

Humanities Montana
Board of Directors Meeting Minutes
April 2, 2026

Present: Ray Ekness (Chair), Sara Bruya, Slaven Lee, David Cates, Karen Reiff, Tim Wilson, Esther Beth Sullivan

Excused: Glory Blue Earth (Vice Chair), Jen Corning, Precious McKenzie, Tim Wilson

Staff: John Knight (Interim Executive Director)

The meeting convened at 11:00am.

Ray Ekness called the meeting to order and outlined the agenda. He then invited Karen Reiff to present the Governance Committee's recommendation regarding the current board vacancy.

Governance Committee Board Recommendation Discussion

- Karen Reiff reviewed the process and applicant pool for the board vacancy created by Jaci Webb's resignation in February 2026. Karen then discussed applicant Daniel Charlton as a strong candidate for the board and noted the Governance Committee's recommendation that he be nominated to fill the vacancy. She invited John to speak to his conversations with previous applicants and with Daniel.
- John noted that he had spoken with prior applicants whose nominations were not advanced in late 2025. He also shared that he had held multiple conversations with Daniel regarding his interest in board service and why he would be a strong fit. John noted Daniel's background and experience in education as an asset to the board.
- Beth noted that, for future meetings, it would be helpful to provide the full board with materials regarding the applicant pool in advance. John agreed and noted that the materials had been made available in the board portal.

Ray called for a motion to nominate Daniel Charlton to the full board. **David Cates made the motion, and Slaven Lee seconded. Ray invited discussion, and no further discussion followed. Ray then called for a vote. The motion carried unanimously, with full board approval to appoint Daniel Charlton to the board at 11:06 a.m.**

Executive Director Search Committee Discussion

- Ray led a discussion on the Executive Committee's recommendation to move forward with the formation of an Executive Director Search Committee. He then invited Beth to speak to the fall 2025 milestones that would guide the timing of the search, including maintaining operating reserves through FY27 as an important benchmark.
- Beth reviewed the benchmarks related to forming the Search Committee and recommended that the board consider moving forward with its formation.
- Ray shared that the Search Committee would be composed of four members of the Executive Committee, including Glory Blue Earth, Karen Reiff, Slaven Lee, and himself. He also noted the anticipated timeline for establishing the committee, with additional information to be shared with the full board at the May meeting.

- Slaven noted that John Knight should be considered for the position. Ray clarified that the Search Committee would first need to be formally established before any discussion of appointments or the search process could proceed.

Ray called for a motion to begin the Executive Director search by forming the Search Committee. **David Cates made the motion, and Beth Sullivan seconded. Ray invited discussion, and no further discussion followed. Ray then called for a vote. The motion carried unanimously, with full board approval to form the Executive Director Search Committee at 11:12 a.m.**

NEH Federal Funding Landscape Discussion

- John led a discussion on the current NEH funding landscape, focusing on the FY27 Notice of Funding Opportunity and the revised period of performance timeline. He noted that the FY27 grant period has shifted to May 1, 2027–April 30, 2028, creating a six-month delay from the traditional November start date.
- He shared that this shift has significant implications for cash flow planning and long-range budget assumptions, particularly given the continued uncertainty surrounding the release of FY26 funds, and emphasized the need for conservative scenario planning as the organization moves through FY26 and into FY27.
- John then led a discussion regarding the waiver language included in Humanities Montana’s FY27 NOFO application. He noted that the council has consistently included general reservation-of-rights language in federal submissions since the termination of its grant last year and that this language was included again in the current application. This waiver relates to the ongoing lawsuit between Oregon Humanities and DOGE.
- John also briefed the board on supplemental DEI-related waiver language developed by Rhode Island Humanities and reviewed by counsel for the Federation of State Humanities Councils. He recommended that Humanities Montana not include the additional DEI-specific language at this time, citing the lack of clear definitions in the NOFO, the absence of a uniform approach among councils, and the political climate in Montana and the Intermountain West.
- John reaffirmed that this recommendation was procedural and did not alter Humanities Montana’s commitment to the values outlined in its 2022 IDEA statement.

Following John’s presentation, the board engaged in brief discussion and asked clarifying questions regarding risk and recommended next steps. By consensus, the board reaffirmed John’s recommendation to continue using only the general reservation-of-rights waiver language related to the Oregon Humanities lawsuit and not to include additional waiver language regarding the DEI provisions in the NOFO until further legal action or guidance is provided.

The meeting adjourned at 11:33 a.m.