Open Government Plan

National Endowment for the Humanities

Version 2.0, June 2012

I. Introduction

This document is an update to our original Open Government Plan of April 2010. It includes status information about various NEH initiatives to increase access to the public.

This document sets forth the National Endowment for the Humanities' (NEH) plan for promoting transparency, participation, and collaboration in all aspects of its work. This open government plan has been developed in accordance with the Open Government Directive issued by the White House on December 8, 2009 (see http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/assets/memoranda_2010/m10-06.pdf).

II. Access to Information

This section describes the ways in which NEH currently provides the public with access to information on various aspects of the agency's work.

A. Publishing Information Online

Visitors to NEH's website can access a wide variety of information about the agency and the projects it supports, including:

- application guidelines for each of NEH's discretionary grant programs
- a regularly updated grant deadline calendar
- examples of funded projects
- funding ratios for each grant program
- lists of recent grant awards
- profiles of NEH's grant-making offices and divisions
- information for grantees concerning the administration of their grants
- recent annual reports submitted by the agency
- agency press releases
- the full text of *Humanities*, NEH's bimonthly magazine
- links to NEH-supported partnerships, such as EDSITEment and Chronicling America
- recent speeches by the Endowment's Chairman
- news and information on the National Humanities Medals and the Jefferson Lecture in the Humanities
- a link to an online database of NEH-funded projects awarded since 1980

- a complete staff listing, with phone numbers and e-mail addresses

B. Publication in an Open Format

NEH conforms to industry and agency best practices in regard to open format standards. Content available through NEH's website is searchable, indexable, downloadable, and available in formats that are accessible through any modern web browser or freely available software/plugins, such as Adobe Acrobat.

C. Publication of High-Value Data Sets

In response to the Open Government Directive, NEH identified and published online six new high-value data sets and registered those data sets at Data.gov. The data sets provide extensive information about all grants that have been awarded by NEH since the late 1970s, and about individuals who have served on NEH grant review panels since 1988. (Links to these data sets are available at Appendix A.)

D. Open Government Webpage

NEH's open government Web page can be found at www.neh.gov/open. This Web page highlights NEH's emphasis on transparency and details compliance with the Open Government Directive. The Web page features this open government plan and also includes links to the data sets described in section C above.

NEH's open government Web page is interactive and user-friendly. The Web page also includes a feedback mechanism that allows users to submit comments, suggestions, or questions on NEH's open government initiatives. Messages regarding NEH's open government plan or open government Web page are directed to the designated open government representative in NEH's Office of the Chairman.

E. Quality of Government Information

NEH will ensure that information on its public website, including its open government Web page, conforms to Office of Management and Budget (OMB) guidance on information quality and that adequate systems and processes are in place within NEH to promote such conformity.

The Open Government Directive requests that NEH designate a high-level senior official to be accountable for the quality and objectivity of, and internal controls over, publicly-disseminated spending information. This official is NEH's Deputy Chairman.

III. NEH's Open Government Plan

This section describes NEH's plans to maintain its commitment to transparency, expand its efforts to promote participation of the public, and build on its already-extensive practice of collaboration.

NEH recently completed a major overhaul of the agency's website. The site features new information architecture and improved usability. Dynamic drop-down menus for primary and secondary navigation, Web 2.0, and other enhancements enable members of the public to find what they need quickly. This new website fosters participation, adds transparency, and facilitates collaboration.

A. Transparency

NEH is committed to openness in its work and seeks to provide as much information as possible to the public. NEH firmly believes that the taxpayers deserve to know how their funding is being used and should be provided the opportunity to offer feedback on how NEH can be even more effective.

1. Review of NEH's current transparency efforts

As noted in section II.A of this plan, NEH already provides a wide variety of information, guidelines, publications, and reports on its website. Additional information about the work of NEH is made available in the following ways:

- Information on upcoming grant review panels is posted in the *Federal Register.*
- NEH staff regularly conducts "mock" peer review panels at colleges and universities, enabling the public to observe first hand NEH's evaluation procedures and to make suggestions for improvements.
- As a matter of policy NEH shares the results of the peer review process with all of its applicants, and the agency also makes public the names of those who serve on review panels.
- NEH provides information on the success ratios for each of its grant programs, enabling prospective applicants to know in advance how competitive a particular grant program is likely to be.
- The NEH Chairman makes numerous speeches and public appearances at venues across the country. His public appearances are advertised widely by the host institutions and by NEH.
- Public events, such as scholarly conferences hosted by NEH, are often open to the public.
- Open sessions are held at NEH's quarterly meeting of its National Council on the Humanities.
- NEH regularly meets with the donor community, nonprofit organizations, and corporations to develop innovative methods of collaboration.
- Press releases are issued regularly throughout the year to announce major agency milestones, publications, and events.
- A fully searchable online database of NEH-funded projects has recently been added to the agency's website.
- NEH regularly responds to press inquiries and requests for interviews, and proactively reaches out to media outlets to publicize information about NEH activities.

