

**Humanities Montana  
Executive Committee**

March 11, 2026

**Present:** Ray Ekness (Chair), Glory Blue Earth (Vice Chair), Esther Beth Sullivan (Finance Chair), Karen Rieff (Governance Chair), and Slaven Lee (Programs and Outreach Chair).

**Staff:** John Knight (Interim Executive Director)

**The meeting convened at 10:02am.**

Ray called the meeting to order and outlined the agenda, which focused on updates from the Humanities on the Hill trip recently taken by John, Finance Committee updates, Governance Committee updates, Programs and Outreach Committee updates, and a discussion on next steps to search for an Executive Director.

**Interim Executive Director Updates**

- John provided an update on his participation in Humanities on the Hill in Washington, D.C., noting positive interactions with Montana's congressional delegation and their staff. He also shared highlights from his talking points during those meetings.
- John informed the committee that the NEH has released the FY27 Notice of Funding Opportunity. He also noted that communication from NEH has become more frequent and shared that the agency has indicated it will be able to release FY26 funds once the nominated Acting Chair is confirmed.

**Finance Committee Updates**

- Beth provided a brief update on financial needs moving into 2026, including the importance of securing new grant funding to supplement the one-time operational stability support received from the Mellon Foundation in 2025. She also expressed appreciation for John's ongoing efforts to conduct grant outreach and pursue new funding opportunities.
- Beth mentioned that she is working with John on the Finance Procedures Manual ahead of the May board meeting.
- Beth asked John for any other updates, where he shared the status of the FY25 Audit and timeline, and ongoing communication improvements with HM's contract accountant.

**Governance Committee Updates**

- Karen provided an update on agenda items for the next Governance Committee meeting on March 11, 2026. She noted that the committee will review past board applicants with the goal of recommending a candidate to the full board at a special meeting for approval.

**Programs Committee Updates**

- Slaven noted that the committee has its first meeting on Monday, March 16, and has a working agenda.

Following the committee updates. Ray asked John to leave the meeting so that the group could discuss next steps to appointment an Executive Director to Humanities Montana.

John departed at 10:16am.

### **Executive Director Search Discussion**

The committee discussed beginning a search for a full-time executive director. Beth went through the metrics and criteria that were set for an interim ED that would start a full search. She said a full-time ED will give HM a way to think about moving forward. Beth mentioned two of the criteria to begin the search were enough cash on hand for six months of operation, to see into 2027, and to keep two staff positions going. She noted that with the possibility of continued NEH funds and continued fundraising, we will be able to move forward as a group and with a search for the ED.

Beth noted that the search committee needs to be voted on and approved by the whole board. The committee set up a search committee of Ray Ekness, Karen Reiff, Glory Blue Earth, and Slaven Lee.

There was also discussion by the committee of how big to make the search. Ray suggested we look at the bylaws pertaining to a search and to review the job description used to hire the interim ED as a way to start. He said we will have the full board approve the search committee to get us started. He said then we can look at the scope of the search, the timeline, and the position description.

**The meeting adjourned at 10:25am.**