

Public Witness Testimony
Submitted to the Interior, Environment and Related Agencies Subcommittee
Committee on Appropriations, U.S. Senate
Regarding FY 2017 Funding for the National Endowment for the Humanities
Stephen Kidd, Executive Director, National Humanities Alliance (April 20, 2016)

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee:

On behalf of the National Humanities Alliance, with our more than 150 member organizations, I write to express strong support for the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH).

Overview

For FY 2017, 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 \$147.9 million to the NEH for FY 2016, thereby increasing the Endowment's funding by nearly \$2 million. This increase was a first step in rebuilding the capacity of NEH, which has been severely eroded in recent years. Despite the increase for FY 2016, the Endowment's current funding is 20 percent below its FY 2010 level, when adjusted for inflation. Modestly increasing 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 NEH should be a priority. In the remainder of this testimony, I will highlight some of the many ways that NEH serves national needs and describe the ways in which the humanities, more generally, have been called upon to help 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 three examples of how NEH grants serve clear national needs.

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

In the past three years, the NEH has added the Standing Together program to its already critical work. Last year's increased appropriation was critical to expanding this program, although much unmet demand continues to exist. The initiative funds reading groups for veterans that help them process their experiences through discussions of literature on war

and homecoming; 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. One key example is Missouri's Veteran's Writing Workshops, sponsored by the Missouri Humanities Council and executed in collaboration with the VA St. Louis Medical System at Jefferson Barracks, the St. Louis Public Library, and Drury University. These workshops are designed for veterans and their families—helping them to process and better express their experiences through writing and narrative. The fiction, non-fiction, and prose composed in these workshops has been compiled into an anthology series entitled *Proud to Be: Writing by American Warriors*, published by Southeast Missouri State University Press, which allows the broader American public to more fully understand the experience of military service.

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

NEH supports the documentation and teaching of native languages, history, and culture. A recent grant supported the creation of an online digital archive of approximately 700 objects, art works, and photographs representing the cultural heritage of the Chugach people of southern Alaska. Another grant provided support to make Ojibwe cultural artifacts—including beadwork, recorded songs, historical photographs, and census rolls—accessible online to tribal members, teachers, and the public. NEH's Office of Challenge Grants 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 a few examples of NEH's long-term commitment to sustaining, revitalizing, and preserving Native American languages and cultures.

NEH works in underserved regions.

Through NEH on the Road, NEH brings museum exhibitions to underserved regions. Between 2014 and 2017, *House & Home*, the flagship installation at the National Building Museum, will travel to Belton, Texas; Townsend, Tennessee; and Carthage, Missouri among 25 sites total. The Humanities in the Public Square program, launched in late 2015, also promises to play a key role in building rural and underserved communities. One grant awarded under this program to North Dakota State University in Fargo, entitled "Telling Stories, Creating Community: Understanding the Legacies of War at Home," will foster community building through dialogues between veterans, families of veterans, and the larger community in Fargo-Morehead.

In addition to these highlighted programs, each year 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, 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, NEH's support is crucial for building and sustaining humanities' infrastructure in all 50 states, serving American citizens at all stages of life.

Importance of the Humanities to National Needs

The humanities are increasingly called upon to play critical roles in our efforts to achieve four national goals: opportunity for all Americans, innovation and economic development, productive global engagement, and strong communities.

Opportunity for All Americans

Many Americans lack access to opportunity because they are deficient in a number of critical skills that are sought by employers. In a recent study conducted by the Conference Board, Corporate Voices for Working Families, the Partnership for 21st Century Skills, and the Society for Human Resource Management, employers ranked reading and writing as top inadequacies in new hires. More than a third of employers found high school graduates “deficient” in reading comprehension, and “written communications” topped the list of applied skills found lacking in high school and college graduates. These deficiencies not only limit the economic mobility of individuals, they also carry an economic burden for society as annual spending on remedial writing courses is estimated at more than \$3.1 billion for large corporations and \$221 million for state employers.

Innovation and Economic Growth

Employers increasingly seek employees who can combine the cultural knowledge and analytical ability fostered by humanities programs with technical knowledge and scientific research fostered by STEM education to create innovation and economic growth. In an effort to serve this demand, the Committee on the Engineer of 2020, a group convened by the National Academy of Engineering, recommends increased interdisciplinary education—including the humanities—in order to train engineers with the broad perspective necessary for 21st century innovation. Similarly, a substantial number of medical schools have integrated humanities coursework into their programs to enhance the cultural knowledge and observational abilities of their graduates with the goal of providing higher quality, more efficient care. Recognizing the role that the humanities play in fostering innovation, countries such as China and India have begun to integrate the humanities into their own education systems.

Productive Global Engagement

As they deal with increasingly complex international relationships, business and military leaders look to the humanities to provide critical knowledge about communities throughout the world. These leaders argue that our ability to engage productively with the world depends on the deep knowledge of the languages, cultures, and histories of rapidly changing areas of the world that the humanities cultivate and maintain. Historians, linguists, anthropologists, archaeologists, and

scholars of literature and religion, among others, spend years learning about communities and their deep roots, thereby gaining expertise that informs those who seek to work in these geographic areas. In 2013, former Ambassador to Afghanistan, Karl Eikenberry, described the critical role of the humanities in preparing our citizens for global engagement, “We need a strong cadre of Americans in our government, military, business, civil society, academe, and beyond who have the right skills and experience to help America stay connected with the world and shape outcomes that secure our national interests.”

Strong Communities

Finally, with the well-documented decline in critical, community-based social institutions, communities throughout our own country are trying to foster a sense of shared identity and responsibility. In doing so, they rely on the humanities to preserve and explore their history and traditions in order to promote the understanding of common ideals, enduring civic values, and shared cultural heritage. To strengthen communities, humanities councils, museums, libraries, and universities produce vital programs that promote understanding among diverse communities through the cultivation and exchange of knowledge about cultural heritage and history.

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 NEH as an investment in opportunity for all Americans, innovation and economic growth, productive global engagement, and strong communities. Thank you for 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. More than 150 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.