

Public Witness Testimony
**Submitted to the Interior, Environment and Related Agencies Subcommittee
Committee on Appropriations, U.S. House of Representatives
Regarding FY 2022 Funding for the National Endowment for the Humanities
Stephen Kidd, Executive Director, National Humanities Alliance (April 16, 2021)**

Mr. Chairman 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 2022, we respectfully urge the Subcommittee to fund the National Endowment for the Humanities at \$225 million.

This is an important first step in rebuilding the NEH's funding capacity, which has not fully recovered after a 36 percent cut in 1995. We urge Congress to take this step and work towards restoring the NEH's capacity to its 1994 level of \$313 million in inflation adjusted dollars by 2026—to ensure a robust investment in our history and culture by the 250th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence.

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) renew our civic and democratic culture; 2) help Americans document and understand diverse histories and cultural heritage; and 3) 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.

Renewing Our Civic and Democratic Culture

The NEH funds programs that can help rebuild our civic infrastructure by supporting history and civics education and providing opportunities for communities to come together, address difficult issues, and build bridges across differences.

By supporting professional development programs for K-12 teachers, the NEH ensures that the U.S.'s diverse history is taught in primary and secondary classrooms. Programs such as The Most Southern Place on Earth and Stony the Road We Trod take deep dives into Civil Rights history and bring teachers into contact with activists, while programs like Teaching Native

American History and The Battle of Little Bighorn and the Great Sioux War introduce teachers to Indigenous perspectives and tribal representatives. Muslim American History and Life and Religious Worlds of New York help teachers understand our nation's religious diversity. And The First Amendment and Twenty-First Century America emphasizes the ongoing life of our foundational documents. NHA conducted a year-out follow-up survey of participants in 12 NEH funded professional development programs that took place in 2019. Respondents were asked to reflect on their classroom practices during the 2020 school year. Eighty-three percent of respondents said they frequently or very frequently "challenge [their] students to think about our nation's history from alternative perspectives," and 73 percent said they "teach about historical events from the perspective of everyday people involved."

The NEH also supports National History Day, providing opportunities for high school students to engage in nuanced explorations of American history that build critical thinking skills and a robust understanding of how the past impacts the present. The NEH also supports conversation-based programs that help Americans build community and come together across differences. *Dialogues on the Experience of War* programs help veterans throughout the country process trauma, contextualize their experiences, and build supportive communities. One-hundred percent of respondents across 5 *Dialogues* programs surveyed by the National Humanities Alliance agreed the groups they took part in were "safe and supportive places for discussion" and reported a desire to "keep in touch with some of the people [they] met through the program."

Helping Americans Document and Understand Diverse Histories and Cultural Heritage

The National Endowment for the Humanities can strengthen the nation by celebrating our nation's diverse heritage, supporting disadvantaged and marginalized populations, and documenting and preserving cultural heritage.

The NEH has funded a wide range of community digitization projects that help build more inclusive archives. A Clemson University program invited descendants of the enslaved and convicted laborers who helped build the school to preserve their heritage, acknowledging these stories as foundational to the university's existence. In Seattle, a program run by the Korean American Historical Society led to the development of much-needed curricular materials on Korean American history and culture.

Research undertaken by the NHA indicates that these projects had immediate impacts on those who participated in them. In a survey of the Museum of Chinese in America's program (MOCA), 100 percent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they felt "a greater sense of belonging as a result of having a project focused on preserving my cultural heritage in my community." Participants from Georgia College and MOCA felt the workshop "[showed their community that they] have more in common."

NEH programs also have a robust track record of addressing inequalities in our institutions and supporting disadvantaged and marginalized populations. A program run through the American Library Association, the *Great Stories Club* helps at-risk and incarcerated youth engage with meaningful literature such as Representative John Lewis's graphic novel, *March*, while

encouraging self-reflection. Reading and conversation programs like those offered by People & Stories / Gente y Cuentos provide opportunities for learning and reflection to people in residential treatment programs, senior centers, and homeless shelters. PRIME TIME Family Reading Programs, meanwhile, offer low-income children and their families a chance to engage in conversation about children's books, enhancing literacy and supporting families at the same time.

The NEH also offers essential support for minority-serving higher education institutions, providing humanities faculty powerful and much-needed opportunities to undertake research and develop new curricula, ultimately serving both students and the local community. An NEH grant to Tuskegee University is helping faculty integrate local literary history—including writing by Zora Neale Hurston, Ralph Ellison, and Albert Murray—into their classrooms. After taking courses that integrated faculty workshop content, 86 percent of student respondents to an NHA survey reported learning more about Tuskegee's local culture and/or literary history. One student wrote: "I gained a greater appreciation for the school I attend and the city it's in.[...] Great minds grew from this soil." NEH funding helped Vanguard University, a Hispanic Serving Institution, develop a summer bridge program themed around American history and culture. A survey NHA conducted of the program demonstrated that it prepares students for success in their college career. At the end of the fall 2020 semester, 100 percent of respondents again agreed or strongly agreed they "know where to go to find resources on campus that will help [them] succeed (e.g., writing center)." Ninety percent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed they are "confident reaching out to [their] professors for assistance/questions/advice when needed" and "feel comfortable going to [their] professors' office hours."

Finally, 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. On the Olympic Peninsula, the creation of the *Klallam Dictionary* has made it possible for children to study the language in their schools. Most local Native American students take Klallam courses, and their collective GPA has risen since the dictionary was published in 2012. Preservation funding has helped Calista Education and Culture, a Native Alaskan organization, collect and publish historical narratives and traditional tales, at the same time preserving the voices of fluent Yup'ik speakers. Similarly, funding to Sealaska Heritage Institute helped the organization collect and publish Tlingit oral literature. Originally published in the 1990s, these collections are still being used in Tlingit language classrooms.

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 past NEH investments that have built strong community institutions and stimulated local economies. NEH funding to the Dubuque County Historical Society in Iowa helped transform the institution into the National Mississippi River Museum & Aquarium, which

contributed about \$10.5 million per year to the local economy prior to the pandemic. In Rabun Gap, Georgia, the NEH helped establish the Foxfire Museum & Heritage Center, an Appalachian cultural institution renowned for its *New York Times* bestselling anthologies that today serves as a local cultural hub and tourist site while providing educational opportunities for students in the rural area. A more recent NEH grant to the Community Library Association in Ketchum, Idaho, is helping build community around Ernest Hemingway's legacy, encouraging locals to reflect on their heritage and providing internships for students, in addition to preserving Hemingway's home. And in Pittsfield, Massachusetts, NEH funding is similarly building community around local cultural heritage by supporting The Mastheads' summer programs. In a 2019 survey of these programs conducted by the National Humanities Alliance, 97 percent of respondents felt that participating in them enhanced their sense of connection to Pittsfield.

Conclusion

We recognize that Congress faces difficult choices in allocating funds in this and coming years. Humanities educators and organizations have so much to offer communities across the country at this pivotal moment in our history, and robust investment in the NEH is essential to ensure that they have the capacity to do so. 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.