Humanities Montana

Program Committee Meeting Minutes

May 16, 2023

**Present:** Jeannette Fregulia (Committee Chair), Glory Blue Earth, Beth Sullivan, Arian Randall

**Absent:** Ramey Growing Thunder

**Staff:** Kim Anderson (Interim Director), John Knight (Programs Manager), Jenny Bevill (The Democracy Project Coordinator)

The meeting was called together at 1:03 pm on Zoom. John Knight welcomed all in attendance to the meeting and introduced Jenny Bevill, The Democracy Project Program Coordinator to the committee. John presented a report on Montana Conversations, Speakers in the Schools, Hometown Humanities, The Democracy Project with Jenny Bevill, the Montana Center for the Book, the United We Stand grant initiative from the NEH, the National History Day supplemental grant initiative from the NEH, and an update on program action steps for the Humanities Montana strategic plan. Jeanette then asked for a discussion among the committee regarding on-going Humanities Montana Ad Hoc Committee discussions on the operations of the Program Committee.

**Montana Conversations and Speakers in the Schools**

John updated the Program Committee on the budget for Montana Conversations (MC), reviewing that the program had a 2023-2023 Fiscal Year budget of $55000.00. He noted that the average program costs $486.00 a booking and 91 presentations had occurred or been scheduled this fiscal year. The expected and spent costs of MC so far for 2022-2023 was $42,000.00. John finished up his budget report on MC by reading from a quote submitted by the Boys and Girls Club of the Flathead Reservation and Lake County, who recently hosted Aspen and Cameron Decker’s *Salish Storytelling* program: “We’ve had many different responses and the kids were super excited to learn the language, sign language, and a variety of coyote stories. We made sure to follow up in each class that attended to encourage them to remember what was taught by doing activities that were closely related.”

John then reported on the budget for Speakers in the Schools (SiS). He noted that the budget was set to $60,000.00, and that $52,602.00 had been spent or expected to be spent. John stated that 89 programs were booked with 332 individual presentations scheduled to be given by speakers by the end of the fiscal year. John then showed the program committee a photo submitted by the Classical Conversations Homeschool group out of Kalispell, who had booked Mark Matthew’s *Dance, Dance, Dance* program at Emmanuel Lutheran Church in Bigfork. John shared two quotes from the group: *“*It was a great experience. The students were exposed to something they had never done and had a great time. Mark was patient with them. He gave some interesting history and facts about the dances that we did. He was easy to talk with and easy to work with.” and, “The whole experience was great. I had a bit of trouble with the application process in the beginning, but John was so helpful and walked me through the process.”

After viewing an interactive map on where SiS programs had occurred for the year, John shared that in late March 2023, Humanities Montana ended program bookings for SiS; noting that several presentations were still scheduled and travel reimbursements were expected to push expected costs near the program budget ceiling. John also noted that new communities were reached with this year’s SiS program, including: including schools in Circle, Grass Range, Jordan, Shelby, Stanford, Sunburst, and the Classical Conversations Homeschool group in Kalispell.

John informed the Program Committee that he and Interim Director Kim Anderson were reviewing and revising the language in speaker contracts, ahead of contract renewal this summer. Beth Sullivan asked for an example of contract revision, and John gave examples of gray-areas of language in the contracts in regards to travel reimbursement, speaker pay expectations, and the total number of presentations that could be booked with one MC or SiS program. John mentioned that it was HM staff’s hope to have speaker contracts complete and sent out to all current program presenters by June 1, 2023.

Following the speaker contract update, John noted that increased program booking goals in northern, central, and eastern Montana had been met. He noted various outreach and program trips including his April trip to central and eastern Montana with stops in: Harlowton, Lewistown, Winnett, Jordan, Circle and Billings; Mary Jane Bradbury’s early April tour to central and northern Montana with visits in: Sand Springs, Jordan, Circle, Glasgow, Malta and Choteau; Sabre Moore’s recent programs in Chinook and Jordan; and Mo Reynold’s upcoming summer tour to Columbus, Sidney, Jordan and Lewistown.

