



NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE HUMANITIES

DIVISION OF RESEARCH PROGRAMS

# PUBLIC SCHOLARS

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

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### I. Eligibility

**1. I am an independent scholar (or a journalist or other writer unaffiliated with a college or university). What are my chances of receiving an award in the Public Scholars program?**

This program encourages applications from independent writers, researchers, scholars, and journalists. Your chances are the same as any other applicant's. All applicants to the Public Scholars program must propose a significant book that is likely to appeal to general audiences and must also present evidence of their qualifications, including previous publications.

**2. I am a graduate student. Am I eligible to apply to the Public Scholars program?**

No. Students enrolled in a degree program are not eligible to apply to the Public Scholars program.

**3. I am translating a book that reached a popular audience abroad. Am I eligible to apply to the Public Scholars program?**

No. Translation projects are unallowable under the Public Scholars program. Applications for translation projects by a single scholar should be directed to NEH's [Fellowships](#) program. Applications for translation projects by a team of two or more collaborators should be directed to the [Scholarly Editions and Translations](#) program.

**4. I am involved in a collaborative project. Can collaborators split an award?**

No. Awards may not be divided. If you seek funding for a co-author, each person seeking funding must submit a separate application specifying the individual contribution. External reviewers will be asked to evaluate each application on its own merits. For additional information on collaborative projects, see section C.3 of the Notice of Funding Opportunity, under the heading "Collaborative projects."

**5. I am working on a book that is primarily addressed to scholars, but it will be accessible to interested general readers as well. Is it suitable for the Public Scholars program?**

No. The program supports books conceived and written for a general audience. Although proposed books may make a scholarly contribution, and may be of interest to professional scholars, such readers should not be the primary audience. Applicants working on books primarily addressed to scholars should apply instead to the NEH [Fellowships](#) program or [Summer Stipends](#) program.

**6. My project fits the goals of the Public Scholars program, but I have not previously published a book with a commercial or university press. Am I eligible to apply?**

Yes, provided that you have published at least three articles or essays in general-interest publications that reach a large national or international audience. For additional information on the requirement regarding previous publications, see section C.1 of the Notice of Funding Opportunity (under the heading “Eligible applicants”).

**7. May I apply for a Public Scholars award to revise and publish my dissertation?**

No. You may, however, apply to the NEH [Fellowships](#) program or [Summer Stipends](#) program.

**8. My research and writing fit into the social sciences more easily than the humanities. Am I eligible to apply?**

You may be eligible. NEH recognizes that there is significant overlap between the social sciences and the humanities, and our founding legislation stipulates that the agency may support work in “those aspects of the social sciences which have humanistic content and employ humanistic methods.” Projects in such areas as anthropology, sociology, archaeology, linguistics, political science, economics, international relations, psychology, and geography may be eligible for the program, provided their methods do not rely primarily on statistical or mathematical analysis. If you are uncertain whether your project fits within the program’s scope, please contact NEH staff for clarification.

## **II. Multiple Applications and Awards**

**1. May I apply for other NEH grants to support the same project that I am submitting to the Public Scholars program?**

Yes. NEH encourages applicants to apply to all programs for which they are eligible. For information on other NEH programs that may be suitable, see section C.3 of the Notice, under “Other Eligibility Information.”

**2. What if I am offered more than one award?**

In most cases, you may accept only one award. You may not hold two or more NEH individual awards (for example, a Fellowship and a Public Scholars award or a Summer Stipend) with overlapping periods of performance or in support of the same tasks, and you may not accept or

hold two NEH individual awards in the same fiscal year. For additional information, see section C.3 (“Other eligibility information”) of the Notice of Funding Opportunity.

### **III. Application and References**

#### **1. What help is available for preparing the proposal?**

NEH staff will answer questions about preparing your proposal and about your eligibility. Staff members are not able to comment on draft proposals for this program. The staff may be reached at [publicscholar@neh.gov](mailto:publicscholar@neh.gov).

#### **2. How should I title my proposal? Does NEH change project titles?**

Your title should be descriptive of the project, substantive, and free of specialized language. It should be easily understood by the general public. The title should not exceed 125 characters (including spaces and punctuation).

Avoid using a main title that requires clarification by the subtitle. For example, “A History of Counterfeiting in the U.S., 1776-1900” is clearer than “Fakes and Fakers: A History of Counterfeiting in the U.S., 1776-1990.”

When possible, include places and dates indicating a project’s scope. For example, “Faith and Belief among New York City Catholics, 1945-1970” is clearer than “Faith and Belief in the Catholic Community.”

