include nonprofit organizations that are 501(c)(3)s, also accredited U.S. institutions of higher education, units of state or local government, and federally recognized tribal governments. Remember that individuals, for-profit organizations, and foreign entities are not eligible to apply.

6:10

Peter Fristedt: What activities does a public humanities projects award support? These planning activities that you see here--so this is for that planning level of funding—these are not all relevant for each of the three funding streams, except for the second one. Every project has to consult with humanities scholars in particular and other experts as appropriate.

6:35

Implementation activities at that higher level of funding move the project beyond the planning phase and prepare it to go live in front of public audiences. Implementation grants, again, support consultation with scholars and a host of other activities, which you can see some of those listed there.

7:00

Jill Austin: Now for project personnel. For an implementation application, we expect these key team members that you see here on the slide to have signed on to the project. Depending, of course, on the type of project you are applying for, you may need an exhibition designer or a curator or a discussion facilitator. In this case, there should be no leading roles that are TBD when you apply at implementation. For public lectures and discussion forums applications, the leading roles should be in place, but the speakers and facilitators for those particular programs that will be part, you know, essential part of your program, will be TBD or may be TBD. List any individuals you are considering

or describe the criteria you will use to identify them.

7:49

Unallowable activities. What activities are explicitly not supported by this program at NEH? The full list of unallowable activities can be found in the Notice of Funding Opportunity, or NOFO, which we will discuss in a moment, but here on the slide we would like to highlight a few. For exhibitions, you should not apply to host a pre-existing show, and that is a traveling exhibition that originated at a different venue, and you are now taking it on your own exhibition schedule. NEH will only fund exhibitions that originate at your own institution. Also, an exhibition that travels abroad is fine, but the grant itself cannot pay for expenses associated with foreign venues. Also, the grant may support digital components of exhibitions, historic site interpretation, and public lectures and discussion series, such as a project website, for example. But the grant request cannot primarily be for a digital component. Digital components or experiences are ancillary. Also, we'd like to note that preservation, archiving, and infrastructure-related projects are not supported by this program, but this type of work can be supported by NEH's Division of Collections and Infrastructure.

Applying for a Grant

9:14

Peter Fristedt: Let's turn to how you start applying for an NEH grant. First, read over the Notice of Funding Opportunity, the NOFO, which provides extensive information on assembling an application. On the Public Humanities Projects program page on the NEH websites, that's neh.gov/grants/public/publichumanitiesgrants, you will find resources for applying under the Application Instructions tab. Under Step 1, you will find the Notice of Funding Opportunity. Read it carefully. It will tell you what information we expect to see in your application and the review criteria that reviewers will be using when evaluating your application.

9:57

You will submit your application as a series of PDF attachments. Each attachment is important, but they all do different work. You can see the list of main ones on the left. In many ways, the most important attachment is the narrative, which is where you provide the intellectual rationale for your project and spell out the humanities ideas that audiences will take away. Pay attention to page limits and other requirements for these attachments.

10:30

Jill Austin: Now we come to Grants.gov. Grants.gov is the government-wide grant submission portal. You can reach the grant page at Grants.gov by clicking on the Grants.gov application package link under the Application Instructions tab on the Public Humanities Projects program page. Once you are on the Grants.gov grant page, you will see a red Apply button, circled here on the left side in orange, 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 NEH, such as the grant resource page on our NEH site and our Lifelong Learning e-mail address, and those are circled in orange on the right side of the slide.

11:22

Required grants.gov forms. There are several required forms on grants.gov in addition to the attachments that Peter already mentioned. The attachments form mentioned at the end of this list on this slide is used to upload those PDF attachments, which include the SF-424 Application for Federal Assistance form, the supplementary cover sheet for NEH grant programs, the project performance site location form, and the research and related budget and budget justification. So those are all uploaded

into the final attachments form. We should also note that it is the institutional grant administrator who submits the application. Also note that the project director and the institutional grant administrator listed on the application cannot be the same person. You must have two different people on those roles on your application.

