



NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE HUMANITIES

DIVISION OF RESEARCH PROGRAMS

PUBLIC SCHOLARS

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

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 a fellowship from 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 and public appearances, presentations, and other relevant experience.

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. 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. The Public Scholars program is designed primarily for individual researchers. 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. Each application should clearly explain how the

work will be divided and the extent to which each collaborator's contribution depends on that of the other(s). Applicants who are seeking funding only for themselves but who are working as part of a collaborative team are eligible. In this case, too, the application should clearly explain how the work will be divided and the extent to which each collaborator's contribution depends on that of the other(s). Applicants proposing to work together may wish to apply instead or in addition for an NEH [Collaborative Research](#) grant.

5. I am working on a book that is primarily addressed to scholars or people with a professional interest in my topic. May I apply to the Public Scholars program?

No. The Public Scholars program supports only books intended to appeal to a general audience. Scholars who are working in a specialized field should apply instead to the NEH [Fellowships](#) program or the [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 print or electronic publications that reach a large national or international audience of general readers. Articles or essays appearing in peer-reviewed academic journals or other publications aimed primarily at readers with a professional interest in the material do not satisfy this requirement. If you do not meet the requirement for previous publication, you may wish to apply instead to the NEH [Fellowships](#) program or the [Summer Stipends](#) program.

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 should support work in "those aspects of the social sciences which has 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. Other Fellowship Opportunities

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. Applicants to the Public Scholars program at the February 5, 2020 deadline may subsequently apply—at

their April 2020 deadlines—to the [Fellowships](#) program or to one of the Awards for Faculty programs (for [Hispanic-Serving Institutions](#), [Historically Black Colleges and Universities](#), or [Tribal Colleges and Universities](#)). They may also apply to the NEH [Summer Stipends](#) program—or (in collaboration with at least one other project participant) to the [Collaborative Research](#) or [Scholarly Editions and Translations](#) program.

Each competition has distinct application requirements. Please follow the instructions in the relevant notice of funding opportunity.

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. (Note: if you apply to the Summer Stipends program and the Public Scholars program in immediate succession, accepting an award in the Stipends program will preclude acceptance of an award in the Public Scholars program.)

You may not hold a Public Scholars award for a project already supported by an NEH Fellowship, a Public Scholars award, or an Award for Faculty. You may, however, hold a Public Scholars award for a project previously supported by a two-month NEH Summer Stipend as long as the tasks supported are different and you have completed the period of your Summer Stipend before applying for a Public Scholars award.

You may not work on a project supported by an NEH institutional award as either a project director or participant during the period of performance of an NEH individual award that is held full time.

3. Are there other grant opportunities related to NEH that I should be aware of as an individual researcher?

In addition to offering the programs mentioned above (under “1. May I apply for other NEH grants...”), NEH partners with several other organizations to offer support for individual researchers:

Library of Congress (LOC) – John W. Kluge Center Fellowships

Projects that draw on the collections of the Library of Congress are eligible for support. Interested applicants should apply directly to [LOC's Kluge Center Fellowships Program](#). These fellowships are available only to applicants who have received a terminal advanced degree within the past seven years in the humanities, social sciences, or in a professional field such as architecture or law.

NEH Grants for Fellowship Programs at Independent Research Institutions (FPIRI)

Projects to be undertaken at independent centers for advanced study, libraries, and museums in the United States, and research centers overseas, are eligible for support. Individual scholars

must apply directly to the institutions themselves. Available [here](#) is a list of currently funded institutions.

Japan-United States Friendship Commission (JUSFC) – [Fellowships for Advanced Social Science Research on Japan](#)

Subjects may include modern Japanese political economy, international relations and society, and United States-Japan relations. Applicants may consult the [JUSFC website](#) for additional information.

NEH and National Science Foundation Fellowship Program for Documenting Endangered Languages (DEL)

Projects on endangered languages are eligible for support. A full description of the DEL program is located [here](#).

III. Application and References

1. What help is available for preparing the proposal?

NEH staff members are not able to comment on draft proposals intended for the Public Scholars program. NEH staff will, however, answer questions about preparing your proposal and about your eligibility. The staff may be reached at (202) 606-8200 and at 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). Your NEH project title should not necessarily be the same as the title of your proposed book.

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 Horologics 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 D 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](#). Enter your NEH application number and your Grants.gov tracking number. You will be able to see the names and e-mail addresses of your letter writers and whether their letters have arrived. If necessary, you may send reminders to your letter writers (including the upload link) from this site.

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 seven to ten days after the application deadline. If, even allowing for this, one of your letter writers has not received such a 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.

In any case, NEH strongly encourages you to confirm that your letter writers have received the upload link before the **February 26, 2020** deadline for submitting letters. You are responsible for ensuring that your letters have arrived by the deadline.

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. 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 an external reviewer has already reviewed your application, it is unlikely that he or she will 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. Knowledgeable people outside the Endowment will read and rate your application, using the evaluation criteria listed in Section E of the notice of funding opportunity. NEH staff comments on matters of fact or on significant issues that otherwise would be missing from these reviews, then makes recommendations to the National Council on the Humanities. The National Council meets at various times during the year to advise the NEH chairman. The chairman takes into account the advice provided by the review process and, by law, makes all funding decisions. More 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 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. In accordance with Review Criterion 3, proposals should demonstrate strong awareness of the current state of the field(s) to which they are contributing.

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. Whatever your sources, you should discuss why you have chosen them and how you will use them. Be sure to list your most important sources in your bibliography and/or your project narrative.

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. It may be quite possible, for example, to establish that the weather was hot on a particular day in a particular city, but to extrapolate from this to say that your subject “had never felt so hot before,” would not be acceptable in the absence of specific documentation.

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.

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, the motivation for the book must be more urgent than this. Not all gaps in knowledge are of equal consequence, so consider other ways to explain why your topic matters and develop the framing of your project with this need in mind. 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 a grant 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). You should explain the details of your work plan in the narrative portion of the application. If you plan to work part-time, indicate whether you will work half-time, three-quarters time, or some other fraction of time. You must work at least half-time on your project for the duration of your period of performance.

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.

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.

NEH will assign a tracking number beginning with FZ- to your application when it has been received. The assignment of a tracking number does not, however, guarantee that the application is free of technical problems (such as missing attachments or failure to convert attachments to PDFs). If NEH's system detects a technical problem with your application after retrieving it from Grants.gov, you will be sent an email notification, provided you have included an e-mail address in your application.

2. What is the Application for Federal Assistance - Individual Form, and where do I find it?

The Application for Federal Assistance - Individual Form is a standard government application form. It is one of the documents that you will need to complete in order to submit your application to Grants.gov. To begin filling out the form, type your name in the “Application Filing Name” field that appears when you open the form. See Section D of the notice of funding opportunity.

3. 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 at your institution’s 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](#).

4. 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.