

NATIONAL ENDOWMENT  
FOR THE HUMANITIES

# 2020

ANNUAL REPORT





## FROM THE CHAIR

December 2022

Dear Mr. President,

It is my honor to present the 2020 Annual Report of the National Endowment for the Humanities. The period covered in this report began October 1, 2019, and ran through September 30, 2020.

I took the helm of NEH in February 2022, nevertheless, I had spent the six previous years on the advisory board for the Endowment. Often, in those years, I had been asked to define “the humanities.” I could list the disciplines included in the 1965 act that founded NEH (history, literature, religion, philosophy . . .) but these do not give the whole story. The humanities are part of everything we do. The humanities are the stories, teachings, and experiences—individual and collective—that inform how we live, how we interact with others and the natural world, and the decisions we make. They are the ideas that illuminate our understanding of our place in the world and the ideals that shape the values that guide us.

I am continually impressed with NEH’s ability as a small agency to have an outsized impact on the state of the humanities across the country. Broadly speaking, NEH grants support the development and preservation of knowledge. Our grants make possible documentaries, exhibitions, and library discussion programs that bring humanities content and ideas to new audiences. We fund advanced humanities research and books, both scholarly and popular, that expand the horizons of our knowledge of history and culture. Our education grants fund curriculum initiatives at colleges and universities and professional development opportunities for teachers at all levels of K–12 and higher education. We support the archiving and digitization of the nation’s cultural heritage. We fund the documentation and preservation of languages on the brink of extinction. Additionally, we provide critical financial support to humanities institutions and organizations to improve their physical and digital infrastructures and strengthen their capacities to serve their communities.

We do not do it alone. NEH has many partners, most importantly, the 56 state and jurisdictional councils that work to bring locally focused programming to their communities. During the pandemic that began in the spring of 2020, these state councils pivoted quickly to digital and online platforms to serve their constituents and continue humanities programming for citizens at a time when it was greatly needed.

Having grown up in a small rural community on the Navajo Reservation in Northeast Arizona, I have personally seen how the humanities can help sustain and strengthen individuals, communities, governments, and institutions. Today it has become even more clear to me how access to cultural and educational resources, libraries, museums, historical sites, and discussion groups, can foster connection among neighbors, imbue a community with pride in its heritage, and inspire individuals to strive for greater knowledge and achievement. NEH is working to make these resources and opportunities available to everyone, regardless of geography, income, disability, gender, or color.

NEH funding is impactful and transformational—in helping humanities institutions build resilience; in fostering new ideas, approaches, and solutions; in changing how we think about some of the most pressing issues of our time.



Shelly C. Lowe (Navajo)  
Chair, National Endowment for the Humanities

**NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE HUMANITIES**  
**SUMMARY OF GRANTS AND AWARDS, FY 2020**

Division/Program	Number <sup>1</sup>	Amount Obligated <sup>2</sup>		Total
		Outright	Matching <sup>3</sup>	
FEDERAL/STATE PARTNERSHIP	116	\$81,013,386	\$386,200	\$81,399,586
EDUCATION PROGRAMS	172	\$25,933,967	\$0	\$25,933,967
PRESERVATION AND ACCESS	211	\$24,443,906	\$426,000	\$24,869,906
PUBLIC PROGRAMS	189	\$29,207,689	\$308,350	\$29,516,039
RESEARCH PROGRAMS	322	\$15,852,521	\$126,950	\$15,979,471
CHALLENGE GRANTS	83	\$0	\$8,806,092	\$8,806,092
DIGITAL HUMANITIES	73	\$8,369,371	\$64,430	\$8,433,801
A MORE PERFECT UNION	28	\$2,678,137	\$0	\$2,678,137
AGENCY-WIDE PROJECTS	8	\$637,265	\$0	\$637,265
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,212</b>	<b>\$188,136,242</b>	<b>\$10,118,022</b>	<b>\$126,237,329</b>

FOOTNOTES:

1) New grants, supplemental awards on previous years' grants, transfers to other agencies, and program contracts. Also includes grants from the CARES Act supplemental appropriations.

