



# NOW MORE THAN EVER: Why America Needs the Humanities in the 21st Century

## Advancement in the humanities is critical to our nation's well-being and continued status as a world leader

» In this time of rapid globalization and new challenges to our national and economic security, the American people need the knowledge and skills of the humanities—those fields of study concerned with human experience, thought, and creativity. Spanning the subjects of history, languages, literatures, philosophy, art history, religion, cultural anthropology, and others, the humanities ask fundamental questions about the ways individuals live, think, and express themselves. They provide information, wisdom, and tools that allow us to understand the values that have sustained and explained the human condition in societies over time and help make sense of a world in which cultures, economies, and systems of belief interconnect and interact.

## We must commit significant new resources to the National Endowment for the Humanities

» Now more than ever, America's future well-being depends on the competitiveness of its workforce, diligent exercise of the responsibilities of citizenship, preservation of its cultural heritage, and an advanced knowledge and understanding of the world. Because the humanities are essential to the development of these capabilities, more than 40 years ago the nation's leaders established the National Endowment for the Humanities to provide essential federal encouragement for teaching, research, and public engagement with the humanities. The 1965 congressional legislation that founded the NEH stated that:

*The world leadership which has come to the United States cannot rest solely upon superior power, wealth, and technology, but must be solidly founded upon worldwide respect and admiration for the Nation's high qualities as a leader in the realm of ideas and of the spirit.*

The welfare and security of the nation can be strengthened when there is sufficient support for this aspiration. As the principal source of federal funding for humanities research and education, the NEH must

reassert high-profile and far-reaching leadership in three aspects of its original purpose:

- the advancement of knowledge and innovation in humanities disciplines
- the promotion of activities that improve teaching and learning in the humanities
- the engagement of the American people with the humanities to preserve the highest ideals of citizenship and the United States' role as a world leader.

This reaffirmation is required now because the agency's capacity to provide vital leadership has been eroded by a decades-long pattern of failure to ensure adequate funding for the NEH. The cumulative effect of this neglect is that NEH now operates at about 34 percent of its peak level of support. If the humanities are to play the critical role that previous generations intended as the U.S. reshapes its engagement with the rest of the world, the NEH must take a strong lead in making the wisdom to be gained from the humanities available to all Americans.

**In order to address the global challenges of the 21st century, the nation must strengthen humanities education and scholarship. The National Humanities Alliance calls for a substantial increase in federal funding for the National Endowment for the Humanities.**

- **At its peak, NEH's annual appropriation was 16% of the National Science Foundation's funding. By 2007, that appropriation had dropped to 2.5%.**
- **Over the past 30 years, while federal funding for NSF grew over 200 percent, federal funding for NEH declined by 60 percent.**

Such increasing disparity in federal funding of scholarship among the disciplines has compromised our ability to understand and effectively engage the forces characterizing our contemporary world. To assure the nation of a citizenry educated to meet the social, political, and economic challenges of the 21st century, that trend-line must be vigorously reversed.

*(continued on reverse)*

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## Reasserting the leadership of the National Endowment for the Humanities will require specific policy changes.

- As the principal source of federal funding for **research** in the humanities, the NEH stimulates discovery, innovation, and the creation of new knowledge. To strengthen the nation's knowledge infrastructure, NEH should:
  - » Increase support for peer-reviewed research, both collaborative and individual
  - » reintroduce support for graduate education (NEH is the only major federal research funding agency that does not provide support for graduate students)
  
- The NEH in decades past has played a significant role in humanities **education**, which is critical in preparing America's students for life in civil society and leadership in the emerging global community. Recovery of that role will require the agency to be more adequately funded in order to:
  - » increase the number of summer seminars and institutes for K-12 teachers and faculty at community colleges, four-year colleges, and universities
  - » provide support for pre-service training for young Americans who aspire to be K-12 teachers in humanities fields
  - » foster collaboration between humanities departments at institutions of higher education and local school districts
  - » support renewed research on teaching and learning in the humanities, including the use of new technologies.
  
- The leadership needed from a reinvigorated NEH is critical to the **preservation** of humanities materials, including books, newspapers, manuscripts, correspondence, film, photographs, sound recordings, and other collections of significant historical value to the United States. The agency should use its unique leadership position to help shape a coordinated national strategy to conserve and make accessible our nation's cultural heritage and traditions.
  
- The NEH needs additional resources to fulfill its mission as the chief source of support for **public programming** that engages the American people directly with the humanities through grants to museums, libraries, film-makers, television, and radio. The demonstrated achievements of the 56 **state humanities councils** to leverage community support for high quality humanities programming should be recognized by a significant increase in federal investment.

- In all its activities, the NEH should emphasize:
  - » **international and global perspectives** in the application of humanities knowledge and research to expand America's awareness of the world beyond our borders. A major part of this emphasis should be a reinvestment in international education to foster improved foreign language instruction and the study of world history, literature, and culture, to support new reference and teaching materials, and to promote faculty/student research and study abroad
  - » increased innovative use of **digital technologies** in humanities research, education and preservation. The agency should develop a strategic plan that encourages commitment from both higher education and the corporate sector, as well as close coordination with other federal agencies.
  
- NEH must support the periodic collection and analysis of benchmarking data on the status of the humanities. **NEH is the only major federal grant-making agency that does not regularly support the collection and analysis of data on the fields for which it is responsible.**

## We Must Bolster Support for the Humanities throughout the Federal Government

Key departments and agencies that contribute to the nation's well-being through the humanities include the:

- » National Endowment for the Humanities
- » U.S. Department of Education
- » Library of Congress
- » National Archives and Records Administration
- » Institute of Museum and Library Services
- » National Park Service
- » Smithsonian Institution
- » U.S. Department of State
- » U.S. Department of Defense
- » National Science Foundation

The National Humanities Alliance advocates increased support for the humanities-related activities of these agencies and departments.

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*National Humanities Alliance*  
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