

Testimony Submitted to the Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior, Environment and Related Agencies, U.S. House of Representatives, *Regarding FY11 Funding for the National Endowment for the Humanities*, by the National Humanities Alliance (March 19, 2010)

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee:

On behalf of the National Humanities Alliance (NHA) and its 104 member organizations and institutions, we write to express strong support for the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH). Our members, and the thousands of teachers, scholars, humanities organizations and institutions they represent, use NEH grants to maintain a strong system of academic research, education and public programs in the humanities. We urge you to provide the National Endowment for the Humanities with funding of at least \$232.5 million in Fiscal Year (FY) 2011, including:

- \$204.0 million for NEH program funds (a \$64.0 million increase)
 - \$144.0 million for national programs (a \$44.4 million increase)
 - \$60.0 million for the federal/state partnership (a \$19.6 million increase)
- \$28.5 million for administrative funds requested by the agency (a \$1.0 million increase)

Funding Overview

Our request constitutes a significant, \$65 million increase over the FY 2010 enacted level, which we believe is a necessary and appropriate federal expenditure given: the value of the humanities in supporting national interests, from a competitive workforce to homeland security; the severity of the current *economic crisis*, and the need for federal intervention to mitigate long-term damage to the nation's education infrastructure; the documented, *unmet demand* for NEH programs at both the federal and state levels; NEH's *present capacity* to distribute requested funds efficiently through existing program structures noted for excellence; NEH's demonstrated *historical capacity* to operate effectively at higher funding levels.

NEH is funded at \$167.5 million for FY 2010, including \$140.0 million in total program funds and \$27.5 million for administration. The agency did not receive funding under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) of 2009. Historically, NEH has demonstrated the capacity to operate at much higher funding levels. Even with recent adjustments, NEH overall funding is still just over a third of its funding peak in 1979 (\$429 million when adjusted for inflation). The agency has not yet recovered from a nearly 40% cut imposed in the mid-90s, before which (in FY 1994), NEH was funded at the equivalent of \$256.9 million (\$2009).

Unfortunately, the Obama Administration has requested decreased funding for NEH at a level of \$161.3 million, which constitutes a reduction of \$6.2 million in *overall* funding from the FY 2010 level approved by Congress. It is important to note that the President's budget represents a \$7.2 million cut in NEH *program* funds, which would absorb a proposed \$1.0 million increase in administrative funds to cover the agency's estimated operating costs for FY 2011. ***We strongly oppose the cuts proposed in the Administration's FY 2011 Budget Request for NEH.***

NEH National Programs

The National Humanities Alliance supports FY 2011 funding of \$144 million for national programs (an increase of \$44.4). New funds requested include:

- \$36.9 million to increase the award rate for critically underfunded grant competitions
- \$7.5 million for a new, competitively-awarded graduate student-faculty program

NEH national programs represent the pool of funds that support peer-reviewed, competitive grant opportunities for a wide range of educational institutions, non-profit organizations, and individual scholars around the country. These grants are at the center of the agency's mission to create, preserve, and disseminate knowledge in the humanities. Current national core programs and special initiatives include the **Division of Research, Division of Preservation and Access, Office of Digital Humanities, Office of Challenge Grants, Division of Education Programs, Division of Public Programs**, and the *We the People* initiative. A new initiative, *Bridging Cultures*, has been proposed by the Administration for FY 2011.

Unmet Demand - Demand for humanities project support, as demonstrated by NEH application rates (and confirmed by feedback from the field), far exceeds funding available. In FY 2009, NEH received 4,366 competitive grant applications representing more than \$402 million in requested funds, but was only able to fund 16.9% of these peer-reviewed project proposals. This is a low figure, when compared to the most recent rate of 32% reported by the National Science Foundation (NSF), a federal agency closely parallel to NEH in its operations and mission to advance research and teaching for the academic fields under its umbrella. We estimate that at least \$37 million would be needed to increase the NEH award rate to 25%, if only the most critically underfunded of NEH's grant competitions were boosted. To achieve parity with the FY 2009 NSF funding rate of 32%, an increase of at least \$60 million would be required. Examples of underfunded NEH grant programs include:

- fellowships and collaborative research
- digital humanities projects
- professional development for teachers and faculty
- preservation of historically-significant collections
- public film, radio, television, and digital media projects
- challenge grants to build institutional capacity and leverage non-federal support

Graduate Student/Faculty Fellowships –NHA supports the recommendation of the Association of American Universities and the Council of Graduate Students, among others, to create a new, competitive program promoting collaboration among graduate students and faculty in the humanities, similar to models in the sciences. *For more than a decade, NEH has stood alone as the only federal research agency that does not support graduate education.* The proposed program would provide much-needed support to sustain the pipeline for the next generation of scholars and educators in the humanities. These young people are particularly vulnerable today because of the especially severe impact of the economic downturn on new faculty hires in humanities disciplines. Increased federal attention to, and investment in, humanities graduate education is critical to attract and retain talented individuals to serve as the nation's future experts and educators. We request \$7.5 million in new funds for this program.

