Mister Chair and Members of the Subcommittee:

On behalf of the National Humanities Alliance (NHA), with our more than 200 member organizations, I write to express strong support for the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH).

Overview

For FY 2023, we respectfully urge the Subcommittee to consider at least $204 million for the National Endowment for the Humanities.

While we recognize the difficult choices that are before this Subcommittee, we believe that expanding the capacity of the NEH is essential at this moment in the nation’s history when the humanities are so needed to 1) build strong communities and foster civic dialogue; 2) preserve cultural heritage including indigenous languages; 3) cultivate knowledge of world histories and cultures; and 4) rebuild the economy and revitalize communities.

The NEH has a clear track record of supporting programs that work towards these ends, and additional capacity is needed to ensure that these crucial goals are met around the country. The NEH does not have the capacity to fund many of the highly rated proposals it receives—in FY 2020, 1,605 applications with high ratings were not funded, amounting to a total of $184,789,512.

Building strong communities and fostering civic dialogue

NEH funding builds strong, civically-engaged communities through its support of cultural organizations. The agency’s grantmaking helps establish and sustain robust community institutions, providing opportunities for learning, empathy, and understanding. The International Storytelling Center in Jonesborough, Tennessee, regularly hosts programs that promote discussion and dialogue. Ninety-three percent of respondents to a survey done by NHA indicated that they were “motivated to listen to the stories of people whose background was different from their own” after participating in a program featuring the stories of Black Appalachians. The NEH’s Dialogues on the Experiences of War grants strengthen communities by offering veterans the chance to reflect upon their experiences, while building bonds with each other and with civilians. Ninety-nine percent of respondents across eight programs reported a desire to “keep in touch with some of the people [they] met during the program.”

NEH funding has an outsized role especially in small and rural communities, where it can build and support the infrastructure and programs that are vital to strong communities. The Seward Community Library and Museum, for example, which leveraged an NEH challenge grant to
build a new facility, has averaged 60,000 more visitors per year than it received in its old space. In addition to hosting tourists, the organization provides space for nonprofits and other institutions to conduct their business. In rural Utah, the Entrada Institute developed programs to encourage meaningful connections between traditional local communities and newer arrivals. In partnership with the local 4-H club, organizers developed after-school programs centering around locally relevant themes—for example, Western Heritage Shooting Sports—that would culminate with community dinners featuring activities for all ages.

**Preserving cultural heritage including Indigenous languages**

Our cultural heritage lives in many forms, from presidential letters and great works of art to community archives and endangered languages. It is also vulnerable and requires protection from natural and man-made disasters as well as simple decay over time. NEH funding is indispensable to ensuring that our cultural heritage is both accessible now and preserved for future generations. In addition to funding projects that tell important presidential histories—like the publication of *The Papers of John Adams* and archaeological research at Andrew Jackson’s The Hermitage—the NEH helps small and mid-size institutions invest in their own preservation needs. Institutions like Abilene Christian University in Texas and the Stillwater Public Library in Oklahoma have used NEH funds to help ensure their collections are protected for the future. NEH funds also help make these collections more widely accessible by funding digitization projects.

Funding for documenting traditional cultures and endangered languages supports Indigenous people throughout the United States. Through the Dynamic Language Infrastructure-Documenting Endangered Languages program, a partnership with the National Science Foundation, NEH funding has preserved and made accessible languages spoken by Indigenous tribes, having a profound impact on their way of life. DEL grants have helped produce dictionaries for languages like Klallam and Arapaho; they have also provided the funds for these resources to be online and freely available to tribal members. NEH support for the Coeur d’Alene Online Language Resource Center helped create a single searchable repository for a wide range of language resources, from dictionaries to archival recordings of personal narratives and coyote stories. The NEH additionally supports the documentation and revitalization of Indigenous American languages through its regular grant programs.

**Cultivating knowledge of world history and cultures**

Established in the midst of the Cold War, the NEH has always provided funding to support research and programs that help Americans understand and engage with timely world issues. From scholarly exchanges with the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe and language institutes in the 1970s, to international research support for American scholars and professional development for school teachers today, NEH funding supports efforts to understand other nations’ languages, cultures, and geopolitical contexts. NEH funding has supported the research and publication of books such as *Treason in Transit: Soviet Defectors and the Borders of the Cold War World* (2022), by Erik R. Scott, and *Iron Curtain: The Crushing of Eastern Europe, 1944-1956* (2013)—among many other works of history that shed light on current events. NEH-supported English translations of Ukrainian literature, including *Words for War: New Poems from Ukraine*
NEH funding also provides high quality education on world affairs for school teachers and college educators. Kean University’s 2021 two-week seminar “The Search for Humanity after Atrocity” helped higher education faculty integrate atrocity studies into their research and curricula, using the Holocaust as a case study. A 2016 program for K-12 educators, hosted by Ferris State University, explored U.S.-Russian/Soviet relations from 1776 to the present. And from 2013-2018, a series of NEH grants helped community colleges throughout the U.S. integrate the study of world cultures into their curricula. These programs included content on Latin America, Asia, Russia, Eastern Europe, and the Middle East, among other topics.

Rebuilding the economy and revitalizing communities

NEH funding catalyzes growth in local economies and connections within communities—exactly the work that is needed as we look to rebuild from the pandemic. Communities throughout the U.S. today benefit from NEH investments that have built strong community institutions and stimulated local economies. NEH pandemic relief provided a direct lifeline to struggling organizations, which they then used to support their communities both economically and culturally. Thomas Jefferson’s Monticello used pandemic relief funds to retain staff and uphold the quality of its programs, thus ensuring the organization remains an important economic driver in the region—50 percent of the site’s 400,000 annual visitors stay in a hotel for at least one night, contributing no less than $13.1 million to the local economy.

Humanities organizations are also important employers, particularly in small and rural communities. The Monhegan Museum in Monhegan Island, Maine (pop. 54) is the island’s primary employer and major tourism attraction. By funding staff salaries over a period of several months in 2020, an NEH CARES grant helped families stay on the island, supporting the island community as a whole. Similarly, NEH funding to the Willa Cather Center in Red Cloud, Nebraska (pop. 1,000) supported staff salaries and public programming during 2020, helping stabilize an organization that is key to the town’s survival. A CARES grant to the Enfield Shaker Museum in New Hampshire allowed them to support the local economy by pairing online talks about local specialties with food baskets, which were sourced from local vendors and available for purchase.

Still, far more support is needed to ensure that these institutions survive and continue to bolster local economies. Both the CARES Act and ARP Act fell short of meeting the needs of the humanities sector. The NEH was only able to fund 14 percent of the applications it received for CARES grants, while on average the state councils were only able to fund 38 percent. Additionally, while state and jurisdictional humanities councils have quickly and effectively distributed $42 million in SHARP grants, they were only able to fund 50 percent of the total requested, which was more than $84 million, underlining a significant unmet need.