



National Humanities Alliance

# Guide to Virtual Advocacy

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National  
Humanities  
Alliance

# Thank you for giving your time to advocate for the humanities on Capitol Hill.

Your virtual visit to Capitol Hill is an important part of a broader advocacy strategy that aims to persuade Members of Congress to increase federal funding for humanities research, teaching, preservation, and programming. As a constituent (or the representative of an organization with members who are constituents), you can testify to the positive impact of humanities work in your district and state.

This document will guide you through goals for your meetings and ways to prepare in advance. It also offers tips on what to expect when meeting with representatives, senators, and their staff members. Finally, it will offer suggestions for following up and building long-term relationships.

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# Before the Meetings

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## GOALS FOR MEETINGS

- Establish a collegial relationship with the office. This is a long-term investment that will depend on follow-up from you and NHA.
- Show the impact of your work in the community and address misconceptions.
- Make specific requests. You will receive Member Profiles that list requests appropriate for the Member. They might include:
  - Join the bipartisan Congressional Humanities Caucus or Senate Cultural Caucus. Membership in these caucuses demonstrates support for the NEH and humanities education.
  - Sign Dear Colleague Letters that support funding the humanities. Dear Colleague Letters are authored by Members of Congress and others have the opportunity to sign-on.
- Gauge the Member's attitude toward federal funding for the humanities.
- Provide information that will allow a staff member to create a memo on humanities funding that will inform the Member's official policy position.

## PREPARING FOR YOUR VISIT

You will be visiting Members of Congress and/or their staff as part of a group. We encourage you to meet with your group in advance to plan roles and coordinate examples. We will provide time at the Annual Meeting for your group to meet, but consider making contact in advance by email or conference call. Below, we suggest a number of ways to prepare for your upcoming meetings. We will send you a schedule and the names of the Members/staffers you will be meeting with the week before Humanities Advocacy Day.

### **Review the resources we provide**

- Learn about the Members of Congress you will be meeting, including specifics on their record of support for the humanities.
- Learn about the impact of the NEH and other federal funding streams nationally and in specific states and districts.
- Craft arguments for humanities funding that will resonate with particular Members of Congress.

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### **Identify materials that you can share virtually**

- Members/staffers will likely be interested in a brochure or handout about your organization's work.
- We will provide you with additional materials to share virtually.
- Discuss leave-behinds with the rest of your group and how to present them.

### **Coordinate with other advocates in your group for an efficient virtual meeting**

- We will introduce the advocates in your group via email in the weeks leading up to the event and connect you via group meetings on Zoom at the Annual Meeting. We encourage additional communication as needed to prepare sufficiently.
- Choose a facilitator for each meeting who can introduce the group and facilitate transitions between each person's chance to speak (for the basic structure of an advocacy meeting, see page 7).
- Decide what each advocate will contribute to the meeting and in which order so the facilitator can move the conversation along.
- Practice everyone's contribution together with the goal of keeping each advocate's part short (about 1 minute) given short virtual attention spans. You can add more when asked questions.
- Identify resources you would like to share with the Members of Congress or their staff via the chat or via screen share during the meeting, whether they be resources we have provided or ones specific to your organization or institution.

### **Identify upcoming virtual events to which you can invite your Member of Congress**

- The dedication of a humanities institute, the opening of a museum exhibition, or a community forum can be a good opportunity to engage a Member of Congress.
- These events will help create a connection between your work, the constituents who care about your work, and the Member.

# The Meetings

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The schedule of visits for your delegation will list the links to join a video call or call-in information for a conference call. We ask you to arrive ten minutes early to ensure that everyone is on the same page and that the facilitator is ready to kick off the meeting when the staffer and/or the Member of Congress arrive.

## WHO YOU ARE MEETING: WHAT TO EXPECT

Although you may have a meeting with a Representative or Senator, your meeting will usually be with a staff member who is entrusted to work on behalf of the Member. The staff members may have a number of positions, and you may have to adjust your approach accordingly (see below for tips on doing so). It is important to remember that nearly all staff members, regardless of rank, age, and experience, are relied upon by the Member and by senior staff. The most common positions you'll see in meetings are:

### **CHIEF OF STAFF**

- The Member's most senior advisor, a chief of staff coordinates the office's strategy, manages all staff members, and frequently acts and speaks on behalf of the Member.
- Their time will likely be limited.

### **LEGISLATIVE DIRECTOR (LD)/SENIOR POLICY ADVISOR**

- Typical years of experience: House 8+; Senate 18+
- Very experienced staffer who manages the LAs and LCs, directs overall legislative strategy, and advances the agenda through high-level discussions with other offices

### **SENIOR LEGISLATIVE ASSISTANT/LEGISLATIVE ASSISTANT (LA)**

- Typical years of experience: House 0-8; Senate 6+
- Has a high level of responsibility
- Has a portfolio of issues that he/she manages for the Member, though knowledge of each issue may vary considerably

### **SCHEDULER/EXECUTIVE ASSISTANT**

- Typical years of experience: varies widely, but this is not a junior position
- Often has the most contact with a Member and is deeply trusted
- Sometimes has a minor legislative role in House offices
- Often has a great sense of the Member's priorities and opinions

### **LEGISLATIVE CORRESPONDENT (LC)**

- Typical years of experience: 0-3
- Provides support on legislative issues to senior staff; works under supervision of more senior staff to draft proposals
- May not have a deep knowledge about the agencies and programs we care about and may not know the Member's position
- Be prepared to drive the conversation. LCs may have very little to say but are likely happy to take the full half hour to hear about the issue.

