

CALL FOR PROPOSALS

2025 National Humanities Conference

Detroit, MI | November 12-16, 2025



National Humanities Conference 2025

Detroit, Michigan

Call for Proposals

The Federation of State Humanities Councils and the National Humanities Alliance invite proposals for the National Humanities Conference in Detroit, Michigan, November 12 - 16, 2025.

Roots of Invention, Innovation, and Revitalization

The automotive capital of the United States, Detroit—the Motor City—is famous as an industrial center with a distinctive soundtrack: the Motown music of the 1960s. Perhaps less recognized is the region's deep sense of rootedness and place. Its roots extend from the Indigenous mound builders and Algonquian-and Iroquoian-speaking people through growth fueled by early French colonization, fur trading, immigration, the Underground Railroad, and the Great Migration to the contemporary inner-community support networks that create and provide what has long been denied and absent from Black Detroit communities. What has revitalized and reinvented Detroit since its inception is its people.

Detroit is known for new technology, arts, and innovation, especially in the face of austerity. Innovation in Detroit has been driven by a commitment and a deep urge in its inhabitants to invent a new way of being, thinking, and creating, all rooted in their love of place. This innovation is rooted in the city's diverse population and its struggles for social justice and economic opportunity.

While these roots are specific to Michigan and Detroit, every place and every story has its own roots. The concept of rootedness illuminates a variety of human experiences, including a connection to place, a sense of belonging, and a dynamic relationship with the world. Being rooted means being connected to a heritage, a language, and cultural moorings that bind us to one another and to place. Rootedness is the social, environmental, and economic anchoring that sees us through tough times. It is what

helps us move forward. Rootedness requires that we ground ourselves in the histories of our people, families, land, local communities, and cultural communities. The theme of rootedness is embedded broadly throughout the humanities. Where there is heritage and culture, where there is something to tell or write about, where there is something to catalog, trace, and map, where there is something to explore and analyze, there are roots. Roots and the concept of rootedness shape the 2025 National Humanities Conference in Detroit.

The 2025 National Humanities Conference invites proposals for sessions that highlight connections across the humanities and other disciplines and practices. The Planning Committee especially welcomes proposals incorporating the theme of roots, exploring the way rootedness—the sense of connection to our homelands, our ancestors, our cultures, and how that impacts how we interact with this world—reveals itself through the public humanities.

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 Detroit will also take up these questions and will be part of the conference experience. Here are some guiding questions—by no means exhaustive—to consider for proposals:

- Roots interconnect humans to experiences within their environments—socially, economically, and culturally. How do public humanities practitioners engage with the many meanings of roots, the stories that emerge and become uprooted when people and communities begin to share their thoughts and feelings? How can community members and/or the public humanities help support and center those lived experiences?
- How can the public humanities be focused on renewal and reimagining? What programs, projects, policies, and practices bring together public history, historic preservation, and cultural heritages? How does oral history function as a technology?
- Labor organizing and grassroots organizations have been paramount in providing Detroiters a means of establishing roots in citizenship, self-sufficiency, and inner-community survival. How have efforts like these paved the way for new creative and/or alternative technologies of survival in Detroit or elsewhere? How can higher education institutions work with other communities to highlight and uplift the community expertise emerging from these efforts?

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
Audience and Participant cultivation
Board Relations
Communication Strategies
Fundraising and Development
Team Building

What to Expect at NHC 2025

Every year, at the end of the National Humanities Conference, we ask for attendees' feedback in an effort to keep evolving and improving the conference to ensure that it meets our attendees' needs. To address feedback regarding our sessions, we have updated the language in our Call for Proposals form to better solicit information from session coordinators to inform the decision-making process of our NHC Planning Committee and ensure the selected sessions include the topics and define takeaways attendees want to see. We are also revamping the conference schedule in order to 1) space out sessions with similar topics, 2) avoid packed session blocks with too many options, and 3) help alleviate end-of-conference fatigue. More details and information about the schedule will be released when we launch registration in the summer!

Session formats

We encourage sessions in the following formats:

Panel: This traditional format includes a moderator and no more than three presenters. Panels are encouraged to spend at least half the session in discussion with the audience.

Roundtable: Roundtables consist of a group of no more than five humanities practitioners (including a 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 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.

Offsite Session: These sessions take place outside of the conference hotel and introduce participants to an aspect of the Detroit 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 and should be outlined in the proposal. Local, Michigan 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 programs of the Great Lake State. To this end, there is a modest budget to cover some costs associated with offsite sessions organized by Michigan-based cultural organizations and/or humanities practitioners.

Individual Flash Presentation: Five-minute presentations by individuals that relate to the *Roots of Invention, Innovation, and Revitalization* 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 a **Session Proposal** for any other type of session, please use [this online form](#).

To submit an **Individual Flash Presentation Proposal**, 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 **Sunday, May 11, by 11:59 pm PT**. For questions regarding the online submission form, please contact 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.