



NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE HUMANITIES

DIVISION OF EDUCATION PROGRAMS

SPOTLIGHT ON HUMANITIES IN HIGHER EDUCATION

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

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1. What are the humanities, and how should they be incorporated into our proposed project?

Under the [National Foundation on the Arts and the Humanities Act of 1965](#), “The term ‘humanities’ includes, but is not limited to, the study and interpretation of the following: language, both modern and classical; linguistics; literature; history; jurisprudence; philosophy; archaeology; comparative religion; ethics; the history, criticism and theory of the arts; those aspects of the social sciences which have humanistic content and employ humanistic methods; and the study and application of the humanities to the human environment with particular attention to reflecting our diverse heritage, traditions, and history and to the relevance of the humanities to the current conditions of national life.” Your humanities project for the Spotlight on Humanities in Higher Education program may incorporate engagement with writing and composition, foreign languages, workforce development, and/or programs of study that lie outside traditional humanities disciplines.

2. Is the Spotlight on Humanities in Higher Education (Spotlight) program a good fit for our institution?

NEH designed the Spotlight program for small and medium sized accredited institutions of higher education and nonprofit organizations whose work advances the humanities at these institutions and among their faculty and students. The program supports the exploration and development of small projects that would benefit underserved populations through the teaching and study of the humanities. You should explain how your institution meets these criteria in the “Institutional Context and Benefit” section of the application narrative. This section should identify the communities and/or students that your institution or organization serves, including

underserved students and/or communities, and clearly explain how they would benefit from the proposed project.

During the review process, peer reviewers will consider the appropriateness of the Spotlight program for your institution or organization and the needs it addresses, among other review criteria. NEH staff will also consider the program's purpose and intended audience when making funding recommendations.

For more information see C. Eligibility Information and E1. Review Criteria in the Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO).

3. Our institution plans to submit multiple Spotlight proposals, and/or a proposal to another NEH program at the same time. Will NEH fund only one? And must each application have a different project director?

It depends. NEH evaluates each application on its own merits. NEH might fund all applications, some, or none. As a reminder, you may not include overlapping project costs in two or more applications for federal funding. In addition, individuals who are participating in multiple federally-funded projects must allocate their time between the projects. For instance, if an individual commits to devote 60% of her time to work on one federal award, she may not propose to spend more than 40% of her time on another federal award.

The same individual may serve as project director for multiple proposed projects under this notice. If an individual will serve as project director on multiple applications, explain in the narratives how the project director would allocate time between the awards. You may not propose someone to serve as your project director if they will hold a full-time NEH individual award during the period of performance. Applicants interested in applying for more than one NEH award should consult with an NEH program officer.

4. What first steps should we take in developing a Spotlight grant proposal?

First, read the NOFO carefully, including the eligibility requirements in C. Eligibility Information. Be sure to read the review criteria for your application in E1. Review Criteria. You may wish to discuss your proposal with colleagues or consult with a grants officer at your institution, if one is available.

After this preparation, contact an NEH program officer for answers to questions, advice on the proposal, and review of draft application materials. Submission of draft material is optional, but you do not need to have a fully developed program idea or near complete application to submit materials for review and feedback. If you wish to submit a draft, consult D4. Submission Dates and Times in the NOFO for the deadline. Email spotlight@neh.gov to reach NEH program staff.

Your organization must also register with the [System for Award Management \(SAM\)](#) and [Grants.gov](#); this process is described in D3. Unique Entity Identifier and System for Award Management.

5. Are sample narratives available?

Sample narratives are not yet available for this program. For short summaries of example projects, see the “Sample projects” under section A1. Purpose of the NOFO.

6. I would like to create a new course in my humanities discipline. Would the development of this course be a strong basis for a Spotlight on Humanities in Higher Education project?

During the review process, peer reviewers will consider how your project meets institutional or organizational needs and how it would benefit students, faculty, the institution or organization, and/or the community. Creation of a single course could suffice as the focus of a Spotlight on Humanities in Higher Education project as long as it fulfills those criteria.

7. What distinguishes an Exploration proposal from a Development proposal?

Exploration-level grants of up to one year support preliminary work necessary to develop a future project and can include activities such as meetings and consultations within the institution or organization, and with outside experts and community members, in order to identify institutional needs and create plans to address them. Such activities may not necessarily involve carrying out those plans. Exploratory proposals should provide a reasonable amount of detail in describing your projected activities and the anticipated results.

Development-level proposals should include concrete plans, including a timetable and work plan, to advance a focused project over a period of up to two years.

