



NATIONAL
ENDOWMENT
FOR THE
HUMANITIES

2021

ANNUAL REPORT

FROM THE CHAIR

March 2024

Dear Mr. President,

It is my honor to present the 2021 Annual Report of the National Endowment for the Humanities. The period covered in this report began October 1, 2020, and ended September 30, 2021. During much of this time of transition, I was serving as an integral member of the advisory National Council on the Humanities while Adam Wolfson was the acting chair of the Endowment. I was sworn in as chair of NEH on February 14, 2022.

I first discovered classes in American Indian studies and sociology when I was an undergraduate student in Tucson at the University of Arizona. Suddenly, everything shifted for me. In those classes, whole worlds opened up: worlds of language, of artistry, of meaning making. The humanities were setting me down paths I never knew existed, paths I'm still traveling today.

The work of NEH supports engagement with the humanities that can be life-changing—for students, for teachers, for veterans, for researchers, and for the general public. In 2021, NEH funded a national survey led by the American Historical Association and Fairleigh Dickinson University to assess public perceptions of, and engagement with, history and the past. The results were enlightening. One finding was that the majority of respondents defined history as facts—names and dates. While facts make up history, the work of historians is much more broad. It's making sense of those facts. It's analysis and debate. It's the stories those facts tell and the context they give.

Our task as leaders in the humanities is to make room for that debate and those stories. The humanities offer us a perspective we didn't consider, a path we didn't see, a voice we could not hear. As Joy Harjo said, "Poetry [is] the use of language when you have no words." The humanities are a kind of doorway onto the world, allowing us to learn about others and, by extension, ourselves.

The doorway could lead us to the world of a young, enslaved girl whose family's story is sewn into the bag she carries as she escapes to freedom. Tiya Miles offered that history in her award-winning book *All That She Carried*. Or we might envision what once existed at the Cahokia Mounds State Historic Site through an app that virtually reconstructs and describes the pre-Columbian society. Or it could show us the formation of the National Welfare Rights Organization in Las Vegas in the 1960s and 1970s in the documentary *Storming Caesars Palace*. Each of these NEH-funded products show us the humanities encompass the good and bad in our past and help us to understand it all. We owe it to ourselves and to each other to understand our histories and to incorporate their lessons into our future.

In 2021, a glimpse into that future also dug deep into the past. With NEH support, a team at the University of Kentucky began developing nondestructive imaging and "virtual unwrapping" technology to read text from the scrolls of Herculaneum, buried under the ash from the eruption of Mount Vesuvius nearly two thousand years ago. Who knows what we will discover in these scrolls and what they might eventually tell us about the human condition?



Shelly C. Lowe (Navajo)
Chair, National Endowment for the Humanities

NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE HUMANITIES
SUMMARY OF GRANTS AND AWARDS, FY 2021

Division/Program	Number ²	Amount Obligated ¹		Total
		Outright	Matching ³	
EDUCATION PROGRAMS	130	\$12,767,770		\$12,767,770
DIGITAL HUMANITIES	56	\$5,217,815	\$199,987	\$5,417,802
RESEARCH PROGRAMS	293	\$36,578,749	\$850,438	\$37,429,187
FEDERAL/STATE PARTNERSHIP	162	\$104,486,152	\$632,900	\$105,119,052
PUBLIC PROGRAMS	86	\$14,801,315	\$43,000	\$14,844,315
PRESERVATION & ACCESS	135	\$18,857,602	\$183,873	\$19,041,475
CHALLENGE GRANTS	45		\$7,189,313	\$7,189,313
A MORE PERFECT UNION	108	\$4,886,123.00		\$4,886,123
AGENCY-WIDE PROJECTS	7	\$723,895.00		\$723,895
Total	1,022	\$198,319,421	\$9,099,511	\$207,418,932

FOOTNOTES:

1) Totals include obligations for new grants, supplemental grants, program contracts, and other program contracts and program-related purposes. Included are awards that are (a) made by NEH using appropriated funds, including funds appropriated to the A More Perfect Union special initiative, (b) made by NEH using funds contributed by nonfederal entities.

