



**National Humanities Conference 2024**  
**Providence, Rhode Island**  
**Call for Proposals**

The Federation of State Humanities Councils and the National Humanities Alliance invite proposals for the National Humanities Conference in Providence, Rhode Island, November 13 - 17, 2024.

*Making Waves, Navigating Currents of Change*

Nicknamed the Ocean State, Rhode Island is shaped by bodies of water. The geographies of the state's cities and towns, farms and forests, and industrial areas are adjacent to Narragansett Bay, the Atlantic Ocean, and many rivers, estuaries, lakes, ponds, and coves. A local humanities-loving gift shop sells t-shirts that say "Rhode Island. Three percent bigger at low tide." This connection between water and human communities, behavior, and decisions over millennia inspires the 2024 National Humanities Conference in Providence.

Much of Rhode Island's heritage is moored to the area's relationship with water, including:

- spiritual practices, foodways, trade relationships, and continued survivance of the Narragansett Indian Tribe, including those citizens who are lineal descendants of the Niantic people. These historic ties to the lands and waters are shared by Wampanoag and Nipmuc communities and the descendants of the Pokanoket people;
- Colonial settlement and early planning, mapping and agricultural practices and their impacts on social life, the physical landscape, and landscape/waterway imaginaries;

- the changing legacy of industrialization and the impact of immigration still evident along the state's rivers;
- the Transatlantic Slave Trade in the ports of Bristol, Newport, and Providence and its ongoing aftermath;
- the role of the fishing industry in Rhode Island's culture, economy, and environment;
- the complexities of planning and development along waterfronts, including issues related to accessibility, environmental justice, and decision-making around recreational use and benefit;
- the allocation of resources among rural and urban communities;
- and the impact of extreme weather such as hurricanes and floods, sea level rise, and our understanding of climate crises and environmental uncertainty.

These concerns are not unique to Rhode Island, and every community has their own stories connected to water to tell. The theme of water can infuse discussion of urgent contemporary issues, center complex narratives, and inspire intersecting public humanities practices, such as conversation and performance, history and storytelling, preservation and heritage tours, and engagement with archives.

### *Topical session proposals*

The 2024 National Humanities Conference invites proposals for topical sessions that **highlight connections across humanities and other disciplines and practices**. The Planning Committee especially welcomes proposals **incorporating the theme of water, making waves** through the public humanities, and **navigating currents of change**. The Planning Committee further encourages **proposals that bring together higher education institutions, humanities councils, humanities organizations, and community partners**. Off-site engagement with sites and stories of Providence will also take up these questions and will be part of the Conference experience.

### *Guiding questions for topical session proposals*

Here are some questions, by no means exhaustive, to consider for proposals:

- Water is an elemental source of life and deeply connected to human emotions, experiences, and expression. How do public humanities engage with the many meanings of water, the stories it tells, the changes it wreaks?

- What are programs, projects, policies and practices that bring together public history, historical preservation, and cultural heritages?
- Tapping into Providence’s spirit as a Creative Capital, how do artists across visual, performing and media arts connect with humanists and scholars?
- How do scholars of public humanities work with humanities councils and community organizations? How does that work challenge traditional scholarly settings?
- How do public humanists in a variety of fields and settings coalesce around memorials and commemoration, including stories and places that have been destroyed, erased, or effaced?
- What are the impacts of publicly surfacing and interpreting complex and difficult histories, such as local histories of enslavement, violent dispossession and colonization, and systemic racism, on different people, places and communities?
- What are practices of healing, health, and hope in the public humanities?
- When and how are humanists part of planning and policy making in arenas such as public health, environment, civic education, economic development and tourism?
- How might public humanities practices move with the rapid and constantly shifting currents of technology and culture, including ethical and generative uses of AI and gaming?
- What are ways that humanities councils promote, measure and evaluate community members’ participation in civic life through cultural engagement?

*Sessions on organizational and field capacity*

The Conference Planning Committee also encourages proposals that build capacities in public humanities sectors and in higher education, such as:

**Advocacy and case-making:** how to develop strategies such as coalition building and impact statements at the local, state, and national levels. On campus, how to work with government relations officers and how to advocate for the humanities beyond humanities departments.

