



NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE HUMANITIES

INFRASTRUCTURE AND CAPACITY BUILDING CHALLENGE GRANTS

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

(Originally published March 4, 2021; updated July 30, 2021)

Overview

I am the prospective project director of an Infrastructure and Capacity Building Challenge Grants application and have looked at the Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) but am overwhelmed. Where should I start?

You should read the NOFO in its entirety, but the following points may help to get you started:

- From the beginning, partner with a research development specialist or grant administrator at your institution to work together on different parts of the application.
- Study **A1. Purpose** in the Program Description section and decide if the Infrastructure and Capacity Building Challenge Grants program is a good match for your project. Compare your ideas with **D6. Funding restrictions** to make sure you are not applying for activities or costs that are not allowed in this program. Consider the information about **Related funding opportunities (H. Other Information)** to decide whether parts of your project might find success in other NEH programs.
- Focus on the instructions in **D2. i. Project Narrative** to craft a compelling presentation of your project's scope and significance. While composing the application narrative, keep the list under **E1. Review Criteria** close at hand to make sure your application responds to each of the evaluation criteria in the appropriate parts of the narrative.
- Assemble materials for **D2. iv. Attachments** with care to make sure all the required components and information are included.
- If possible, submit an optional draft before the date stipulated in **D4. Submission Dates and Times**.
- Your institutional grant administrator, who is responsible for budgets, federal compliance, and proposal submission, should look closely at the sections **D2. ii.**

Budget, D2. iii Budget Justification, D3. Unique Entity Identifier and System for Award Management, and F. Federal Award Administration Information.

A. Program Description

We are planning to work on a proposal that responds to NEH’s “A More Perfect Union” special initiative. Does this help our chances of getting an award?

No. All projects, including those that respond to special initiatives and encouragements, are evaluated by the same review criteria found in section **E1.** of the NOFO.

I have questions about the terminology found in the NOFO. Where can I find more information?

See the glossary in NEH’s [General Terms and Conditions for Awards to Organizations](#) and definitions in [2 CFR §200.1](#).

B. Award Information

When will we hear back on whether or not our application was approved?

For applications submitted to the May deadline, decision notifications will be issued in December. Applications to the September deadline will receive notifications in April of the following year (see **E4. Anticipated Announcement and Award Dates** in the NOFO).

How will our application be reviewed?

See **E2. Review and Selection Process** in the NOFO for a description of the NEH review process. For additional information on how NEH conducts application review, see <https://www.neh.gov/grants/application-process>.

C. Eligibility

Is there any flexibility with regard to the matching ratio or the period of performance listed in the NOFO?

No. While the matching requirements vary for different kinds of institutions, they are fixed. See **C2. Matching Requirements**. The period of performance is up to five years and must start on the first of a month (see **B2. Summary of Funding**). The fundraising period begins no earlier than five months prior to the application deadline and can include donations through the period of performance.

May we apply to both the May and September deadlines?

Eligible applicants may only apply for one Challenge Grant per calendar year, unless the application was deemed ineligible at the first deadline. See C3. Other Eligibility Information in the NOFO.

D. Application and Submission Information

How important is the format of the application (including attachments)?

Applications must follow the format outlined in the NOFO. Pay particular attention to recommended page limits listed under D2. Content and Form of Application Submission. NEH will automatically reject any applications that include files not saved as PDFs.

We have supporting materials that are not in electronic format. How should we submit them?

You must convert them into one or more PDF files. See the instructions under “Attachments Form” in section **D.2.iv.** in the NOFO for guidance on how to format your PDFs.

We expect to receive additional supporting materials after the deadline. Can they be added to our application?

No. Additional materials may not be added to an application after the deadline.

Who should be the project director?

The project director is responsible for the programmatic aspects and day-to-day management of the proposed project. Typically, the project director is either the leader of the fundraising team, the senior institutional administrator overseeing the project, or (for capital projects), the senior manager with operational oversight of the construction activities.

Are we allowed to have more than one project director?

Yes. You may designate a co-project director in your application but should provide justification for such an arrangement in the narrative section on **Project and fundraising personnel.**

We are interested in submitting a draft for preliminary review. What should we include and how do we submit it?

Submitting a draft application is voluntary. Your draft should include a narrative, preliminary workplan, and preliminary budget. Draft applications must be sent to challenge@neh.gov by the date specified in **D4. Submission Dates and Times** in the NOFO. NEH staff will respond within approximately two weeks of receipt of the draft.

E. Budget Advice

I am having a difficult time understanding the budget instructions. Whom should I contact for assistance?

Contact your institution’s research development, sponsored research, or grant administration office, if available, which will likely be familiar with federal budget requirements. If they have questions about allowable costs or administrative requirements, they should contact NEH’s Office of Grant Management at grantmanagement@neh.gov.

Some of the items on our budget can’t be explained in the space available. Where can we provide additional information?

You must include a budget justification, which briefly describes the amounts requested from NEH for each line item of the budget and how each item will support the achievement of the proposed objectives. Capital Projects applicants will attach their budget justification to the

Attachment Form; Digital Infrastructure applicants will attach it to the Research and Related Budget form (section L).

Can we include indirect costs in the budget?

It depends. For Capital Projects, indirect costs are not allowable. Indirect costs may be allowable for Digital Infrastructure applications. See section **D2.ii. Budget** for more information about allowable costs.

When can we start fundraising the matching funds?

You may apply third-party non-federal gift funds received **no earlier than five months** prior to the application deadline to fulfill matching requirements. See [Administration of Challenge Infrastructure and Capacity Building Grants](#).

Can funds set aside as savings be used as matching funds?

No. You cannot use your own institution's funds (savings, investments, budget allocations) as matching funds for Challenge Grants. Matching funds are defined as funds raised from non-federal third-party sources. See [Administration of Challenge Infrastructure and Capacity Building Grants](#).

Can government funds (state or local) be used as matching funds for a Challenge Grant?

Yes. You may use state and local government funds, provided they are non-federal and specifically designated for the proposed project. See [Administration of Challenge Infrastructure and Capacity Building Grants](#).

F. Application Review

What can we do to increase our chances for success?

Familiarize yourselves with the materials on the program resource page, including sample proposals and a list of recent funded projects. While preparing your proposal, carefully adhere to the instructions in the NOFO. While voluntary, submitting a draft is strongly encouraged. If your application is unsuccessful, request the reviewers' comments about your proposal and incorporate their advice in a revised application. If you have specific questions about your application, contact the Office of Challenge Programs staff at challenge@neh.gov.

We applied for a grant last year and were unsuccessful. Will this be held against us if we apply again this year?

No. NEH regards all applications as new. Previous applications are considered confidential and will not be disclosed to panelists. Your current application will not be evaluated by the same panelists as your previous application. Therefore, you are encouraged not to mention unsuccessful applications in your narrative.

G. Federal Award Administration Information

For Capital Projects, how involved is Section 106/NHPA review? How long will it take?

The extent and time needed to complete a Section 106/NHPA compliance review varies greatly from project to project. In addition to section **F2.** in the NOFO, you can find guidance at NEH's [Section 106 webpage](#). If you have additional questions, contact NEH's Federal Historic Preservation Officer at hpe@neh.gov.

H. Additional Assistance

We have read the NOFO and this FAQ but we still have questions. Whom should we contact for answers?

You can email challenge@neh.gov with specific questions, and program staff will respond as quickly as possible. In addition, see the **Executive Summary** at the beginning of the NOFO for information on the date of a pre-application webinar.