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.”

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.”

Distribution of NEH Program Funds among Activity Types, FY2017

- Digital Humanities: 4.6%
- Education Programs: 12.0%
- Public Programs: 13.1%
- Research Programs: 14.3%
- State Humanities Councils: 41.5%
- Preservation and Access: 14.3%
- Other: 0.4%

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