

Public Witness Testimony
**Submitted to the Interior, Environment and Related Agencies Subcommittee
Committee on Appropriations, U.S. Senate
Regarding FY 2024 Funding for the National Endowment for the Humanities
Stephen Kidd, Executive Director, National Humanities Alliance (May 24, 2023)**

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee:

On behalf of the National Humanities Alliance (NHA), with our more than 260 member organizations, I write to express strong support for the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH).

Overview

For FY 2024, we respectfully urge the Subcommittee to consider no less than \$211 million for the National Endowment for the Humanities.

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) build strong communities and foster civic dialogue; 2) preserve cultural heritage, including Indigenous languages; 3) cultivate knowledge of world histories and cultures; and 4) shore up local tourism economies and community institutions.

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.

Building strong communities and fostering civic dialogue

NEH funding builds strong, civically-engaged communities through its support of cultural organizations. The agency’s grantmaking helps establish and sustain robust community institutions, providing opportunities for learning, empathy, and understanding. The International Storytelling Center in Jonesborough, Tennessee, regularly hosts programs that promote discussion and dialogue. Ninety-three percent of respondents to an NHA survey indicated that they were “motivated to listen to the stories of people whose background was different from their own” after participating in a program featuring the stories of Black Appalachians. Meanwhile, *Dialogues on the Experiences of War* grants strengthen communities by offering veterans the chance to reflect upon their experiences while building bonds with each other and with civilians. Ninety-nine percent of respondents across eight programs reported a desire to “keep in touch with some of the people [they] met during the program.” Programs have been held throughout the U.S. and are tailored to local audiences. In California, San Francisco’s Chinese Historical Society of America is hosting a program on Chinese American Veteran experiences, while Cal Poly Pomona’s program featured California voices more broadly. In Maryland, Bowie State University’s program brings together ROTC cadets, student Veterans, and Veterans from the

broader community, while a 2017 program hosted by the University of Maryland was designed for women Veterans.

NEH funding has an especially outsized role in small and rural communities, where it can build and support the infrastructure and programs that are vital to strong communities. Foundational support from the NEH has enabled Bend, Oregon's High Desert Museum to create engaging exhibitions and programs that showcase the region's diverse history. Recently, NEH funding has helped the museum strengthen relationships with and support for local Indigenous populations. In Matewan, West Virginia, NEH funding has proven transformative for the grassroots Mine Wars Museum, enabling it to hire staff, engage with partners and stakeholders, and create events for the local community that explore the region's significance to U.S. labor history and the struggle to unionize the southern coalfields. And in Red Cloud, Nebraska, NEH funding helped the Willa Cather Foundation expand its facilities and programming, having a robust impact on the rural town of 1,000 as both an employer and as an educational and cultural center that hosts theatrical adaptations on Cather's work, children's film screenings, and an annual conference.

Preserving cultural heritage, including Indigenous languages

Our cultural heritage lives in many forms, from presidential letters and great works of art to community archives and endangered languages. It is also vulnerable and requires protection from natural and man-made disasters as well as decay over time. NEH funding is indispensable to ensuring that our cultural heritage is both accessible now and preserved for future generations. The NEH funds documentary editions that make the papers of significant Americans accessible—from *The Papers of John Adams* and *Civil War Governors of Kentucky* to New Mexico's *Amador Family Correspondence, 1856–1949*. In a partnership with the Library of Congress, the agency's *Chronicling America* program is digitizing the historic newspapers of every state. And the NEH helps small and mid-size institutions invest in their own preservation needs. Institutions such as Dothan, Alabama's Wiregrass Museum of Art and the Stillwater Public Library in Oklahoma have used NEH funds to help ensure their collections are protected for the future.

Funding for documenting traditional cultures and endangered languages supports Indigenous people throughout the United States. Through the Dynamic Language Infrastructure-Documenting Endangered Languages (DEL) program, a partnership with the National Science Foundation, NEH funding has preserved and made accessible languages spoken by Indigenous communities, having a profound impact on their way of life. In North Dakota, DEL grants have supported Sitting Bull College's Standing Rock Lakota/Dakota Language Project, including funds for a Master-Apprentice Language Learning Program and to expand an accessible digital language archive. NEH support for the Coeur d'Alene Online Language Resource Center helped create a single, searchable repository for a wide range of language resources, from dictionaries to archival recordings of personal narratives and coyote stories. The NEH additionally supports the documentation and revitalization of Indigenous American languages through its regular grant programs.

Cultivating knowledge of world history and cultures

Established in the midst of the Cold War, the NEH has always provided funding to support research and programs that help Americans understand and engage with timely world issues. From scholarly exchanges with the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe and language institutes in the 1970s to international research support for American scholars and professional development for schoolteachers today, NEH funding supports efforts to understand other nations' languages, cultures, and geopolitical contexts. NEH funding has supported the research and publication of books such as *Treason in Transit: Soviet Defectors and the Borders of the Cold War World* (2022), by Erik R. Scott, and *Iron Curtain: The Crushing of Eastern Europe, 1944-1956* (2013)—among many other works of history that shed light on current events. NEH-supported English translations of Ukrainian literature, including *Words for War: New Poems from Ukraine* (2017) and *The White Chalk of Days: The Contemporary Ukrainian Literature Series Anthology* (2017) bring Ukrainian literature to broader American audiences.

NEH funding also provides high-quality education on world affairs for school teachers and college educators. Using the Holocaust as a case study, Kean University's 2021 two-week seminar "The Search for Humanity after Atrocity" helped higher education faculty integrate atrocity studies into their research and curricula. A 2016 program for K-12 educators, hosted by Ferris State University, explored U.S.-Russian/Soviet relations from 1776 to the present. Moreover, from 2013-2018, a series of NEH grants helped community colleges throughout the U.S. integrate the study of world cultures into their curricula. These programs included content on Latin America, Asia, Russia, Eastern Europe, and the Middle East, among other topics.

Building local tourism economies and shoring up community institutions

NEH funding catalyzes growth in local tourism economies and shores up local institutions so that they can continue serving their communities. A series of grants to the Dubuque County Historical Society, in Iowa, helped the organization transform from a small, regional museum into a world-class institution dedicated to the Mississippi River and its history—one that contributes more than \$10.5 million per year to the local economy. NEH support has also proven crucial to Thomas Jefferson's Monticello, which is an important economic driver in its Virginia region: 50 percent of the site's 400,000 annual visitors stay in a hotel for at least one night, contributing no less than \$13.1 million to the local economy.

Humanities organizations play a crucial role in their communities, and NEH funding helps ensure their financial stability and longevity. From offering COVID relief funding to New Hampshire's Currier Museum of Art, to supporting Appalshop following historic flooding in Kentucky, NEH funding helps cultural organizations survive times of crisis. NEH funding also offers crucial financial support necessary for accomplishing the more mundane tasks that private funders often overlook, such as replacing the roof on Libby, Montana's Heritage Museum or upgrading HVAC systems and improving ADA compliance at Detroit's Opera House.