2) Totals include obligations for new grants, supplemental grants, program contracts, and other program contracted and program-related purposes. Included are awards that are (a) made by NEH using appropriated funds, including funds appropriated to the A More Perfect Union special initiative, (b) made by NEH using funds contributed by nonfederal entities.

3) Totals include definite program funds used to match gifts.

Note: Detail may not add to totals due to rounding

## THE YEAR IN REVIEW

In fiscal year 2020, the National Endowment for the Humanities awarded \$198,254,264 to 1212 humanities projects through seven funding offices (Education Programs, Preservation and Access, Public Programs, Research Programs, Digital Humanities, Challenge Grants, and Federal/State Partnership). After reviewing the grant recommendations of 2,267 peer-review panelists and a 26-member presidentially appointed council, the chair of NEH made all final decisions on the awarding of grants.

FY 2020 began in the fall of 2019, before the societal effects of the COVID-19 pandemic were even imagined. The year would bring many challenges and opportunities for expanding participation in the humanities.

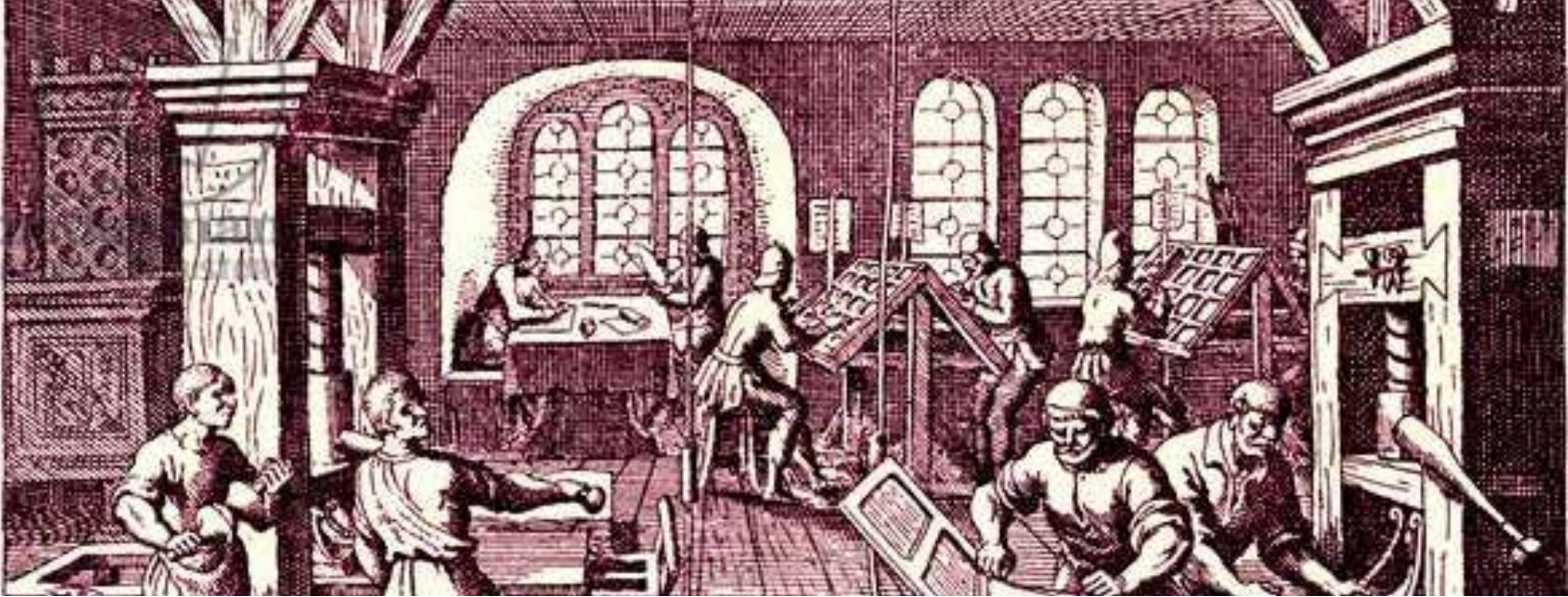
By the time the spring meeting of the National Council on the Humanities was to be held on March 19 and 20, 2020, the Endowment had pivoted to remote work for its staff and held its first council meeting via teleconference. Proudly, NEH didn't miss a beat—its staff transitioned to telework with few hitches, and its work continued without pause. A great debt is owed to NEH's talented IT team, a dedicated human resources office, and an agile program and administrative staff able to quickly stretch their knowledge and skills.