2) New grants, supplemental awards on previous years' grants, transfers to other agencies, and program contracts. Also includes grants from the American Recovery Plan (ARP) supplemental appropriations.

3) Totals include definite program funds used to match gifts.

Note: Detail may not add to totals due to rounding.

THE YEAR IN REVIEW

In fiscal year 2021, the National Endowment for the Humanities awarded \$207,418,932 to 1,022 humanities projects through seven funding offices (Education Programs, Preservation and Access, Public Programs, Research Programs, Digital Humanities, Challenge Grants, and Federal/State Partnership). After reviewing the grant recommendations of 956 peer-review panelists and a presidentially appointed council, the chair of NEH made all final decisions on the awarding of these grants.

During the year, the world continued to be affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, economic shutdowns, and social struggles. In October 2020, NEH awarded \$120,000 to help repair and restore statues of historical figures that were damaged or vandalized, and to construct new ones. In Madison, Wisconsin, for example, a chair's grant was awarded to repair two vandalized statues at the Wisconsin State Capitol: one of Colonel Hans Christian Heg, an abolitionist and Union military officer during the Civil War; and another of the allegorical statue *Forward*, commemorating women's suffrage.

As COVID-19 restrictions stretched into 2021, NEH received \$135 million in supplemental funding through the American Rescue Plan Act to assist cultural institutions affected by the pandemic. By the fall, \$87.8 million was awarded to nearly 300 cultural and educational institutions to help retain and rehire workers, and reopen sites, facilities, and programs. These grants helped the Museum of Mississippi History and Mississippi Civil Rights Museum maintain operations and expand virtual museum tours for schools across the state and helped the Grassroots Indigenous Multimedia Ojibwe language-revitalization organization work on a mobile app that teaches students about the connections between the Ojibwe language and the natural environment. Earlier, \$52.6 million was awarded to our partner state and jurisdictional humanities councils to support humanities programs and professionals at a local level.

The NEH-supported book *Franchise: The Golden Arches in Black America* by Marcia Chatelain received the 2021 Pulitzer Prize for History in June. The prize committee described the book, for which Chatelain had received an NEH research fellowship, as “a nuanced account of the complicated role the fast-food industry plays in African American communities” and “a portrait of race and capitalism that masterfully illustrates how the fight for civil rights has been intertwined with the fate of Black businesses.”

In July, NEH joined the Teagle Foundation to sponsor the *Cornerstone: Learning for Living* initiative for 21 colleges and universities across the country, totaling \$1,625,000. This was the second round of funding for *Cornerstone*. Thirty institutions received grants to support courses in which students engage with transformative texts that bring enduring questions and diverse perspectives to the challenges facing our society.

Fiscal year 2021 also saw two major historical anniversaries. A hundred years earlier, in May 1921, the Tulsa Massacre destroyed what had been one of the most economically prosperous Black neighborhoods in the country. Oklahoma Humanities awarded more than \$50,000 in grants to educational programs, a traveling exhibiton, and a symposium recalling the tragic event. September 2021 marked the twentieth anniversary of 9/11. Thousands of organizations in the U.S. and abroad took part in events related to the NEH-supported “September 11, 2001: The Day That Changed the World,” which consisted of a national exhibition and community programs that examined the events of September 11, its historical precursors, and ongoing legacy. Funded by a \$200,000 grant from NEH, the project was developed by the National September 11 Memorial & Museum in collaboration with the American Library Association.



Longwood University examines the African American experiences of war, including those of African American women. —*African American WACs at a ceremony in honor of Joan of Arc in Paris, May 27, 1945. They were members of the 6888th Central Postal Directory Battalion in World War II. Everett Collection Historical / Alamy*

Division of Education Programs

The goal of NEH’s Division of Education Programs is to strengthen the teaching of the humanities at all levels, from K–12 classrooms to community colleges and universities. Through intensive summer programs with recognized scholars, teachers deepen their understanding of humanities subjects. Other grant programs support the development of new curricula, other educational projects, and enhanced course content.

