

## **Testimony on behalf of the Federation of State Humanities Councils**

Prepared for the House Appropriations Subcommittee on the Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies by Trent Clark, Public and Governmental Affairs Director at Monsanto, in Soda Springs, Idaho and member of the Idaho Humanities Council board; Addressing the National Endowment for the Humanities, April 10, 2014.

Mr. Chairman and members of the subcommittee, I appreciate the opportunity to present testimony on behalf of the state humanities councils, the state affiliates of the National Endowment for the Humanities. I am the Public Affairs Director at Monsanto and a member of the Idaho Humanities Council board. I am here to request **\$154.5 million** for the National Endowment for the Humanities and **\$46 million** for the Federal/State Partnership for FY 2015.

I would first like to thank the members of this subcommittee for your past support. The funding included in the FY 2014 omnibus bill for state humanities councils was extremely helpful to these organizations, particularly following the severe cuts of the previous year. Councils are careful stewards of these funds, which they administer strategically to achieve the maximum benefit for the communities in their states. As full partners of the NEH, councils receive their core funding through the Federal/State Partnership line of the NEH budget, which they use to leverage additional support from foundations, corporations, private individuals, and state governments. In 2013, every federal dollar the councils awarded through grants to local institutions leveraged, on average, \$5.00 in local contributions. Councils further extended their resources by forming partnerships with more than 9,000 organizations throughout their states.

These numbers tell part of the story—but not the most important part. I am here today to talk to you about the many ways in which council programs improve not just individual lives but also the civic and cultural life of the communities in your states. The benefits of the federal funds invested in the state humanities councils are realized through programs that 1) preserve local history and culture, 2) support veterans, 3) serve rural communities, 4) reach diverse audiences, 5) boost local economies, 6) enhance national security, and 7) promote lifelong learning.

**Council programs preserve local history and culture.** Programs that help communities understand and appreciate their history have been a staple of council work from the beginning, illuminating the events and conditions that have shaped these unique places. Consider, for example, the Idaho Humanities Council’s “Wilderness Considered” reading and discussion series, developed to commemorate the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the 1964 Wilderness Act. This program is designed not only to look at the idea of wilderness in the American imagination but also to explore the particular relationship that Idahoans ranging from ranchers to snowmobilers to hunters and hikers have to wild places and the impact this relationship has had on the state’s character. Humanities Washington, in partnership with the state historical society, is travelling an exhibit entitled “Hope in Hard Times” to eight communities. The exhibit and related activities will allow participants to reflect on the ways Washingtonians during the Great Depression coped with their struggles and sustained hope for a better future. It will also invite them to share family and community stories as a means of looking at the impact of that history on their own lives, reminding themselves to look for their own opportunities to create change.

Though councils have been supporting such programs throughout their history, they have continually explored fresh approaches, involving scholars in new ways, engaging audiences

more interactively, and employing the many electronic tools at hand. The online state encyclopedias developed by councils have given residents, visitors, and educators unprecedented and constantly evolving access to the history of the state. The Virginia encyclopedia, to cite an outstanding example, allows visitors to scroll through an alphabetical index of state figures and events, browse an interactive map, or bore more deeply into topics covered by the blog. The encyclopedia also provides resources for teachers and researchers.

In addition, council programs bring to light stories long hidden but crucial to the state's or a community's understanding of its culture and identity. The Minnesota Humanities Center, in partnership with the Minnesota Indian Affairs Council and the National Museum of the American Indian, developed an exhibit, "Why Treaties Matter: Self-Government in the Dakota and Ojibwe Nations," that has given more than 50,000 Minnesotans in 39 communities a deeper understanding of the circumstances surrounding Minnesota land, its use, and the treatment of the land's indigenous people, historically and today. The exhibit has also been used in schools, prompting Kevin Gover, Director of the National Museum of the American Indian to observe, "Together, we can work to educate a new generation of Minnesotans who understand basic important facts about Minnesota's tribal nations."

**Councils serve veterans.** A number of agencies and groups provide services and programs for veterans, but the humanities have a special role to play. Humanities scholars and facilitators have proven skill at drawing out stories and exploring their meaning. Council programs look at larger and deeper questions of what it means to individuals to be in violent circumstances and what it means to a society to place their men and women in such conditions. Over the past few years, councils have developed a rich array of programs for and about veterans. These include, among others, the Missouri Humanities Council's "Proud to Be" volumes of veterans writings, the council-sponsored Literature and Medicine reading and discussion programs for veterans' caregivers throughout the country, and the Veterans' Voices programs sponsored by the Minnesota Humanities Center and Humanities Texas that explore the veteran experience through plays and discussion groups.

Cal Humanities recently announced a statewide multi-year program, "War Comes Home," that will launch hundreds of events involving dozens of partners throughout the state. Through speakers, reading and discussion groups, public forums, oral histories, and teacher resources, the program will help veterans and their families and communities explore how Californians are welcoming their returning veterans. All these council-sponsored programs have the potential not only to allow veterans to tell their stories and to begin to re-integrate into their communities, but also to compel the public to listen, to wrestle with the consequences of sending people to war and bringing them home, and to claim their own role and responsibility in this process.

**Councils serve rural communities.** A recent Federation survey revealed that council programs reached more than 6,000 communities last year, many in rural, even remote areas, where they are often the only programs of this sort that small towns have access to. Whether they involve individual speakers who stimulate a discussion well into the evening, a reading and discussion program at the local library, or a facilitated community conversation about an issue of concern, these programs strengthen and revitalize communities. They unite and enlighten residents. They encourage habits of dialogue.