**Audience and participant cultivation:** how to broaden and diversify audiences for, participants in, and co-creators of community-based public humanities work. On campus, how to build humanities enrollments.

**Communication strategies:** how to enhance digital capacity and offerings, build programmatic accessibility, and communicate through diverse media outlets to reach increasingly fragmented audiences. How to partner with local media.

**Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Access (DEIA):** how to operationalize practices across organizations, including programming, board recruitment, ethically and intentionally collecting, disaggregating, and using data, and staff hiring and retention. How to continue DEIA practices in light of legislation barring the use of public funding for this work.

**Fundraising and development:** how to cultivate support from private and public entities including grant writing, annual appeals, individual planned giving, and crowdfunding campaigns, as well as through practices such as trust-based philanthropy and Community-Centric Fundraising.

### *Session formats*

We encourage sessions in the following formats:

**Offsite Session:** These sessions take place outside of the conference hotel but ideally within walking distance! They introduce participants to an aspect of the Providence humanities landscape or to a type of humanities program that is best understood beyond the hotel and convention center walls (e.g. programs that engage with the environment or monuments and memorials). All logistics are handled by the session's presenters/facilitators. Local, RI-based cultural organizations and/or humanities practitioners are encouraged to submit proposals for this session type as a way to introduce the national audience drawn by the conference to the rich humanities ecosystem of the Ocean State. To this end, there is a modest budget to cover some costs associated with offsite sessions organized by RI-based cultural organizations and/or humanities practitioners.

**Panel:** This traditional format includes a moderator and no more than three presenters. Presentations are timed so that at least half the session consists of moderator questions and discussion with the audience.

**Roundtable:** Roundtables consist of a group of no more than five humanities practitioners (including moderator) discussing a topic in front of an audience,

rather than each presenting discrete remarks. A moderator leads the discussion and poses questions, but all participants speak equally about the topics.

**Working group:** Established groups that are exploring subjects of shared interest can request space to meet at the conference to continue their ongoing work. Each working group should have a facilitator responsible for guiding the conversation at the conference. Proposals for working groups should describe the history, subject, and goals of the working group.

**Workshop:** A hands-on session that teaches a particular skill set associated with program development, grantmaking, communications, collaboration, assessment, development/fundraising, cultivating new audiences, or any other aspect of humanities programming.

**Individual Flash Presentation:** Five-minute presentations by individuals that relate to the *Making Waves, Navigating Currents of Change* theme and guiding questions listed above. The program committee will group these flash presentations together to curate lightning round sessions of four to five similarly-themed presentations.

### **Proposal Submissions:**

To submit an **Individual Flash Presentation Proposal**, please use this [online form](#).

To submit a **Session Proposal** for any other type of session, please use this [online form](#).

If you start a proposal and need to finish it at a later time, you can click on the “Save” button at the bottom of any page. You can then either create an account with Jotform where your progress will be saved or you can click on “Skip Create an Account” to enter your email and receive a link allowing you to continue your progress.

### **Deadline:**

The deadline for proposal submission is Wednesday, April 3 by 11:59 pm ET. For questions regarding the online submission form, please contact [events@statehumanities.org](mailto:events@statehumanities.org).

### **About the Federation of State Humanities Councils**

Founded in 1977, the Federation is the national membership organization for the state and jurisdictional humanities councils. Rooted in the distinctive places and people they serve, the councils are independent nonprofit organizations that conduct and fund public humanities programs, engaging millions of people in community and civic life. The councils are funded in part by the federal government through the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH). The Federation serves the councils in every state and jurisdiction by fostering connections and deepening their networks, providing resources and capacity-sharing opportunities, acting as a liaison with the NEH, and advocating to Congress for federal funding.

### **About the National Humanities Alliance**

The National Humanities Alliance (NHA) is a nationwide coalition of organizations advocating for the humanities on campuses, in communities, and on Capitol Hill. Founded in 1981, NHA is supported by over 250 member organizations, including: colleges, universities, libraries, museums, cultural organizations, state humanities councils, and scholarly, professional, and higher education associations. It is the only organization that brings together the U.S. humanities community as a whole.