2021 HIGHLIGHTS

A \$149,890 grant from NEH is supporting a three-year curriculum development and public engagement project organized by faculty from New Mexico State University’s geography and English departments. “Critical Approaches to Place: Teaching Narrative Mapping in Southern New Mexico” includes a faculty development workshop, which will help instructors from diverse disciplines develop digital story-mapping assignments that support first-generation, multilingual, and binational students. Additional components include a new geohumanities course, a public lecture series, and a bilingual public exhibition developed in partnership with the Las Cruces Museum System to highlight students’ work. Faculty participants, students, and community partners will develop stronger relationships with one another and explore how the humanities provide essential insights into place and global environmental challenges.

Longwood University in Farmville, Virginia, was awarded \$99,549 for Civil War, Civil Rights, and Civic Duty: The African American Experience of War. The project emphasizes the involvement of Black combat veterans in three historically distinct conflicts: the American Civil War, Vietnam, and the Global War on Terror. Themes include civil rights and patriotism, the role of race in war, homecoming, and the experiences of Black women in war. Those topics are explored through multiple humanities sources including historical documents, literary selections, public history, and film. Ten discussion leaders participate in an intensive residential preparatory program grounded in the humanities and receive training in facilitating discussions. A series of discussions with African American combat veterans will be conducted at the historic Moton Museum.

The National Council for History Education in Ohio received an NEH award of \$190,000 to partner with the Astronauts Memorial Foundation on a project that examines the interconnectedness of history, race, gender, technology, and environmentalism during the space race of the 1950s through the 1970s. An interdisciplinary project team will bring together two groups of 36 K–12 humanities, civics, language arts, STEM, and elementary school educators in two separate workshops to study artifacts at the Kennedy Space Center and explore the role of the natural and built environments of east Florida in the mid twentieth century. Experiential learning activities at the space center are coupled with site visits and archival work that highlight the significance of place in historical developments.



Conservators determine sampling areas in an eighteenth-century desk at the Amparo Museum in Puebla, Mexico, as part of an international project to identify biological materials used in non-European works of art. —*Courtesy of the Metropolitan Museum of Art*

Division of Preservation and Access

Projects funded through NEH’s Division of Preservation and Access help ensure the longevity and accessibility of the nation’s cultural heritage. Much of our cultural legacy resides in books, serials, manuscripts, sound recordings, still and moving images, works of art, and digital collections at museums, libraries, and archives. NEH helps institutions preserve these collections and make them accessible to the public.

2021 HIGHLIGHTS

With a \$399,999 Research and Development award, the Metropolitan Museum of Art will lead an international team of scientists and museum practitioners to develop a methodology for identifying classes of biological materials used in the production of mostly non-European works of art. Understanding the biomolecular composition of a work of art could reveal information about the work’s geographical origin, manufacturing process, and date of creation, information that is critical for its historical analysis and conservation. The Met will develop this method in partnership with Mexico’s Hispanic Society Museum and Library and Grupo Artesanal Tecomaque, an Indigenous collective of artisans, as they study the application of chia seed oil to New Spanish paintings and lacquerware.

The Sounding Spirit digital library, a project led by Emory University in collaboration with special collections repositories at Middle Tennessee State University, the University of Kentucky, the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, the University of Michigan, and the University of Tulsa, received a \$344,687 award to digitize and make accessible 1,284 books of vernacular sacred music from the southern United States and published between 1850 and 1925. The corpus features gospel songbooks, collections of spirituals, shape-note tune books, and hymnals representing a variety of religious groups in the region.

With a \$286,191 grant, the University of Hawaii, Honolulu, will develop best practices for creating audio descriptions of humanities collections for the blind, visually impaired, and deaf-blind. Partnering with the American Council of the Blind and Helen Keller National Center, researchers will conduct empirical investigations on how to interpret and describe a range of visual heritage materials, as well as develop a web and mobile application designed to present audio descriptions of heritage sites and artifacts.



A depiction of a Cheyenne and Arapaho village near what would become Denver, 1858, is connected to an exhibition on the Sand Creek Massacre. —*History Colorado*

Division of Public Programs

NEH's Division of Public Programs supports projects that bring a variety of humanities topics to a diverse and wide audience through museum and library exhibitions, reading and discussion series, television and radio documentaries, the interpretation of historic sites, digital media projects, and history and literature programs at hundreds of local libraries and cultural organizations.