Soon, NEH was tasked with awarding an extra \$75 million in supplemental funding to assist cultural institutions affected by the pandemic as part of the \$2.2 trillion CARES Act economic stabilization plan. The first round of NEH CARES grants were awarded in June 2020, as \$40.3 million in funding went to more than 300 institutions, spanning all 50 states and the District of Columbia. NEH received more than 2,300 eligible applications from cultural organizations, requesting more than \$370 million in funding. Approximately 14 percent of the applicants received grants. Among them were nonprofits that desperately needed a lifeline, such as the American Civil War Museum in Richmond, Virginia, which was able to retain its 25 staff members, and schools in South and North Dakota that expanded Lakota language e-learning resources. Others used grants to transition to online programming and outreach, like the Reginald F. Lewis Museum of Maryland African American History & Culture that was able to devote staff to create an online version of its exhibition on the experiences of runaway slaves. Others dealt directly with the history of pandemics, such as Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory's humanities center that used oral histories to compile biomedical histories and responses to pandemics since the flu epidemic of 1889–94.

The exceptional work of NEH continued during the spring and summer, as seen through its grants and products. The NEH-supported book *Sweet Taste of Liberty: A True Story of Slavery and Restitution in America* by W. Caleb McDaniel received the Pulitzer Prize for History in May of 2020. In July, a two-part NEH-funded documentary titled *The Vote* aired on PBS, telling the story of the final decade of cultural and political action that led to the 1920 ratification of the 19th Amendment guaranteeing American women's suffrage. Many NEH Summer Seminars and Institutes for teachers took place virtually in 2020, although with different dynamics, challenges, and benefits—including near-perfect attendance and hands-on practice for participants incorporating technology into their classrooms.

A partnership with the Teagle Foundation was announced in September for a grant program to reinvigorate the humanities in general education in colleges and universities across the country. The initiative, called Cornerstone: Learning for Living, is funded by a joint pledge of \$7 million to support grants that will strengthen teaching and learning of the humanities on campuses.

And in January 2021, the 2020 National Humanities Medal was awarded to three recipients: educator Kay Coles James, Civil War battlefield preservationist O. James Lighthizer, and the National World War II Museum in New Orleans.



Teachers study the culture of the book during the Reformation. —Engraving of a printer's shop from Gottfried's Historical Chronicle, Frankfurt 1619, Lebrecht History / Bridgeman Images

## Division of Education Programs

The goal of NEH's Division of Education Programs is to strengthen the teaching of the humanities at all levels, from K–12 classrooms to community colleges and universities. Through intensive summer programs with recognized scholars, teachers deepen their understanding of humanities subjects. Other grant programs support the development of new curricula, other educational projects, and enhanced course content.

### 2020 HIGHLIGHTS

The University of Mississippi embarked on a curriculum project with a \$34,891 grant from NEH to build environmental literacy and engagement in northern Mississippi. The project strengthens the university's minor in environmental studies by incorporating an interdisciplinary approach to teaching seven major areas of inquiry: environmental history, sustainability, biodiversity, environmental justice, food, water, and human/nature connections. Incorporating disciplines in the humanities, natural sciences, and social sciences, the project develops new courses, as well as experiential and service-learning internships that serve as a gateway to the world beyond the university.

Montana State University Billings City College was awarded a Humanities Initiative award from NEH for \$99,792 to embed applied ethics across the core curriculum through four themes: environmental, intercultural, medical, and technological. The college is a two-year career and technical education institution, and nearly 700 of its 900 students take general education courses each semester. The project strengthens interdisciplinary study among general education faculty, generating humanities-based resources, unifying the general education curriculum, and expanding ethical reasoning for 77 percent of the school's associate degree-seeking students.

