Office of Digital Humanities

2025 Institutes for Advanced Topics in the Digital Humanities
Webinar for Prospective Applicants to the Funding Opportunity
Recorded December 4, 2024

Script for the Webinar

Slide 1
Hello, I'm Jennifer Serventi from the NEH Office of Digital Humanities. I'm pleased to present some information today on NEH's Institute for Advanced Topics in the Digital Humanities. This webinar is specifically intended for those interested in potentially applying to direct one of these opportunities. This webinar will cover the February 2025 deadline.

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In this webinar, I will give an overview of the program, including a discussion of the program's mission, important dates, and eligibility. I will then provide some information about planning and writing your application, while discussing the program's review criteria and sharing some tips and reminders. I will then outline the NEH review process. I'll share some additional resources and contact information.

Starting with the program resource page on the NEH, you can find more specific information about the program under the About the Program section.

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NEH's Office of Digital Humanities has offered this program since 2008. The Institutes for Advanced Topics in the Digital Humanities or the Institutes for Advanced Topics, as I'll be referring to them during the webinar, support national or regional, meaning multistate, training programs for scholars, humanities professionals, and advanced graduate students to broaden and extend their knowledge of digital humanities, broadly conceive.

Another way to think about this program is that it is focused on funding regional or national continuing education opportunities in some aspect of the digital humanities.

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Scrolling further down that Program Resource page, you'll find specific information about What's New for 2025. But the short answer is not much.

You will see that we've added an introductory one-paragraph "Nature of the request" section in Attachment 2. Narrative to help the peer reviewers focus on what's being proposed.

We have clarified our expectations for how project can be evaluated. We can provide additional guidance in the "Impact and evaluation" section of the Attachment 2. Narrative and, for repeat

directors, provided additional information about what you need to include in Attachment 6. Evaluations

And finally, we have added a required Attachment 7. Data management and sharing plan to the application materials and have provided instructions in that Notice of Funding Opportunity.

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Let's talk about that Notice of Funding Opportunity. It is the most important document for this application process. It lists deadlines and the required materials for a complete application package. Make note of all of these requirements such as page length and size and whether something is required or conditionally required. It details what we can and cannot fund.

So start by downloading and reading the notice of funding opportunity formerly known as the application guidelines. This document is also known as the NOFO, so when I refer to the NOFO throughout this recording, this is what I mean.

Please carefully read, highlight, underline that document. It's your guide to preparing an application. It really is in your best interest to follow the instructions so identify all of the required components and attachments in the package. Your application will not be considered eligible for review if it's late or if you don't satisfy all of the requirements as described in the NOFO.

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We also have prepared a Frequently Asked Questions document for this program. Follow that link under Step 1 Review of the Application Instructions section of the program resource page. Read that document too.

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So back to the NOFO. Once you open the PDF document, this is what you'll see. It's a long document with lots of details. I'm going to call your attention to some sections that are really key.

At this stage, it's also a good idea to contact your institutional grants administrator in your office of sponsored research or sponsored programs or development office—whoever at your institution is responsible for external funding, particularly federal funding. They will go to Grants.gov and download the entire package. They will be submitting this application for you on behalf of the institution via the Grants.gov. Some institutions, particularly larger institutions, require long lead times for submission of applications to federal awards, with multiple levels of internal review and sign off. You always want to start these conversations early.

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Let's talk a bit about eligibility. The Institutes for Advanced Topics makes awards to institutions rather than to individuals. Awardee institutions must be in the United States or

one of its jurisdictions and be a nonprofit organization recognized as tax-exempt under section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code, an accredited institution of higher education (either public or nonprofit), a state or local government or one of their agencies, or a federally recognized Native American Tribal government.

An individual may serve as a Project Director (or PD) or co-PD on only one Institutes for Advanced Topics application per deadline and may not submit identical applications (or applications with significant overlap) to multiple NEH programs at the same time. Keep in mind, though, that institute faculty can appear in more than one proposed application to this program.

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The Program Description section of the NOFO provides more details about the mission and goals of this program.

The possible topics for the professional development offering that can be supported by the funding opportunity are vast—we've listed some possible ones in the Notice of Funding Opportunity. But they are just possibilities.

But we want you to identify a coherent, exciting, and creative topic appropriate for this program. We want to see applicants combine significant humanities questions and topics with challenging digital methods and approaches and propose a training or professional development opportunity for your intended audience. And offer it in the most appropriate format for the target audience—whether it be online, in-person, and hybrid.

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For those of you who have considered this program in the past and seen previous NOFO, you'll notice that the Program Outputs and Outcomes are new subsection of the Program Description. In fact, this section will be in all of the NEH's Notices of Funding Opportunity going forward.

