

House Congressional Testimony - FY2010 NEH

Testimony Submitted to the Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior, Environment and Related Agencies, U.S. House of Representatives, Regarding FY10 Funding for the National Endowment for the Humanities, by the National Humanities Alliance (March 26, 2009)

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee:

On behalf of the National Humanities Alliance and its 102 member organizations and institutions, we write to express strong support for the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH). Our members, and the thousands of teachers, scholars, humanities organizations and institutions they represent, use NEH grants to maintain a strong system of academic research, education and public programs in the humanities. We urge you to provide the National Endowment for the Humanities with at least \$230 million in Fiscal Year (FY) 2010, including: \$50 million for competitive grant programs and \$25 million for operating grants to state humanities councils. This funding level would represent a \$75 million increase over the FY 2009 enacted level, and would allow NEH to meet significant unmet needs at both the federal and state levels.

Unmet Needs

As the single largest source of support for the humanities, NEH funding is critical to the health of our nation's education and research infrastructure. NEH represents a unique funding source for nonprofit institutions central to the education and the cultural life of our nation's citizens, including: 2- and 4-year colleges, universities, local education associations, museums, historical societies, libraries, independent research institutions, scholarly societies, and state humanities councils. Unfortunately, demand for humanities project support, as demonstrated by NEH application rates and feedback from the field, far exceeds funding available. In FY 2008, applications for NEH grants in all programs represented \$421 million in requested funds, more than three times the program dollars obligated for that year.

At the national level, only 16% of competitive, peer-reviewed project proposals were funded, compared to a 26% funding rate for merit-reviewed projects at the National Science Foundation (an agency similar to NEH in its mission to strengthen education and research at all levels in its sector). We estimate that at least \$40 million would be required to help close this opportunity gap by allowing NEH to increase the number of applications accepted for critical, underfunded programs, such as:

fellowships for college/university faculty and independent scholars

- classroom curriculum and materials development
- preservation of historically-significant collections and resources
- digital humanities workshops for teachers and faculty
- public media projects in film, radio and television
- capacity-building challenge grants to humanities institutions

Additional funding of at least \$10 million is also needed to allow NEH to begin to introduce or expand targeted support in several areas where federal leadership is essential, including: international education and global society perspectives (at all levels of learning), digital humanities projects, graduate education, and data collection and dissemination of information on the state of the humanities.

NEH is the only federal research agency that does not have funding to support graduate students, or engage in regular collection and analysis of data on the health of the fields it serves.

Our request would also strengthen the capacity of state humanities councils to support local cultural and educational institutions, teaching and learning resources, family literacy programs, community discussion groups, and programs for new citizens. A recent survey of state council capacities and resources has identified \$150 million in funds needed for programs and infrastructure support in their states. State councils seek to secure half this figure in federal funding over the next three years.

NEH has the capacity to operate at much higher funding levels. While NEH has made much needed funding gains in recent years, its current budget of \$155 million is still far below historical levels. For example, in 1994, NEH was funded at \$258 million when adjusted for inflation; and at its peak in 1979, NEH was funded at \$431 million in 2008 constant dollars. While some additional administrative funds would likely be needed to oversee grants at the levels suggested, the structure is already in place for NEH to immediately fund more, excellent projects in a way that is proven, competitive, transparent, and accountable.

The Humanities and the Economy

In an increasingly knowledge-based global economy, study of the humanities—languages, literatures, philosophy, the arts, religion, anthropology, government, and other related fields—are prerequisites for vocational mobility, personal growth, and civic participation. In addition, the humanities impart practical knowledge and skills needed by all Americans, including reading, writing, language proficiency, critical thinking, moral reasoning, effective communication, historical knowledge, civic awareness, and cultural literacy.

Investment in broad-based education through the humanities is essential to our nation's long-term economic well-being, and to our continued status as a world leader. The 1965 legislation that established the NEH states: "An advanced civilization must not limit its efforts to science and technology alone, but must give full value and support to the other great branches of scholarly and cultural activity in order to achieve a better understanding of the past, a better analysis of the present, and a better view of the future." Unfortunately, in the forty years since NEH's founding, federal investment in the humanities has lagged behind other fields; and it continues to fall further behind as billions of federal dollars are rightly invested in science and engineering research and education each year. (For example, NEH funding today represents only 2.5% of National Science Foundation funding, compared to 16% thirty years ago.) We cannot allow this gap to grow unheeded.

As the economic recession deepens, it is critical that the federal government reinvigorate its investment in the humanities, or we risk losing a generation of young students, scholars, and researchers. Serious long-term challenges posed by rapid globalization, economic crisis, and threats to our national security require solutions informed by the humanities. As a nation, we must cultivate deep expertise and knowledge in all areas of learning, and support the full range of our citizens' talents—from math and science, to history and foreign languages. And we must also ensure broad, equitable access to high-quality humanities instruction throughout our nation's K-12 and higher education institutions.