John ended his MC and SiS report with an image from Mary Jane Bradbury’s SiS program, *Kid Gloves and Brass Knuckles: The Life of Nancy Cooper Russell* at Sand Springs School in Sand Springs. He also shared two quotes: “The speaker tied into my curriculum just as I was finishing Montana History and the cowboy/sheepherder era of open range. Russell is a featured person in the 4th Grade Montana History.” and: “Mary Jane did a wonderful job of acting the part of Nancy Russell. She told stories that we had heard along with information that was new to my students. Extending the talk into an art project, several adults along with the students created a picture that we then told a story with. She also got to see a real rural one-room schoolhouse in action and was offered sheepherder hors d'oeuvres and chuckwagon beans!”

**Hometown Humanities**

John updated the Program Committee on the number of programs that had been booked in Lewistown since November 1, 2023; noting that only 2 program presentations had occurred. He mentioned to the committee that Lewistown Public Library staff had stated that they were working at capacity with their various roles, and had less time to book Humanities Montana programs. He also updated the Program Committee that the proposed Lewistown / Hometown Humanities Writer’s Institute and Author’s Dinner ideas had been tabled by the library due to capacity concerns. John also mentioned that the library is currently booking Humanities Montana speakers for their Summer Reading Series.

John spoke about his recent trip Lewistown, where he met with librarians at the Lewistown Public Library; David Cunningham, the director of the American Prairie Discovery Center; and Mary Callahan Baumstark, the director of the Lewistown Art Center–all partnering Hometown Humanities Sites. All three community partners committed to continuing their work with Humanities Montana. To cap off his time in Lewistown, MC and SiS speaker Leslie Van Stavern Millar III presented her program, *Queen Elizabeth I Time Travels To Montana*. The program was booked by the library, and 25 community members attended. John then noted that during the past two years, the Hometown Humanities program has concentrated efforts in Lewistown alongside the Lewistown Public Library, the Lewistown Art Center, and The American Prairie National Discovery Center. Set to end during the summer of 2022, the program was extended through May of 2023 to accommodate needs following the Covid-19 pandemic.

Beth Sullivan asked if it was Humanities Montana staff plans to end the Hometown Humanities program in accordance with the strategic plan and programs work plan. Kim Anderson stated that John and incoming Executive Director Jill Baker would evaluate the program and determine if the program should stay on hiatus, dissolve, or continue on.

**The Democracy Project**

John introduced Jenny Bevill, The Democracy Project Coordinator to the Program Committee. He and Jenny discuss project updates; library sites that are on hold for 2023, a rubric they are developing to evaluate successes and failures of the program and participating sites, the development of toolkits for Democracy Project sites, and ongoing outreach efforts.

Jenny began her presentation by restating that it is a teen-led humanities program, supported by local libraries, community members and Humanities Montana. She presented a map of current library sites, and walks through which sites are currently on pause, which sites are on track to complete their culminating projects. It was noted that Billings Public Library and Aaniiih Nakoda College Library are on pause for the remainder of the school year. All other sites were on track to complete their final Democracy Project projects by the start of summer. Jenny then noted various project outcomes for year two of the program, stating that: “Our teen-led, collaborative process acknowledges that circumstances change and evolve and the measures of success vary from site to site. At some sites, a robust teen audience was already in place. Some sites were developing their teen audience from scratch or rebuilding it after the pandemic. Some sites have accomplished a lot with a small but mighty group. Other sites have needed to press pause on a project in order to focus on outreach and recruitment. The teen-led mandate results in a wide variety of projects and approaches. Some sites accomplished more than they even dreamed possible!”

Jenny presented on the completed projects at Democracy Project sites. She shared that the teens at Lewis and Clark Public Library drafted Montana House Bill 875: An Act Establishing the School Mental Health Promotion Pilot Program, which seeks to allocate public funds via the Office of Public Instruction for schools to access when addressing mental health needs with their students. Montana State Representative Melissa Romano (D / Helena / HD 81) signed on to sponsor the bill, which was introduced to the education committee on March 27, 2023. Teens and others gave proponent testimony. At the end of the hearing, House Education Committee Chair, Rep. Fred Anderson (R) told the teens: “I’d like to also add my thank you to the students that came, both for your testimony and also for being proactive rather than just sitting and feeling bad about the current system not working well. So, thank you.” Though the bill was tabled at committee, the teens built a website of mental health resources for Montana young adults.

