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Connecting Constituents with Federal Assistance for the Arts and Humanities

The National Foundation on the Arts and the Humanities is the primary vehicle for federal support for the arts and the humanities. Established in 1965, the foundation currently consists of three agencies: the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS), the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), and the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH). These three federal agencies provide assistance to museums, arts centers, theaters, performing arts, arts classes, arts programs, humanities programs, and more.

IMLS is funded through the Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act. For FY2026, P.L. 119-75, the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2026, provided \$291.8 million for IMLS, \$3.0 million less than FY2024 and FY2025.

NEA and NEH are funded through the Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act. For FY2026, P.L. 119-74, the Commerce, Justice, Science; Energy and Water Development; and Interior and Environment Appropriations Act, 2026, provided \$207.0 million to NEA and \$207.0 million to NEH, the same amounts they received in FY2024 and FY2025.

This In Focus provides a summary of grant programs administered by IMLS, NEA, and NEH to support arts and humanities projects. Grants awarded by formula to state or regional agencies may be subawarded to other entities, including local governments, nonprofits, and individuals. In general, competitive or discretionary grants are awarded directly to eligible applicants by federal agencies. For 2026, all three agencies are prioritizing grants that celebrate the country's 250th birthday.

Institute of Museum and Library Services

IMLS is the primary administrator of grants supporting the nation's state, local, and private libraries and museums.

IMLS administers the following competitive grant programs for museums, among others:

- **Museums for America** invests in museums of all sizes and disciplines in project-based efforts to serve the public through educational programs and exhibits, community partnerships, and collections stewardship activities.
 - **Museums Empowered** is a special initiative of the Museums for America grant program that supports projects that use professional

development and training to generate change and growth within museums of all types.

- **Native American/Native Hawaiian Museum Services** supports Native American Tribes, Alaska Native Villages, and organizations that primarily serve and represent Native Hawaiians in sustaining heritage, culture, and knowledge. The program funds projects such as educational services and programs, professional development, organizational capacity building, community engagement, and collections stewardship.
- **National Leadership Grants for Museums** invests in projects that address critical needs of the museum field by advancing museum-based learning practices, responsiveness to community needs, or high-priority collections care or conservation issues.
- **Museum Grants for African American History and Culture** is designed to build museum capacity, support the growth and development of museum professionals, and improve access to museum and archival collections at African American museums and Historically Black Colleges and Universities.
- **Museum Grants for American Latino History and Culture** is designed to build the capacity of American Latino history and culture museums to serve their communities and advance the growth and development of a professional workforce in American Latino institutions.
- **Inspire Grants for Small Museums** supports small museums of all disciplines in project-based efforts to serve the public through educational programs and exhibits, community partnerships, and collections stewardship activities.
- **21st Century Museum Professionals Program** supports projects that build career pathways, strengthen professional networks, and identify and share effective workforce education and training practices in the museum field.

IMLS's awarded grants database allows searches of past grants by keywords, year, state, city, and program.

National Endowment for the Arts

NEA is a major source of support for all arts disciplines. Typically, NEA grants fund nonprofit arts organizations and public arts agencies and organizations.

The **State Partnership Agreement grants program**, NEA’s largest, awards grants by formula to state and regional arts agencies. Agencies apply annually for this support, which supports state-identified goals and activities, as well as funding for folk and traditional arts, arts education, arts and health, and outreach to underserved communities. Organizations can apply to their state and regional arts agencies for grant funding through this program.

NEA’s competitive grants include the following:

- **Grants for Arts Projects** is NEA’s principal competitive grant program for nonprofit organizations. Through project-based funding, the grants support a number of artistic disciplines, including arts education, dance, design, folk and traditional arts, literary arts, local arts agencies, visual and media arts, museums, music, theater and musical theater, opera, and multidisciplinary works. The program supports public engagement with the arts and arts education, integration of the arts with strategies promoting the health and well-being of people and communities, and improvement of overall capacity and capabilities within the arts sector. NEA encourages applications for arts projects that focus on one or more agency funding priorities.
 - **Our Town** is a program within Grants for Arts Projects that supports projects that integrate arts, culture, and design in efforts to advance local economic, physical, and other community-based outcomes. Projects must be place-specific (such as a community, neighborhood, or cultural district) and should focus on community priorities.
 - **Challenge America** is a program within Grants for Arts Projects that supports projects specifically focused on activities for underserved groups or communities. It provides grants of \$10,000.
- **Research Grants in the Arts** supports research studies that investigate the value and/or impact of the arts in American life.

NEA’s grants database allows searches of recently awarded grants by keywords, discipline, year, organization, or state.

National Endowment for the Humanities

NEH supports grants for humanities education, research, preservation, and public programs; the creation of regional humanities centers; and the development of humanities programs under the jurisdiction of the state humanities councils. Typically, NEH grants support cultural institutions, such as museums, historical sites, archives, libraries, colleges, universities, public television and radio, and research institutions. Grants are also made to individual scholars.

The **Federal/State Partnership program** is the largest program in NEH’s budget. Program grants are awarded, by formula, to state humanities agencies to advance public awareness of, access to, and support for the humanities on a local grassroots level. Organizations can apply through their state humanities councils for grant funding through this program.

NEH has more than 20 grant programs, including the following, in which art organizations and museums may be most interested:

- **Public Humanities Projects** supports projects that bring the ideas of the humanities to life for general audiences through public programming. Projects must focus on one of the following topic areas: the 250th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence, American Military Valor, the American Dream and Economic Freedom, or America’s Role on a Global Scale. Supported projects may be one of two categories: Historic Places or Exhibitions.
- **Rediscovering Our Revolutionary Tradition** supports activities to preserve and improve access to primary source materials—including archival records, documents and rare publications, art and material culture, and photographs and sound recordings. Materials must document the history of American independence and establishment and/or expansion of the nation or the history of American government in federal, state, and local contexts.

NEH’s award search allows searches of recently awarded grants by award number, keywords, organization, state, or congressional district.

Additional Resources

CRS has a number of products related to grants work, many of which are listed on the Grants and Federal Assistance page of the CRS website.

The Assistance Listings page on SAM.gov is the primary source of information on federal assistance programs. The listings include information on eligibility, how to apply, and matching requirements. Actual funding of specific grant programs depends on annual congressional budget appropriations.

Grants.gov provides grant seekers with information on competitive federal grant opportunities and how to apply for them.

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