



# National Humanities Alliance

June 23, 2006

Larry Myers  
Director, Office of Strategic Planning  
National Endowment for the Humanities  
1100 Pennsylvania Ave., N.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20506

Dear Larry,

The National Humanities Alliance is pleased to submit comments on the FY 2004-2009 Strategic Plan for the National Endowment for the Humanities. We appreciate the opportunity to provide suggestions to NEH as the agency begins its strategic plan review, as required by the Government Performance and Results Act of 1993.

The National Humanities Alliance is a coalition of more than ninety organizations and institutions dedicated to the advancement of education, research, preservation, and public programs in the humanities. The Alliance plays a unique role in advocating on behalf of the broad humanities community, including major disciplinary societies, higher education associations, libraries, museums, and the state humanities councils.

Comments are provided in the attached document. We would be glad to discuss these remarks in further detail. Jessica Irons can be reached directly at (202) 296-4994 x149, or by email, <jirons@nhalliance.org>. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

John Churchill  
President, NHA  
Secretary, Phi Beta Kappa Society

Jessica Jones Irons  
Executive Director, NHA

**National Humanities Alliance**  
**Comments on NEH Strategic Plan Review**  
**June 23, 2005**

These comments are submitted in response to the National Endowment for the Humanities Strategic Plan, Fiscal Years 2004-2009, which is currently under review by the agency. Suggested new language is presented in *italics*.

The National Humanities Alliance applauds the agency for its broad, comprehensive goals: (1) to "advance knowledge and understanding in the humanities in the United States" and (2) to "broaden awareness of, access to, and support for the humanities".

**American History and Culture** - The NEH has rightly identified understanding of American history and culture as an area of national need. The NEH correctly gives this area of study special attention throughout the strategic plan, and has implemented the strategies identified through the agency's "We the People" program. Humanities organizations and institutions throughout the country have made excellent use of grant funds awarded under this program to support a wide array of projects, including collaborative research, preservation, library programs, television and radio productions, museum exhibitions, and state council programs.

**Foreign Language and International Studies** - The NHA strongly urges the NEH to identify, as a concurrent national need, the study and understanding of world history, cultures, and languages. In January, 2006, the White House introduced the administration's National Security Language Initiative, identifying the study of critical, under-taught languages as vital to our nation's strategic objectives. "Deficits in foreign language learning and teaching negatively affect our national security, diplomacy, law enforcement, intelligence communities and cultural understanding. It prevents us from effectively communicating in foreign media environments, hurts counter-terrorism efforts, and hampers our capacity to work with people and governments in post-conflict zones and to promote mutual understanding. Our business competitiveness is hampered in making effective contacts and adding new markets overseas."<sup>1</sup>

On January 5, 2006 at the Summit of U.S. University Presidents on International Education, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice stated, "... this country made a huge intellectual investment in winning the Cold War. ...In universities across the country, people studied the cultures and the languages of Eastern Europe and of Asia and of places that we had not known before World War II and had not been. This country made a huge investment in bringing young people from the recovering parts of Europe like Great Britain but also from a new German democracy through programs like the Marshall Fellowships and the Fulbright Fellowships. And we made a huge investment -- intellectual investment -- in getting young people to learn about those cultures and

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<sup>1</sup> January 5, 2006, Fact Sheet, Briefing by Dina Powell, Assistant Secretary of State for Education and Cultural Affairs and Barry Lowenkron, Assistant Secretary of State for Democracy, Human Rights and Labor.

those languages. I was one of those young people who fell in love with the study of the Soviet Union and of Russia. But I was also told that it was a patriotic and good thing to do for my country. We have not as a country made the kind of intellectual investment that we need to make in the exchange of peoples, in the exchange of ideas, in languages and in cultures and our knowledge of them that we made in the Cold War.”<sup>2</sup>

The study of foreign languages and world cultures is not only central to our nation's defense and business interests; it is central to the humanities enterprise itself. A deficit in foreign language proficiency negatively impacts teaching, learning and scholarship in the United States. It hinders the ability of scholars and educators to study and work with foreign language documents, to participate in international scholarly communication, to conduct research overseas, and to encourage knowledge and understanding of American history and culture abroad. It hinders students' range of reading, discussion, and opportunities for international exchange. Likewise, a lack of understanding of world cultures, history, and civic institutions inhibits the ability of learners at all levels to develop language proficiency.

