NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE HUMANITIES

DIVISION OF **PUBLIC PROGRAMS**

Public Humanities Projects

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Posted May 6, 2022

Humanities content and advisers

1. What are "humanities themes"?

A theme is a brief interpretive assertion about a topic that shows the educational direction that a project will take. More than a topic, a theme considers the relevant humanities scholarship and offers a broad conceptual framework for understanding material. For example, "Women in the Civil War" is a topic. It describes a subject but does not reveal the interpretive approach to it. On the other hand, "Women played important economic roles during the Civil War" is a theme. It identifies a topic and also suggests what audiences might learn about it.

2. How much should we pay scholarly advisers?

There is no set fee for scholars and other professional consultants and interpretive experts working on your project. Some applicants pay scholars a flat honorarium, others pay a daily rate. Discuss your project with the scholars, including the work that you expect from them, and negotiate a fair rate. See 2 CFR § 200.459.

General information about Public Humanities Projects (PHP)

3. How do I know whether my organization's project is more appropriate for the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) or the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH)?

If your project involves the creation of musical compositions, dance, painting, poetry, short stories, novels, or if it focuses on arts performance or training, you should apply to NEA. NEH supports projects that provide an analytical, reflective, or historical perspective on the arts and other subjects.

4. How do we know which level of funding is right for our project?

You are ready to apply for a Planning level award if you:

- are planning an exhibition or historic site interpretation (Humanities Discussions are not funded at this level);
- have conducted preliminary research, including introductory discussions with scholars, and are able to articulate major analytical ideas about your subject that you seek to explore more deeply;
- have a group of scholars from outside your organization who are committed to collaborating with you on development of the project; and
- can articulate a vision of possible interpretive techniques and potential project elements that you would like to investigate or test with audiences (for example, ideas about the use or display of certain objects, specific concepts for an interactive activity, or ideas about the utilization of a particular space).

You are ready to apply for an Implementation level award if you:

- have conducted significant research and collaboration with scholars outside your organization that resulted in highly developed, thoughtful and articulated analysis of your subject;
- have designed and planned the interpretive elements of your project, such as interactive activities, panel discussions, or living history presentations, and can fully describe how audiences would engage with them; and
- have blueprints or drafts for various project elements, such as exhibition elevation designs, floor plans, docent or facilitator training, label text, site signage, tour scripts, or discussion agendas; and
- are ready to begin putting these plans into action to "go live" before a public audience.

5. Our organization is implementing a museum exhibition that will be accompanied by a website and a short film. Should we apply only to PHP or should we submit multiple applications to different NEH programs?

Many PHP projects include multiple formats. You should consider how you will use grant funds and staff resources in order to determine the primary format for which to request support and then apply to the most appropriate NEH program.

In this example, the exhibition is the primary grant product; the other components enhance and broaden its content. You should probably apply to PHP and follow the PHP Notice of Funding Opportunity for describing the exhibition and related components.

6. What if we want funding only for a single format, such as a museum exhibition?

Projects with a single format are still welcome and will be judged on their own merits.

7. Must our organization apply for a Planning grant before we apply for an Implementation grant?

No. You may apply for the type of grant that is appropriate for the developmental stage of your project. Although many applicants find it beneficial to obtain planning funds before applying for implementation, it is not required.

8. To which program should our organization apply if we want to produce a documentary film or podcast?

If you are planning to produce a radio program, film, television series, or podcast for broad regional or national distribution over broadcast media, the most appropriate program is Media Projects.

9. What are the most common mistakes that applicants make?

Applicants often fail to provide as much information as evaluators expect. You must discuss the project in considerable detail, clearly articulating your concept for the project and the humanities issues that the project deals with, even when the proposal is for a Planning project. In order to be competitive, you should have done considerable research on the subject and consulted with scholars about their ideas; you should also explain the scholars' contributions in the proposal.

10. What are Positions in Public Humanities, and how are they related to PHP?

Positions in Public Humanities provide additional funding to hire a one- or two-year entry-level staff person to work with the proposed project. Implementation applicants are eligible to apply for this support; Planning applicants are not. Implementation applicants may request up to an additional $50,000 for a one-year position or $100,000 for a two-year position to support the hiring of a recent graduate of an MA or PhD program in a humanities discipline relevant to the project, including museum studies and public history. The individual must have graduated in the last five years, and they must be a U.S. citizen or a foreign national who has been living in the U.S. or its jurisdictions for at least three years prior to the PHP application deadline. The candidate selected to fill the position would be expected to strengthen the interpretive and public aspects of the PHP project by incorporating fresh ideas and perspectives. More information is available in the Notice of Funding Opportunity.

