NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE HUMANITIES

DIVISION OF **RESEARCH PROGRAMS**

PUBLIC SCHOLARS

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

(Updated August 5, 2022)

I. Eligibility

1. I am an independent scholar (or a journalist or other writer unaffiliated with a college or university). What are my chances of receiving an award in the Public Scholars program?

This program encourages applications from independent writers, researchers, scholars, and journalists. Your chances are the same as any other applicant's. All applicants to the Public Scholars program must propose a significant book written to appeal to general audiences and must also present evidence of their qualifications, including previous publications.

2. I am a graduate student. Am I eligible to apply to the Public Scholars program?

No. Students enrolled in a degree program are not eligible to apply.

3. I am translating a book that reached a popular audience abroad. Am I eligible to apply to the Public Scholars program?

No. Translation projects are not eligible. If you are an individual scholar with a translation project, you may apply to NEH's [Fellowships](#) program, [Summer Stipends](#) program, or (if you are affiliated with an eligible institution) the [Awards for Faculty](#) program. If you are a team of two or more collaborators working on a translation project you may apply to the [Scholarly Editions and Translations](#) program.

4. I am involved in a collaborative project. Can collaborators split an award?

No. You may not divide an award. If you seek funding for a co-author, you must each submit a separate application specifying your individual contribution. NEH will ask external reviewers to evaluate each application on its own merits. For additional information on collaborative

projects, see C3 of the Notice of Funding Opportunity, under the heading "Collaborative projects."

5. I am working on a book that is primarily addressed to scholars, but it will be accessible to interested general readers as well. Is it suitable for the Public Scholars program?

No. The program supports books conceived and written for a general audience. Although proposed books may make a scholarly contribution, and may be of interest to professional scholars, such readers should not be the primary audience. Applicants working on books primarily addressed to scholars should apply instead to the NEH Fellowships or Summer Stipends program, or (if you are affiliated with an eligible institution) the Awards for Faculty program.

6. My project fits the goals of the Public Scholars program, but I have not previously published a book with a trade press or university press. Am I eligible to apply?

Yes, if you have published at least three articles or essays in general-interest publications that reach a large national or international audience. For additional information on the requirement regarding previous publications, see C1 of the Notice of Funding Opportunity (under the heading "Eligible applicants").

7. May I apply for a Public Scholars award to revise and publish my dissertation?

No. You may, however, apply to the NEH Fellowships program or Summer Stipends program, or (if you are affiliated with an eligible institution) the Awards for Faculty program.

8. My research and writing fit into the social sciences more easily than the humanities. Am I eligible to apply?

You may be eligible. NEH recognizes that there is significant overlap between the social sciences and the humanities, and its founding legislation stipulates that the agency may support work in "those aspects of the social sciences which have humanistic content and employ humanistic methods." Projects in such areas as anthropology, sociology, archaeology, linguistics, political science, economics, international relations, psychology, and geography may be eligible for the program, provided their methods are humanistic and do not rely primarily on statistical or mathematical analysis. If you are uncertain whether your project fits within the program's scope, please contact NEH staff at publicscholar@neh.gov for clarification.

II. Multiple Applications and Awards

1. May I apply for other NEH grants to support the same project that I am submitting to the Public Scholars program?

Yes. NEH encourages applicants to apply to all programs for which they are eligible. For information on other NEH programs that may be suitable, see C3 of the Notice of Funding Opportunity, under "Other Eligibility Information."

2. What if NEH offers me more than one award?

In most cases, you may accept only one award. You may not hold two or more NEH individual awards (for example, a Fellowship and a Public Scholars award or a Summer Stipend) with overlapping periods of performance or in support of the same tasks. For additional information, see C3 ("Other eligibility information") of the Notice of Funding Opportunity.

III. Application and References

1. What help is available for preparing the proposal?

NEH staff will answer questions about preparing your proposal and about your eligibility. Contact the staff at publicscholar@neh.gov. Staff members are not able to comment on draft proposals for this program.

2. How should I title my proposal? Does NEH change project titles?

Your title should be descriptive of the project, substantive, and free of specialized language. The general public should be able to easily understand it. The title should not exceed 125 characters (including spaces and punctuation).

