

Statement of Shelly C. Lowe (Navajo)
Chair of the National Endowment for the Humanities
Before the Subcommittee on
Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
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(Navajo Greeting.) Chairman Simpson, Ranking Member Pingree, and distinguished Members of the Subcommittee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on behalf of the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) on the President’s Fiscal Year 2025 Budget Request for NEH. Nearly six decades ago, Congress and the White House established NEH and the NEA as independent federal agencies to provide access to the arts and humanities to all Americans. In the founding legislation for NEH and the NEA, Congress recognized that “an advanced civilization must not limit its efforts to science and technology alone, but must give full value and support to the other great branches of scholarly and cultural activity in order to achieve a better understanding of the past, a better analysis of the present, and a better view of the future.”¹

NEH is the nation’s largest federal funder of the humanities, which includes history, philosophy, literature, language, ethics, law, archaeology, political theory, comparative religion, anthropology, sociology, and media and cultural studies. Since its founding in 1965, NEH has awarded nearly \$6 billion in grants to support museums, historic sites, colleges, universities, K-12 teachers, libraries, public television and radio stations, research institutions, independent scholars, and state and jurisdictional humanities councils nationwide.

NEH approaches its 60th anniversary in Fiscal Year 2025. And now—more than ever—NEH funding is vital to fostering a strong, resilient, and thriving democracy and to sustaining the United States’ role as a global leader in the humanities.

Expanding Access to the Humanities in All 56 States and Jurisdictions

NEH’s Fiscal Year 2025 appropriations request of \$200.1 million reflects the resources needed to continue NEH’s support for American civil society, helping us to advance research and development in the humanities, examine the human condition, understand our cultural heritage, foster mutual respect for diverse beliefs and cultures, develop media and information literacy, and promote civics education.

The President’s Budget includes \$60 million—or approximately 40 percent of NEH’s programmatic funding—for NEH’s state affiliates, the state and jurisdictional humanities councils, to support humanities programming at the grassroots level in all 50 states; the District of Columbia; Puerto Rico; the U.S. Virgin Islands; Guam; the Northern Mariana Islands; and American Samoa.

¹ The National Foundation on the Arts and the Humanities Act of 1965, Pub. L. 89-209, sec. 2(4), codified at 20 U.S.C. § 951(4).

- NEH's 56 state and jurisdictional humanities councils are essential partners in ensuring the Agency reaches audiences of all ages and in every community across the nation. One example is through NEH's longstanding partnership with National History Day, which engages more than half a million middle and high school students annually in a national historical research competition. NEH recently launched a program with the humanities councils to extend National History Day's reach to underserved communities; funded projects include support for a two-day workshop for Idahoan teachers on primary source research and place-based learning at the Idaho State Historical Society; a free, three-day educator workshop in Georgia at the nation's largest consortium of Historically Black Colleges and Universities, or HBCUs, to reach educators and students in underserved urban communities in Atlanta and teachers-in-training at HBCUs; and efforts to expand National History Day's impact in Maine's three most rural counties through partnerships with local and Tribal educators as well as other cultural and community leaders.

NEH's Fiscal Year 2025 appropriations request also includes \$74.4 million for NEH's flagship grant programs to support research and development, preservation, capacity building, and educational and public programming in the humanities in all 56 states and jurisdictions.

- As the largest and most prestigious funder of advanced humanities research in the United States, NEH invests in scholarship and complex research projects by individual scholars, collaborative research teams, and institutions in all disciplines of the humanities and humanistic social sciences. While this work may sometimes seem distant from everyday life, humanities research and development, or R&D, is foundational to American life. For example, NEH's support for humanities R&D has resulted in the publication of more than 16,000 books and academic monographs since NEH's founding in 1965, including 20 Pulitzer Prize-winning books. This includes *American Prometheus: The Triumph and Tragedy of J. Robert Oppenheimer* by Kai Bird and Martin J. Sherwin, the sweeping biography that inspired one of last year's summer blockbusters, the Academy Award-winning film *OPPENHEIMER*.
- NEH also supports the building blocks of humanities R&D by ensuring the public can more easily find and make use of cultural heritage collections at libraries, archives, museums, and historical organizations across the country; and by fortifying under-resourced collecting organizations, such as small and mid-sized libraries, archives, and museums. One example is NEH's support for the National Digital Newspaper Program, which produces *Chronicling America*, a digital repository of more than 21 million pages of historical American newspapers from 1690 to the present in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, the U.S. Virgin Islands, and Puerto Rico.
- Another core aspect of NEH's work is its support for the teaching and study of the humanities at K-12 schools and colleges and universities around the nation, including Native American and Indigenous institutions; Historically Black Colleges and Universities, or HBCUs; Hispanic Serving Institutions, or HSIs; community colleges; rural colleges and universities; schools with a majority-minority undergraduate enrollment; and schools with significant numbers of first-generation students. Recent NEH awards include support for South Carolina State University, an HBCU, to develop an online graduate program in English literature; for Kansas State University to develop humanities resources that support undergraduate and K-