11. Does this program fund resources for students and teachers?

You should target projects to the general public, and the project budget and activities should reflect this focus. However, an Implementation project can include resources that help students and teachers explore the humanities content and themes central to the project. Such resources might include classroom-specific hands-on activities, lesson plans, scholarly essays, maps, and/or timelines. Projects intended primarily for students in formal learning environments are not allowed in this program.

12. Are program officers available through phone or e-mail to answer questions?

Yes. We encourage you to contact us to discuss applications prior to their submission. Draft proposals are voluntary, but we are happy to review those submitted by the dates in section D4

of the Notice of Funding Opportunity, and to share samples of previously funded projects. You can reach the staff at 202-606-8269 or publicpgms@neh.gov.

13. If I am an individual scholar, community member, or curator unaffiliated with a nonprofit organization, may I apply for a Public Humanities Projects grant?

No. Individuals are not eligible to apply. Nevertheless, many cultural organizations, arts centers, and universities may be willing to partner with you and participate in your proposed project. The partnering organization is responsible for submitting the application to NEH. If the application is funded, the partnering organization is the recipient of record and assumes all programmatic, financial, and legal responsibilities of the award. The partnering organization may not function solely as a fiscal agent.

Submitting an application

14. Must our organization submit our application through Grants.gov?

You must apply online, using either Grants.gov Workspace or your organization's system-to-system software.

15. May our organization submit an application for two different projects at the same time?

Yes. In each application, clearly explain how you would allocate your time if you were to receive more than one award. Overlapping project costs between two or more applications for federal funding and/or approved federal award budgets are not permitted.

16. May unsuccessful applicants resubmit their proposals?

Yes. Unsuccessful applicants may revise and resubmit proposals that were not previously funded to future application deadlines. All applicants may request the evaluators' assessments of their proposals. This information is useful as you continue working on the project and decide whether to resubmit.

17. May the project director also serve as the institutional grant administrator?

No. The project director may not serve as the institutional grant administrator. The role of the project director must be distinct from that of the institutional grant administrator, who functions as the representative of the recipient organization with authority to act on the organization's behalf in matters related to the administration of the award. All financial reports and prior approval requests, such as budget revisions, extensions of the period of performance, and changes in key personnel, must be signed or countersigned by the institutional grant administrator. Similarly, official correspondence from NEH to a recipient (for example, an offer letter, the award document, an extension, a supplement or amendment) is addressed to the institutional grant administrator and copied to the project director. The project director is the person directly in charge of the conduct of the funded project. Because the project director's involvement in the project is normally critical to its success, the replacement of the project director or the co-director or a substantial reduction in the level of their effort (for example, an unanticipated absence for more than three months, or a 25 percent reduction in the time devoted to the project) requires prior written approval from NEH.

18. How do I know if I need to submit a subrecipient budget in my application package?

If your project includes subawards, you must provide a Research and Related budget and budget justification for each subrecipient. Per OMB Circular A-133, a subrecipient relationship exists when a pass-through entity (your organization) provides funding to a third party to perform a portion of the scope of work or objectives of the pass-through entity's federal award.

Federal award information

19. What are the differences between outright funds and federal matching funds? What is cost sharing?

Outright funds are awarded on a non-matching basis, which means they are not contingent on additional fundraising.

Federal matching funds require a recipient to obtain nonfederal gift funds from third parties before the matching funds are released. See NEH Federal Matching Funds Guidelines.

Learn more about different types of grant funding.

Cost sharing or matching is the portion of the project costs not paid by NEH funds.

Required cost sharing consists of third-party nonfederal cash contributions used to release federal matching funds. If NEH only awards you outright funds, you do not have any required cost sharing.

You may use voluntary cost sharing for projects in which the total costs exceed the amount awarded by NEH. Voluntary cost sharing includes cash contributions to a project by the applicant and nonfederal third parties, as well as in-kind contributions, such as donated goods and services and unrecovered indirect costs.

20. If our organization receives NEH funding, may we also accept funding from other sources?

Yes. We encourage applicants to approach a range of funders. You may use voluntary cost sharing for projects in which the total costs exceed the amount awarded by NEH. As a reminder, overlapping project costs between two or more applications for federal funding and/or approved federal award budgets are not permitted.

21. Do we need to have already raised money from other sources in order to be competitive for a Public Humanities Projects award?

No.