Critical Priorities Addressed in the FY 2011 Budget Request - The National Humanities Alliance continues to urge expansion of NEH activity in a number of critical areas, including: international/global studies, humanities data, and graduate education. While we do not support the Obama Administration's overall funding recommendations for NEH, *we are very pleased to note interest signaled in the agency's FY 2011 budget request for the following:*

- **Global understanding**—For FY 2011, NEH has proposed a new special initiative—Bridging Cultures—to advance Americans' understanding of their own rich cultural heritage, as well as the cultural complexity of the world in which they live. As the only federal agency responsible for advancement of a broad range of critical fields in this area (e.g., history, foreign language, comparative literature, religious studies, cultural anthropology), NEH is well-positioned to provide leadership in support of increased U.S. global competency and competitiveness abroad, as well as civil engagement and understanding at home.
- **Humanities data**—NHA applauds the following statement in the Administration's budget request for NEH: "In FY 2011, the Endowment plans to enter into a partnership with the American Academy of Arts and Sciences (AAAS)...to sustain and extend AAAS's developmental work on the Humanities Indicators project. This project, which is responsive to NEH's legislative mandate to develop a "system of national information and data collection...on the humanities," is making a wide range of humanities data available to researchers, educators, and the general public. These data will equip policymakers and institutional administrators with statistical tools to help inform decision-making about primary and secondary education, higher education, the humanities workforce, levels and sources of humanities funding, public understanding of the humanities, and other areas of concern to the humanities community."
- **Graduate education**—NEH has recently revised the eligibility criteria for summer seminars and institutes to create opportunities for humanities graduate students, beginning in the summer of 2010. NHA strongly supports this policy change, which is responsive to suggestions from the humanities community.

NEH Federal/State Partnership

The National Humanities Alliance supports FY 2011 funding of \$60.0 million for the NEH Federal/State Partnership (a \$19.6 million increase). Our request would strengthen the capacity of state humanities councils to support local cultural and educational institutions, teaching and learning resources, family literacy programs, community discussion groups, and programs for new citizens. A recent survey of state council capacities and resources has identified \$150 million in funds needed for programs and infrastructure support in their states. State councils seek to secure half this figure in federal funding over the next three years.

Value of the Humanities

The 1965 legislation that established the NEH states: "*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.*" At a time of rapid globalization and technological development, the wisdom of this statement is *as evident today – if not more so* – than it was forty-five years ago. The humanities represent critical modes of thought and fields of knowledge that support a globally competitive (and vocationally mobile) workforce, undergird

our civic institutions, inform complex policy challenges, and enrich individual lives. They encompass a broad range of fields—including the study of languages, linguistics, literature, history, law, government, philosophy, archaeology, comparative religion, ethics, and more—which support capacities especially relevant to the 21st century: knowledge of world cultures, religions, and languages; understanding of U.S. history and democratic traditions; and humanistic perspectives to evaluate the implications of scientific and technological advances.

Economic Crisis

Additional funds are needed to help offset severe economic pressures on the academic workforce and humanities institutions and invest in the nation's long-term economic recovery. As one of the largest sources of support (private or public) for the humanities in the United States, NEH funding is critical to the health of our nation's education and research infrastructure. As the impact of the economic downturn deepens, many institutions and nonprofit associations around the country are struggling to maintain continued access to high-quality programming and educational opportunities in the humanities – from colleges and universities, to schools, museums, libraries, historical societies, and other nonprofit organizations.

Our nation's long tradition of fostering broad access to liberal arts education is increasingly looked to by nations around the world as a unique driver of U.S. economic leadership and innovation in the last century. Nevertheless, recent federal policy places almost exclusive emphasis on fostering scientific and technological advancement, and widens still further the historic gap between federal and institutional support for the humanities and investment in other academic disciplines. As a result, opportunities for humanities researchers, educators, and students, are failing to keep pace with those provided to their counterparts in the sciences. NSF, for example, received \$3 billion in Recovery Act funding that by October, 2009, had already enabled 4,599 competitive awards supporting more than 6,700 investigators in all 50 states and Puerto Rico — many of them located at the same educational institutions served by NEH. While these are critical expenditures, we cannot allow this gap to continue to grow without damaging our nation's capacity to foster the broad range of our citizens' talents, and train the next generation of scholars and educators in all fields of learning. Our long-term economic success depends on cultivating a broadly educated workforce ready to compete in the knowledge-based, global economy of the 21st century. It is a strategic mistake to turn away from a historic strength of the U.S. educational system at the very moment others are moving to embrace it.

Conclusion

We recognize that Congress faces difficult choices this year, and ask the Subcommittee to fund a significant increase for the National Endowment for the Humanities in FY 2011 as an investment in the nation's long-term economic recovery and competitiveness, the strength and vitality of our civic institutions, the preservation and understanding of our diverse cultural heritage, and the lives of our citizens. The National Humanities Alliance and its members are grateful for the Subcommittee's vigorous and sustained support for the humanities, and would especially like to recognize its leadership for the increase received by NEH for FY 2010. Thank you for your consideration of our request.

Founded in 1981, the National Humanities Alliance is a coalition of nonprofit humanities organizations and individuals dedicated to the advancement of humanities education, research, preservation and public programs (www.nhalliance.org).