

TOM COLE, OKLAHOMA, CHAIRMAN

HAROLD ROGERS, KENTUCKY
Chairman Emeritus
ROBERT B. ADERHOLT, ALABAMA
MICHAEL K. SIMPSON, IDAHO
JOHN R. CARTER, TEXAS
KEN CALVERT, CALIFORNIA
MARIO DIAZ-BALART, FLORIDA
STEVE WOMACK, ARKANSAS
CHARLES J. "CHUCK" FLEISCHMANN, TENNESSEE
DAVID P. JOYCE, OHIO
ANDY HARRIS, MARYLAND
MARK E. AMODEI, NEVADA
DAVID G. VALADAO, CALIFORNIA
DAN NEWHOUSE, WASHINGTON
JOHN R. MOOLenaar, MICHIGAN
JOHN H. RUTHERFORD, FLORIDA
BEN CLINE, VIRGINIA
GUY RESCHENTHALER, PENNSYLVANIA
ASHLEY HINSON, IOWA
TONY GONZALES, TEXAS
JULIA LETLOW, LOUISIANA
MICHAEL CLOUD, TEXAS
MICHAEL GUEST, MISSISSIPPI
RYAN K. ZINKE, MONTANA
ANDREW S. CLYDE, GEORGIA
STEPHANIE I. BICE, OKLAHOMA
SCOTT FRANKLIN, FLORIDA
JAKE ELLZEY, TEXAS
JUAN CISCOMANI, ARIZONA
CHUCK EDWARDS, NORTH CAROLINA
MARK ALFORD, MISSOURI
NICK LALOTA, NEW YORK
DALE W. STRONG, ALABAMA
CELESTE MALOY, UTAH
RILEY M. MOORE, WEST VIRGINIA

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Committee on Appropriations
Washington, DC 20515-6015

ROSA L. DeLAURO, CONNECTICUT
STENY H. HOYER, MARYLAND
MARCY KAPTUR, OHIO
JAMES E. CLYBURN, SOUTH CAROLINA
SANFORD D. BISHOP, JR., GEORGIA
BETTY McCOLLUM, MINNESOTA
DEBBIE WASSERMAN SCHULTZ, FLORIDA
HENRY CUELLAR, TEXAS
CHELLIE PINGREE, MAINE
MIKE QUIGLEY, ILLINOIS
GRACE MENG, NEW YORK
MARK POCAN, WISCONSIN
PETE AGUILAR, CALIFORNIA
LOIS FRANKEL, FLORIDA
BONNIE WATSON COLEMAN, NEW JERSEY
NORMA J. TORRES, CALIFORNIA
ED CASE, HAWAII
ADRIANO ESPAILLAT, NEW YORK
JOSH HARDER, CALIFORNIA
LAUREN UNDERWOOD, ILLINOIS
SUSIE LEE, NEVADA
JOSEPH D. MORELLE, NEW YORK
MIKE LEVIN, CALIFORNIA
MADELEINE DEAN, PENNSYLVANIA
VERONICA ESCOBAR, TEXAS
FRANK J. MRVAN, INDIANA
MARIE GLUESENKAMP PEREZ, WASHINGTON
GLENN IVEY, MARYLAND

SUSAN ROSS
CHIEF CLERK AND STAFF DIRECTOR
(202) 225-2771

November 11, 2025

Michael McDonald
Acting Chairman
National Endowment for the Humanities
400 7th Street, SW
Washington, DC 20506

Dear Mr. McDonald:

I have been closely monitoring the developments at the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) since the administration illegally terminated previously awarded federal grants and laid off more than 65% of NEH employees earlier this spring.

In recent weeks, it has become increasingly apparent that the agency's ability to conduct grantmaking has been seriously damaged.

First, it is my understanding that dozens of NEH grant lines have been eliminated. In just one example, NEH abruptly cancelled the Humanities Research Centers on Artificial Intelligence competition. The grant application was made available July 8, 2025, in accordance with this administration's stated focus on AI. Yet, the program was cancelled in September, only weeks before the application deadline. NEH attributed the cancellation to a lack of staff capacity, a self-imposed deficiency caused by the reduction in force.

Second, NEH announced the award of two of the single largest grants in the agency's history – both seemingly non-competitive. These two grants alone make up 10% of the agency's annual appropriation. NEH has a long history of maximizing its impact through numerous smaller awards across the country. Departure from this tradition to fund such large awards presumably comes at the expense of numerous smaller grants. Further, a non-competitive process for grantmaking suggests that NEH doesn't have the staff capacity to ensure that the most promising proposals are being elevated. It is a concerningly irresponsible approach to awarding taxpayer dollars.

