

ORDE “KNOW YOUR AGENCY” SERIES: NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE HUMANITIES

NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE HUMANITIES (NEH) – <http://www.neh.gov>

OVERVIEW

The National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH), an independent federal agency, will be celebrating its fiftieth anniversary in a few years. Established by an Act of Congress in 1965, that Act defines humanities as “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 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” (National Foundation on the Arts and the Humanities Act of 1965).

Specific Interests

Promoting excellence in the humanities and making the lessons offered through humanities disciplines accessible to the American people are major goals of NEH. To reach these goals, NEH supports research, public programming, access and educational outreach projects – all designed to insure the humanities are relevant to Americans and our dialogue on democracy.

AGENCY ORGANIZATION

NEH is headed by a Chairman who is advised by the 26-member National Council on the Humanities. The Chairman and Council members are appointed by the President of the United States and confirmed by the US Senate. All Council members are humanities experts and most are drawn from academia. NEH has seven program divisions and offices that provide competitive funding through 37 funding programs.

Divisions and programs that support University researchers are described next along with corresponding application success rates. Information on all NEH programs can be found at <http://www.neh.gov/grants>.

1) **Division of Research Programs –**

- a) NEH Fellowships support humanities research efforts by providing individual researchers with stipends for 6-12 months (7% success rate)
- b) Collaborative Research Grants support interpretive humanities research by two or more scholars; projects may be for research, conferences that will benefit research efforts, archaeological field efforts (13% success rate)
- c) The Scholarly Editions and Translations Program supports preparation of editions of foreign language materials in the original language and translations of pre-existing texts important to the humanities (37% success rate)
- d) Summer Stipends support scholars performing full-time humanities research for two summer months; while this program provides individual awards, NEH limits institutions to only two nominations each year [*internal selection process run by the Vice Chancellor for Research*] (8% success rate)

2) **Division of Preservation and Access Programs –**

- a) The Documenting Endangered Languages Program is jointly sponsored with the National Science Foundation and supports field work, information technology efforts and other methods of documenting and archiving dying languages (14% success rate)
- b) Humanities Collections and Reference Resources grants support cataloging of major humanities collections, digitizing such collections, creating encyclopedias, preparing linguistic tools, developing spatial analysis tools to effectively depict humanities data and preserving endangered sound recordings and movies (15% success rate)
- c) Preservation and Access Research and Development grants support projects addressing how best to preserve our cultural heritage – artifacts, manuscripts, recordings, digital resources – and how to make our cultural heritage more easily accessible and usable by scholars and the public (14% success rate)

- 3) **Division of Education Programs –**
 - a) The Enduring Questions Program supports postsecondary course development around the study of a specific question (e.g., What is good government? What is friendship? What are the origins of the universe?) (10% success rate)
 - b) Summer Seminars and Institutes grants allow faculty to propose 2-5 week humanities development programs aimed at school teachers or university faculty (33% success rate)
- 4) **Division of Public Programs –**
 - a) Through Bridging Cultures through Film: International Topics, NEH supports the development and production of documentaries that examine international themes in the humanities (8% success rate)
- 5) **Office of Digital Humanities –**
 - a) Digital Humanities Start-Up Grants fund planning phases of digital humanities projects to research best practices, technologies and methods to be employed (17% success rate)
 - b) Digital Humanities Implementation Grants fund the implementation phase of innovative and significant digital humanities projects (11% success rate)

AGENCY GRANTS PROCESS

NEH supports workshops and conferences, public outreach efforts, preservation of humanities collections including digitization, humanities course and curriculum development, historic site interpretation and preservation, and research related to the humanities. Grants are primarily made to institutions – museums, colleges, universities, state humanities councils and other non-profit organizations – although the prestigious NEH Fellowship Program provides direct stipend support to individuals. Citizenship criteria are applied only to grant programs for which individuals apply – all US citizens and foreign nationals who have lived in the US for at least three years prior to the application deadline are eligible. For programs where the institution is the applicant, the only criterion is that degree candidates are not eligible to serve as principal or co-principal investigators.

NEH uses [Grants.gov](https://www.grants.gov) to announce funding opportunities and for grant application submission. Application guidelines, budget templates and sample application narratives for each funding program are available on the NEH website.

For Fiscal Year 2011, NEH supported 1,086 projects totaling \$114,609,926 (NEH Annual Report, 2011, p. 93). Funding levels vary greatly by program, ranging from \$5,000 to \$800,000, with project lengths of two months to three years. Cost share requirements vary by program – some programs expect no cost share from applicants and other programs (especially humanities collections programs) have cost share expectations of up to 50%. Cost share conditions are set out in each program's application guidelines.

Contact with Agency Program Staff:

NEH strongly encourages investigators to begin working with their program officers at the early stages of the application process. NEH sets all application deadlines early in the fiscal year, allowing applicants to begin planning their projects and working with program officers by using the previous year's guidelines. Final program guidelines are usually issued 2 months in advance of a deadline. Many NEH programs allow applicants to e-mail a draft of their application for program officer review and comment; draft applications are due at least six weeks prior to the official application deadline. While pre-reviews do not guarantee awards, applicants who have taken advantage of this offer by program officers have found these reviews to be very helpful.

Typical Agency Proposal Process:

- 1) PI determines suitability of proposed project to NEH mission and specific program requirements
- 2) PI contacts program officer for assistance in determining how best to meet the program mission and with specific questions about the application
- 3) If allowed by NEH program, PI submits application draft for program officer review and comment 6 weeks prior to application deadline
- 4) Applications are submitted via Grants.gov
- 5) Program officer assembles peer review panel
- 6) Peer review panel evaluates applications
- 7) NEH program officers recommend applications for funding based on peer reviewer evaluations and available funds
- 8) The National Humanities Council reviews recommended applications and forwards information to NEH Chairman
- 9) NEH Chairman makes all final funding decisions, taking into account advice provided by review panels and program officers
- 10) Successful PI receives notification of award

NEH Proposal Review Process:

NEH uses a combination of peer and program officer review. Peer reviewers are responsible for application evaluation, but do not rank proposals for funding. Based on the peer reviewer evaluations and availability of funds, program officers recommend applications for funding to the NEH Council. Council members review recommended applications and then forward to the NEH Chairman who makes all final funding decisions. Review criteria vary by program, but generally include project significance, methodology, project staff qualifications, outcomes of project, quality of dissemination plan and reasonability of budget.

What Happens Next?

Successful applicants move into project implementation, ultimately resulting in peer-reviewed articles, books, monographs, sustainable collections and other outcomes. Applications that have been turned down by NEH for funding may be resubmitted for consideration in a later competition; however, NEH treats all applications received as new. Before resubmission, applicants should review the evaluations provided by NEH and talk with program officers to gain a clearer vision of how to best meet the funding program's needs. Note that NEH does not automatically provide the peer review evaluations to PIs; rather, PIs must request them via e-mail (specifics are found in each program's application guidelines).

NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE HUMANITIES PROPOSAL & REVIEW PROCESS