2021 HIGHLIGHTS

With a \$400,000 NEH grant in 2021, History Colorado will implement a permanent exhibition that explores the Sand Creek Massacre of 1864, where U.S. federal troops murdered more than 230 women, children, and elders of the Cheyenne and Arapaho tribes who lawfully occupied the Sand Creek land. Developed in partnership with three tribes—Northern Cheyenne Tribe of the Northern Cheyenne Reservation, Northern Arapaho Tribe, and Cheyenne and Arapaho Tribes of Oklahoma—the exhibition will be the first in the U.S. to share the culturally vetted history of the massacre through the voices of Cheyenne and Arapaho tribal members.

Verse Video Education received \$300,000 from the NEH Short Documentaries program to support the completion of five episodes in Season 4 of the award-winning public television show *Poetry in America*. The series focuses on poets and their work, and gathers distinguished persons in other fields, and individuals representing a range of ages, professions, and backgrounds, to explore American poetry as a central part of American culture and history. With this grant, the series explores the work of poets Phillis Wheatley, Robert Lowell, Joseph Brodsky, Martin Espada, and Tracy K. Smith.

With a \$400,000 grant from NEH, Carnegie Hall in New York is producing a website and interactive timeline on African American music from the seventeenth century to the present, covering more than fifty musical genres. The primary goal of the project is to create an engaging and innovative digital resource that makes humanities content on African American music, culture, and history accessible to a broad public audience. New scholarly essays and stories, revamped design and timeline interfaces, music and archival clips, and educational resources enliven the timeline that was originally created in 2009. Humanities themes explore the African heritage of African American music and culture, the intersections where African and European musical traditions meet, the evolution of the African American musical tradition, and the African American experience of performance and speechmaking at Carnegie Hall.



Historic Castillo de San Marcos, St. Augustine, was a part of the Spanish colony in Florida. —Dawna Moore / Alamy

Division of Research Programs

NEH's Division of Research Programs supports scholarly research that advances knowledge and understanding of the humanities. Awards are made to individuals and groups of scholars for projects of significance to specific fields and to the humanities as a whole. Through grants for research, translation, scholarly editions, and archaeological work, NEH works to bring forth knowledge that has long-term benefits for humanities education and public programming.

2021 HIGHLIGHTS

Beth Bailey, a professor of history and director of the Center for Military, War, and Society Studies at the University of Kansas, received a 2021 Public Scholars award of \$60,000 to write the history of race in the military during the late 1960s and early 1970s, during the period of war in Southeast Asia and civil unrest at home. Bailey's book, written for a general audience, will examine how the U.S. military responded, adopting military justice reform and race relations education while accepting the use of limited cultural symbols and affirmative action programs.

Carolyn Boyd, professor of anthropology at Texas State University-San Marcos, and a team of researchers affiliated with the Shumla Archaeological Research and Education Center received a \$145,000 award from the Archaeological and Ethnographic Field Research program to document prehistoric rock art in the Lower Pecos River Canyonlands of south Texas and north Mexico and conduct ethnographic research with Indigenous groups. Support will enable the team to interpret the images and narratives, better understand connections among early peoples in the region, and compare ancient communities across Central America.

Jason Sharples, associate professor of history at Florida Atlantic University, received a \$60,000 award from the Awards for Faculty at Hispanic-Serving Institutions program to complete a book on colonial-era Florida when Spain and Britain, and ultimately the U.S., claimed the Florida territory, each time changing its laws and governance. Sharples will tell a complicated alternative origin story for the U.S. with roots in the Caribbean, Latin America, Native America, and anglophone North America and reflect on how individuals and communities adapt to changing borders.



Harriet Beecher Stowe Center in Hartford, Connecticut, is using a challenge grant for restoration. —Naum Chayer / Alamy

Office of Challenge Grants

Challenge Grants programs strengthen institutional and organizational capacity for work in the humanities by awarding matching grants that stimulate private funding. Institutions and organizations in the United States support the humanities by preserving and providing access to collections, conducting scholarship and research, and developing educational programs for various audiences. Challenge Grants projects may involve building and renovating structures, such as museums and libraries, and updating the infrastructure that undergirds the humanities.

