

2025 Board Strategic Planning Session
3:00-4:30pm, February 21, 2025
MSU American Indian Hall

Thanks in advance to everyone who can make it to this working session. The session is not an official 'board training' nor does it fall into 'business' per se. Rather, it is meant to be a time for both focused and open-ended conversation, thinking about goals we might accomplish as a board in 2025.

The discussion will take place onsite at MSU's American Indian Hall immediately following our tour of the Hall.

HM's 2022-25 strategic plan is expiring in the current year. Jill will be preparing a comprehensive report for the Spring meeting to detail the accomplishments from that plan, which are many! With that plan phasing out, it gives us the opportunity to focus on some tailored and timely goals for the current year.

This working session will refer to documents and outcomes from recent board trainings, including: board governance training in Billings 2023; fundraising session in Helena 2024; and guiding principles session in Fort Benton 2024.

Three avenues of inquiry will begin the conversation, although certainly others may arise:

- How can the board make use of HM metrics to better inform our decision-making? Are there metrics that account for board activity and involvement?
- How can board members effectively support HM's fundraising efforts? What opportunities are coming up in the near future for board members to assist HM's fundraising efforts?
- What are different ways in which board members can serve as HM ambassadors? How can the organization assist board members in better serving as ambassadors for HM?

To ground the conversation, we're hoping you will have time to review Jill's Executive Director Report for February as well as the following documents:

1. 1-pager 'Background in Brief': a digest of outcomes from recent board trainings spanning the timeframe of the current strategic plan;
2. HM 2025 Development Plan: first drafted in consultation with Susan Howlett and shared with the board in February 2024; updated for 2025
3. Draft of HM guiding principles or values: developed in consultation with Mark Willmarth at the September 2024 board meeting, shared in October 2024.

Thank you again for all your service to HM, and if possible, for your participation in this discussion.
Best,

Beth Sullivan
HM Board Chairperson, 2025

Background in Brief

HM 2025 Board Aspirations: Stewardship, Fundraising & Outreach

Background in Brief: This 1-pager provides an overview of significant ideas and outcomes realized through board workshops and trainings that have occurred since the adoption of HM's 2022-25 strategic plan.

Governance Improvements: Board trainings over the past 2 years have focused on enriching board culture and establishing clear governance routines and responsibilities. Accomplishments include: 2022-25 strategic plan; establishment of a board code of conduct; retooling of board standing committees to focus on the mission-critical board activities of grant approval, financial and audit oversight, and governance. Still to come:

- **Stewardship Metrics:** consistent reporting and use of HM metrics to guide board decision-making
- **Fundraising and Outreach:** developing routines within the board to support HM outreach and assist where appropriate in HM fundraising; identifying opportunities across the year's calendar that allow for board members to serve as HM ambassadors

Fundraising Basics: Drawn from the board fundraising workshop held February 2024 in Helena with consultant Susan Howlett, three good reasons for HM board involvement in fundraising and outreach:

- **Our supporters long to feel appreciated;** they want to be heard and valued; they want us to know their stories. Board members can assist by making calls, writing letters, hosting listening sessions.
- **Our supporters want to make a difference** and have an impact; they want to know the work we do has impact. Board members can assist by attending HM events, talking about HM programs and projects.
- **Our supporters want to belong to something bigger than themselves,** extending to **"All 56 Counties!"** Board members can assist by making connection for HM in their communities and among their circles of influence.

Postulated values: Digested from a wide range of ideas generated during the September 2024 board discussion of HM guiding principles facilitated by Mark Willmarth, a few thoughts to ground the board's stewardship, fundraising, and outreach efforts:

- **Engagement with the humanities is intrinsically valuable.** *The humanities have the transformative power to change people's lives in significant ways and are at the heart of our nation.*
- **Connecting Montanans through the power of storytelling strengthens a sense of belonging.** *Montana is a diverse state – geographically, politically, ethnically, experientially, and culturally – with compelling histories and stories that together make our state distinct, resilient, and interesting.*
- **Supporting and promoting high quality public humanities programming engages communities, encourages lifelong learning, and empowers civic involvement.** *Locally relevant humanities programs bring Montanans together to build personal relationships and to reflect on who we are as individuals and communities.*
- **Effective stewardship of our resources establishes trust and integrity with those we serve and furthers the mission of Humanities Montana.** *Humanities Montana demonstrates its compliance, transparency, and accountability through effective board governance. All board members bring their own strengths to the organization and collaboratively ensure the successful future of the organization.*



