



National Humanities Alliance



FEDERATION OF
STATE HUMANITIES
COUNCILS

March 19, 2020

The Honorable Nita M. Lowey
Chairwoman, House Committee on
Appropriations
U.S. House of Representatives
2365 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Kay Granger
Ranking Member, House Committee
on Appropriations
U.S. House of Representatives
1026 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Betty McCollum
Chairwoman, Interior, Environment, and
Related Agencies Appropriations
Subcommittee
U.S. House of Representatives
2256 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable David Joyce
Ranking Member, Interior, Environment,
and Related Agencies Appropriations
Subcommittee
U.S. House of Representatives
1124 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairwoman Lowey, Ranking Member Granger, Chairwoman McCollum, and Ranking Member Joyce,

We write to request \$500 million in stimulus funding for the National Endowment for the Humanities. As the COVID-19 crisis forces Americans to stay at home, humanities organizations that support humanities teaching, preservation, programming, and research are facing intense strains that threaten their ability to support the K-16 educational system and serve the American public. These challenges come at a moment when the humanities are being called on to make sense of the crisis through explorations of past pandemics such as the 1918 flu and to connect communities and individuals even as they are forced to distance themselves physically.

Museums and historic sites are losing over \$1 billion a month due to the loss of visitors and are consequently forced to reduce staff. In addition to lost income for these individuals, the downsizing of cultural organizations undermines their ability to produce virtual content at this trying moment and compromises their long-term ability to serve the American public once the crisis has passed. These challenges will be compounded as philanthropic giving slows as a result of the economic crisis. Independent libraries and archives are similarly compromised, undermining their ability to provide a vital lifeline to the cultural heritage and original documents and sources that support education and civic life. And, as we have seen in the past, serious economic disruptions persist the longest for institutions and communities that are already economically disadvantaged.

The crisis has also placed burdens on humanities educators, both in K-12 and higher education, as they work to educate students in unprecedented circumstances. Professional development opportunities for educators have been largely curtailed due to travel restrictions. Educators depend on regular professional development opportunities to best serve their students, and the need is particularly acute as they transition to online education for the foreseeable future. The educational system relies heavily on humanities educators, both in K-12 and higher education, who are casually-employed and on contract, and they are especially vulnerable to the impacts of the crisis.

The organizations that create in-person and remote opportunities for professional development are struggling to offer virtual resources to fill this need, as they struggle with the consequences of cancelling in-person meetings. Yearly conferences are key professional development opportunities, and their cancellation undermines the continuing capacity of these organizations to pivot to costly virtual options and to support the professional development needs of scholars and educators.

Relief through the National Endowment for the Humanities and state humanities councils:

We call for \$500 million in supplemental funding for the National Endowment for the Humanities to alleviate these strains through the following means:

- Providing direct emergency grants to humanities organizations (museums, libraries, historical societies, cultural organizations, and professional associations) that can be applied to operational expenses to sustain them in this time of crisis.
- Supplying state humanities councils with funding to distribute for emergency grants to organizations in their state. Funds channeled through the councils would provide relief and vital support to small cultural centers, history museums, and other institutions that are centers of community life in rural areas. The well-established relationships they have developed over their 50-year history would enable them to quickly identify the areas of greatest need and direct funding to those institutions. The state humanities councils serve the smallest and most vulnerable communities and institutions in their states and are able to reach into areas that receive few other cultural resources.
- Designating NEH funding lines to bolster humanities organizations, colleges, and universities in developing the digital content that is now necessary for classroom use and for the digital resources to sustain communities during this moment of crisis. With support for the digitization of their archives and collections, libraries, museum and historical societies can support faculty as they reinvent their curricula. Additional resources channeled through state humanities councils could also be used to strengthen the technology infrastructure that would support expansion into virtual programming, including streaming lectures, short documentary films, and online conversations about vital community issues. Such programming would connect people well after this immediate crisis has passed.
- Supporting virtual professional development opportunities to support K-12 teachers and higher education faculty in developing rich humanities curricula that can be delivered virtually.

Other federal relief in response to COVID-19:

Federal relief should ensure the viability of nonprofit humanities organizations and educators, both in K-12 and higher education, through:

- Paid leave and unemployment relief provisions for employees and self-employed workers as well as casually-employed and on contract educators.
- Rapid, streamlined access to SBA disaster relief loans and FEMA disaster assistance for organizations and self-employed individuals.
- Enhanced deductions for charitable contributions to support continuity plans for nonprofit humanities organizations and their workforce, through a universal charitable deduction for all taxpayers.
- Access to multiple forms of stimulus funding aimed at community development, nonprofit business continuity, and relief for self-employed individuals, as well as dedicated funding administered by the National Endowment for the Humanities to accomplish these goals.

Thank you for considering this request at this difficult time.

Sincerely,

Stephen Kidd
Executive Director
National Humanities Alliance

Esther Mackintosh
President
Federation of State Humanities Councils

James Grossman
President
National Humanities Alliance

Susan McCarthy
Board Chair
Federation of State Humanities Councils