2021 HIGHLIGHTS

The Anchorage Library Foundation, located in Anchorage, Alaska, received \$390,500 to be matched with more than \$1.1 million in nonfederal third-party gifts. Funding will be used to construct a new Alaska Room within the flagship Loussac Library building, which will house a collection of more than 20,000 historical newspapers, books, reports, and recorded interviews relating to Alaskan Indigenous and settler communities. Inaccessible to the public since 2017 because of a water leak, the new Alaska Room will allow for moving the collection out of temporary storage and increase humanities programming through renovation of adjacent meeting rooms.

The Harriet Beecher Stowe Center in Hartford, Connecticut, was awarded \$385,416, to be matched with more than \$1.1 million in nonfederal third-party gifts. This funding will support restoration of the 1884 Katharine S. Day House and the 1873 carriage house that serves as the visitor center. The NEH award will also fund substantial improvements to landscaping, increased ADA-compliant accessibility, and upgraded security. As a result, the center will be able to reach broader and more diverse audiences, increase humanities programming and research, and better preserve this site of national importance.

New York Public Radio in New York City was awarded \$750,000, to be matched with \$3 million in non-federal third-party gifts. This funding will support the preservation of historical audio recordings related to WNYC's legacy and centennial in 2024. The NEH challenge grant will also support the acquisition and implementation of a digital asset management system for NYPR Archives. As a result, the recipient will ensure the long-term sustainability of historical assets of WNYC and WQXR, two of New York City's oldest media organizations.



The Archaeorover improves geophysical surveying for archaeological research. —Dartmouth College

Office of Digital Humanities

NEH's Office of Digital Humanities supports efforts to use computing tools for research and teaching in the humanities. Funded projects have involved data visualization, putting searchable archival material online, and crowdsourcing transcriptions of texts. The field is changing the ways material can be searched, mined, displayed, taught, and analyzed. These grants often facilitate partnerships with other funding bodies in the United States and abroad.

2021 HIGHLIGHTS

A project at the University of Maryland, College Park, received \$282,905 from NEH to improve the accuracy of handwritten text recognition (HTR) for Persian- and Arabic-script manuscripts. The project will develop a collation tool to automatically create large amounts of training data from existing digital texts and manuscript images without time-consuming human annotation of individual manuscripts. The Automatic Collation for Diversifying Corpora (ACDC) project will extend the capabilities of the text alignment tool *passim* and the HTR engine *Kraken* to align poor initial HTR transcriptions of diverse manuscript examples with existing digital texts to automatically produce training data. The ACDC will enable, for the first time, the creation of generalized Arabic and Persian HTR models required for the digital transcription of large-scale Persian and Arabic manuscript collections, making these sources more accessible for humanities research and teaching.

Georgia Tech Research Corporation in Atlanta received a \$99,893 grant to produce user-friendly software tools for the computational analysis of musical scores. Musicology research is a humanistic endeavor well suited to computational methods. Yet, despite the work of a small niche of scholars, most humanistic music scholarship is conducted via traditional, nondigital techniques. A research vacuum has been largely filled by those pursuing digital music research from a largely engineering perspective that often lacks humanistic knowledge and perspective. This project will modernize and expand the existing humdrum ecosystem to create new software tools and pedagogical materials (*humdrumR*) for computational musicology analysis that are accessible to musicologists and music theorists.

Finding, identifying, and mapping buried archaeological sites and features is a critical component of archaeological research. The most powerful tools to do this are nondestructive geophysical prospection technologies such as Ground Penetrating Radar (GPR). These tools have been used to identify buried architecture, artifacts, fields, roads, ditches, and stratigraphic sequences. However, the established field techniques for collecting this data are slow and limiting, requiring initial surveys and the manual recording of small individual grids. The University of Pennsylvania received a \$99,962 grant from NEH to develop and deploy a novel autonomous robot, the Archaeorover, that dramatically increases the efficiency and scale of geophysical survey by combining recent advances in robotics, autonomous navigation technology, and Global Navigation Satellite Systems (GNSS) with geophysical instruments.