Ohio State University received \$151,278 to hold a four-week seminar for 16 higher education faculty on the history of books during the Reformation. The program focuses on religious book publishing, the "gradual reforming of the production, dissemination, and reading of books," and the spread of scientific knowledge in this period. Participants engage in close study of book production technology of the era, the history of the book as an academic discipline, and the uses of printing during the Protestant and the Catholic Reformations.





An archive in New Hampshire preserves its resources related to Teacher in Space Christa McAuliffe, who was killed during the Space Shuttle Challenger tragedy in 1986. —NASA Photo / Alamy Stock Photo

## Division of Preservation and Access

Projects funded through NEH’s Division of Preservation and Access help ensure the longevity and accessibility of the nation’s cultural heritage. Much of our cultural legacy resides in books, serials, manuscripts, sound recordings, still and moving images, works of art, and digital collections at museums, libraries, and archives. NEH helps institutions preserve these collections and make them accessible to the public.

### 2020 HIGHLIGHTS

The Amistad Research Center in Louisiana received a \$302,217 NEH grant to increase access to two large sets of organizational records on African-American land ownership and agriculture in the rural south from the 1960s through the 1990s. This project completes archival processing for two targeted organizational records collections: the Federation of Southern Cooperatives/Land Assistance Fund (FSC/LAF) and The Emergency Land Fund (ELF). Largely unavailable to researchers in the past, due to their size and lack of organization, these records document an overlooked but fundamental aspect of African-American civil rights—access to land and to sustainable economic prosperity.

The New Hampshire McAuliffe-Shepard Discovery Center serves as a living memorial to the first American in space, Alan Shepard, and the teacher who died in the Challenger space shuttle disaster, Christa McAuliffe. NEH funded a \$10,000 preservation assessment of the center’s archival collection, consisting of 14,000 cubic feet of photographs, letters, scrapbooks, artworks, and other ephemera relating to the life and career of Shepard, the national outpouring of response to the Challenger disaster, and other stories of the space age. These materials are used by the center for research and exhibitions chronicling this era of science and engineering in American history, and highlight themes of discovery, pushing boundaries, tragedy, and resilience.

In commemoration of the 200th anniversary of the state of Missouri, the Spencer Art Reference Library of the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art in partnership with the Jannes Library of the Kansas City Art Institute and the Saint Louis Public Library is making information on Missouri artists discoverable online through a publicly accessible digital portal, Missouri Remembers: Artists in Missouri 1821–1951. The website, supported by a \$157,653 NEH grant, enables users to explore iconic artists like Thomas Hart Benton and George Caleb Bingham and to discover lesser-known artists who lived in or spent part of their careers in Missouri. So far, 285 artists are represented and searchable through the portal.



NEH supported an exhibition on La Malinche, the Indigenous interpreter for the Spanish conquistador Hernán Cortés.  
—El sueño de la Malinche (*Malinche's dream*), by Antonio Ruíz, 1939 © Archivo Antonio Ruíz. Image © and courtesy Galería de Arte Mexicano, Mexico City

## Division of Public Programs

NEH's Division of Public Programs supports projects that bring a variety of humanities topics to a diverse and wide audience through museum and library exhibitions, reading and discussion series, television and radio documentaries, the interpretation of historic sites, digital media projects, and history and literature programs at hundreds of local libraries and cultural organizations.

### 2020 HIGHLIGHTS

Based on recent archaeological research on Cahokia Mounds, the largest settlement of the Mississippian period and one of the most significant archaeological sites north of the Rio Grande, the Cahokia Mounds Museum received a \$250,000 award to create an app and educational materials for middle and high school students exploring the Mississippian culture. The mobile app uses augmented reality representations of the religious, domestic, and defensive structures to fill in the picture of what the 2,000-acre site may have looked like when it was populated.

