HumanitiesDC

HISTORY
LITERATURE
LANGUAGES
ETHICS
PHILOSOPHY
ARTS APPRECIATION

General Operating Support Reviewer Training – May 2025

Outline

- Overview of HumanitiesDC and the humanities (& humanities exercise)
- Overview of General Operating Support grant
- Timeline of grant review process
- Weighted review criteria
- Overview of scores and comments
- Evaluation questions
- General evaluation tips/instructions
- Implicit bias
- Timeline of post-review period

Who We Are

Hillary Steen
Community Grants Manager

- Oversees HumanitiesDC's grants portfolios
- Main point of contact for review process

hsteen@humanitiesdc.org
202.770.3077 x 812

Leah Gage
Community Grants Manager

- Oversees HumanitiesDC's grants portfolios;
- Additional point of contact for review process
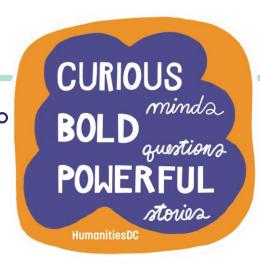
lgage@humanitiesdc.org
202.770.3077 x 815

Lois Nembhard
Director of Grantmaking + Programs

- Oversees HumanitiesDC's Community Grants and Public Programs

lnembhard@humanitiesdc.org

What We Do

At HumanitiesDC, we connect curious people with bold questions to the powerful stories of our vibrant city. Through our grantmaking and public programs we help build a community where all can engage in intellectual exchange, reflect on our connected stories and celebrate our various cultures.

- Public Programs – Community Journalism Program, Culture Series, DC Oral History Collaborative (DCOHC), Fellowships

- Community Grants - $1M to 60+ grantees across 8 wards

Our Guiding Principles

- **Equity-driven:** We strive to center equity principles across our organization, internally and externally. This focus helps us broaden access, inclusion, and diversity in all our work to create structures that share power and core decision-making.

- **Community-powered:** As an organization based in the humanities, we recognize that our work would not be possible if not for the strength and experiences of all the people who make up our city. Our aim is to build authentic relationships and collaborations that reflect the vibrancy of our community.

- **Creative vision:** We relish opportunities to venture into unexplored territory. We strive to bring a creative and entrepreneurial spirit into our collective work with the hopes of continuing to explore how the humanities can act as a connector across all our lives.

- **Amplifying voices:** We seek to use the power and resources made available to us to create spaces and opportunities to celebrate and share Washington, DC stories, culture, and experiences, especially those traditionally marginalized or left out of mainstream narratives.

- **Acting with integrity:** We are a curious group, excited to always better our grantmaking, public programs, internal culture, and community partnerships. We strive to be reflective, accountable, and ever-learning as we foster transparency across our organization and build mechanisms for feedback.

What are the Humanities?

Human stories allow us to navigate the complexities of our past, present, and future. The humanities help us learn from history and literature, empathize through language and comparative religion, and challenge our assumptions with philosophy and ethics. They are a compass for interpreting what humans make and exploring what makes us human.

They help us understand...
- ❖ Our past, through history, anthropology, & archaeology
- ❖ Our story's public expressions, through literature, language, and art history/theory/criticism
- ❖ Our story's meaning, through ethics, philosophy, comparative religion, and the law

Link to the National Endowment for the Humanities Definition

Is it humanities?

[Organization] nurtures the creation, development, and production of new works; fosters the development of professional and young artists and their collaborations across cultures and musical languages; and engages audiences in the creative process to promote a deeper understanding and critical appreciation of the transformative power of music-theatre. Our core audiences include local DC professional and young artists who are dedicated to collaborating across disciplines to develop new works and local DC audiences who are interested to engage in the creative process of music-theatre and how it relates to other disciplines in the humanities. For all our projects we bring in an educational component to enhance the audience experience.

For each project, we measure success by how our projects fulfill our mission. Any new project must include all three parts of our mission and include an educational component.