But it just re-enforces the intent of this program which is provide training to build cadres or cohorts of humanities scholars and professionals with knowledge of specific digital humanities methods, tools, and platforms.

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It's also important to see what we do not fund. It is detailed in the notice of funding opportunity, but I will mention a few highlights. In particular, this program does not fund recurring and established conferences and professional meetings, as well as projects that fall outside of the humanities. And with all NEH awards, we do not support the promotion of a particular political religious, or ideological point of view; advocacy for social or political action; or lobbying.

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You might also want to be aware of and explore the Institutes Program from the Division of Education Programs and the Education and Training program from the Division of

Preservation and Access—two other funding opportunities from the NEH that support continuing and professional development.

And after reviewing those programs on the NEH website, if you're not sure which program is most appropriate, please do not hesitate to get in touch with NEH staff to help you determine the best fit.

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 The maximum amount available per award in $250,000 in outright funds. And that's inclusive of both direct and indirect costs. So keep that number in mind as you consider the scope of your activities.

Costsharing is not required for this program.

You certainly don't have to ask for the maximum amount. Particularly if this offering would be your first, consider starting small…ish to establish a track record of success for future work.

Awards can also be for up to three years, but don't have to be. Do give yourself and your team enough time in the period of performance for all of the activities that need to happen before, during, and after the actual training offering.

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I also want to mention an exciting opportunity to work with the National Library of Medicine of the National Institutes of Health. This federal institution has wonderful digital collections and knowledgeable staff and are interested in helping humanities scholars using digital methods to explore them in new and innovative ways. If you think that your proposed Institute for Advanced Topics might benefit from access to these collections along with expertise from their staff, please get in touch with Jeffrey Reznick from the National Library of Medicine.

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I also want to call your attention to the language in the Notice of Funding Opportunity about this program's participation in the NEHwide Humanities Perspectives on Artificial Intelligence. The Institutes for Advanced Topics in the Digital Humanities is one of the designated programs. We are interested in supporting continuing or professional development opportunities that help participants seek to understand various aspects of artificial intelligence—how this technology works—and address the ethical, legal, and societal implications of AI.

So if you and your colleagues, including those outside of your institution, are experts in this area, and want to share that knowledge and know-how with others in a regional or national setting, consider applying to this program.

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A reminder of some key upcoming dates. The next deadline for 2025 is February 13 and applications must be received by 11:59 p.m. Eastern time through the grants.gov portal.

I know that you all are living and working in different time zones, but for the purpose of submission, these applications need to be in before midnight US eastern time, February 13, 2025.

The ODH team also is happy to read your drafts.

We have some guidance in the Notice of Funding Opportunity about the steps for submitting drafts. Please send them to odh@neh.gov which will appear on the next slide. This program has just one deadline. We must receive them by December 12, 2024 for the February 2025 deadline.

And even if you are not able or do want to submit a draft for review, please do not hesitate to contact us. We are always available to schedule a time for conversation.

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Let's turn back to the Notice of Funding Opportunity and in particular the section on preparing the various required application attachments. But before you begin writing, remember to review these review criteria. Ensure that your materials specifically address these criteria. We'll also return to these review criteria a bit later in this webinar.

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So the Institutes for Advanced Topics in the Digital Humanities has a number of required and conditionally required components detailed in the Application Component Table. You can use as a checklist as you're preparing the different sections of your application. This tells you whether a particular section is required or conditionally required and specifies any page or paragraph limits. Pay attention to the page limits please any longer and the application will be declared ineligible. And no one wants that.

Be particularly mindful of the words: should and musts in the NOFO.

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Attachment 2 is the narrative. It's the heart of your application The first section of the narrative is new this year. The one-page Nature of the Request will help our panelists understand right at the beginning of the proposal what it is your proposing for whom.

The second component of the narrative is the intellectual significance of the proposed Institute for Advanced Topics for the humanities. You are applying to the National Endowment for the Humanities, so it should not be a surprise to you that we ask you to make the case for the humanities significance.

Set the stage for why this Institute for Advanced Topics at this time.

It's okay if it is for a particular group of humanities scholars or professional focused in a certain area—you don't have to promise an Institute for Advanced Topics that will appeal to everyone.

Understanding who the target audience is early in the proposal, helps the reviewers consider how the proposed institute structure and curriculum will meet that audiences' needs.

Next is Curriculum and Work Plan. Now that you've made the case for the topic, demonstrate to the reviewers that you've identified an effective structure and curriculum for effectively addressing this topic.

So why this topic delivered in this way? Describe what will happen before, during, and after the offering.

Provide information about the specific topics, themes, methodologies, approaches, or tools that will be considered during the Institute for Advanced Topics.