If a person is mentioned in your title, include dates and a descriptor. For example, “A Biography of German Philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724-1804)” is clearer than “A Biography of Immanuel Kant.”

Use words and phrases that are informative and specific rather than puzzling or intriguing. For example, “A Cultural History of the Telephone and Telecommunications in America, 1950-2015” is clearer than “Ten Digits and a Party Line: A Study of a Number and a Nation.”

Omit technical terms, jargon, and unfamiliar words. For example, “Time, Space, and Clocks in the 19th-Century British Novel” is clearer than “Chronotopes and Horologies in the 19th-Century British Novel.”

You should provide the project title in section 6.a. of the SF-424 Application for Federal Assistance – Individual Form. This form is part of the Grants.gov application package. It is explained in section D2 of the Notice of Funding Opportunity.

NEH reserves the right to re-title funded projects that do not follow agency guidelines. Award recipients, however, are permitted to use their preferred title for any award products.

#### **3. Will I be notified as to whether my letter writers have submitted their letters?**

Yes. NEH will notify you by e-mail when each of your letters of reference has arrived. After Grants.gov notifies you that NEH has received your application, you may also check the status of

your letters of reference by logging in to the [secure area of NEH's website](#). For more information, see section D.7 of the Notice of Funding Opportunity ("Other Submission Requirements").

**4. One or both of my letter writers did not receive the e-mail from NEH requesting the upload of his or her letter. What should I do?**

NEH will not send out requests for letters until approximately January 11. If, even allowing for this, one of your letter writers has not received the request, it is usually because a junk e-mail filter captured the request or because you supplied an incorrect e-mail address (the NEH system uses the address exactly as you enter it). You may resend the upload link to your letter writers by logging in to the [secure area of the NEH website](#). If you need to correct an error in an e-mail address, please contact the program staff at [publicscholar@neh.gov](mailto:publicscholar@neh.gov).

**5. Is it possible to change a letter writer after the application deadline?**

Yes. To do so, please contact the program staff at [publicscholar@neh.gov](mailto:publicscholar@neh.gov). Indicate which letter writer you would like to replace and provide the contact information, including e-mail address, for the new person.

**6. Are late letters of reference accepted?**

Yes. NEH will automatically add all letters to your file as soon as they are uploaded. But if one or more external reviewers have already reviewed your application, it is possible that they will not take the late letter into account.

**7. Does a missing letter of reference disqualify my application?**

No. Your application will still be eligible for review and for an award. Reviewers may, however, find your application less persuasive if one or both letters are missing.

**8. After the application deadline, I was offered a contract for publication of my book. May I update my application to reflect this?**

After the application deadline has passed, you may not change your application or add material to your file (apart from letters of reference).

**9. How will my application be reviewed?**

All applications receive peer review. Details about NEH's review process are available [here](#).

**10. Can I see the reviewers' comments after the competition?**

Yes. The notification you receive about the decision made on your application will contain instructions for requesting the reviewers' comments. If your application is unsuccessful, the comments may help you revise it for resubmission.

## **IV. Research Methods, Sources, Documentation, and Writing for General Readers**

### **1. I am a journalist used to conducting research through interviews and other firsthand conversation or through information-gathering on the internet. Are these research methods acceptable?**

Yes, but by themselves they may not be sufficient to gain a full picture of the topic and effectively present it to general readers. You may wish to consider additional research methods, including consultation of previous publications in relevant fields, archival research, or contacting scholars in the humanities who may be able to offer useful perspective. As explained in the directions for the “Significance and contribution” section of the project narrative, you should discuss how your project relates to previous work on the topic and how your work makes a new contribution.

### **2. What types of sources are acceptable as the basis of a Public Scholars project?**

The program is open to projects using many different types of sources. Appropriate primary and secondary sources include historical and contemporary documents, books and other writings, artifacts and objects, literary or artistic or cinematic or visual works, print or digital publications or other digital materials and resources, interviews, observation (including participant observation), the administration of surveys or questionnaires, and other fieldwork. As explained in the Notice of Funding Opportunity, the “Sources and organization” section of the project narrative should discuss your sources and research materials, how you will use them, and how they support your treatment of the topic.

### **3. How thoroughly should I document sources?**

This program only supports nonfiction. Your documentation of sources should make clear how you know what you are telling your reader.

If, for example, you are writing a biography, you must be careful to make clear when you are speculating about what your subject saw, heard, or thought at particular moments, and to avoid introducing detail that has no firm basis in the historical record. For additional information on documentation, see the instructions for the “Final product and dissemination” section of the project narrative. The Endowment has a [research misconduct policy](#) addressing fabrication of data and plagiarism.