2025 DEVELOPMENT PLAN

INTRODUCTION:

Overall, Humanities Montana (HM) is in a good position to increase fundraising and expand its offerings through individual gifts. The organization has been in existence for over 50 years and has a successful track record with both public and cultural organizations. However, HM continues to rely heavily on federal grants from the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH). It is imperative that HM diversify its funding sources in order to build a broad, sustainable base of financial support for the organization's next 50 years. Therefore, the focus will be building systems that generate a larger portion of the annual budget from sustainable sources each year, including individual donors and earned income.

GOAL: To build authentic relationships and engage with individual supporters of Humanities Montana in order to increase private donations and diversify funding sources for the future sustainability of the organization.

STRATEGIES:

1. Development & Communications Associate Duties

- a. Focus on building relationships and engaging supporters including former board, former staff, current donors, and recently lapsed donors, natural partners and other stakeholders.
- b. Coordinate low-cost special events in communities across Montana (ex: house parties, raise a pint night, etc.)
- c. Coordinate 3-4 mailings per year
 - i. April - Spring Appeal
 - ii. July - Annual Report Theme
 - iii. September - Legacy Giving Campaign tailored to people who already have a relationship with HM.
 - iv. Mid-November - Annual Appeal
- d. Facilitate pilot participation in Online Giving Campaigns—MT Community Foundation Giving Days in May (Billings & Great Falls for 2025)
- e. Maintain database, thank you letters, etc.
- f. Work with ED to develop board materials for successful Donor Retention Campaign.
- g. Implement new Development section of E-Newsletter, "Heart of the Humanities"

- h. Work closely with ED to coordinate HM's Annual Report
 - i. Increase brand strength (Confidence of Board and Staff in Brand): develop Communications Toolkit & Donor pamphlet
- 2. Host House Parties to facilitate storytelling, conversations, and HM's supporter reach
 - a. Potential 2025 locations: Helena, Billings, Bozeman, Great Falls, Missoula
 - b. Focus on the Impact of Humanities on their lives (listening sessions).
- 3. Engage Board through Donor Retention Campaign
 - a. Assign two local donors/supporters to each board member with the goal of building a relationship over the next year.
 - b. Communications Toolkit: Facilitate skill building with board members with the goal of fostering a conversation about humanities versus an elevator speech; the emphasis is on asking open ended questions.
 - c. Call or text new donors to thank them for their gift. Ask new donors open ended questions.
 - i. ED and Development Associate will create scripts for board members to leave a voicemail or send a text.
- 4. Develop a Major Donor Stewardship Plan
 - a. Build authentic relationships with key supporters and stakeholders. ED will focus on cultivating top donors and supporters.
 - b. Communicate regularly with major donors with meaningful updates multiple times per year.
 - c. Submit grant proposals with private foundations.
- 5. Determine future of Public Humanities Awards
 - a. What is the ROI?
 - b. What potential partnerships exist?

MEASURING SUCCESS:

CASH GOAL: To raise at least \$36,000 in unrestricted individual gifts in FY25.

FY2025 Annual Appeal Report:

Total: \$14,111.45

Individual Donors: 66



Guiding Principles

The Board of Humanities Montana is guided by the following principles.

We believe ...

- **Engagement with the humanities is valuable to all Montanans.** *The humanities have the transformative power to change people's lives in significant ways.*
- **Connecting people through the power of storytelling is meaningful and strengthens a sense of belonging.** *We have the capacity to understand others and become more gracious human beings.*
- **Amplifying unheard voices and perspectives honors people's stories and experiences throughout the state, including urban and rural communities.** *Montana is a diverse state—geographically, politically, ethnically, experientially, and culturally. All Montanans have stories that deserve to be found and told.*
- **Supporting and promoting high quality public humanities programming and re-grant opportunities engages communities, encourages lifelong learning, and empowers civic involvement.** *Compelling humanities programs bring Montanans together and builds personal relationships and a sense of community connection.*
- **Effective stewardship of our resources, including funding, gifts, staff, board and constituents, establishes trust and integrity with those we serve and furthers the mission of Humanities Montana.** *Humanities Montana acts strategically and demonstrates its compliance, transparency, and accountability through metrics and stories. We choose to take strategic risks to be more innovative. Our success comes from our willingness to find and support new and unique ways to tell our Montana stories.*
- **Working together as a board will prepare us to think carefully about Humanities Montana's mission and role.** *All board members bring their own strengths to the organization. The board functions best when everyone is fully invested in the successful future of the organization. Diversity helps us to be more innovative and solve problems more effectively. We respectfully value everyone's voice.*