Demonstrate that you have enough time allocated for each of the topics to be considered. Is there an appropriate mix of readings and discussions combined with hands-on activities? Are there times for participants to work alone or in-groups to try out what they've learned? Don't overwhelm the participants with such a huge menu of highly technical topics that they will become frustrated—be thoughtful of how the schedule flows from one topic or activity to another.

In the Participants section of the narrative, you'll want to reinforce your arguments for your intended audience that you made previously in the Significance section. But this is your opportunity to provide additional details.

And describe how you will target your publicity to reach this audience? If you want to particularly ensure that previously underserved audience learn about this opportunity, how will your reach them? Be specific—which media and outreach channels are you proposing to target?

Remember the participants must be drawn from a national or regional—meaning multistate pool. This is not the right program for a professional development opportunity limited to a single state or institution.

Describe how the institute will be accessible to persons with disabilities.

How will you and your leadership team manage the application process? And what's your process for selecting participants?

And a brief word for any directors of previous Institutes for Advanced Topics that may be tuning into this webinar—you have additional requirements to address in this section. Don't forget to attach the final evaluations from all of the participants from your previous offerings as Attachment 6.

On to the Institutional Profile. In this section, you'll be able to make the case for the host institution. So why this topic now for these participants at this institution?

What special facilities can you offer? Will participants will provided special access to technology labs or special collections appropriate for the institute topic? Where will the Institute for Advanced Topics meet—in the library's digital scholarship center? In a classroom?

If your proposed offering includes a residential component, provide information about the various housing accommodations that will be made available to the participants. Remember—the individual needs of participants can vary widely, so consider how you might allow for a variety of options.

In the Staff, Faculty, and Consultants section, you want to convince the reviewers that you have assembled the right team members and visiting faculty to provide a deep, rich and thoughtful experience in the digital humanities for the participants.

Describe their roles and the responsibilities of each team member and make sure they appear in the Attachment 3, the Work Plan and Course Outline.

It is very appropriate to include a project coordinator, in addition to the project directors, as a member of the project team. That person helps to ensure that the logistics for the Institute for Advanced Topics are well-executed.

These Institutes for Advanced Topics are opportunities for participants to meet and work with leaders in a particular area of the digital humanities, so assemble your team thoughtfully. And remember, visiting faculty members may come from outside of the United States.
And don't forget to include biographies and letters of commitment for the project team and visiting faculty as Attachments 4 and 5.

The final section of the narrative is about the impact and evaluation of the proposed professional development opportunity. And a hallmark of this program its long tail.

How will the community developed during these Institutes for Advanced Topics be sustained? Are there plans for conference panels, the development of open educational resources, special issues of journals? Are you making available captioned videos of any keynote addresses or lectures?

We've also tried to provide additional suggestions as to what to include in this section about your evaluation strategy (before, during, and after it takes place), including the use of qualitative and quantitative measures, and how it will involve the participants and the participating organizations.

Don't forget to describe scholars and professionals who were not able to participate still benefit from any materials produced for and by the Institute for Advanced Topics. These opportunities are funded by US tax dollars, so we want the widest possible primary and secondary audiences to benefit.

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In Attachment 3, the Work Plan and Course Outline, you have about 5 pages to provide additional details along with a schedule of readings and activities. Help the reviewers envision the proposed experience. Be sure that it is clear who on the team is doing what when. Everyone in your List of project personnel attachment should also appear somewhere in this attachment. The sample narratives that we have in the Program Resources section on the landing page have some excellent examples of how various successful applicants addressed this requirement.

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For those returning directors, Attachment 6 is where you include the final evaluations from your previous offering. You don't need to include any formative evaluation that occured, say, daily. Don't overwhelm the reviewers of your current application. Rather help them understand what worked and what didn't work in your previous offering and any responses that you may have in this new application.

We also now require a separate attachment, Attachment 7, for a Data management and sharing plan. Do not forget it. It is not optional. We've provided some guidance on how to think about data management for this type of project.

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And now, a few words about the budget and budget justification. Many pages in the Notice of Funding Opportunity are devoted to instructions for preparing the budget.

Panelists are looking to ensure that proposed budget is reasonable is relation to the proposed activities and the anticipated results. Remember the maximum amount that you can request for this program is $250,000 in outright funds, although many projects request much less.

So the budget must correspond to the work plan in the narrative section, and any accompanying appendices.

Reviewers will be looking at the budget and they will be asking does this budget align with the project's overarching goals and specific planned activities? Are adequate resources allocated for project staff relative to the accompanying tasks?

