



# FEDERAL/STATE PARTNERSHIP

A Handbook for New Board Members  
of State and Jurisdictional  
Humanities Councils



**“The arts and the humanities  
belong to all the people  
of the United States.”**

–National Foundation on the Arts and the Humanities Act of 1965

# Welcome

**Dear Colleague,**

On behalf of the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH), congratulations and welcome! As a board member of a state or jurisdictional humanities council, you are a part of a small cadre of individuals who serve a multifaceted organization that is both local and national in scope. This is a position of great privilege and responsibility; NEH thanks you for your dedication, commitment, and service to the humanities.

NEH provides general operating support awards to 56 states and jurisdictions to bring humanities education, lifelong learning, and public humanities programming to communities across the country; this support is managed by NEH's Office of Federal/State Partnership. By congressional mandate, approximately 40 percent of NEH's annual appropriation is sent directly to the state and jurisdictional humanities councils. The councils tailor their grantmaking and programs to the needs, resources, and interests of their state or jurisdiction.

As a member of the board, you provide leadership and vision to an organization with an established record of success and exciting plans for the future. As an ambassador of the council, you will attend council-funded programs, oversee or help plan the council's work, ensure solid financial and fiduciary stewardship, and represent the council at public events and state and national meetings. The rich variety of meaningful, council-conducted programs, and your state or jurisdiction's cultural environment will make your tenure on the board an experience like no other.

We hope this handbook orients you to NEH and your role as a board member. We encourage you to learn more about the work of NEH on our website ([neh.gov](http://neh.gov)). If you have any questions or would like to share your ideas, please feel free to call or email me at 202/606-8307 or [kkenton@neh.gov](mailto:kkenton@neh.gov); I always enjoy hearing from you.

We look forward to working with you and extend a warm and sincere welcome!

**Karen Kenton**  
**Director, Office of Federal/State Partnership, NEH**

## Governance: The Work of the Board

A nonprofit governing board is expected to be responsible and accountable as it represents the public trust, ensuring that the organization carries out the purposes for which it was established and as expressed in its mission statement. Each state and jurisdictional humanities council oversees the expenditure of taxpayer dollars, yet they operate as independent entities and rely on citizen volunteers to provide governance and leadership. Councils develop comprehensive plans for meeting the needs of their state or jurisdiction, maintaining and delivering strong programs, and acting as a bridge between scholars and the public.

An essential function of the board is building a solid working relationship with the executive director. The executive director is the person who maintains the daily operations and programs of the council, leads the staff, and is the main point of contact with NEH. All members of the board should have a solid, professional relationship with the executive director. Such relationships, forged through frequent, ongoing communications, are essential to the council's success.

Council boards are expected to support and work together with the executive director to:

- set goals and conduct long-range planning (strategic planning)
- conduct overall program evaluation
- evaluate the executive director's work on a regular basis
- create and sign board ethics and conflict-of-interest policies
- participate in board development and evaluation program
- broaden constituencies for the council's work
- fundraise
- respond to questions or suggestions raised in public meetings
- actively participate in the NEH self-assessment process
- ensure compliance with federal-wide grant regulations and NEH policies

Each member of the board is also responsible for fulfilling three legal duties: the duty of care, the duty of loyalty, and the duty of obedience.<sup>1</sup>

**The Duty of Care** requires that board members “be reasonably informed about the organization’s activities, participate in decisions, and do so in good faith and with the care of an ordinarily prudent person in similar circumstances.”

**The Duty of Loyalty** requires that board members “exercise their power in the interest of the organization and not in their own interest or in the interest of another entity, particularly one in which they have a formal relationship.”

**The Duty of Obedience** requires that board members “comply with applicable federal, state, and local laws; adhere to the organization’s bylaws; and remain guardians of the organization’s mission.”

Council programs should be reflective of and respond to the needs and interests of the public. Councils should evaluate operations and programs on a regular basis, incorporating fresh visions and strategies. Strong working relationships with the staff, effective committees, and well-managed board meetings are important for the council’s success. Your adherence to best practices will ensure the health of the organization, which is essential as the council continues to strengthen the intellectual and cultural life of the state or jurisdiction with rich and meaningful humanities scholarship and programs.

NEH funding is used to support rich, compelling council-conducted and council-funded humanities programs. NEH funding may not be used to engage in lobbying activities. Additionally, council-conducted and council-funded programs that advocate a particular political, religious, or ideological point of view or promote political or social action are not allowed when using federal funds.

