

Humanities Montana

Board of Directors Meeting

Missoula Public Library, Missoula, Montana

September 26-27, 2025

Board of Directors Present: Glory Blue Earth, David Cates, Ray Ekness, Jeanette Fregulia (vice chair, on Zoom), Lynda Grande (on Zoom), Mary Hernandez, Karen Reiff, Esther Beth Sullivan (chair)

Excused: Clark Whitehorn, Jen Corning, Tim Wilson

Staff: Jill Baker (Executive Director), Jennifer Bevill (Program Manager)

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 26TH, 2025

Opening Remarks and Actions

Beth Sullivan, Board Chair, welcomed everyone and called the meeting to order at 1:30pm. An invitation for public comment was offered.

Beth provided an update on membership. Jeremy Carl, Lathie Poole, and Arian Randall had all resigned from the board prior to this meeting. Beth acknowledged the contributions of these board members, particularly bringing a diversity of perspectives to Humanities Montana, and noted that each had offered personal reasons for stepping away.

With these departures the board consists of 11 members, and with 8 in attendance, a quorum was met.

Beth Sullivan called for a motion to approve the agenda. David Cates made the motion; Glory Blue Earth seconded. Motion carried unanimously.

Beth Sullivan then called for a motion to approve the consent agenda. Ray Ekness made the motion; Mary Hernandez seconded. Motion carried unanimously.

Executive Director and Program Manager Reports

Jill thanked the board for the privilege of serving as Executive Director over the past two years. She then introduced Jenny Bevill, Program Manager, to the board. Jenny reported that over the summer she and Jill worked closely together to leverage partnerships and begin the process of rebuilding programming and outreach efforts at Humanities Montana. In addition to the Democracy Project and Montana Poet Laureate programming, Jenny has leaned into the Montana Center for the Book programming to relaunch One Book Montana this fall highlighting the 2025 Great Reads from Great Places book selections and authors. So far, 31 libraries across the state have expressed interest in participating. June's losses have become September's launches. The website has been updated to include these launches, and the e-newsletter has also been reformatted to highlight the current programming.

Jill thanked Jenny for her report. In addition to the partnerships with libraries that Jenny has stewarded, she has been working closely with the Montana Arts Council to partner on programming. In addition to the ongoing partnership with the Montana Poet Laureate, HM and MAC will partner on humanities programming at the Montana Folk Festival next summer with support from the Federation of State Humanities Councils and the Smithsonian Center for Folklife. She added that work she and Jenny completed over the summer to realign programs will assist HM with fundraising moving forward. There is positive momentum to highlight in our communications efforts, and to share with both new and established donors as HM approaches the end of the year fundraising campaign.

The board moved in to executive session at 3:00pm and adjourned for the day at 4:30pm.

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 27TH, 2025

Beth called the meeting to order at 9:15am, welcoming everyone back.

The board resumed executive session at 9:30am and returned to regular order at 10:30am. Outcomes from the executive session included:

The board offered the position of Interim Executive Director to John Knight (former HM Program Director).

The board agreed on the following benchmarks as indicators for when they would move forward to fill the Executive Director position on a permanent basis:

- Solid programming to include our current portfolio (Democracy Project, Center for the Book, MT Poet Laureate) as well as the seeds of new statewide programs offered by HM (focused on MT writers and literature, MT history and culture, and civic education and veterans' outreach);
- Likelihood and predictability of funding through 2027 for our current portfolio of programs;
- Ability to maintain 2 full-time staff positions in budgets through 2027, Executive Director and Program Manager;
- 6 months of unrestricted cash reserves on hand to carry HM operations forward if funding issues arise.

Board meeting schedules and locations through 2026:

- December 4, 2025, 12:00-1:00pm, if needed, to be held virtually on Zoom
- February 20-21, 2026, Winter meeting to be held virtually on Zoom
- May 29-30, 2026, tentatively planned for Helena to honor the re-

- opening of the new MT Historical Society building
- October 1-2, 2026, tentatively planned for Billings in conjunction with the High Plains Book Awards

Fundraising priorities for the end-of-year campaign: tag “30K in 30 days” and “double your dollars” to realize the FSHC/Mellon 50K match.

Finance and Audit Committee

Beth shared that Humanities Montana’s TY23 990 IRS form had been submitted to meet a deadline of September 15, 2025. Jill explained that normally the 990 would be submitted at the same time as completion of the spring audit. With the new auditor and loss of staff in April, HM requested an extension and filed the form prior to the extended deadline. The Finance and Audit Committee reviewed and approved the 990 on behalf of the full board.

Jill provided an overview of the financial reports to date, reviewing details from the Balance Sheet and Profit and Loss Report as of July 31, 2025.

David Cates moved to approve the Balance Sheet and Profit and Loss Report as of July 31, 2025; Glory Blue Earth seconded. Motion carried unanimously.

Jill walked the board through the proposed 2026 budget, explaining that she had developed a conservative approach assuming no funding from the NEH and emphasis on maintaining the current portfolio of sponsored programs (Democracy Project, Center for the Book, MT Poet Laureate, as well as a few others). Discussion focused on the appropriateness of this conservative approach for the time being.

Ray Ekness moved to approve the proposed 2026 budget; Glory Blue Earth seconded. Motion carried unanimously.

Governance Committee

Mary Hernandez led the group through board elections, with secret ballots for each action.

The board elected David Cates and Ray Ekness to 2nd terms, extending their board membership through 2028.

The board elected Ray Ekness as 2026 board chair and Glory Blue Earth as 2026 board vice chair.

The board elected leadership and approved standing committee assignments for 2026:

- **Finance and Audit Committee: Beth Sullivan (committee chair); David Cates; Tim Wilson.**

- **Governance Committee: (committee chair *tbd*); Glory Blue Earth; Jen Corning; Karen Reif.**

The board will search for new members for 2026 to include a total of 11-12 members, with up to 2 new Governor's appointees, and up to 3 new elected members.

Grants Committee

Beth Sullivan moved that the standing Grants Committee be paused for 2026; David Cates seconded. Motion carried unanimously.

Recognitions

Beth offered recognitions for the board members who are completing their terms as of December 31, 2025: Lynda Grande, Jeanette Fregulia, Mary Hernandez, and Clark Whitehorn.

And lastly, Beth offered recognition for Jill, noting her significant contributions during her term as Executive Director.

The meeting was adjourned at 11:30am. EBS & JB