Is the method for compensating participants clear? Are they slated to receive a straight honorarium? Or per diem and travel expenses? Both are permissible—just be clear in describing your method of calculation.

Use that budget justification to discuss any institutional policies regarding compensation rates or even allowable time for project directors. We recognize that each institution has their own way of working and that's often invisible for reviewers.

This is an excellent opportunity to work closely with your office of sponsored research or accounting office to ensure that everyone is on the same page.

And finally, be sure to use the correct indirect cost rate and apply it correctly when calculating the budget. It can be rather technical, but your colleagues in your office of sponsored research or programs will be able to help you.

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Earlier in this webinar, I recommended that you look at the review criteria as you begin to prepare the narrative. Remember, these are the review criteria, and only these, that the peer panelists will use to evaluate your proposals.

Turning to the program's five review criteria, these appear on pages 28-29 of the NOFO. I'll go through all of these, noting that each of them has a number of subcriteria that you will want to address in your application materials.

We have keyed the review criteria to sections of the application, so before you submit the application, be sure to compare these criteria to your application to ensure that you've addressed them completely.

Review Criterion 1. Intellectual significance and potential impact. No matter how cool the proposed topic is, if you haven't made the case for the intellectual significance of the proposed professional development offering in the humanities and don't have a clear sense of your audience for it, we can't fund it.

Review Criterion 2. Conception, definition, organization, and description of the program. This is where the rubber hits the road, so to speak. If you have a fantastic idea for a professional development offering in the digital humanities, but haven't nailed down the details, panelists will not be inclined to recommend your proposal for funding. They want to have confidence that what you are proposing can actually happen.

Review Criterion 3. Participant selection. Once again panelists will be looking for details in your narrative to give them confidence that you have thought carefully about the audience for this proposed offering and have a clear idea about how to publicize it to that audience and select them for the institute.

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Number four is the Appropriateness of the institute team and the host institution. This review criterion addresses the why you and your team and why the applicant institution. And the final review criteria is Criterion 5: Impact, evaluation, and budget
It will be in your interest to:
- Make sure that the budget and budget justification align with the goals and activities outlined in the narrative and related attachments
- Set aside adequate resources for team members commensurate with their contributions to the project, and

This is criteria also where panelists will address your evaluation plans and the data management and sharing plan.

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Let's talk a bit about what happens once you submit the application. The review process for Institutes for Advanced Topics follows a similar timeline as most other NEH grant programs. The process starts when an applicant begins preparing a proposal and then submits it using Grants.gov by the program deadline. Once NEH staff have ensured applications are eligible, complete, and compliant, we assign them to panels and assemble a peer review panel, typically with 5 members. After the panel, NEH staff identify which proposals will be recommended for funding based on peer review input and the amount of funding available.

All of the recommended applications across NEH then go to the NEH National Council on the Humanities, which meets 3 times a year, typically in March, July, and November. After the council meeting, the NEH Chair makes final funding decisions. The final step is notifying applicants as to whether their projects will be funded. The program will be presented at the July 2025 Council meeting.

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As we conclude this webinar, a few final reminders. Start now. Get those letters of commitment from your visiting faculty members, pull together the proposed curriculum, start to map out the budget.

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In terms of additional resources, I want to remind you about the Notice of Funding Opportunity and the frequently asked questions documents.
Review the sample narratives from successful applications, keeping in mind that the applications requirements have changed, so follow our current instructions.

You can also follow the links found under Step 1 of the Review drop down menu to a list of the current offerings and to the NEH database of funded projects to see what we've funded over the 16 years of this program.

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You'll want your application to be clear and concise. Be sure that someone not familiar with your project can figure out what it is you want to do in the first paragraph. given that the peer review panel will likely be composed of some humanities scholars in your field, but also some outside your field as well as computer and information scientists, librarians, archivists, and other humanities professionals. So write for a broad, yet educated, audience.

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As mentioned previously, we always encourage potential applicants to start the process earlier than you think you need to and to work closely with your office of sponsored research (or equivalent office) as the person serving as the Institutional Grant Administrator (or IGA) will be providing a lot of the key information on the application and will actually submit the application via Grants.gov.

Budgets for Institutes for Advanced Topics can be quite complicated, often with funds for visiting faculty members, for participants, and sometimes for partner institutions that are

servicing as subrecipients. Your colleagues in your office of sponsored research can help you prepare the budget correctly, using the correct indirect cost rate. They are professionals and want to help you.

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Finally, you can reach out to a program officer. The contact information for the Office of Digital Humanities is shown here. Staff in ODH and elsewhere at NEH are happy to assist you. Please reach out to us.

We do want to hear from you. You can email us. Thank you so much for your time today. Good luck with writing your applications, and we hope to hear from you soon.