NEH Review

12:18

Peter Fristedt: Looking now at the review process, what happens once you've submitted your application? NEH Review is a multi-stage process designed to ensure that each application receives a full and fair review. We start by checking for eligibility, which usually eliminates a small number of projects, for example, projects submitted by for-profit businesses, or that are about topics outside of the humanities, or that have left out required application attachments. We then sort applications onto review panels by topic and activity type, as appropriate. The goal is to make sure that like proposals are reviewed with like as much as possible. Next, we recruit panels of outside peer reviewers to assess the quality of the proposals against the stated review criteria. Division staff then 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. They are a group of presidentially appointed and Senate-confirmed humanities experts and professionals. That body then reviews the recommendations and proposals and then makes further recommendations to the head of the agency, NEH's Chairman. Finally, the NEH Chairman considers the recommendations of the staff and council, and by law, makes all final funding decisions.

13:46

Who are those external reviewers who will be looking at your application? Panelists will be a mix of scholars and practitioners, and those practitioners can include curators, education directors, museum directors, historic site staff, and public discussion series organizers. We try as much as possible to match the experience and expertise of the panelists to the topic and activities of the applications under review.

14:12

Jill Austin: And now on that note, we come to the review criteria. Proposals are reviewed against the review criteria in the NOFO. So, what you see outlined here on this slide and the next couple of slides is also included in the Notice of Funding Opportunity so you can refer to it as you prepare your application. At every stage of the review that we just saw, reviewers inside and outside the agency consult these criteria and see how well your application stacks up against them. Public Humanities Projects has five review criteria, again over these few slides, with a sixth added for the cases for projects applying for a Chairman's Special Award at the higher funding level. We look at projects intellectual content and humanities significance, for example, as well as its format and program resources. We also look at audience, the targeted and anticipated audience and reach, as well as the qualifications and experience of the project team and humanities advisors. We also look at the project feasibility. Does the budget make sense? Does the work plan make sense, for example? And if applicable, we consider the justification in the case of a Chairman's Special Award request at that higher funding level.

15:33

Peter Fristedt: One of the best ways to learn what makes a strong NEH application is to serve as a reviewer. If you're interested, there is a sign-up form on the NEH website where you can enter your information. You can see the URL over there on the left side of that slide. Your information 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 often tell us it is very fulfilling. Currently, all panels take place online, and there is a modest stipend for service.

Application Tips

16:06

Jill Austin: Now it's time for some application tips. We've got some here on the slide. And consult your colleagues for any additional tips that they may recommend. First, read the NOFO. Read it again, maybe read it a third time. The NOFO and the linked budget instructions will provide all the information you need for what goes in the application. If you are at a university, contact your sponsored research office early in the process and consult them to help guide you every step of the way. Make sure that you include all required materials in your proposal and address that review criteria. Make the strongest possible case that you can for your project. Remember that reviewers are not mind readers. Don't assume that they will know everything there is to know about your project or your institution, or that they will read between the lines or fill in the gaps that you haven't included. Know your audience and know your funder. High-quality humanities content is at the core of what we fund according to the NOFO and the review criteria. 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. So draft early and get feedback. Currently, NEH staff cannot read draft applications, but your colleagues, again, may be willing to do so. We can answer questions, though. Contact the Division of Lifelong Learning if you have questions. You can also e-mail your questions to learning@neh.gov.

17:45

Peter Fristedt: Coming up, we will be holding a live Q&A that will take place on November 10th if you have any questions after watching this webinar. So, for information for that, keep an eye on the Public Humanities Projects program page on the NEH website. And also follow us on social media @NEHgov.

18:11

Jill Austin: And that's all we have for now. Thank you so much for viewing and looking over the materials. We look forward to hearing from you and reading your applications. And don't forget to tune in on November 10th for the live Q&A.