

# 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.”

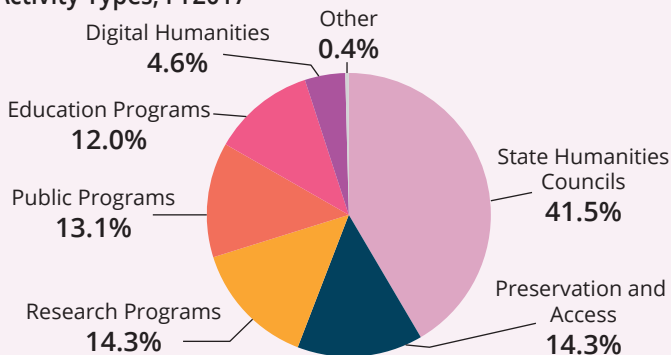
## PUBLIC HUMANITIES

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 Program for Public Humanities at the Jonathan M. Tisch College of Civic Life, for instance, offers events, partnerships, and projects that involve “such collaborative practices as historical inquiry, recovery, and acknowledgment, as well as innovative uses of narrative and artistic expression to produce civically minded, creative, and just mutual engagements among a broad range of constituencies.” The program is also currently developing a curricular track to be offered beginning in the fall semester of 2020 that will include new and cross-listed course offerings that will be known as “Civic Humanities.”

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.

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For more on the broad trends that mark American engagement with various forms of the humanities, visit [humanitiesindicators.org](http://humanitiesindicators.org) or email [humanitiesindicators@amacad.org](mailto:humanitiesindicators@amacad.org).

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