

Public Witness Testimony
**Submitted to the Interior, Environment and Related Agencies Subcommittee
Committee on Appropriations, U.S. Senate
Regarding FY 2019 Funding for the National Endowment for the Humanities
Stephen Kidd, Executive Director, National Humanities Alliance (April 27, 2018)**

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee:

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

Overview

For FY 2019, we respectfully urge the Subcommittee to fund the National Endowment for the Humanities at \$155 million.

We would like to thank the Subcommittee for appropriating \$152.8 million to the NEH for FY 2018, thereby increasing the Endowment's funding by nearly \$3 million. This increase is a critical step in rebuilding the capacity of the NEH, which has been severely eroded in recent years. Even with the increase, the Endowment's current funding is 20 percent below its FY 2010 level, when adjusted for inflation. Modestly increasing the NEH's budget to \$155 million would allow the Endowment to regain its capacity to support the humanities at a time when the humanities are increasingly called upon to meet national needs.

While we recognize the difficult choices that are before this Subcommittee, we believe that expanding the capacity of the NEH should continue to be a priority. In the remainder of this testimony, I will highlight some of the many ways that the NEH serves national needs and helps accomplish critical national goals.

NEH Serves National Needs

The National Endowment for the Humanities' funding is distributed to the Federal/State Partnership, which supports humanities councils in every state and territory; Competitive Grants divisions, which award peer-reviewed grants in research, education, preservation, digital humanities, challenge grants, and public programs; and Chairman's Grants, which are used to pilot new programs and respond to natural disasters and other emergency situations. I will highlight just five examples of how NEH grants serve clear national needs.

The NEH's Standing Together program aids veterans' reintegration into civilian life and deepens public awareness of the experience of war.

For the past four years, the NEH has supported innovative programs that harness the power of the humanities to serve veterans. Increased appropriations over the past three years have been critical to expanding these programs, although much unmet demand continues to exist. Dialogues on the Experience of War, an NEH initiative now in its third year, supports community discussion programs for veterans and their families. Dialogues programs have reached veterans in 18 states and the District of Columbia and will reach an additional 4 states in the coming year. In FY 2017, a program held in College Park, Maryland, honored one-hundred years of women's service in the military while supporting female veterans of recent conflicts; at the University of West Florida, a Dialogues program helped first-year students who are also veterans bridge their military and civilian experiences through history, literature, philosophy, and art.

Other efforts funded through the Standing Together initiative include programs that help document and preserve veterans' life experiences. A grant to North Dakota State University funded an oral history program that helps veterans explore their memories through creative outlets, while a grant to Lewiston Auburn College supported a program for preserving veterans' pictures and memorabilia in Maine. Veterans from across the nation benefit from intensive college-preparation programs and training for Veteran Affairs staff that helps them understand veterans' experiences.

The NEH plays a key role in the preservation of native languages and cultures.

The NEH supports the documentation and teaching of native languages, history, and culture. A 2011 grant helped Salish Kootenai College in Pablo, Montana establish a degree program in Tribal Historic Preservation that prepares students to interpret and preserve indigenous heritage. To date, all graduates of the program have continued their studies in graduate training or found work in preservation offices, cultural departments, museums, private resource management firms, and government agencies.

Meanwhile, a 2015 grant to Ilisagvik College in Alaska helped preserve Iñupiaq, a UNESCO-classified endangered language with only about 2,000 fluent speakers. In addition to creating an online database that documents the language, faculty and students created language-acquisition materials—online apps and storybooks—that are used by the local summer reading program and the college's innovative "language nest" program for pre-K children. And in New Mexico, a 2017 grant is helping the Indian Pueblo Cultural Center document the oral histories of women from the New Mexico Pueblo, preserving their life stories for generations to come. These are just three examples of NEH's long-term commitment to sustaining, revitalizing, and preserving Native American languages and cultures: since 2006, the NEH has provided \$11.4 million in support of its Documenting Endangered Languages program.

The NEH is the only entity, federal or private, with a national mandate to ensure that the humanities serve all Americans.

Through a partnership with Missouri's Mid-America Arts Alliance, the NEH on the Road program ensures that high-quality museum exhibitions—originally curated with NEH support—reach all parts of the country. Fifty-three percent of the communities served have a population under 50,000. For example, in Red Cloud, Nebraska, a community of only 1,020, more than 3,000 people saw *Our Lives, Our Stories: America's Greatest Generation*. The exhibition traveled to 23 other locations including Excelsior Springs and Fulton, Missouri and Fairmont, West Virginia. Additionally, between 2010 and 2015, *Bison: An American Icon*, traveled to 19 sites, including Bend, Oregon, Las Cruces, New Mexico, and Brigham City, Utah.