The highly successful Museum on Main Street program, the product of a partnership between state councils and the Smithsonian and designed very specifically for rural communities, demonstrates the lasting benefits that can derive from a relatively modest investment. In Frederick, Oklahoma, with a population just under 4,000, the Ramona Long Theater and Community Center last year hosted the music-themed exhibit “New Harmonies” Celebrating American Roots Music,” which explored music, history, and cultural movements such as desegregation and gender equality. The Center’s exhibit and program attendance grew by 50 percent and donations increased by 150 percent. Local donors contributed to programming and repairs to the theater. Teams of volunteers repainted crosswalks, revitalized historic buildings, and repaired storefronts. More than half the town’s residents attended exhibit programming and community events, and 75 educators in the Frederick school district received professional development credit by participating in a teacher institute using a Smithsonian curriculum.

**Council programs reach citizens of all ages, incomes, and levels of education.** Increasingly, council programs engage young adults as well as seniors, a variety of ethnic communities, immigrants, low-income families, prison populations, and Native Americans. These groups are not just passive recipients of council programs but partners and active participants.

As our future leaders, teens and young adults are especially important participants in humanities programs. Several councils support or coordinate their state’s National History Day, which offers students intellectual, practical, and even emotional benefits. The Pennsylvania council offers vibrant interactive programming for students with the library-based Teen Reading Lounge. These programs supplement formal education for young people and help instill habits of communication and critical thinking that will serve them well into adulthood.

Councils also conduct programs that help immigrants and refugees adjust to their new homes and enable long-time residents to learn about the cultures of these new citizens. The New York Council for the Humanities, in collaboration with the Citizens Committee for New York City and several other groups, provided grants to faith-based or neighborhood-based immigrant and cultural groups to encourage unity through active engagement between new immigrant groups and their longer-term neighbors as well as residents of different faiths. Projects funded in 2013 through this first-of-its-kind program included an interfaith celebration of Eid hosted by Afghans United, a cross-cultural mural project with students from different ethnic and racial backgrounds, and a film series sponsored by the National Council of Negro Women that encouraged members diverse communities to view and discuss films about a variety of immigrant experiences.

**Council programs boost local economies.** Council programs help improve and revitalize such institutions as libraries, museums, and schools, which gives communities a vibrancy that draws both new residents and potential investors. Many councils conduct books festivals that bring dollars to local economies. Many use the Museum on Main Street exhibits to draw tourists. Still others are steadily building cultural tourism programs that leverage local dollars. In Ohio, where tourism is the fourth largest economic driver in the state, Ohio Humanities offers grants and technical assistance to communities seeking to engage in heritage tourism, offering authentic place-based experiences for travelers. The council has also produced driving tours drawing from

“The Ohio Guide,” the 1940 publication of the Federal Writers Project. Communities along the eleven selected routes report that the tours have increased visitation.

The many book festivals that councils conduct in states including Tennessee, Montana, Colorado, Virginia, South Carolina, and South Dakota serve as another economic boost for host communities, drawing readers and tourists from all regions of the state and beyond. A recent economic impact study by the Charlottesville Albemarle Convention and Visitors Bureau estimated the Virginia Festival of the Book's total impact at \$3.9M. Over 600 hotel rooms are booked each year for the South Carolina Book Festival, which generates more than \$100,000 in book sales. The Utah Humanities Council's statewide Book Festival has for 16 years brought Utah readers and writers together with authors from around the world to talk about books and ideas. Throughout the month of October (National Book Month) historians, journalists, biographers, politicians, and members of the public mingle with poets, novelists, and children's writers in communities in every corner of the state, both enriching the intellectual and cultural lives and contributing to the economies of those communities.

**The humanities and the humanities councils increase national security.** Clearly councils do not directly affect national security policy-making, but council programs contribute to the citizen understanding of global issues that is the necessary prerequisite to citizen involvement with the decision-making process and the elected officials who do make these decisions. The Maine Humanities Council offers evidence of the validity of this assumption with “The World in Your Library: A Foreign Policy Speakers Series,” a speaker series through which local libraries host three one-hour presentations, with discussion, on foreign policy issues of their choice, providing a rare opportunity for residents to explore these issues with experts in foreign policy.

Finally, **council programs promote lifelong learning.** This learning extends to citizens who participate in the many community conversations conducted by councils, to teachers who benefit from the council-sponsored institutes and seminars that enrich and re-energize them, to the parents and children who improve their reading skills and engage with ideas through councils' family literacy programs.

The Virginia Foundation for the Humanities recently offered a program, “Segregation, Desegregation and Civil Rights in Virginia,” that provided learning opportunities for several audiences. First, it offered a day-long seminar that used events surrounding the 1959 school closings in Arlington and Prince Edward county to help teachers “consider new ways to understand and teach this multi-layered history; the ways our collective understanding of citizenship and community was challenged during the desegregation era; and why this history still matters—and the issues remain current—in the present day.” The workshop was following by a community conversation inviting residents to recall their own experience of those years and discuss why these issues still matter.

I have offered only a small sampling of the programs that enrich and enliven communities throughout the nation. I hope these examples have demonstrated the significant difference that this modest investment in federal funds makes. And I hope you will look with favor on our request for \$46 million for the councils and \$154.5 million for NEH.