12 teaching about local Indigenous history and culture; and for San Diego State University, an HSI, to enhance its Brazilian studies program.

- NEH’s public programming grant opportunities support the production of documentary films, museum exhibitions, and discussion programs that engage public audiences of all ages in questions in the humanities, such as ASIAN AMERICANS, a Peabody Award-winning film series that explores the history of identity, contributions, and challenges experienced by Asian Americans in the United States; *Latino Poetry*, a yearlong public humanities initiative focused on how the legacy of the Latino poetic tradition shapes our creativity and evolving aspirations of *e pluribus unum*; and THE CIVIL WAR, the landmark documentary series by Ken Burns that was viewed by 40 million Americans when it first aired.
- NEH’s leadership role in digital humanities has been widely acknowledged in the humanities field and has helped set the pace for research funders around the world. Examples of NEH-funded digital humanities projects include “Voyages: The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database,” a groundbreaking historical resource that represents the culmination of several decades of independent and collaborative research by scholars in libraries and archives around the world to help the public understand the forced relocations of more than 12 million African people through the Transatlantic slave trade.

Promoting Private-Sector Investment in the Humanities

NEH’s Fiscal Year 2025 appropriations request also provides \$8.75 million in federal matching funds for NEH’s grant programs to help stimulate and match nonfederal donations in support of cultural and educational institutions across the nation. This includes support for a new pilot program that will focus on workforce development through matching funds for the hiring, training, and retention of humanities professionals at museums, libraries, archives, colleges and universities, and other cultural organizations across the country.

Leveraging the Humanities to Address Key Societal Challenges

Now—as our nation grapples with existential threats to our democracy, the persistent scourge of systemic racism, and the ongoing climate crisis—the humanities are more essential than ever. The President’s Fiscal Year 2025 Budget for NEH provides \$14.6 million for the Agency’s *American Tapestry: Weaving Together Past, Present, and Future* strategic initiative, which emphasizes the role of the humanities in strengthening our democracy, advancing equity for all, and addressing our changing climate. Through multiple funding opportunities at NEH—including five grant programs created during the Biden-Harris Administration—NEH’s *American Tapestry* initiative encourages humanities projects that advance knowledge of the country’s history and political institutions; examine threats to its democratic principles; elevate the role of civics in K-12 schools and public programs; explore the untold stories of historically underrepresented groups; build capacity at cultural and educational institutions to benefit underserved communities; embed climate resilience and Indigenous Knowledge in the cultural and educational sectors; and promote basic R&D in the humanities on the historical roots and cultural effects of climate change.

Of note, NEH’s Fiscal Year 2025 appropriation request includes:

- \$7.1 million for *Humanities Perspectives on Artificial Intelligence*, NEH’s new Agency-wide research initiative that supports humanities R&D to understand and address the ethical, legal, and societal implications of artificial intelligence, or AI. AI is one of the most powerful technologies of our time and will have profound consequences for civil rights and civil liberties, safety and security, and democratic values. Questions about the ethical, legal, and societal implications of AI are fundamentally rooted in the humanities. In fact, NEH’s founding legislation tasks the Agency with making the American people “masters of their technology and not its unthinking servants.”² Created in response to President Biden’s Executive Order 14110 on Safe, Secure, and Trustworthy Artificial Intelligence, NEH’s *Humanities Perspectives on Artificial Intelligence* initiative features a new flagship grant program named *Humanities Research Centers on Artificial Intelligence* (HRCAI) that supports the creation of humanities research centers focused on AI at universities and independent research organizations. NEH’s appropriations request for Fiscal Year 2025 includes funding to expand HRCAI to include emphases on equity, privacy, and human rights as well as educational and public programming that enhance AI literacy and public awareness of human perspectives on AI. The President’s Budget also includes support for a nationwide AI literacy program with all 56 state and jurisdictional humanities councils; professional development opportunities for K-12 teachers, college and university professors, museum staff, and other humanities practitioners on the use of AI; and special encouragements for AI-focused humanities projects across NEH’s grant lines.
- NEH’s Fiscal Year 2025 appropriations request also includes \$2.8 million to continue the Agency’s activities as part of *United We Stand: Connecting Through Culture*, an initiative launched in partnership with the NEA that aims to combat hate-motivated violence, promote civic engagement, and achieve better mental health outcomes in the United States through the arts and humanities. Since the launch of the initiative in Fiscal Year 2022, NEH has invested more than \$13 million to support humanities R&D, K-12 educational workshops, public discussion series, documentary films, and museum exhibitions that foster cross-cultural understanding, empathy, and community resilience; educate the public on the history of domestic extremism and hate-based violence; promote civic engagement, information literacy, and social cohesion; and deepen public understanding of community, state, and national history. In Fiscal Year 2025, NEH will continue a nationwide *United We Stand* program with all 56 state and jurisdictional humanities councils. NEH-funded projects as part of this program include support for educational programming in Ohio that explores the impact of hate groups on the state’s civic fabric, past and present; a community conversation series in Arizona that invites people across the state to examine what it means to be civically engaged and why diverse representation is critical for democracy; and a discussion program for teens in Mississippi in connection with “Anne and Emmett,” a one-act play about an imaginary meeting of Anne Frank and Emmett Till. Furthermore, NEH proudly contributed to the formation of the White House’s first-ever *U.S. National Strategy to Counter Antisemitism* through commitments to offer research, teaching, and convening opportunities for humanities scholars to study the origins and history of antisemitism in the United States as well as support for the development of K-12 educational materials on countering antisemitism in partnership with National History Day and the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum. NEH will continue to support these activities in Fiscal Year 2025.

² Ibid.

- The President’s Fiscal Year 2025 Budget for NEH also includes \$1.5 million for the development of a new program to support the revitalization and reclamation of Native languages and culture. This program will complement NEH’s partnership with the Department of the Interior on the *Federal Indian Boarding School Initiative*, a comprehensive effort to recognize the troubled legacy of federal Indian boarding school policies with the goal of addressing their intergenerational impact and shedding light on the traumas of the past. To date, NEH has allocated nearly \$5 million to support the digitization of records from the United States’ system of over 400 federal Indian boarding schools; the creation of a permanent oral history collection to document the experiences of the generations of Indigenous students who were raised in the federal Indian boarding school system; and new humanities projects that deepen the public’s understanding of this chapter in our nation’s history.
- NEH’s Fiscal Year 2025 appropriations request will also further the *Pacific Islands Cultural Initiative*, an NEH initiative that aims to strengthen the cultural and educational sectors in the U.S. Pacific Islands—Hawaii, American Samoa, Guam, and the Northern Mariana Islands—which face unique challenges due to their remote geography and the historic underinvestment in the region by the Federal Government.
- NEH’s work in the U.S. Pacific Islands includes emergency relief for cultural and educational organizations devastated by the wildfires in Maui, Typhoon Mawar in Guam, and Tropical Storm Bolavan in the Northern Mariana Islands in 2023. NEH’s disaster recovery efforts—which also includes recent support for cultural organizations affected by natural disasters in Florida, Mississippi, New Mexico, and Vermont—is one example of the Agency’s implementation of its first-ever climate strategy.

Enhancing NEH’s Operations, Including its Reach to Underserved Communities

Finally, the President’s Budget for Fiscal Year 2025 provides \$42.35 million to operate NEH in an efficient and effective manner. This includes dedicated resources for two new offices formed as part of NEH’s Equity Action Plan to embed equity across its programs and operations—the Office of Data and Evaluation and Office of Outreach—which will evaluate NEH’s impact on the humanities field and deepen the Agency’s engagement with underserved communities. The Budget also supports the continued implementation of Executive Orders, directives, and Administration priorities involving organizational health and organizational performance and information security modernization.

Chairman Simpson, Ranking Member Pingree, and distinguished Members of the Subcommittee, thank you again for supporting NEH and for your consideration of the Agency’s Fiscal Year 2025 appropriations request.