

Humanities Montana

Board of Directors Meeting

Zoom Meeting

February 20–21, 2026

Board of Directors Present: Ray Ekness (Chair), Glory Blue Earth (Vice Chair), Sara Bruya, Slaven Lee, Precious McKenzie, David Cates, Jen Corning, Karen Reiff, Tim Wilson, Esther Beth Sullivan

Excused:

Absent: Jaci Webb (resigned Saturday, February 21, 2026)

Staff: John Knight (Interim Executive Director), Jenny Bevill (Program Development Director)

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 20, 2026

Opening Remarks and Actions

Ray Ekness, Board Chair, welcomed everyone and called the meeting to order at 1:33pm. An invitation for public comment was offered. No public comment was received. With a quorum present, the meeting proceeded.

Ray noted that the consent agenda included minutes from the last full board meeting; minutes from the last special board meeting; two Governance Committee meeting minutes; Finance Committee meeting minutes; the Interim Executive Director's report; and the Program Development Director's report. Tim Wilson asked for clarification regarding the absence of Executive Committee meeting minutes. John Knight confirmed the Executive Committee meeting had not yet occurred.

Ray Ekness called for a motion to approve the consent agenda at 1:50pm. David Cates made the motion; Tim Wilson seconded. Motion carried unanimously.

Ray Ekness then called for a motion to approve the agenda for the February 20–21, 2026 meeting at 1:52pm. David Cates made the motion; Glory Blue Earth seconded. Motion carried unanimously.

Beth Sullivan departed the meeting at 2:00pm.

New Board Member Orientation

John led a new board member orientation grounded in Humanities Montana's bylaws and fiduciary responsibilities, emphasizing duties of care, loyalty, and obedience during a period of organizational rebuilding following federal funding disruption. Directors discussed committee engagement expectations, audit preparedness, documentation standards, and the importance of disciplined governance in restoring public trust and institutional credibility.

A break was taken at 2:20pm. The meeting reconvened at 2:25pm.

A mission moment was shared highlighting statewide impact and reinforcing strategic priorities through the Democracy Project program.

The meeting adjourned for the day at 3:03pm.

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 21, 2026

Ray called the meeting to order at 8:47am, welcoming everyone back. An invitation for public comment was offered; none was received. A quorum was confirmed.

Executive Director and Program Development Director Reports

John provided a comprehensive update on organizational stabilization, including FY25 close-out progress, audit preparation timelines, reconciliation of NEH drawdowns, strengthened internal controls, and efforts to rebuild unrestricted reserves. Discussion included maintaining two full-time staff positions through disciplined financial planning and ensuring long-term sustainability beyond the current funding cycle. Directors asked questions regarding reconciliation timelines, reporting cadence, and safeguards to ensure consistent month-end reporting. The board underscored the importance of financial transparency in restoring institutional credibility.

Jenny Bevill then presented the Programs Report, outlining current statewide initiatives, program reach, and strategic alignment during the federal funding pause. Poet Laureate Allen Morris Jones participated in the program discussion and presentation. Directors engaged in conversation regarding program sustainability, outreach, and alignment with fundraising priorities. The board expressed appreciation for continued program delivery during a period of financial transition.

Finance and Audit Committee

Esther Beth Sullivan reported that the Finance and Audit Committee met on January 22, 2026 and reviewed the Balance Sheet and Profit and Loss statements prior to presentation to the full board.

Beth Sullivan moved to approve the Finance and Audit Committee membership as: Esther Beth Sullivan (Chair), David Cates, Tim Wilson, and Sara Bruya. Motion carried unanimously.

Beth Sullivan then moved to approve the financial reports (Profit & Loss statements for FY25 and through January 22, 2026; and Balance Sheets for the same two periods). Slaven Lee seconded. Motion carried unanimously.

Discussion focused on fiscal year alignment, interpretation of financial statements, reconciliation timelines, and the importance of consistent reporting format at each board meeting.

Following approval of the financial reports, the board discussed the Financial Policies and Procedures Manual in the context of audit readiness and fraud mitigation. Beth noted that auditors request documentation demonstrating safeguards against fraud and noncompliance. John and Beth described reviewing the manual to identify and address gaps. No formal vote was taken on this item.

Governance Committee

The board took action to establish Governance Committee leadership and confirm committee membership for 2026.

Beth Sullivan nominated Karen Reiff to serve as Governance Committee Chair. Jen Corning seconded. Motion carried unanimously. Karen accepted the role.

The board then approved Governance Committee membership as: Karen Reiff (Chair), Jen Corning, Precious McKenzie, and Glory Blue Earth. Motion carried unanimously.

Programs and Outreach Ad Hoc Committee

John presented the proposed charge for a Programs and Outreach Ad Hoc Committee, noting its advisory role in program development, statewide outreach,

and resource development, and emphasizing that new program development must be pursued in parallel with credible funding pathways.

Ray Ekness called for a motion to create the Programs and Outreach Ad Hoc Committee. Beth Sullivan made the motion; David Cates seconded. Motion carried unanimously.

Ray opened nominations for chair of the committee. Tim Wilson nominated Slaven Lee. Motion carried unanimously. Slaven Lee accepted the role.

John noted that Jaci Webb had resigned from the board that morning, and that committee assignments would be adjusted accordingly.

The board approved Programs and Outreach Ad Hoc Committee membership as: Slaven Lee (Chair), Ray Ekness, Sara Bruya, and Glory Blue Earth. Motion carried unanimously.

Fundraising and Development Strategy

The board engaged in discussion regarding uncertainty surrounding federal funding distribution timelines. John outlined planning scenarios under varying revenue assumptions and emphasized disciplined fiscal management during the interim period. Directors discussed contingency planning, reserve thresholds, and reputational considerations should funding delays continue. The board reaffirmed its commitment to sustaining core programming while maintaining financial prudence.

John reviewed the 2026 Q1–Q4 fundraising roadmap and shared updates on the successful completion of the Mellon Foundation match campaign, which strengthened Humanities Montana’s unrestricted reserves and reflected strong community support for the organization’s work. Directors discussed strategies for cultivating major donors, strengthening relationships with foundations, and reinforcing a culture of shared fundraising leadership across the board. The discussion also emphasized the importance of clear expectations for board engagement in donor cultivation and consistent messaging about Humanities Montana’s statewide impact during a period of federal funding uncertainty. No formal action was taken.

The meeting was adjourned at 11:26am.