Humanities MONTANA

Board Retreat notes
Grand Union Hotel, Fort Benton, Montana
September 27, 2024

As members of the Humanities Montana Board we believe ...

Group 1 (Governance Committee)

1. In the power of the story to connect people in a meaningful way.

What does this look like?

Following grant making guidelines and scoring metrics.
Quality programming in Montana conversations and speakers in the schools.

This is why it matters.

Integral to the job of the humanities and Humanities Montana's mission

2. In exposing people to the humanities, some for the first time, especially in their own communities. This is particularly true for small communities.

What does this look like?

Are we doing enough to reach communities in such a big landscape with a small population?

This is why it matters.

We must reach as many people as possible in our state.

3. The value of the humanities merits financial support both from the federal government and foundation/individual donations.

What does this look like?

Careful use of funding and effective fundraising.
Telling our story about what we've done and what we can do to show how we add value.

This is why it matters.

Financial support makes it possible to do the work we do.

4. **As individual board members it is our responsibility to be prepared and think carefully about Humanities Montana's mission and role.**

What does this look like?

Commitment to our various positions on committees.

Being prepared for all meetings.

Practicing open communication and graceful interactions.

This is why it matters.

The board functions best when everyone's fully on board.

Everyone brings their own strengths to the organization.

Group 2 (Grants Committee)

1. **In quality ongoing programs and regranting funding**

What does this look like?

Educating on the availability of programs and grants.

Advice about how to prep a grant to advance their goals.

Humanities Montana Board and staff evaluate/rate grant proposals and programs.

This is why it matters.

It is the mission of Humanities Montana.

We have a responsibility to the NEH and our funders, as well as our communities.

2. **We are stewards of the money we receive from the NEH and HMT.**

What does this look like?

Hire a staff finance person.

Board Finance Committee.

GAAP principles reflected in Humanities Montana policies and procedures.

This is why it matters.

Sustainability/viability of the organization.

3. **In facilitating people's stories/honoring people's stories from across Montana cities and rural communities.**

What does this look like?

Compelling programs that bring Montanans together.

Fund grant proposals that reflect the varied stories of Montana.

This is why it matters.

Provides opportunities for sharing the varied stories and experiences of Montanans.

Vehicle to share less heard stories.

4. **In seeking out the unheard voices across Montana.**

What does this look like?

Board and staff members are ambassadors to communities.

We will see an increase in applications received from unknown/new players.
Increase marketing and PR.

This is why it matters.

We don't want to miss the important stories that need to be told.
It helps to complete/fill out the tapestry of Montana.

5. In connecting speakers in Montana communities.**What does this look like?**

Robust and diverse Speakers Bureau.

Publicize and connect speakers with a variety of venues.

This is why it matters.

Share and perpetuate Montana stories.

Group 3 (Finance Committee)**1. Exposure/engagement with the humanities is important to Montanans.****What does this look like?**

Projects in local communities and organizations.

Speakers that focus on history/lecture.

Civic engagement.

This is why it matters.

We have the capacity to understand others and be better human beings.

Foster community/forged bonds.

Documenting who we are and who we have been.

2. Spread support across all 56 counties in Montana.**What does this look like?**

We have speakers in all 56 counties.

Our grants go to as many counties as possible, especially the less populated.

This is why it matters.

Montana is diverse – geographically, politically, ethnically, experientially and culturally.

3. Support the use of funds/stewardship of funds.**What does this look like?**

Review financial reports.

Review and audit applications.

Budgets

This is why it matters.

Continue to receive funding.

4. Support and continue to do the work of the humanities in Montana.

What does this look like?

This is why it matters.