If possible, include places and dates indicating a project's scope. For example, "Faith and Belief among New York City Catholics, 1945-1970" is clearer than "Faith and Belief in the Catholic Community."

You should provide the project title in section 6.a. of the SF-424 Application for Federal Assistance – Individual Form. This form is part of the Grants.gov application package. It is explained in D2 of the Notice of Funding Opportunity.

NEH reserves the right to re-title funded projects for clarity. If you receive an award, however, you may use your preferred title for any award products.

3. Will NEH notify me when my letter writers have submitted their letters?

Yes. NEH will notify you by email when each of your letters of reference has arrived. After Grants.gov notifies you that NEH has received your application, you may also check the status of your letters of reference by logging in to the secure area of NEH's website. For more information, see D7 of the Notice of Funding Opportunity ("Other Submission Requirements").

4. One or both of my letter writers did not receive the email from NEH requesting the upload of his or her letter. What should I do?

NEH will not send out requests for letters until approximately January 9. If, even allowing for this, one of your letter writers has not received the request, it is usually because a junk email filter captured the request or because you provided an incorrect email address (the NEH system uses the address exactly as you enter it). You may resend the link to your letter writers by logging in to the secure area of the NEH website. If you need to correct an error in an email address, please contact the program staff at publicscholar@neh.gov.

5. Is it possible to change a letter writer after the application deadline?

Yes. Contact the program staff at publicscholar@neh.gov. Indicate which letter writer you would like to replace and provide the contact information, including email address, for the new person.

6. Will NEH accept letters of reference after the stated deadline?

Yes. NEH will automatically add all letters to your file when your references upload them. However, if one or more external reviewers have already reviewed your application, it is possible that they will not take the late letter into account.

7. Does a missing letter of reference disqualify my application?

No. Your application will still be eligible for review and for an award. However, reviewers may find your application less persuasive if one or both letters are missing.

8. After the application deadline, I was offered a contract for publication of my book. May I update my application to reflect this?

No. You may not change your application or add material to your file (apart from the two letters of reference) after the application deadline has passed. If you are submitting a letter of interest or commitment from a publisher, you must include it with your other application materials prior to the application deadline.

9. How will NEH review my application?

All eligible applications receive peer review. Details about NEH's review process are available [here](#).

10. Can I see the reviewers' comments after the competition?

Yes. The notification you receive about the decision made on your application will contain instructions for requesting reviewers' comments. If your application is unsuccessful, the comments may help you revise it for resubmission.

IV. Research Methods, Sources, Documentation, and Writing for General Readers

1. I am a journalist used to conducting research through interviews and other firsthand conversation or through information-gathering on the internet. Are these research methods acceptable?

Yes, but by themselves they may not be sufficient to gain a full picture of the topic and effectively present it to general readers. You may wish to consider additional research methods, including consultation of previous publications in relevant fields, archival research, or contacting scholars in the humanities who may be able to offer useful perspective. As explained in the directions for

the "Significance and contribution" section of the project narrative, you should discuss how your project relates to previous work on the topic and how your work makes a new contribution.

2. What types of sources are acceptable as the basis of a Public Scholars project?

The program is open to projects using many different types of sources. Appropriate primary and secondary sources include historical and contemporary documents; books and other writings; artifacts and objects; literary, artistic, cinematic, or visual works; print or digital publications; other digital materials and resources; interviews; observation (including participant observation); the administration of surveys or questionnaires; and other fieldwork. The "Sources and organization" section of the project narrative should discuss your sources and research materials, how you will use them, and how they support your treatment of the topic.

3. How thoroughly should I document sources?

This program only supports nonfiction. Your documentation of sources should be thorough enough to demonstrate how you know what you are telling your reader.

If, for example, you are writing a biography, you must be careful to make clear when you are speculating about what your subject saw, heard, or thought at particular moments, and to avoid introducing detail that has no firm basis in the historical record. NEH has a research misconduct policy addressing fabrication of data and plagiarism.