We encourage you to become acquainted with the rules concerning council functions set by NEH, including the [legislation pertaining to councils \(Sec. 956 \(sec. 7\)\(f\)\(1-8\)\)](#) and the [General Terms and Conditions](#) for General Support Grants to State Humanities Councils, as well as any rules set by the council itself.

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<sup>1</sup> Bruce R. Hopkins, JD, LL.M. *Legal Responsibilities of Nonprofit Boards*, Second Edition (Washington, D.C.: BoardSource, 2009).

NEH provides a BoardSource membership to all board members and council staff, at no cost. BoardSource is a 501(c)(3) organization that provides an extensive range of tools, resources, and research data to increase board effectiveness and strengthen organizational impact. We encourage you to take advantage of the many resources available by registering for an account. Learn more at [boardsource.org](https://boardsource.org)

**For instructions on how to register, email us at [fedstate@neh.gov](mailto:fedstate@neh.gov)**

## Partnership: NEH and Humanities Councils

NEH is an independent federal agency established by Congress in 1965 to support and fund research, education, and public projects in the humanities. NEH accomplishes this through its seven divisions and offices: Challenge Programs, Digital Humanities, Education, Federal/State Partnership, Preservation and Access, Public Programs, and Research. NEH collaborates with the nation's state and jurisdictional humanities councils through the Office of Federal/State Partnership.

The state and jurisdictional humanities councils were first established in the early 1970s. They operate, as designated by Congress, in the states as well as in the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, the U.S. Virgin Islands, Guam, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, and American Samoa. Since 1976, when councils were expressly incorporated in the federal legislation that authorizes NEH, they have expanded their audience and focus.

Today, the councils employ nearly 500 staff members and engage over 1,000 board members. They develop humanities

programs that draw on local resources and support the unique needs of the diverse communities they serve, including teachers and students, newly literate adults, prison inmates, senior citizens, veterans, and other groups. Each council operates as an independent nonprofit organization; it sets its own programming priorities, defines the best approach to fulfill its mission, and makes public humanities programs available to all.

NEH's broad mandate to all councils is to:

- **strengthen** teaching and learning in schools and colleges
- **facilitate** research and original scholarship
- **provide** opportunities for lifelong learning
- **preserve** and provide access to cultural and educational resources
- **strengthen** the institutional base of the humanities

## Information Sharing: News and Updates

Through annual and cyclical reporting, NEH regularly requests and collects important information from state and jurisdictional humanities councils. In addition, we request that councils share council-generated materials and newsletters with the Office of Federal/State Partnership.

The Office of Federal/State Partnership regularly communicates with the councils and shares important information from NEH, including grant opportunities, award nominations, and announcement of public events and projects.

If you have a question, idea to share, or would like to meet with staff at NEH, please don't hesitate to visit, call, or email. We look forward to working together.

## Important Reports and Deadlines

- January: Deadline to submit Activities and Outcomes form, Board Minutes, Board and Staff List, Subaward Summary, and Federal Financial Report.
- May: Deadline to submit the General Operating Support Grant program application, Annual Plan, and Lobbying forms.
- SF-424A Budget Information Form: Due sixty days after the full award amount for a given federal fiscal year has been awarded.
- Self-Assessment Report: Due every five years in advance of the site visit. The report provides a detailed review of the organization, governance, operations, programs, and future plans.
- Site Visit: The site visit occurs once every five years.
- Councils respond to site visitors' observations and recommendations, as well as outline progress and activity since the site visit.
- Annual Audit: Information on audits can be found on page 8, *Get to Know NEH: Office of the Inspector General*.

## Get to Know NEH: Core Work and Key Staff

### OFFICE OF FEDERAL/STATE PARTNERSHIP

The Office of Federal/State Partnership brings humanities education, lifelong learning, and public humanities programming to communities across the country by providing general operating support awards to 56 states and jurisdictions. Within NEH, the office represents the interests of the state and jurisdictional humanities councils.



The Office of Federal/State Partnership encourages councils to produce and support programming that makes rich humanities ideas accessible for general public audiences, fosters discussion, and promotes civic engagement. In addition, the office encourages councils to serve as models of excellent nonprofit management; to maintain open communication, mutual support, and shared goals with NEH and other councils; and to exercise responsible and impeccable stewardship of all funds, public or otherwise, entrusted to them.

The office oversees the congressionally appropriated General Operating Support Grants program, a grant program that provides funding to councils for general operations and subawards. It is important to note that General Operating Support Grant funding cannot be used for, among other restrictions, advocacy of a particular program of social or political action.