At Gallatin High School Library, it was mentioned that teens are working with the school administration and the local community to develop a native plants garden that can be used for mental health and educational purposes by students and community members. They have also engaged with the facilities crew and government and history classes and various clubs at the school to support the project. At Drummond School and Community Library, stating that teens worked to fill a community need by creating a grocery delivery service. The closest grocery store is 30 miles away in Clinton. By partnering with this business the teens have created a service that allows folks to place an order and have their groceries brought to them. At Lewistown Public Library, teens worked with a local volunteer group called ROWL (Recycle Our Waste Lewistown) to expand the program both by setting up more recycling bins and recruiting more volunteers to handle the increased volume of recyclables collected. Teens are extending the Democracy Project to revive the Environmental Club at their school. They presented their project to city commissioners on the project.

With Lewis and Clark Public Library–East Helena Branch, teens held a clothing drive for veterans, gathering donations from the community and purchasing new sweatshirts, t-shirts, socks, underwear, hats, and gloves to make to-go bags for the unsheltered during the colder months. The teens were pleased with how many items were donated and they received many positive comments about the good work they were doing. At Whitehall Community Library, the Holocaust Book Club teen group hosted a Survivor and Rescuer Fair. They educated 40 attendees about individuals impacted by the Holocaust by sharing these stories. They also traveled by invitation to visit the Holocaust Museum LA and met with three children of survivors. The books the club has purchased will go into circulation statewide. At McCone County Library, the teens of Circle wanted to learn the history of the generations that came before them and prevent those stories from being lost. They were given lots of advice and the stories they learned were interesting. Several of the people interviewed had profound memory loss and it would have been more successful to have talked to them several years earlier. Teens are currently working with city officials and investigating where to archive their interviews.

To end the presentation on The Democracy Project, Jenny updated the committee with sites that are on currently on hold, or struggling to complete their projects. She mentioned that Billings Public Library and Aaniiih Nakoda Community College have paused due to staffing challenges and hope to resume in the fall. Seeley Lake School and Community Library and Missoula Public Library have faced challenges but are navigating these obstacles with support and expect to accomplish steps towards their goals. In Seeley Lake, teens expect to complete three projects: a playground cleanup, a snowmobile ramp, and a new city park sign. All sites have spent time and energy on outreach. Jenny finished her presentation with a quote from Sherry R. Schlundt, the Teen Librarian at Lewis and Clark Library in Helena: “In my many years of being a librarian, working with the Democracy Project and its group of dedicated, caring, teens who have been meeting all year long and using their time to write a House Bill and developing a website dedicated to Teen Mental Health has been the highlight of my career. It has been an honor to work with this group of forward-thinking young people. They give me hope.” Beth noted that all of the data and reporting developed by Jenny and John will help to develop future funding for the program.

**Montana Center for the Book**

John presented updates on the Montana Center for the Book. He noted that the Library of Congress, State Center for the Book Affiliation Agreement for 2023-2025 has been resigned. John updates the Program Committee on the “Great Reads from Great Places” book selections for the National Book Festival. The Montana Center for the Book has made two selections: *Holding Fire: A Reckoning with the American West*, by Bryce Andrews (Adult selection); and
 *Elk Morning: At the Battle of Arrow Creek*, as interpreted by AJ Otjen and Sabrena Half (Young Adult selection). He notes that during the 2023 National Book Festival, on Saturday, Aug. 12, at the Washington Convention Center, representatives from the 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, the U.S. Virgin Islands, American Samoa, Guam and Northern Marianas will staff tables to promote their book selections and other literary works reflective of their unique locations. The area at the convention center where the 56 tables will be assembled is called the Roadmap to Reading.

John mentioned that he continues to meet monthly with all Center for the Book Affiliate program directors, as well as the Western II regional group that Montana is a part of. He noted that the Western II group is in the process of putting together a series of Zoom interviews and panel discussions of their Great Reads authors to be shown at the National Book Festival and archived by the Library of Congress. John stated that he is committed to maintaining the Montana Center for the Book as a Humanities Montana program, and was encouraged in a recent meeting with Lucas Fralick of the Wyoming Center for the Book and Humanities Wyoming. To close out, John updated the Program Committee with recent website updates that are now live on the Montana Center for the Book page.

