

Public Witness Testimony  
**Submitted to the Interior, Environment and Related Agencies Subcommittee  
Committee on Appropriations, U.S. House of Representatives  
Regarding FY 2024 Funding for the National Endowment for the Humanities  
Stephen Kidd, Executive Director, National Humanities Alliance (March 16, 2023)**

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee:

On behalf of the National Humanities Alliance (NHA), with our more than 250 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 a robust increase 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 a survey done by NHA 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. The NEH’s *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.”

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. In Ketchum, Idaho, NEH funding has helped the local library increase cultural opportunities in its rural area

by bringing community members together to explore Ernest Hemingway’s regional legacy. By leveraging an NEH challenge grant to garner additional private support, the library has preserved Hemingway’s Idaho home and personal collections, developed audio walking tours, established a Writer-in-Residency program, and created an annual seminar that brings lectures, art, and discussion programs to the community. The Seward Community Library and Museum, for example, leveraged an NEH challenge grant to build a new facility and has averaged 60,000 more visitors per year than it received in its old space. In addition to hosting tourists, the organization provides space for nonprofits and other institutions to conduct their business. And in rural Utah, the Entrada Institute developed programs to encourage meaningful connections between traditional local communities and newer arrivals. In partnership with the local 4-H club, organizers developed after-school programs centered around locally relevant themes—for example, Western Heritage Shooting Sports—that culminate with community dinners featuring activities for all ages.

### **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 simple decay over time. NEH funding is indispensable to ensuring that our cultural heritage is both accessible now and preserved for future generations. In addition to funding projects that tell important presidential histories—like the publication of *The Papers of John Adams* and archaeological research at Andrew Jackson’s The Hermitage—the NEH helps small and mid-size institutions invest in their own preservation needs. Institutions like St. Vincent College in Pennsylvania and the Stillwater Public Library in Oklahoma have used NEH funds to help ensure their collections are protected for the future. NEH funds also help make these collections more widely accessible by funding digitization projects.

Funding for documenting traditional cultures and endangered languages supports Indigenous people throughout the United States. Through the Dynamic Language Infrastructure-Documenting Endangered Languages 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. DEL grants have helped produce dictionaries for languages such as Northern Paiute and Arapaho; they have also provided the funds for these resources to be online and freely available to tribal members. 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 the University of Dallas that ensured continuity of instruction for students, to supporting Corpus Christi's South Texas Institute for the Arts following Hurricane Harvey, 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 installing HVAC systems in Scottsdale, Arizona's Taliesin West.