### **4. What form of documentation should I use?**

The form of documentation is up to you (and your publisher), but you should balance the demands of readability and precision. Frequent footnotes may annoy the general reader and make the page look forbidding. Lumping notes together and employing endnotes may be preferable, provided you can do so without introducing ambiguity about which parts of your account are derived from which source(s). Many successful works of nonfiction for general readers use endnotes keyed to particular phrases in the text without inserting any indication in the text itself that there is a note. If the writing sample you provide is drawn from the proposed book, it should demonstrate how you will handle the documentation of sources or contain a note explaining this. If the writing sample is not drawn from the proposed book, the “Final product

and dissemination” section of the project narrative should indicate how you will handle documentation of sources (as explained in the Notice of Funding Opportunity).

**5. I am a professional scholar. Should I consider applying?**

Yes, but keep in mind that in accordance with Review Criterion 1, your proposed book will be judged on its appeal and intellectual significance for general readers. Superficial changes to academic writing, such as reducing the number of notes or changing their format, or including explanations of specialized terms, are usually not sufficient to satisfy this criterion. Academic writing is often motivated by the perception of “a gap in knowledge.” But to attract the general reader, a more urgent motivation for the book will probably be required. Not all gaps in knowledge are of equal consequence, so consider other ways to explain why your topic matters and to develop the framing of your project. In presenting your material, consider such things as effective use of storytelling, reining in the length of chapters, limiting the number of examples you give, and returning regularly to the big picture. Scholarly debates and the names of scholars and their books are often best relegated to the notes and bibliography if they are mentioned. If your project is not well suited to the Public Scholars program, you may wish to consider applying instead for an NEH Fellowship or Summer Stipend.

**V. Award Information and Allowable Periods of Performance**

**1. May I hold an award part-time or combine part-time and full-time work during the period of performance?**

Yes. You could, for example, work half-time for six months (which is the equivalent of three full-time months) and full time for three months. The dollar value of your award would be \$30,000 (6 full-time months at \$5,000 per month). For more information, see section B.2 of the Notice of Funding Opportunity (“Summary of funding”).

**2. May I apply for a period of performance shorter than six months?**

No. The minimum period of performance is six full-time months (or the equivalent amount of part-time or full- and part-time work). Applicants requesting a period of performance shorter than this are subject to disqualification.

**3. Can I count work done before or after the period of performance toward the minimum requirement of six months of work?**

No. The minimum period of performance is six full-time months or the equivalent. You may not count work done before or after the period of performance toward this requirement.

**4. Does the period of performance have to be continuous?**

Yes. You must work at least half-time on your project throughout your period of performance.

**5. I plan to work full time on the project with the exception of one month when I need to reduce my effort to half time. Would this constitute a break of continuity in my period of performance?**

No. Awards may be held part time or full time (or part time for some months and full time for other months). This would constitute a continuous period of performance. The dollar value of your award would be reduced to reflect your switch to half-time status during that month.

## **VI. Submitting Your Application**

### **1. How do I know if I have submitted my application successfully?**

It is your responsibility as an applicant to confirm that Grants.gov and subsequently NEH have received your application. You can use the Grants.gov [Track my Application](#) tool to check the status of your application. For more information, see section D.4 of the Notice of Funding Opportunity (“Submission Dates and Times”).

### **2. What is a D-U-N-S® number? What is a TIN/EIN number? How do I find out my institution’s numbers?**

D-U-N-S® stands for “data universal numbering system.” D-U-N-S® numbers are issued by Dun and Bradstreet (D & B) and consist of nine digits. TIN/EIN stands for “Taxpayer Identification Number/Employer Identification Number.” These numbers are generally available from an institution’s sponsored research office or on your institution’s website. You may also find your institution’s D-U-N-S number using the [advanced search tool](#) on the D&B website. If you have a U.S. institutional affiliation, you must provide the D-U-N-S number on the NEH Supplemental Form for Individuals to ensure that your application is processed correctly.

More information about D-U-N-S® numbers is available [here](#).

### **3. Why must I provide a D-U-N-S® number? Isn’t this a program for individual applicants, not institutional applicants?**

The Public Scholars program is indeed for individual applicants, not institutional applicants. Nevertheless, applicants affiliated with a U.S. institution must provide the institution’s D-U-N-S® number, to ensure that institutions’ names are listed correctly in the NEH database and in the materials that we provide to external reviewers.