John Hope Franklin, a leading U.S. historian who passed away yesterday at the age of 94, once stated: "I want to be out there on the firing line, helping, directing or doing something to try to make this a better world, a better place to live." His words express the sentiments of scholars around the country who are working to address pressing policy issues, from cultural anthropologists

lending their expertise to make sure that vaccines are used effectively in developing countries, to historians re-examining current issues like race, poverty, and immigration in America, to college/university faculty volunteering with family literacy programs, to linguists documenting disappearing languages among Native Americans and populations around the world, to curators repairing documents and other artifacts damaged by flood waters.

The humanities workforce should be recognized as a driver of our nation's long-term recovery efforts, as well as a sector deserving of federal investment to address serious economic pressures facing these fields. The humanities workforce is significant—according to data published in the newly-released Humanities Indicators (www.humanitiesindicators.org), more than \$2.5 million Americans are engaged in a broad range of humanities professions, including:

- K-12 teaching
- postsecondary teaching (including college/university, business, and government posts)
- newspaper, periodical, book, and directory publishing
- humanities professions (librarians, editors, writers/authors, archivists, curators, museum technicians, interpreters, translators, historians)
- other related professions (news analysts, reporters, correspondents, tour guides, audiovisual collections specialists)

Unfortunately, negative pressures are threatening the humanities workforce. Especially troubling are threats to the pipeline of young scholars and teachers, as exemplified by field reports and data from the Humanities Indicators:

- In 2000, the percentage of middle (29%) and high school (37.5%) students taught by a highly qualified history teacher was lower than for any other major subject area
- Since 1990 mean math SAT scores have been higher than verbal scores, so that by 2006 the mean math score was 15 points higher than the mean verbal score (a reversal of historical trends)
- Humanities faculty receive the lowest salaries of all fields. They also have a higher proportion of part-time, non-tenured positions than their counterparts in the sciences and engineering
- As college/university departments face tightening budgets, the availability of tenure-track positions is constricting; humanities disciplinary associations report decreased numbers of job openings through publication ads and annual meetings in 2009

NEH cannot single-handedly address these issues, but its leadership in these areas—research, education, preservation, public engagement, data gathering—is needed now more than ever. Each year, NEH grants support strengthened institutional capacity, jobs, and professional development for thousands of scholars, educators, curators, librarians, public historians, museum professionals, filmmakers and others around the country. These funds are not only vital for the direct support provided, but for the additional, non-federal dollars stimulated by NEH seed money—especially as endowments, state and local funding, individual giving, and other traditional sources of non-federal support constrict.

NEH Core Programs

The NEH's national, core program competitions are at the center of the agency's mission to create, preserve, and disseminate knowledge in the humanities. Since 1994, these programs have suffered disproportionately from budget cuts and inflation. Requested funds would reinvigorate:

NEH Research grants, which support fellowships, stipends, collaborative research, and scholarly editions. NEH application success rates (less than 12% overall, and between 5.7-7.8% for individual fellowships) confirm findings from a recent questionnaire by the National Humanities Alliance that identified funding for humanities research as the leading priority among its members. FY 2008 application requests in this division totaled \$115 million.

NEH Preservation and Access programs, which support the preservation of historically significant materials; training and education of curatorial staff; the creation of reference materials and new methods to increase access to them. According to the Heritage Health Index, a 2004 survey conducted by Heritage Preservation, only 37% of collecting institutions in the United States report adequate storage and over one-half report damage to collections due to poor environmental conditions for their collections. FY 2008 applications totaled \$85.8 million.

NEH Challenge grants, which help local, state and national institutions secure humanities resources and activities through fundraising as a means of building permanent resources for the future. Since the program started, NEH Challenge grants have leveraged \$1.58 billion in nonfederal support. FY 2008 applications totaled \$54.5 million.

NEH Education programs, which support professional development workshops for teachers and faculty members, model curricula, and classroom resources for the humanities for all grade levels. FY 2008 applications totaled \$48.7 million.

NEH Public programs, which support traveling exhibits and community programs in local museums and libraries; film, television and radio productions. NEH public programs reach literally millions of Americans each year. FY 2008 applications totaled \$61.7 million.

Launched in FY 2007, the *Office of Digital Humanities* offers grants to support the use of digital technologies in conducting research and presenting scholarship. FY 2008 applications totaled \$13.7 million.

Conclusion

We recognize that Congress faces difficult choices this year. We ask the Subcommittee to fund a significant increase for the National Endowment for the Humanities in FY 2010 as a necessary investment in the long-term well-being of our nation's economic, cultural, and civic institutions. We are grateful for the Subcommittee's vigorous support for the arts and humanities, and would especially like to recognize the Subcommittee's leadership for the \$10 million increase received by NEH for FY 2009. Thank you for consideration of our request.

Founded in 1981, the National Humanities Alliance is a coalition of nonprofit humanities organizations and individuals dedicated to the advancement of humanities education, research, preservation and public programs.

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