**United We Stand**

John presented on a grant opportunity from the National Endowment of the Humanities (NEH), called United We Stand. He and Kim noted that staff were working on applying for the grant which is non-competitive and up to $50,000.00 of funding. The United We Stand grant would supplement programs and grants that combat hate through humanities resources and programs that foster cross-cultural understanding, empathy, and community resilience; develop and implement humanities-based programming that educates the public on the history of domestic extremism and hate-based violence and promotes civic engagement, information literacy, and social cohesion through strategic partnerships, community-building, and on-going public engagement; and develop and share humanities resources that deepen public understanding of and contextualize community, state, and national history. Kim noted that the grant request was due May 19th, and that if awarded, Humanities Montana would begin United We Stand programming during the autumn of 2023.

**National History Day**

John presented on the National History Day Supplements grant available to NEH-affiliated state humanities councils to develop or partner with state-wide facilitators to support NHD programs. John noted that NEH invites all state and jurisdictional humanities councils—those that serve as an NHD coordinator and those that do not—to apply for a supplemental award of up to $7,500 to support planning or up to $20,000 to support program development and implementation. He mentioned that the supplemental funding could be used to extend NHD outreach to educators and students in underserved and hard-to-reach communities. Kim and John spoke to the Program Committee about partnering with Hailey Hancock, Assistant Teaching Professor at Montana State University – Bozeman, who is developing National History Day Programming statewide in Montana. Kim clarified that Humanities Montana is not developing a new program, but instead making the NHD NEH accessible funds available to MSU-Bozeman. Humanities Montana in turn would be responsible for funding and budget oversight if awarded the supplemental grant.

Jeanette Fregulia asked if she could have five to 10 minutes of time to present on current Ad Hoc Committee discussions. John and Kim wrapped up speaking about the NHD grant.

**Strategic Plan, Programs Action Steps**

John briefly presented on the Strategic Plan for Programs, Action Steps Update and Timeline shift. He noted that why all action steps are currently on track, it was recommended by Jeanette to push back action step dates until strategic plan and programs review could occur during the summer of 2023 with Jill Baker. Beth asked if the overall timeline or process strategies for programs and the strategic plan were going to shift. Kim clarified that timelines and process strategies were already board approved with target dates being met.

**Program Committee Information Check-in**

John and The Program Committee tabled this agenda item due to time limitations with the meeting.

**Ad Hoc Committee discussion**

Jeanette led a conversation on current discussions occurring with the Ad Hoc Committee regarding the Program Committee. She stated that it came down to a question of governance versus operational oversight of Humanities Montana programs. Beth brought up the Humanities Montana charter, asking if a Program Committee was required at all. Jeanette explained that the Ad Hoc Committee was debating if the Program Committee should be developed in a special projects and programs events committee for fundraising. Kim returned back to the conversation regarding governance versus operational concerns, stating that the Program Committee doesn’t vote on program development, and instead exists to oversee programs alignment to the strategic plan. Beth continued the conversation on program oversight asking about the past history of the committee, and if they used to make programmatic decisions. Kim insisted that the debate occurring with the Ad Hoc committee was debating if programs should be governed by the committee or provide oversight in regards to the strategic plan. She stated that board member Mary Hernandez brought up previous board training with Liz Moore of the Montana Nonprofit Association, and that the Humanities Montana board needed to shift away from operational functions and towards governance.

Glory Blue Earth left the meeting at 2:03 pm to return to work. She stated that she had no further comments and would think through the operational versus governance debate. Beth asked if the Grants Committee is federal mandated. Kim confirmed that the Grants Committee is federally mandated, and that the Programs Committee is not. Beth expressed concern about the shifting viewpoints of operational versus governance in regards to the Program Committee. Kim confirmed that the Ad Hoc Committee were debating the differences between operational oversight of programs and program governance. Beth asked how programs and speakers are decided upon and selected. Kim answered that the Program Committee used to control program and speaker development, but this process was done away with years ago. She confirmed that speaker and program development occurred with Humanities Montana staff under the direction of the Executive Director, who works with the board to make sure programs are aligned with the strategic plan. Beth asked how The Democracy Project program was developed, and the appropriateness of staff developing the program without direct input from the Program Committee. Jeanette confirmed the appropriateness of current program developments as being aligned with the strategic plan.

Beth asked about donor gifts to programs, and if and where input of the board would apply to program development. Jeanette stated that input would come from the whole board. The conversation regarding the Ad Hoc Committee discussions ended. Jeanette asked Arian Randall if she had any further comments, which she did not. Arian stated she is still learning about programs and enjoyed the lively conversation.

John Knight adjourned the meeting at 2:14 pm.