- NEH produces and disseminates an award-winning bimonthly magazine, *Humanities*. Available in print and online, this journal provides the public with a variety of informative articles about a wide range of humanities topics.
- Regularly updated information about NEH job vacancies—including time-sensitive information about the status of already-submitted applications—is made available on the government-wide USAJOBS website.

2. Compliance with legal and administrative guidance related to transparency

Freedom of Information Act

NEH's Office of the General Counsel (OGC) serves as the agency's FOIA Requestor Service Center and is responsible for processing all Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests and administrative appeals. The FOIA personnel in the OGC consist of the General Counsel, an attorney-advisor, and a paralegal specialist. Upon receipt of a FOIA request, FOIA personnel in the OGC intake and process the request by working, if necessary, with NEH staff to search for responsive records, and by preparing an agency response for NEH's Deputy Chairman, who serves as the Chief FOIA Officer and signs off on all FOIA responses.

NEH is committed to responding to all FOIA requests and administrative appeals in a timely manner. NEH has worked to significantly improve its response times over the past few years. For example, the agency's average response time for complex requests has decreased by approximately 72% from FY 2010 to FY 2011. NEH is also committed to ensuring that the agency has an effective system for responding to FOIA requests. The agency has dedicated two members of the OGC staff to work on FOIA requests and administrative appeals for at least 50% of their time. Other steps that NEH has taken to streamline and strengthen its FOIA response process are further detailed in the latest NEH Chief FOIA Officer Report, which is available on the NEH website at http://www.neh.gov/about/foia.

At this time, NEH does not have a significant backlog of requests. As reported in NEH's FY 2011 Annual Report, the agency only had three backlogged requests and one administrative appeal pending at the end of FY 2011.

Information Quality

In conformance with the Treasury and General Government Appropriations Act for Fiscal Year 2001, Section 515(b), NEH has developed a formal procedure to comply with the OMB's guidelines on "Ensuring and Maximizing the Quality, Objectivity, Utility, and Integrity of Information Disseminated by Federal Agencies." Information about NEH's efforts in this area can be found at http://www.neh.gov/whoweare/dissemination.html.

Transparency Guidance

As noted elsewhere in this plan, NEH has posted six high-quality data sets on the government-wide data.gov website. In addition, NEH is fully compliant with the requirements to post agency

data on the USAspending.gov website and on the FFATA (Federal Funding Accountability and Transparency Act) Portal.

Records Management

NEH has a records officer who is fully conversant with the requirements of the General Schedule of Records. An agency-specific "Schedule of Records," which been approved by the National Archives and Records Administration, guides the agency in carrying out its records management responsibilities.

3. Planned enhancements in NEH's current transparency efforts

During the past three years, the NEH has embarked on a major effort to expand its electronic outreach, and correspondingly to increase the transparency of the agency's work. As part of this effort, the agency has begun to explore (or in some cases, is already using) the following technologies and services:

- Web Chats: NEH is considering the use of this technology to host topical webchats featuring NEH staff and humanities scholars and practitioners from around the nation. Such webchats would be open to the public, and transcripts would later be posted on NEH's website. [Status: Targeted for mid-2013].
- Facebook: NEH is planning on creating a Facebook page to post information on NEH activities and to solicit public comment from users. [Status: Completed. See link].
- Twitter: NEH may soon be available on Twitter, through which the agency will share high-profile tidbits of information on NEH activities and NEH mentions by public figures. [Status: Completed. See link.]
- YouTube and Vimeo: NEH is considering the creation of channels on YouTube and Vimeo, allowing the public to view videos of NEH public events and interviews with NEH officials. [Status: Completed. See link.]
- Webcasts: The increasing penetration of broadband into the nation's homes and businesses has made it possible to stream video to a broad swath of the public. NEH will take advantage of this capability on its newly designed website. Among the types of programs that will be webcast is our annual Jefferson Lecture in the Humanities. We may also webcast the public sessions of our quarterly meetings of the National Council on the Humanities. [Status: Completed. See link.]
- Blogs: Blogs are a powerful communications tool and an effective way to interact with the public. NEH is considering the establishment of several blogs on topics of specific interest to the humanities community. [Status: Completed. Each NEH grant-making Division/Office now has a blog. See link.]
- Calendars: NEH will develop and post on its website a comprehensive calendar of forthcoming events and activities related to the work of the agency. Included on the calendar will be upcoming speaking engagement of the NEH staff, openings of major museum exhibitions, airings of NEH-supported film and radio programs, conferences and workshops on humanities topics, and many other NEH-supported events. [Status: Completed]

B. Participation

NEH values the input of the public and is dedicated to expanding opportunities for the public to participate in the agency's work.