To ensure a wide reach, the NEH has dedicated funding lines for innovation in humanities curricula in community colleges, HBCUs, Hispanic-Serving Institutions, and Tribal Colleges. At one two-year school, South Florida State College, an NEH grant is helping faculty develop new curricular units based on Florida's history and purchase much-needed books and materials for the rural college's library.

Additionally, the NEH provides critical support to rural institutions, establishing the cultural infrastructure necessary for thriving communities. For instance, in Seward, Alaska, the Seward Community Library & Museum, which was built with NEH challenge grant funding, is the city's

only public space designed for people of all ages. In Whitesburg, Kentucky, the NEH has supported Appalshop since awarding it a foundational grant in 1972. Appalshop is now an economic driver that amplifies Appalachian voices and concerns on a national level while contributing to community life.

The NEH safeguards our historical and cultural legacies.

With grants to historical societies, historic sites, archives, and town and county record offices around the country, the NEH ensures that historical documents and artifacts are preserved under the proper conditions and accessible in the long-term. For example, grants to Andrew Jackson's Hermitage in Tennessee have supported archaeological investigations as well as the full restoration of the home's historic interior. In West Virginia, grants to Davis & Elkins College have helped preserve the papers of Senators Henry Davis and Stephen Elkins as well as 10,000 items representing American history from Native American civilizations to the present day. And several small grants to the International Tennis Hall of Fame Museum in Newport, Rhode Island, helped the museum become accredited by the American Alliance of Museums as well as preserve items related to the history of tennis and Newport.

In a massive undertaking, the NEH is also enabling the digitization of historical newspapers from around the country through the National Digital Newspaper Program. For example, in 2013, the NEH awarded a grant to the Mississippi Department of Archives and History to digitize 100,000 pages of historic Mississippi newspapers published between 1836 and 1922. To date, the NEH has provided support for the digitization of approximately 11 million pages of newspapers published between 1690 and 1963—making these resources accessible for scholars, students, and anyone interested in researching local history or genealogy.

The NEH also supports the publication of the documents associated with important historical figures and events and ensures that these documents are widely accessible. Grants to the University of California, Berkeley have supported the print and digital publication of Mark Twain's letters and other writings, including his best-selling autobiography. NEH funding has supported many similar projects centered on the lives of such notable figures as George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, John and Abigail Adams, Albert Einstein, and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

With a modest investment, the NEH stimulates private, local investment in the humanities and cultivates tourism.

NEH matching grants over the last 50 years have generated more than \$4 billion in nonfederal donations to humanities projects and institutions. The NEH's investments in museums, historic sites, research, and the preservation of historic artifacts have played a key role in developing local cultural heritage tourism economies, which attract 78% of all leisure travelers. Over several decades, for example, the NEH has supported the development of new exhibitions at Thomas Jefferson's Monticello. These grants have had an outsized impact on the local economy as Monticello welcomes nearly 400,000 annual visitors, 93% of whom are from outside Virginia and 50% of whom stay in a hotel for at least one night adding at least \$13.1 million to the local economy. In Dubuque, Iowa, NEH investment in the National Mississippi River Museum and Aquarium has helped turn a small local historical society into a nationally-significant tourist site that generates \$10 million per year to the city's economy.

From funding professional development programs for teachers that celebrate the history of the Mississippi Delta to supporting collaborative, interdisciplinary archaeological research that has led to new understanding of heart disease, each year the NEH awards hundreds of competitive, peer-reviewed grants to individual scholars and a broad range of nonprofit educational organizations around the country. Grantees include universities, two- and four-year colleges, humanities centers, research institutes, museums, historical societies, libraries, archives, scholarly associations, K–12 schools, local education agencies, public television/film/radio producers, and more.

The NEH supports the preservation of collections that would be otherwise lost, path-breaking research that brings critical knowledge to light, programs for teachers that enrich instruction in schools, and public programs that reach individuals and communities in every district in the country.

Overall, the NEH's support is crucial for building and sustaining humanities' infrastructure in all 50 states, serving American citizens at all stages of life.

Conclusion

We recognize that Congress faces difficult choices in allocating funds in this and coming years. We ask the Subcommittee to consider modestly increased funding for the humanities through the NEH as an investment in opportunity for all Americans, innovation and economic growth, and strengthening our communities. Thank you for your consideration of our request and for your past and continued support for the humanities.

Founded in 1981, the National Humanities Alliance advances national humanities policy in the areas of research, preservation, public programming, and teaching. Nearly 200 organizations are members of NHA, including scholarly associations, humanities research centers, colleges, universities, and organizations of museums, libraries, historical societies, humanities councils, and higher education institutions.