NHA encourages NEH to play a leadership role in promoting foreign language training and international education, and urge that this objective be integrated strategically throughout the agency's programs:

Goal 1/Objective 1: Facilitating Research and Scholarship

- *Foster significant research and scholarship on world cultures, societies, and languages*
- *Support English translations of major works in classical and modern languages*
- *Encourage university and college faculty, as well as graduate students, to pursue advanced language studies*

Goal 1/Objective 2: Strengthening Education

- *Expand and strengthen the teaching of foreign languages at the K-12, postsecondary, and advanced study levels*

Goal 1/Objective 4: Supporting Public Programs/Lifelong Learning

- *Support local, regional, and national projects that provide support to immigrant communities and heritage language speakers for documentation of their experiences and culture; and that support study and understanding of American history, culture and civic institutions*

Goal 1/Objective 8: Under the current NEH strategic plan, the NEH review process is made available "to other federal agencies to evaluate humanities activities proposed for their support." In its first year, the President's NSLI proposes expenditure of \$114 million for foreign language, to be coordinated by the Secretaries of Education, State, Defense, and the Director of National Intelligence. NEH has long-standing experience in supporting scholarly research, and highly successful, content-rich teacher seminars and institutes. We encourage NEH to participate in discussions with the administration and other federal agencies to support the NSLI programs.

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<sup>2</sup> Secretary Condoleezza Rice, Remarks at the Summit of U.S. University Presidents on International Education, Washington, DC, January 5, 2006

**Agency Programming** - Under Goal 2, Objective 1, the agency lists as a strategy for "increasing awareness of the importance of the humanities", use of "events such as the annual 'Idea of America' student essay contest, the 'Heroes of History' lecture, and a National History Bee to enhance understanding and awareness of the nation's history and culture". Such modest agency-conducted programming may indeed be helping the NEH achieve its stated objectives. However, in considering new and continued programs, we encourage the agency to maintain its historical commitment to the use of program funding to stimulate and encourage projects outside the agency to fulfill its purposes.

**Humanities Data** - The NEH authorizing legislation, as amended in 1985, calls for the NEH to prepare a biennial report on the state of the humanities in the Nation<sup>3</sup>. In the reauthorizing legislation, Congress called on NEH to "develop a practical system of national information and data collection on the humanities, scholars, educational and cultural groups, and their audiences. Such system shall include cultural and financial trends in the various humanities fields, trends in audience participation, and trends in humanities education on national, regional, and State levels." The National Endowment for the Humanities is in a unique position to support the nation's infrastructure for teaching and learning in the humanities by advocating for and supporting efforts to collect and analyze data on the state of the humanities. Such data is vital to the formulation of sound policy at the national, state, local, and institutional levels.

In NEH's current strategic plan, support for data collection and analysis is identified as a strategy under Goal 2/Objective 1, that NEH should "Work independently and in partnership with other national organizations to collect, analyze, and provide access to data and information on the state of the humanities in the United States." NHA strongly supports this statement. Indeed, we believe that data collection and analysis should be given elevated priority level within NEH's strategic plan, and we urge the agency to treat this important issue as an independent objective, and to identify strategies to meet it.

We also urge the NEH to continue publishing regular annual reports on its own grants and activities, and to make this publication broadly available to the public. The NEH is the largest single source of support for the humanities in the United States. To meet its Congressional mandate to report on the state of the humanities, the NEH must, at a minimum, provide regular, timely reports on its own activities. We propose clarification of the strategy outlined under Goal 2, Objective 1 as follows:

- (current) Effectively publicize NEH programs and activities and the accomplishments of NEH grantees.

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<sup>3</sup> Compilation of the National Foundation on the Arts and the Humanities Act of 1965, December 31, 1986. Prepared for Use by the Committee on Education and Labor, US House of Representatives, Serial No. 99-S.

- (proposed) Effectively publicize NEH programs and activities and the accomplishments of NEH grantees *through regular publication and dissemination of annual reports and grant awards.*

Further, we encourage NEH to explore and report historical trends over the last forty years within its own structure that could be used to extrapolate or contrast with trends in support for the humanities nationwide. For example, how has NEH support for various disciplines declined or remained constant over time? How have applications by discipline or program area changed? What are the primary sources of nonfederal support for matching grants? Is this changing? How have audience/participation rates for NEH-supported programs changed over time?

Goal 2/Objective 1:

- *NEH should work independently and in partnership with other national organizations to analyze and report on historical trends on NEH grants, applications, and other activities.*

**Digital Humanities** - The current NEH strategic plan touches lightly on digitization by noting that the digitization of “previously printed scholarly editions” and “previously printed reference works” can support Objectives 1 and 3 of Goal 1. We urge NEH to expand the vision of what digitization can do in support of all of the goals and objectives of the strategic plan. Digital technologies have proven to be one of the most effective means of expanding access to information – including scholarship and the original materials of the historical record – and expanding the audiences for ideas and learning. We urge in particular that NEH include building the infrastructure of the digital humanities as one strategy under Objective 5 “Strengthen the institutional base of the humanities” of Goal 1. Measures that build the infrastructure of the digital humanities would include support for the creation of digital collections of rare library, museum, and archival materials; supporting the development of tools that facilitate the searching, interpretation, and presentation of digital information; and supporting institutional centers where scholars and others can develop new collections of digital materials and carry out research on those materials.