A \$100,000 award to The Kitchen Sisters supported the production of the second season of their series *The Keepers*, which explores the motivations of a wide range of keepers of culture and history, such as curators, librarians, archivists, and oral historians. The project produced eight stories that aired on the podcast, *The Kitchen Sisters Present*, and on NPR's *Morning Edition*. Each episode told the story behind a different effort to collect and protect cultural traditions, such as the work of the Oglala Lakota College Archives in South Dakota, the preservation of historic notebooks by female astrophysicists from Harvard, and the efforts of Emanuel Ringelblum to create and bury 60,000 pages of writings and diaries of Jewish resisters in the Warsaw Ghetto. The project also produced 52 short "Keeper of the Day" stories distributed via social media.

Images and myths of La Malinche, a young enslaved Indigenous woman who served as an interpreter between the Spanish and Indigenous populations of Mexico in the sixteenth century, are part of the traveling exhibition "Traitor, Survivor, Icon: The Legacy of La Malinche." The Denver Art Museum received an award of \$400,000 to mount this exhibition exploring visual representations of La Malinche, her continued symbolic importance, and her influence on ideas about the role of women, indigeneity, cultural identity, and the power of language. The exhibition opened at the Denver Art Museum in February 2022 and traveled to several venues across the country.





The Cuban Missile Crisis is the subject for research on Latin American perspectives of the Cold War. —The front page of the Evening Standard, October 1962 / Maurice Savage / Alamy Stock Photo

## Division of Research Programs

NEH's Division of Research Programs supports scholarly research that advances knowledge and understanding of the humanities. Awards are made to individuals and groups of scholars for projects of significance to specific fields and to the humanities as a whole. Through grants for research, translation, scholarly editions, and archaeological work, NEH works to bring forth knowledge that has long-term benefits for humanities education and public programming.

### 2020 HIGHLIGHTS

Renata Keller, assistant professor of history at the University of Nevada, Reno, received a 2020 Public Scholars award of \$60,000 to write a history of the Cuban Missile Crisis and the Cold War as seen through the countries of Latin America, where the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. competed for influence. While the book is written to appeal to a wide public audience, it is based on Keller's deep research in the archives of Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Peru, Uruguay, and Venezuela.

The Ethiopic tradition is one of the oldest streams of Christianity, but it is rarely studied by Western scholars. Larry Niccum, professor of Biblical studies at the Graduate School of Theology at Abilene Christian University, and an international team of seven scholars, received a \$300,000 Scholarly Editions and Translations award to compile 30 early extant manuscripts of the Old Testament and digitally reconstruct how these manuscripts differ from manuscripts in other traditions (notably early Greek and Hebrew). During the three-year grant period, the team will focus on the books of Deuteronomy, Nahum, Hosea, Judges, Ecclesiastes, Zechariah, Esther, and Daniel.

Amy Forbes, a faculty member of the University of Mississippi Medical Center and associate professor of history at Millsaps College, with Patrick Hopkins, a professor of philosophy at Millsaps College, and Ralph Didlake, a professor of surgery and medicine at the University of Mississippi Medical Center, received a Collaborative Research grant of \$250,000 to support a team of scholars reconstructing the history of the Mississippi Lunatic Asylum, following the discovery of what is estimated to be the largest institutional burial site in the U.S. The Asylum Hill Project ([asylumhillproject.org](http://asylumhillproject.org)) is using the funding to support archaeological excavations, work with descendant communities, and oral history and archival research to understand life and practices at the asylum, which operated from 1855 to 1935.





A grant to the Buffalo Bill Center for the West in Wyoming is to improve the facilities of its five museums. —Bronze 2010 sculpture Bill Cody—Hard and Fast All the Way, by Peter Fillerup, gift of Bill and Joanne Shiebler

## Office of Challenge Grants

Challenge Grants programs strengthen institutional and organizational capacity for work in the humanities by awarding matching grants that stimulate private funding. Institutions and organizations in the United States support the humanities by preserving and providing access to collections, conducting scholarship and research, and developing educational programs for various audiences. Challenge Grants projects may involve building and renovating structures, such as museums and libraries, and updating the infrastructure that undergirds the humanities.