Third and finally, at the beginning of October, the National Council on the Humanities (Council) was dismantled when the White House dismissed a significant number of its members. Only four of the 26 members remain on the Council, far short of the 14 required for a quorum.

To help me better understand the situation at NEH and fulfill my responsibility to conduct oversight, I would like to schedule a meeting with you. To aid our conversation, please provide answers to the following questions in advance of that meeting, but no later than 30 days from receipt.

- According to information contained in the August 6, 2025, U.S District Court’s decision, “only six employees remain in the Office of Grant Management and five employees in accounting, making it virtually impossible for NEH to perform its statutorily required role rigorously to review more than one hundred million dollars in federal grants and oversee tens of millions of dollars in Federal/State Partnership grants.”¹
 - Is this figure accurate?
 - How many FTEs responsible for grantmaking are necessary for NEH to meet its obligations, including ensuring that announced competitions such as the Humanities Research Centers on Artificial Intelligence are actually awarded?
 - What steps is NEH taking to rebuild its capacity?
 - What is the status of the funds covered by the injunction issued by the U.S. District Court?
 - Please provide a breakdown of FY25 funding by program.
- Due to the diminished capacity caused by the reduction in force, I understand that NEH has eliminated numerous existing grant programs, despite there being sufficient appropriations. Many of them have bipartisan Congressional support. The cancellation of these important grants is harmful and unacceptable.
 - Please provide a list of all previously awarded grant programs have been cancelled in Fiscal Year 2025 due to capacity issues resulting from the reduction in force.
 - Please provide a list of open grant competitions that were cancelled after the funding opportunity was issued.
- On August 1, NEH announced a \$10 million grant to the University of Virginia. On September 15, NEH announced a \$10.4 million grant to Tikvah.
 - Please share any application materials associated with these grants.
 - What are the funding sources for these grants?
 - It is my understanding that the Council reviewed the Tikvah application and denied it. What was the justification and authority for overriding the Council’s decision?
 - Did the Council review the University of Virginia grant?
 - Were these larger awards made because of staffing shortages?
 - Is NEH moving toward a model of selecting fewer recipients for larger grant awards?
 - Is NEH in the process of inviting other organizations to apply for large-scale non-competitive grants?
 - How many other grant opportunities were not offered to offset the size of these grants?

¹ <https://www.courthousenews.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/08/humanities-order.pdf>

- As noted above, only four out of 26 members remain on the National Council for the Humanities. The Council’s authorizing statute² stipulates that for awards over \$30,000, “the NEH Chairperson shall not approve or disapprove any such application until the Chairperson has received the recommendation of the Council on such application, unless the Council fails to make a recommendation thereon within a reasonable time.”
 - Were the councilmembers dismissed in retaliation for raising questions about the Tikvah application or other agency initiatives?
 - What is the timeline for appointing new members to the Council?
 - In the absence of the Council’s ability to have a quorum, what is the NEH’s procedure for grantmaking?
 - How is NEH planning to move ahead with the Garden of Heroes funding opportunity without a quorum on the Council?
 - Please provide a list of any grants awarded this year that did not receive a recommendation from the Council.

- It has come to my attention that you have made liberal use of the authority to make Chairman’s Awards of up to \$30,000 to institutions and individuals.
 - One such award is entitled “Meritocracy vs. Equity: the Declaration of Independence in Tension with Critical Race Theory and DEI.”
 - Earlier this year, NEH cancelled awards that are, “at variance with agency priorities, including but not limited to those on diversity, equity, and inclusion.”³ Why is this award that is directly related to DEI different?
 - The recipient for this grant award is listed as unaffiliated independent scholar. Please provide the name of the recipient.
 - Please provide a list of all Chairman’s Awards that have been selected this year.
 - What is the NEH’s procedure for identifying recipients of Chairman’s Awards?

I am deeply concerned by the rapid destruction of NEH, and am committed to ensuring that NEH can once again conduct a rigorous process for selecting grantees, as it had previously successfully done since its founding in 1965. It is imperative that the damage inflicted on this agency be undone and that the integrity of NEH be rebuilt. Communities across the country are relying on it.

I look forward to our meeting.

Sincerely,



Chellie Pingree
 Ranking Member
 Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related
 Agencies
 House Committee on Appropriations

² <https://uscode.house.gov/view.xhtml?req=granuleid:USC-prelim-title20-section957&num=0&edition=prelim>

³ <https://www.neh.gov/updates-neh-priorities>