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## THE CONVERSATION

You will typically have about 10-15 minutes—five at the least; 30 at the most—to make your case. You may consider working with your group to draft short scripts or talking points for each of the following items:

### THANK, INTRODUCE, AND CONNECT

Thank the Member or staffer for meeting with you. Identify yourself and your institution. You may want to begin with a statement about your institution's impact on the community or information about programs that your institution sponsors.

This may also be a good opportunity to try to connect with the Member or staffer on a personal level so that they remember you and your visit at the end of the day. The staff member may be a graduate of your institution or have an interest in your discipline or research. At the very least you can talk about the weather, current bills on the floor, or explore points of personal intersection that come up naturally.

### GAME PLAN FOR YOUR VISIT

- **Thank, introduce, and connect**
- **Make your case and relate it to the Member**
- **State your request**
- **Offer further resources**

### MAKE YOUR CASE AND RELATE IT TO THE MEMBER

Drawing on the resources provided to you, make a persuasive case about the impact of federally-funded humanities programs. Remember to focus on the positive. Frame your case in terms that will resonate with the Member of Congress. What issues are they passionate about? How do these intersect with the humanities? How can public humanities programs, for example, further their interests? Explain how humanities programs, teaching, research, and preservation have a positive impact on communities in their district. Invite them to an event at your institution.

You might also consider ways to make an emotional case for the value of your request. Do you have a current grant that advances a public policy goal that the Member may care about such as supporting veterans' transition to civilian life, deepening cultural understanding among diverse populations, revitalizing a native language, preserving community heritage, etc.? Do you have a brief story that illustrates the impact of your teaching?

### STATE YOUR REQUEST

State your request directly, being as specific as possible. Is the Member willing to sign Dear Colleague Letters? Or join the Congressional Humanities Caucus/Senate Cultural Caucus? Or does he/she want to take a more active role in championing the NEH?

### OFFER TO FOLLOW UP

Do not let the conversation end once the meeting ends. Offer to follow up with resources that provide additional information. Make plans for future contact—e.g., promise to send information about a topic you discussed or the Dear Colleague Letter. Ask how you might contact their office in the future. Remember to thank them again for their time and for discussing the importance of federal funding for the humanities.

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## RESPONDING TO DIFFICULTIES

### IF THE STAFF MEMBER SEEMS UNINFORMED OR INEXPERIENCED

- Be prepared to drive the conversation. This is not necessarily a sign of a lack of interest. Whether these meetings last five minutes or 20 usually depends on how much advocates have prepared to say.
- If the staffer doesn't know the Member's position, it might be because they are not on the record on the issue.
  - Ask if the staffer can find out whether the Member would sign the Dear Colleague Letters that are circulating.
  - If the staffer agrees to find out if the Member will sign on, check back by email in a week to see if the staffer has an answer.
- Leave materials behind that will help the staff member write a memo about the subject and invite them to contact you or NHA if they ever have questions or need information.

### IF THE STAFF MEMBER HAS VERY LITTLE TIME

- Thank the staff member for his/her time and for the Member's support if they've been supportive.
- Quickly demonstrate the support the humanities have in your community by mentioning organizations you're a part of or briefly sharing an example of an important humanities program.
- Make sure that you request that the Member sign the Dear Colleague Letters that are circulating.
- Follow up with an email providing more resources.
- A week after the meeting, check on the status of your request that they sign the Dear Colleague Letters.

### IF THE MEMBER IS UNSUPPORTIVE

- Try to identify why the Member is unsupportive and if any misperceptions exist.
- Politely dispel any misperceptions that come up. Common misperceptions include:
  - That NEH grants are awarded by government bureaucrats. *Explain that experts from around the country serve as peer reviewers for all grants.*
  - That government funding crowds out private investment. *Explain that many NEH grants often require private matching funds that incentivize and facilitate private support.*
  - That the humanities use tax money for programs that only benefit wealthy Americans. *Point to examples of the diverse populations that benefit from NEH and state council programs.*
- Don't give up. Try to tailor the discussion to their concerns.
- Include their objections on your Post-Visit Worksheet—this feedback is helpful both in our follow-ups with that office and in shaping our talking points.

# After the Meetings

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## SOON AFTER THE MEETING

### USE SOCIAL MEDIA TO PUBLICIZE THE MEETING

- Post thank yous to the Member on Twitter, Facebook, and/or Instagram. Use the event hashtag, tag us @humanitiesall, and tag the Member of Congress.
- Ask permission to take a screenshot of your meeting and post it along with the “thank you” post.

