

Public Witness Testimony
Submitted to the Interior, Environment and Related Agencies Subcommittee
Committee on Appropriations, U.S. Senate
Regarding FY 2018 Funding for the National Endowment for the Humanities
Stephen Kidd, Executive Director, National Humanities Alliance (May 26, 2017)

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 2018, 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 \$149.8 million to the NEH for FY 2017, thereby increasing the Endowment's funding by nearly \$2 million for the second consecutive year. These increases are critical steps in rebuilding the capacity of the NEH, which has been severely eroded in recent years. Despite the recent increases, 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 seriousness of the fiscal situation faced by Congress and the Administration, and we understand 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 the Common Good Initiative, which harnesses the power of the humanities to address society's pressing challenges. 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 two years have been critical to expanding these programs, although much unmet demand continues to exist. In FY 2017, the NEH introduced the Dialogues on the Experience of

War program, which supports community discussion groups for veterans and their families. The NEH awarded one of these grants to a faculty member at the University of Oklahoma to develop a course for past, current, and future (ROTC) service members. Through an exploration of the history and literature of war, the course encourages veterans to express thoughts on the experience of war.

Other efforts funded through the Standing Together initiative include writing programs for veterans suffering from PTSD; intensive college-preparation programs; and training for Veterans Affairs staff to help them understand the experiences of veterans.

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 2016 grant to the North Slope Borough Department of Inupiat History allowed it to work together with the Inupiat Heritage Center Museum to properly conserve seven paintings depicting the traditions and history of the Inupiat people. These paintings, in conjunction with an ongoing oral history project, help pass the Inupiat culture to the next generation. Another 2016 grant was awarded to the Cankdeska Cikana Community College in Fort Totten, North Dakota to develop a curriculum on Dakota literature and oral history, preserve the Dakota language, and increase outreach efforts to the broader community.

The NEH's Office of Challenge Grants, meanwhile, awarded funding to the Northwest Indian College in Bellingham, Washington to develop programs to preserve the culture and revitalize the language of the Salish people. These are just three examples of NEH's long-term commitment to sustaining, revitalizing, and preserving Native American languages and cultures.

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

Through NEH on the Road, the NEH brings museum exhibitions to underserved regions, making use of existing exhibitions from larger museums to efficiently provide high-quality exhibitions to communities across the country. More than half of the communities served have fewer than 50,000 residents. 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 exhibit traveled to 23 other locations including Excelsior Springs and Fulton, Missouri and Fairmont, West Virginia. Additionally, between 2012 and 2023, *For All The World To See: Visual Culture and The Struggle for Civil Rights*, will travel to a total of 50 sites, including in Boise, Idaho, Park City, Utah, and Belton, Texas.

To ensure a wide reach, the NEH has also dedicated funding lines for innovation in humanities curricula in community colleges, HBCUs, Hispanic-Serving Institutions, and

Tribal Colleges. A recent grant to Columbus State Community College in Columbus, Ohio, funds the development of a course on the history of Western medicine, disease, and public health, the first such general education course taught at a community college. This course is specifically designed for students interested in medical fields to afford an understanding of the social, political, and cultural dimensions of disease.

The NEH safeguards our historical and cultural legacies

With small grants to historical societies, historic sites, archives, and town and county record offices around the country, the NEH ensures that local historical documents and artifacts are preserved under the proper conditions and accessible in the long-term. For example, the NEH recently awarded a grant to Scarborough Library at Shepherd University to assess the preservation of memorabilia, photographs, books, scrapbooks, correspondence, and maps related to the history of Shepherdstown, West Virginia. A 2016 grant of just \$2,035 funded the purchase of equipment to monitor the environmental conditions for the collections at the Hockaday Museum of Art in Kalispell, Montana, thereby enabling the preservation of the history and art of Glacier National Park.

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 2016, NEH awarded a grant to the Alaska Division of Libraries, Archives, and Museums to digitize 100,000 pages of historic Alaska newspapers published between 1866 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.

NEH also supports the publication of the documents associated with important historical figures and events and ensures that these documents are widely accessible. For example, a 2016 grant to the University of Tennessee supported the publication of the papers of President James Polk and the development of an online portal that provides free and convenient access to students, teachers, and the public. Another recent grant supported the University of Southern Mississippi's digitization and online publication of 483 interviews documenting the Civil Rights Movement in Mississippi.

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 non-federal 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 addition to these highlighted programs, 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. Through its competitive grants programs, 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.