### 2020 HIGHLIGHTS

The Buffalo Bill Center for the West in Cody, Wyoming, was awarded \$500,000 to be matched with \$1.5 million in nonfederal third-party gifts. Funding goes to improving environmental and security controls at the center's five museums, including comprehensive repairs and upgrades to obsolete security systems, environmental and building management controls, and damaged roofs above collections and exhibition areas. Improvements stem from needs identified in a facilities master plan and allow the center to continue to care for both the collection and the safety of visitors, staff, and volunteers.

Holmes Community College in Goodman, Mississippi, received an award of \$231,848 to be matched 1-to-1 with nonfederal third-party gifts. Funding supports interior renovations in the college's McMorrough Library, including enhanced venues for traveling exhibits, improved accessibility, seating for talks and presentations, and a conference area for guest speakers. The improvements foster the expansion of humanities programming, not only at the college but also more broadly within the region, consistently listed as having one of the highest rates of poverty in the nation.

Michigan State University in East Lansing, Michigan, was awarded \$500,000, to be matched with \$1.5 million in nonfederal third-party gifts. This funding supports the implementation of a sustainability plan for Humanities Commons, a digital network of more than 17,000 humanities scholars. The grant funds the hiring of a lead developer and a membership manager to allow the Commons to shift away from foundation support to long-term support through scholarly organizations and institutional memberships. As a result, the university anticipates a balanced budget within five years, ensuring the sustainability of a trusted, nonprofit profile system, open-access repository, and publishing platform.



Cape Coast Castle in Ghana, a hub of the transatlantic slave trade, becomes a virtual reality experience through a grant to Indiana's Purdue University. —*Sabena Jane Blackbird / Alamy Stock Photo*

## Office of Digital Humanities

NEH's Office of Digital Humanities supports efforts to use computing tools for research and teaching in the humanities. Funded projects have involved data visualization, putting searchable archival material online, and crowdsourcing transcriptions of texts. The field is changing the ways material can be searched, mined, displayed, taught, and analyzed. These grants often facilitate partnerships with other funding bodies in the United States and abroad.

### 2020 HIGHLIGHTS

The Center for Constitutional Studies (CCS) at Utah Valley University received \$374,791 for a major expansion of its undergraduate-led digital modeling of state constitutional conventions. Building upon the completion of an interactive edition of the Utah convention records, an accomplishment enabled by a partnership with Oxford University's Quill Project, the center is adding three more state conventions from the American West. The project entails hiring five student employees to do modeling, purchasing an additional server to upgrade Quill's user-friendliness, and holding a conference to share findings and encourage other universities to model a convention.

With a \$99,755 grant from NEH, scholars from Purdue University in Indiana are developing an interactive virtual reality experience of Cape Coast Castle in Ghana, one of the most important sites out of the 40 slave castles or commercial fortresses that dot the coastline of Ghana. This immersive experience centers Africa in the transatlantic slave trade, for use by scholars, teachers, students, and the public. Intended to reach a broad audience, the project, titled "The Stayed & The Stolen," is an innovative perspective that provides critical consideration of the significance of Africa in the history of the transatlantic slave trade.

BookNLP is a natural language processing pipeline for reasoning about the linguistic structure of text of books, specifically designed for works of fiction. In addition to its pipeline of part-of-speech tagging, named entity recognition, and coreference resolution, BookNLP identifies the characters in a literary text and represents them through the actions they participate in, the objects they possess, their attributes, and dialog. The availability of this tool has driven sizeable work in the computational humanities. At the same time, however, BookNLP has one major limitation: it currently only supports texts written in English. With a \$324,874 NEH grant, the University of California, Berkeley, is expanding the platform for studying the linguistic structure of textual materials for analysis in Spanish, Japanese, Russian, and German, and creating a blueprint for others to develop it for additional languages in the future.