Staff members facilitate council reviews; maintain communication with the council community; read council board minutes, newsletters, and other publications; amplify councils' activities on the web and social media; and track trends and ideas in the nonprofit sector.

Additionally, the Office of Federal/State Partnership assists councils in planning and evaluating their programming and operations. The office works with each council to ensure compliance with legislative requirements by collecting data regarding the reach and impact of programs and grants, board composition, and governance.

Finally, the Office of Federal/State Partnership builds and cultivates collaborative and cross-sector partnerships for NEH and the council community.

Contacts: Karen Kenton, director; Meg Ferris McReynolds, senior program officer; Jean Wortman, program officer; and Elizabeth Quaglieri, program officer; fedstate@neh.gov, 202/606-8254

## **What's the difference between the Office of Federal/State Partnership and the Federation of State Humanities Councils?**

- The Office of Federal/State Partnership is a grant-making division of the National Endowment for the Humanities, an independent federal agency of the United States Government that is located within the Executive Branch.
- The Federation of State Humanities Councils is the membership organization of the state and jurisdictional humanities councils. Like the councils, it is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit. Two of the Federation's major annual activities are the National Humanities Conference and Humanities on the Hill, a focused congressional advocacy effort.

While the Office of Federal/State Partnership and NEH work closely with the Federation, they are not connected except through shared interests and goals.

## **OFFICE OF THE INSPECTOR GENERAL (OIG)**

The Office of the Inspector General provides independent oversight of all NEH programs and operations. The office is responsible for conducting audits and investigations; reviewing legislation; recommending policies to promote efficiency and effectiveness; and preventing and detecting fraud, waste, abuse, and mismanagement concerning federal funds.

The OIG is also responsible for ensuring that audits of NEH awards, as conducted by non-federal auditors, conform to federal requirements. Subpart F of Title 2 U.S. Code of Federal Regulations Part 200, Uniform Administrative Requirements, Cost Principles,

and Audit Requirements for Federal Awards (2 CFR Part 200) establishes audit requirements for state and local governments, colleges and universities, and non-profit organizations receiving federal awards.

All humanities councils that expend \$750,000 or more a year in federal awards must undergo an annual organization-wide audit that includes the council's financial statement and compliance with federal award requirements (i.e., Single Audit requirement). Humanities councils that expend less than \$750,000 in federal awards during the organization's fiscal year are not subject to Single Audit requirements; however, if the organization expends between \$500,000 and \$750,000 in funds awarded through NEH general support grants, the organization must undergo a compliance audit of the Federal/State Partnership program for that fiscal year (i.e., NEH program audit requirement). OIG staff routinely complete desk reviews of single audit reports and on-site quality control reviews of work papers prepared by non-federal auditors during performance of single audit engagements.

Lastly, OIG staff provide audit and accounting guidance to the humanities council community. The OIG has also published materials to assist the accountability efforts of the community, which include an [Accounting System Manual for State Humanities Councils](#) (revised, January 2009) and a [Program-Specific Audit Guide: Federal/State Partnership Program](#) [CFDA No. 45.129].

Contact: Laura Davis, inspector general; [ldavis@neh.gov](mailto:ldavis@neh.gov), 202/606-8350

## **OFFICE OF GRANT MANAGEMENT (OGM)**

The Office of Grant Management is responsible for overseeing compliance with the administrative requirements, cost principles, audit requirements, and other non-programmatic aspects of the awards. Activities include, but are not limited to, evaluating applications for administrative content and compliance with statutes, regulations, and guidelines; negotiating awards; providing consultation and technical assistance to applicants and recipients, including interpretation of federal award admin-

istration policies and provisions; and post-award monitoring and compliance, including reviewing financial reports and closing out awards. The Office of Grant Management is the focal point for receiving and acting on requests for prior approval or for changes in the terms and conditions of award. The Office of Grant Management is the only office authorized to issue the notice of award that obligates the NEH to the expenditure of federal funds or to change the funding, duration, or other terms and conditions of an award.

Contact: Chris Sciotto, grants management specialist, Alabama through Missouri; Lindsay Simmons, grants management specialist, Montana through Wyoming; [grantmanagement@neh.gov](mailto:grantmanagement@neh.gov), 202/606-8494

## Connect with NEH

- Conveniently located in the Constitution Center, 400 7th St., SW, Washington, DC
- Visit us online, at [neh.gov](http://neh.gov)
- Read HUMANITIES magazine, with *Statements* and *Around the Nation* devoted to state and jurisdictional humanities councils
- Connect with the NEH on social media @NEHgov



American Samoa



GUAM



Northern Mariana Islands



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