

The Humanities in Our Lives

THE VALUE OF PUBLIC HUMANITIES

The public humanities play a vital role in strengthening civic engagement and underpinning a strong democracy. In the creation of the National Endowment for the Humanities and the state humanities councils, Congress emphasized the importance of the humanities for a democracy that “demands wisdom and vision in its citizens.”

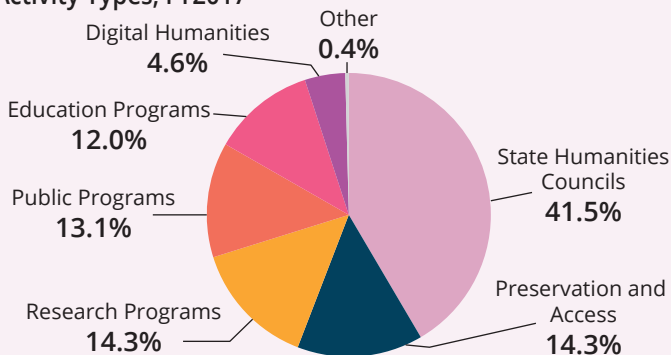
PUBLIC HUMANITIES

The humanities have been inextricably linked to the public sphere since the Renaissance, when humanist education prepared men to be public speakers and take on roles in government and the courts. As the humanities crystallized into discrete academic disciplines, however, a break emerged between academia and the wider public. When Congress passed the National Foundation for the Arts and Humanities Act in 1965, it sought to bridge that gap by providing funding for humanities projects focused on reaching the public.

KEY FACTS

- In 2019, NEH provided \$48 million to state humanities councils.
- NEH awarded \$8.4 million in grants to 48 projects in the public humanities in 2019.

Distribution of NEH Program Funds among Activity Types, FY2017



INNOVATIVE PROGRAMS

Public humanities programs are emerging as discrete areas of education within the humanities. One of the earliest examples is the John Nicholas Brown Center for Public Humanities and Cultural Heritage at Brown University. The Center supports a wide range of activities, including a public humanities podcast, scholarship, digital tours, and a program called “**Year of the City**,” which “brings together more than 50 public programs over the course of the year that explore the history, life and culture of Providence’s twenty-five neighborhoods through exhibitions, performances, walks, lectures, and conferences.”

The Jonathan M. Tisch College of Civic Life at Tufts University includes an innovative public humanities program that offers the first-of-its-kind major in civic studies. The program acknowledges the close connection between the public humanities and civic engagement, stating that the major “will give students the opportunity to examine the significance of critical reflection, ethical thinking, and action for social change, within and between societies, from a variety of disciplinary perspectives.”

The Humanities in Our Lives series (#HumInOurLives) highlights the many and diverse forms of humanities activities in the nation, and key facts about the health of the field.

THE ANDREW W. MELLON FOUNDATION

For more on the broad trends that mark American engagement with various forms of the humanities, visit humanitiesindicators.org or email humanitiesindicators@amacad.org.

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