Nevada residents share their pandemic stories through an online gallery of images and narratives. —*Courtesy Robin McLean*

## Office of Federal-State Partnership

Through the Office of Federal-State Partnership, NEH provides general operating support awards to 56 states and jurisdictions to bring humanities education, lifelong learning, and public humanities programming to communities across the country. The Office of Federal-State Partnership collaborates with designated state and jurisdictional humanities councils to advance public understanding of the humanities while enhancing public awareness of, access to, and support for the humanities on a local, grassroots level.

### 2020 HIGHLIGHTS

The Alabama Humanities Alliance awarded a mini grant of \$1,960 to the H. Grady Bradshaw Library and Cobb Memorial Archives in the small town of Valley, Alabama, for a project titled “History Unboxed,” which commemorated the 75th anniversary of the end of World War II. It sponsored an exhibit, a lecture and film series, and a week-long History Detectives Club for students aged nine through thirteen. The library designed activities to highlight the local community’s role in the war through primary sources, such as the 1947 book *The Valley in World War II* and a 1941 film titled *Our Valley*, which focused on the area’s textile manufacturing. The next summer, the library offered “History Unboxed” as a self-paced kit, featuring an activity book with photographs and letters from Cobb Memorial Archives’ collections, and an accompanying webpage.

Alaska Humanities Forum awarded a grant to Out North for Cup’ig Gospel Songs: Preserving Music and Traditional Ways of Teaching. Nunivak Island is isolated in the Bering Sea in western Alaska, where the residents speak Cup’ig, a rare subdialect of Central Yup’ik that is in danger of extinction. The project was to preserve, revitalize, and enhance the use of the Cup’ig language by digitizing and mastering deteriorating cassette tapes recorded in the 1990s, including a version of the Cup’ig language that predates first contact. Although the project was greatly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic—travel to elders was restricted and internet access is limited in that region—143 recorded tracks on five cassette tapes were digitized and extracted and 139 tracks were saved to mp3 files and uploaded to SoundCloud for availability.

One response to the pandemic of 2020 was Nevada Humanities online project called Heart to Heart, in which a series of essays and multimedia presentations created by Nevadans highlight diverse, personal perspectives from all corners of the Silver State, reflecting on life during the COVID-19 pandemic. The program was launched in July 2020, with participants offering intimate glimpses of their lives and work, for example, reflecting on being a college student diagnosed with cancer during the coronavirus outbreak, sharing artwork inspired by dancing in a time of quarantine, and describing how a theater transformed from a traditional auditorium performance into a drive-through experience for isolated audiences.

## **MEMBERS OF THE NATIONAL COUNCIL ON THE HUMANITIES**

NEH's chair is advised by the National Council on the Humanities, a board of 26 distinguished private citizens appointed by the president and confirmed by the Senate. The National Council members serve staggered six-year terms. Council members with expired terms continue to serve until their replacement has been confirmed by the Senate and sworn in at the following council meeting.

### **Members Serving in 2020**

Kathe Albrecht  
Francine Berman  
Russell Berman  
Allison Blakely  
Keegan Callanan  
Constance Carroll  
Armand DeKeyser  
William English  
Marjorie Fisher  
John Fonte  
Claire Griffin  
Kim Holmes  
Phyllis Kaminsky  
Dorothy Kosinski  
Shelly Lowe  
Joyce Malcolm  
Adair Margo  
Matthew Rose  
Ramón Saldívar  
William Schneider  
Katherine Tachau  
Noël Valis  
Jean Yarbrough



The National Endowment for the Humanities is an independent federal agency created in 1965. It is one of the largest funders of humanities programs in the United States. The Endowment serves and strengthens our Republic by promoting excellence in the humanities and conveying the lessons of history to all Americans. NEH-supported grant programs foster scholarship and research, enrich all levels of education, preserve cultural treasures, and encourage public understanding of the humanities.

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Cover: The Cape Fox Dancers at the Sealaska Heritage Institute Celebration in 2014. An NEH grant is helping digitize, catalog, and provide online access to 540 hours of performances from the Sealaska Cultural Festivals. —*Michael Penn, Juneau Empire File*



NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE HUMANITIES



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