4. What form of documentation should I use?

The form of documentation is up to you (and your publisher), but you should balance the demands of readability, thoroughness, and precision. Frequent footnotes may annoy the general reader and make the page look forbidding. Lumping notes together and employing endnotes may be preferable, provided you can do so without introducing ambiguity about which parts of your account are derived from which source(s). Many successful works of nonfiction for general readers use endnotes keyed to particular phrases in the text without inserting any indication in the text itself that there is a note. If the writing sample you provide is drawn from the proposed book, it should demonstrate how you will handle the documentation of sources or contain a note explaining this. If the writing sample is not drawn from the proposed book, you should indicate how you will handle the documentation of sources in the "Final product and dissemination" section of the project narrative (as explained in the Notice of Funding Opportunity).

5. I am a professional scholar. Should I consider applying?

Yes, but keep in mind that in accordance with Review Criterion 1, peer reviewers will judge your proposed book on its appeal and intellectual significance for general readers. Superficial changes to academic writing, such as reducing the number of notes or changing their format, or including explanations of specialized terms, are usually not sufficient to satisfy this criterion. Academic writing is often motivated by the perception of "a gap in knowledge." But to attract the general reader, a more urgent motivation for the book will probably be required. Not all gaps in knowledge are of equal consequence, so consider other ways to explain why your topic matters and to develop the framing of your project. In presenting your material, consider such things as effective use of storytelling, reining in the length of chapters, limiting the number of examples you give, and returning regularly to the big picture. Scholarly debates and the names of scholars

and their books are often best relegated to the notes and bibliography if you mention them. If your project is not well suited to the Public Scholars program, you may wish to consider applying instead for an NEH Fellowship or Summer Stipend.

V. Award Information and Allowable Periods of Performance

1. May I hold an award part-time or combine part-time and full-time work during the period of performance?

Yes. You could, for example, work half-time for six months (which is the equivalent of three full-time months) and full time for three months. Your award would be $30,000 (6 full-time months at $5,000 per month). For more information, see B2 of the Notice of Funding Opportunity ("Summary of funding").

2. May I apply for a period of performance shorter than six months?

No. The minimum period of performance is six full-time months (or the equivalent amount of part-time or full- and part-time work). NEH will reject applications requesting a period of performance shorter than six months.

3. Can I count work done before or after the period of performance toward the minimum requirement of six months of work?

No. The minimum period of performance is six full-time months or the equivalent. You may not count work done before or after the period of performance toward this requirement.

4. Does the period of performance have to be continuous?

Yes. You must work at least half-time on your project throughout your period of performance.

5. I plan to work full time on the project with the exception of one month when I need to reduce my effort to half time. Would this constitute a break of continuity in my period of performance?

No. You may hold an award on a part- or full-time basis (or part time for some months and full time for other months). This would constitute a continuous period of performance. The dollar value of your award would be reduced to reflect your switch to half-time status during that month.

6. If I am working part-time on my project, can I hold the grant longer than 12 months? For example, could I work half-time for 24 months?

No. Your period of performance may not exceed 12 months, even if it includes part-time work.

7. Why do you notify successful applicants so close to the start of the academic school year? If I win an award, I will need time to arrange for someone to take over my classes.

The timeline takes into account many factors, including the meeting schedule of the National Council on the Humanities. If NEH offers you an award, you may start your period of performance as late as September 1 of the year following your notification. If you have an academic position and you know you will need time to make special arrangements in the event you receive an award, consider applying for the award at the deadline that falls approximately 21 months prior to the start of the academic year in which you plan to hold the award.

VI. Submitting Your Application

1. How do I know if I have submitted my application successfully?

It is your responsibility to confirm that Grants.gov and subsequently NEH have received your application. You can use the Grants.gov Track my Application tool to check the status of your application. For more information, see D4 of the Notice of Funding Opportunity ("Submission Dates and Times").

2. Why must I provide a UEI (Unique Entity Identifier) number for my institution? Isn't this a program for individual applicants, not institutional applicants?

The Public Scholars program is indeed for individual applicants, not institutional applicants. Nevertheless, individuals affiliated with a U.S. institution must provide the institution's UEI number to ensure that institutions' names are listed correctly in the NEH database and on the cover sheet that we attach to your application before forwarding it to external reviewers.