1. Existing opportunities for public participation

NEH's open government Web page incorporates a mechanism for the public to provide feedback on published information and to suggest ways in which the agency can enhance and augment the information that is now provided.

The NEH website includes a link to the agency's Office of the Inspector General, where members of the public can report instances of alleged waste, fraud, or abuse related to an activity supported or conducted by NEH. A toll-free telephone number is provided, along with pertinent addresses to which allegations can be sent.

Additional opportunities for public comment are provided at the conclusion of NEH's peer review panel meetings. Each year more than 100 such panels are convened by NEH at its headquarters in Washington. Scholars, teachers, and other humanities practitioners from around the country are invited to come to Washington to provide funding recommendations on grant applications submitted to NEH's various grant programs. At the conclusion of each panel meeting, panelists are given the opportunity to comment on the goals, policies, and procedures of the NEH grant program for which they are serving as a panelist.

Similarly, project directors meetings—which are a routine annual occurrence for a number of NEH grant programs—afford NEH an opportunity to elicit from the directors their opinions on grant priorities, policies, and procedures.

Site visits performed by NEH staff provide an additional mechanism to invite public participation in the work of the agency. Such visits are an integral component of grant oversight at NEH. While on site visits NEH staff welcome the comments and suggestions of project participants. Such comments can often lead to improvements in various aspects of the grant program.

A key feature of NEH's new "eGMS" (electronic Grants Management System) is the "Improve eGMS: Make a Suggestion!" page. Here users of the agency's proprietary grants system are invited to suggest ways in which the system can be changed to bring greater simplicity and clarity to its core functions.

Speeches presented by the NEH chairman and other senior staff provide yet another opportunity to invite public comment on the work of the agency. Following such presentations there is almost always a question-and-answer session during which members of the audience can ask questions and make suggestions.

2. New Feedback Mechanisms

In the coming year NEH will explore new feedback mechanisms that will further enhance public participation and involvement in NEH activities. Among the mechanisms currently under consideration are:

- Webchats: As noted in section III.A.3 of this plan, NEH is exploring the possibility of hosting public webchats, which will allow greater dialogue between the agency and the public it serves. [Status: Targeted for mid-2013]
- Continuous public comment site: Following the example of other federal agencies, NEH may reach out to the U.S. General Services Administration (GSA) to explore options for collaborating to create a public comment site for NEH through the site that GSA administers and supports. This type of site will allow members of the public to share their ideas on open government, discuss them with each other, and vote or express agreement/disagreement with the ideas; as a result, the most popular ideas emerge for closer review by the agency. [Status: Targeted for mid-2013]
- "Rate this page" web survey boxes: NEH will explore options to develop pop-up box surveys for user feedback on specific pages of NEH's website. This will enable NEH to better understand the kind of information the public seeks and how best to present it on the NEH website. [Status: Targeted for mid-2013]

C. Collaboration

NEH actively pursues collaboration with government agencies, both foreign and domestic, and with educational and nonprofit organizations, private foundations, corporations, and other entities seeking to advance knowledge and understanding in the humanities. By leveraging each other's strengths and identifying areas in which collaboration can enhance impact, NEH and its partners are finding new ways to achieve common goals.

1. NEH's Ongoing Collaboration Efforts

NEH has a long record of successful collaborations in support of humanities activity. These partnerships have contributed greatly to the success of many of NEH's programs and special events. Among the most noteworthy of our recent collaborations are the following:

— a program of fellowships sponsored jointly by NEH and the Library of Congress;

— the National Digital Newspapers Program, a multi-year collaboration with the Library of Congress to digitize and make publicly available on the World Wide Web newspapers already preserved on microfilm through the United States Newspapers Program;

— the Advanced Research Fellowships on Japan Program jointly sponsored by NEH and the Japan-United States Friendship Commission;

— the interagency Save America's Treasures initiative administered by the National Park Service;

— a "Cultural Diplomacy" partnership of NEH and the U.S. Department of State that enables teachers from other nations to participate in "Landmarks of American History and Culture" workshops;

— an agreement with the Bureau of Education and Cultural Affairs at the State Department to make the NEH Picturing America image sets available for use by U.S. Overseas Missions and to translate the Picturing America Teachers resource Book into four languages;

— cooperation with the German Research Foundation through two jointly funded grant programs coordinated by the Office of Digital Humanities;

— a jointly funded grant program with the England's Joint Information Systems Committee and coordinated by NEH's Office of Digital Humanities; and

— a cooperative international grant competition involving NEH, the National Science Foundation, the Joint Information Systems Committee from the United Kingdom, and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council from Canada.