### SEND A FOLLOW-UP EMAIL

- We will provide contact information for the staffers and instructions for following up. Please feel free to copy us on the messages.
- Thank them for their time and their support or consideration, as appropriate. When an office is unsupportive of humanities funding, please avoid expressing disappointment.
- Send along any additional information and materials that you promised. We will provide resources that you can include in a follow up email as well.
- Reiterate any requests, such as joining the Congressional Humanities Caucus/Senate Cultural Caucus or signing Dear Colleague Letters. We will provide the staff contacts for you to pass along as well.

### GIVE US YOUR FEEDBACK

- Please give NHA feedback on your visit by filling out the Post-Visit Worksheet, which we will share with you.
- Details about how Members or staffers responded to your questions can be helpful in:
  - Gauging their level of support and attitude towards the humanities.
  - Honing our arguments and strategizing about new approaches to unsupportive Members.
  - Identifying Members who are interested in becoming more involved in promoting the interests of the humanities in Congress.
- You will also receive a survey following Humanities Advocacy Day asking for your feedback about the event. Please be as candid and informative as possible in your responses.

## IN THE COMING WEEKS AND MONTHS

### REMEMBER THAT EFFECTIVE ADVOCACY IS YEAR-ROUND

- Once you’ve made in-person contact with a congressional office, it’s much easier to communicate on specific policy issues in the future.
- Hold your elected representatives accountable by monitoring and acknowledging their actions on the policy issues that matter to you. You can do this by emailing the staff member with whom you have met.
- Add the office to your organization’s mailing list or periodically forward selected publications and news items of interest.
- Like and follow your legislators on social media to see what they are up to/thinking about.
- Invite the Member to participate in a virtual humanities event. Take pictures and post them on your organization’s website and social media accounts to thank the Member for their involvement with the humanities.

# Appendix

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## Federal Funding for the Humanities

### **NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE HUMANITIES (NEH)**

The NEH is an independent federal agency created by Congress in 1965. With few private foundations providing funding for the humanities, the NEH provides critical support for research, education, preservation, and public programs in the humanities through grants to a wide range of educational institutions, nonprofit organizations, and individual scholars nationwide. The NEH offers competitive grants in six divisions: Education, Preservation and Access, Public Programs, Research, Challenge Grants, and Digital Humanities. Through its office of Federal/State Partnerships, the NEH also provides operating grants to state humanities councils.

[www.neh.gov](http://www.neh.gov)

### **TITLE VI/FULBRIGHT-HAYS (INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION PROGRAMS)**

The Department of Education's International Education and Foreign Language Studies (IEFLS) programs, including HEA-Title VI and Fulbright-Hays, form the vital infrastructure of the federal government's investment in the international service pipeline. The IEFLS programs support comprehensive language and area study centers, international business centers, and language resource centers within the United States; research and curriculum development; opportunities for American students and scholars to study abroad; and activities to increase the number of underrepresented minorities in international service. Administrative responsibility for these programs falls under the Office of Postsecondary Education, International Education Programs Service.

<http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ope/iegps/index.html>

### **NATIONAL ARCHIVES (NARA)**

Congress established the National Archives in 1934 to preserve and make accessible to the public the records of the U.S. Government. American citizens rely on access to immigration, naturalization, military, and census records held by the National Archives for many routine needs and for veterans and their families to gain access to benefits. NARA is best known to the public as the keeper of original copies of the Declaration of Independence, U.S. Constitution, and Bill of Rights. NARA now has over 40 facilities nationwide, including 14 Presidential Libraries.

[www.archives.gov](http://www.archives.gov)

### **INSTITUTE OF MUSEUM AND LIBRARY SERVICES (IMLS)**

The Institute of Museum and Library Services is the primary source of federal support for the nation's 123,000 libraries and 17,500 museums. The mission of IMLS is to inspire libraries and museums to advance innovation, lifelong learning, and cultural and civic engagement. In addition to grant making, IMLS provides critical leadership to the museum and library communities through support for research and policy development. Its Office of Museum Services (OMS) awards grants to museums to support educating students, preserving collections, coordinating resources, and digitizing collections. IMLS also administers the Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA), which consolidates federal library programs while expanding services for learning and access to information resources.

[www.imls.gov](http://www.imls.gov)

### **LIBRARY OF CONGRESS (LOC)**

The Library of Congress is the largest and most comprehensive legislative and national library in the world. Created by Congress in 1800 and sustained by Congress through every period of our nation's history, the Library of Congress is America's oldest federal cultural institution. It stands as both a symbol and a working institution of fundamental importance for our knowledge-based democracy—preserving and making available vital resources for scholars, educators, students, policymakers, and individual citizens.

[www.loc.gov](http://www.loc.gov)

### **HISTORY AND CIVICS**

The Elementary and Secondary Education Act, signed into law in December 2015, includes funding for K–12 history and civics education—the first dedicated funding lines for these subjects since the “Teaching American History Grants” were eliminated in FY 2012. One funding line supports a grant program that promotes evidence-based strategies to encourage innovative American history, geography, and civics instruction. Another funding line goes to “Presidential and Congressional Academies for American History,” intensive academies for teachers and students to learn more about civics.