8. What types of costs may we include in our application budget?

You must only include costs in the budget that are directly related to the proposed project and allowable indirect costs. For example, a budget could include compensation for faculty and/or staff time spent on grant activities, based on their involvement in and contributions to the project. List compensation for key personnel as a percentage of annual salary.

You could also use funds to provide small stipends for workshop attendance; for travel and/or honoraria for guest scholars and visiting consultants; for books and other materials; or for modest purchases of computer equipment directly related to the project.

The application budget should not include costs listed in the NOFO in section D6. Funding Restrictions. For example, you cannot use funds for travel unrelated to the project, or to promote a particular political, religious, or ideological point of view.

9. Can our project budget include course releases for participating faculty?

Yes, however you must present them as compensation for the faculty contributing to time spent on the project rather than payments for replacement instructors. In your budget, list compensation for key personnel as a percentage of annual salary. If NEH selects your project for funding, it will pay the award funds to the applicant organization, which may provide course releases or other compensation consistent with its own policies and practices.

10. Does our institution need a grant writer to prepare an application?

No, but you must assign an institutional grant administrator to oversee the award. NEH staff members are available to answer your questions and assist you as you prepare your proposal. Contact program staff at spotlight@neh.gov.

11. Our institution applied for an NEH award in the past and was unsuccessful. Will NEH hold this against us if we apply again? Is there anything we can do to increase our chances for success this time?

NEH evaluates all applications as new applications. If you are revising a previous submission, you may find it helpful to request the reviewers' comments on that application and to consult with an NEH program officer. To request the reviewers' comments or to get in touch with an NEH program officer, email spotlight@neh.gov.

12. May we continue the work of a currently funded project with a subsequent NEH award?

Yes, a project that has received or is currently receiving NEH support may apply for support for a new or subsequent stage of that project. NEH will not give these proposals special consideration and will judge them by the same criteria as others in the current competition. In addition, you must substantially update your new proposal and must include a description of new activities and a new budget justification.

The [Humanities Initiatives](#) and [Humanities Connections](#) programs may be especially appropriate to fund further stages of a Spotlight project. See "Related Funding Opportunities," under H. Other Information in the NOFO.

13. May we use a Spotlight award to pursue independent research?

No. However, NEH offers support for independent research in the humanities through its [Public Scholar](#), [NEH-Mellon Fellowships for Digital Publication](#), [Fellowships](#), [Fellowships for Advanced Social Science Research on Japan](#), and [Summer Stipends](#) programs, as well as the Awards for Faculty [at Hispanic-Serving Institutions](#), [at Historically Black Colleges and Universities](#), and [at Tribal Colleges and Universities](#). NEH also supports independent research indirectly through the [Fellowship Programs at Independent Research Institutions](#) program.

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

No. As a matter of NEH policy, the project director and primary contact/grant administrator must not be the same person. The grant administrator (also called the "institutional grant administrator") functions as the representative of the recipient organization. This individual should have authority to act on the organization's behalf in matters related to the administration of the award. The institutional grant administrator must sign or countersign financial reports and prior approval requests such as budget revisions, extensions to the period of performance, and changes in key personnel. NEH will address official correspondence (for example, the offer letter or Notice of Action) to the institutional grant administrator and copy 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.

15. How will we know if we have submitted our application successfully?

It is your responsibility to confirm that Grants.gov and subsequently NEH have received your application. [Check your Grants.gov application status.](#)

When NEH receives your application, the agency will assign it a tracking number beginning with ASA- or ASB-. A tracking number does not guarantee that your application is free of technical problems (such as missing attachments or failure to convert attachments to PDFs). If your files are not correctly formatted, eGMS, NEH's electronic grants management system, will reject your application and notify you by email. eGMS cannot detect other errors such as missing components or excess pages.

NEH recommends you submit your application 48 hours prior to the deadline so that you have time to correct any technical errors eGMS has notified you of or that you have discovered. It is your responsibility to correct any errors prior to the deadline.

16. How will NEH review our application?

NEH uses a peer review process based on the evaluation criteria in section E1 of the NOFO to review applications. Teachers and scholars in the humanities will convene in panels to read and rate the applications. NEH staff will compile a slate of recommended applications based on the panelists' comments and ratings and taking into account the program's purpose and intended audience. The National Council on the Humanities will review the recommendations and provide additional insights. All advice—from the panelists, staff, and National Council—will be sent to the NEH Chair. By law, the Chair has the sole authority to make final funding decisions. [Learn more about the NEH review process.](#)

17. When will NEH notify us of the outcome of our application?

NEH will notify applicants of funding decisions by email in April 2023. See sections E4 and F1 of the NOFO for additional information.