A complete listing of current and recent NEH partnerships appears in Appendix B.

D. NEH's Initial 2010 flagship initiative [Status: Completed]

Initially, as our flagship Open Government initiative, NEH planned to produce and disseminate a monthly electronic newsletter. However, after discussing the matter internally and with customers, we decided to instead roll this major new communications effort into our new website. The new NEH website was launched in 2012. It provides the public with accurate and timely information about NEH's programs, priorities, events, and initiatives. The website facilitates *transparency* by providing substantive and timely information about NEH's plans and activities; *participation* by regularly inviting readers to comment upon, and make suggestions for improvements in, the programs and activities of the agency; and *collaboration* by opening up avenues for readers to join with NEH in planning and carrying out humanities programs.

The NEH website includes the following features:

- Announcements of NEH-supported events taking place across the country, with information about opportunities for public participation.
- Featured stories on new grant programs and funding opportunities.
- Information about partnership opportunities with NEH and its affiliated state humanities councils.

- Calendars conveying important information about upcoming grant deadlines.
- Descriptions of recent publications, exhibitions, films, and other programs that have resulted from NEH-supported projects.
- Links to articles and publications about humanities projects.
- Invitations to comment on grant programs and other funding opportunities that NEH is preparing to launch.
- Important data and statistics documenting current conditions in the humanities.
- Links to blogs, wikis, webcasts, videos, Facebook pages, and other mechanisms NEH has created to help the humanities community stay in touch with current issues and concerns in the humanities.

E. NEH's Four New Initiatives (2012)

In the coming year, the NEH expects to roll out these four new initiatives:

1) Flagship Initiative: Products Online Database
Description: A major crowd-sourced online database that allows the public to see the books, articles, films, and other products that result from NEH grants.

2) Prizes Online Database
Description: A major crowd-sourced online database that allows the public to see prizes (e.g. Pulitzer, Emmy, etc.) that have been awarded to NEH-funded projects.

3) Media Coverage
Description: A major crowd-sourced online database that allows the public to see media coverage (e.g. newspaper articles, TV interviews, etc.) that cover NEH-funded projects.

4) Research Performance Progress Report Implementation
Description: Implement a new system for grantees to report much more detail about the impact of their projects. We will make this data available to the public both in raw and aggregate forms and also include it in our media outreach.

Appendix A: High Value Data Sets (list current as of June 2012)

NEH provides the public with access to the following high-value datasets in XML format. These data may also be found on the Data.gov portal.

- NEH grant data 1970-1979 - Information about institutional grants made by the National Endowment for the Humanities from FY 1970 - FY 1979.
- NEH grant data 1980-1989 - Information about institutional grants made by the National Endowment for the Humanities from FY 1980 - FY 1989.
- NEH grant data 1990-1999 - Information about institutional grants made by the National Endowment for the Humanities from FY 1990 - FY 1999.
- NEH grant data 2000-2009 - Information about institutional grants made by the National Endowment for the Humanities from FY 2000 - FY 2009.
- NEH grant data 2010-2019 - Information about institutional grants made by the National Endowment for the Humanities from FY 2010 - present.
- NEH evaluator data – Information about individuals who have served on NEH grant review panels since 1988.

<u>Appendix B: Current and Recent NEH Partnerships with Domestic and International Agencies and Organizations</u> (as of June 2012)

Partners in the federal government:

- The President's Committee on the Arts and the Humanities
- The Institute of Museum and Library Services
- The National Endowment for the Arts
- The Library of Congress
- Preserve America
- The Japan-United States Friendship Commission
- The National Park Service
- The National Science Foundation
- The Smithsonian Institution
- The U.S. Department of Defense Education Activity
- The U.S. Department of Education
- The U.S. Department of Energy
- The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Head Start
- The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, National Institutes of Health, National Library of Medicine
- The U.S. Department of State
- The U.S. Department of the Interior
- The United States Mint

Private-sector and international partners:

- The National Trust for the Humanities
- The American Library Association
- The Carnegie Corporation of New York
- *El Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes* (Mexico)
- *Consiglio Nazionale delle Ricerche* (Italy)
- Crayola, Inc.
- *Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft* (Germany)
- Mr. Robert M. Edsel
- The History Channel/A&E Television Networks
- The JM Freedom Foundation
- Joint Information Systems Committee (U.K.)
- The McCormick Foundation
- The O'Donnell Foundation
- Scholastic, Inc.
- Mr. and Mrs. Robert H. Smith
- The Terra Foundation for American Art
- *La Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México* (Mexico)
- The Verizon Foundation

- Arts and Humanities Research Council (UK)
- Economic and Social Research Council (UK)
- Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (Netherlands)
- Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (Canada)