High school student Rachael Schmidt, left, is seen taking a test in the California film *Try Harder*. —Lou Nakasako

Office of Federal-State Partnership

Through the Office of Federal-State Partnership, NEH provides general operating support awards to 56 states and jurisdictions to bring humanities education, lifelong learning, and public humanities programming to communities across the country. The Office of Federal-State Partnership collaborates with designated state and jurisdictional humanities councils to advance public understanding of the humanities while enhancing public awareness of, access to, and support for the humanities on a local, grassroots level.

2021 HIGHLIGHTS

The West Virginia Humanities Council launched its first podcast series, *Mysterious Mountains*, on January 31, 2021. The podcast showcases West Virginia as represented in folktales, local legends and lore, and genre fiction. The first season contained 12 hour-long episodes and featured the fiction of Melville Davisson Post, a popular early twentieth-century West Virginia writer whose Uncle Abner detective stories, set in nineteenth-century Harrison County, were published serially between 1911 and 1928. The first season included interviews with Romani scholar Ian Hancock of University of Texas, Austin, regarding “Gypsy” stereotypes in literature and film; Suzanne Bray, professor of British literature and culture at Lille Catholic University in France, discussing Old Testament prophets and Uncle Abner’s frequent references to Biblical texts and scripture; and Crystal Wimer, director of the Harrison County Historical Society, discussing the history of religious communities in early Harrison County.

With funding from California Humanities, the film *Try Harder* by filmmaker Debbie Lum premiered at the January 2021 Sundance Film Festival and was broadcast nationally on PBS in May 2022. The film chronicles the intense academic pressures on five seniors at San Francisco’s prestigious Lowell High School as they navigate the American college-application process. The film gives voice to a core Asian American issue—the pursuit of educational achievement—through an engaging humanistic story of students who are stereotyped as “the model minority.” *Try Harder* has screened at more than 25 festivals nationally and was selected by the Center for Asian American Media as the opening night film of CAAMFest 2021. The project team has built partnerships, organized screenings, and developed educators’ guides to dig into issues, such as mental health, explored in the film.

New Hampshire Humanities’s Connections is an adult literacy and book discussion program that primarily serves refugees, immigrants, disabled adults, adult basic education students, and individuals in the criminal justice system. NHH connects a facilitator—artist, writer, or scholar in literature and other humanities fields—with a teacher at a host organization. Over the course of a series, the facilitator leads the students in discussion of four selected texts chosen from a book list of award-winning and culturally diverse titles for all reading levels. At correctional facilities, Connections works with facility staff to send the book and an audio recording of the participant reading the book to their homes outside the facility, helping incarcerated parents maintain connections with their children. Between November 1, 2020, and October 31, 2021, Connections served 330 people. Teacher evaluations reported that 86 percent of the students increased their vocabulary, 81 percent increased their knowledge of history or culture, and 67 percent increased their conversation skills.

MEMBERS OF THE NATIONAL COUNCIL ON THE HUMANITIES

NEH's chair is advised by the National Council on the Humanities, a board of up to twenty-six distinguished private citizens appointed by the president and confirmed by the Senate. The National Council members serve staggered six-year terms.

Members Serving in 2020

Kathe Albrecht
Francine Berman
Russell Berman
Allison Blakely
Keegan Callanan
Constance Carroll
Armand DeKeyser
William English
Marjorie Fisher
John Fonte
Claire Griffin
Kim Holmes
Phyllis Kaminsky
Dorothy Kosinski
Shelly Lowe
Joyce Malcolm
Matthew Rose
Ramón Saldívar
William Schneider, Jr.
Katherine Tachau
Noël Valis
Jean Yarbrough

The National Endowment for the Humanities is an independent federal agency created in 1965. It is one of the largest funders of humanities programs in the United States. The Endowment serves and strengthens our Republic by promoting excellence in the humanities and conveying the lessons of history to all Americans. NEH-supported grant programs foster scholarship and research, enrich all levels of education, preserve cultural treasures, and encourage public understanding of the humanities.

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Cover: The last column remaining from Ground Zero stands in front of slurry wall at the National September 11 Memorial & Museum. NEH supported "September 11, 2001: The Day That Changed the World," a national exhibition with community programs that examined the events of 9/11 at its 20th anniversary. —Amy Cicconi / Alamy



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