• We develop new works - including opera, musicals, cabaret, jazz works, multi-media, and cross-cultural works where music, word, and often dance-movement co-join – through research, writing, composing, and workshops. The bold, mostly original works respond to and tell stories that resonate with our times

• We explore new ways of making sound, offering on-going training to composers, librettists, singer-actors and other music-makers that develop their stylistic capacities

• Our commitment to partnerships and civic engagement builds long-standing relationships. We forge strategic alliances with like-minded, forward-thinking partners, both local and international, to support each other's work and strengthen the Washington community as a whole

• We produce and present in neighborhoods and venues that relate to our creative work and are easily accessed and resonate with our audiences such as "DC Emancipation and the Right to Vote" in Georgetown's Black Cemeteries and historic churches, Mexican Cultural Institute in the Latino heart of DC. We are fortunate that the DC region is blessed with interesting spaces and the rich diversity of its communities.

• Engage with audiences in conversations through sharing initial ideas, open rehearsals, workshops, and post-show discussions to cultivate ever-more critically appreciative audiences of our work and music-theatre throughout the Greater Washington area.

Is it humanities?

[Org]'s mission is to develop youth into informed, empowered and active citizens who will promote a just and equitable society. We do this by engaging youth in Action Civics, an authentic and transformative learning process built on youth voice and youth expertise. By opening up spaces for democratic education and youth participation, we strive to prioritize the needs of under-resourced communities and schools. We are passionately committed to giving all youth – especially those who feel disempowered, marginalized, or unheard due to systemic barriers – equal access to 'a seat at the table' and the clear understanding that their perspectives are relevant and valued. Our programs aim to create a full youth voice infrastructure where young people's ideas and civic leadership are highlighted and included in school & citywide policymaking. These include school-based programming and direct youth work:

School-Based & Teacher-focused Programs: In our Issues to Action curriculum (ITA), students identify and research issues in their communities, analyze the root causes of issues, develop solutions, and mobilize support for their cause among peers, school staff, and neighborhood leaders – all skills essential to Humanities.

Citywide Youth Councils: Students work like think-tank researchers taking a deep dive into a public policy problem, developing policy recommendations and actions to present to the city leaders, and then partnering with the leaders to implement a few of the best policy ideas.
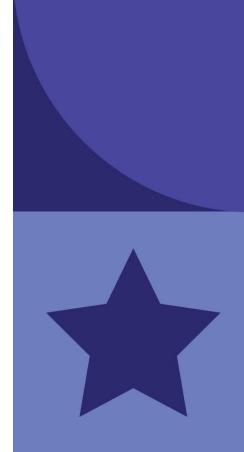
Summer Fellowships: Our SF program places 20 students in paid internship positions. Students are placed in the offices of local and appointed officials for 20 hours/week in partnership with the Summer Youth Employment Program. In addition to working in public officials' offices, student interns attend weekly [Org] leadership training and develop critical thinking, public speaking, and teamwork skills.

General Operating Support Grant

- Eligibility: DC humanities-focused non-profits with annual budgets of $2 million or less. Not open to individuals or fiscal sponsors

- Maximum Award: $25,000

- Project period: July 1, 2025 - April 30, 2026

- Funding is unrestricted and intended to support an organization's general operations

- Link to RFP, link to workshop recording

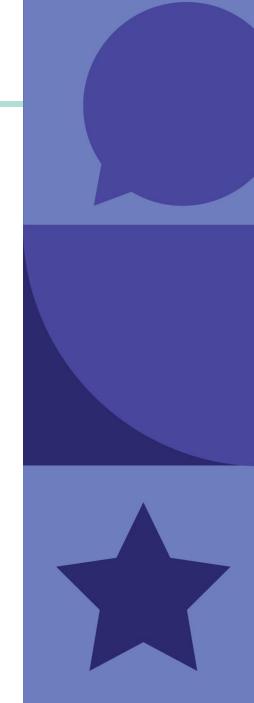- In 2025 we received 26 eligible applications and will fund 12

Grant Review Process

1. Review assigned applications for any conflicts of interest

2. Submit conflict of interest form

3. Read through each application (evaluation is only based on application, no outside info)

4. Write out quantitative scores and qualitative comments

5. Finish all evaluations by May 29* at 12pm

6. **Virtual, required panel meeting.** Panel number and panel meeting date were provided in email from May 8. During this meeting, you'll discuss applications with others on your panel. After the meeting, you'll have 24 hours to revise evaluations based on the conversation.

7. Revise evaluations (if necessary)

8. End of review period

Deadline to Finish Reviews

Thursday, May 29 at 12pm (noon)

Weighted Review Criteria

Organization Profile and Programming (50%)

- The applicant organization's mission has an explicit humanities focus; the organization's programming and/or track record includes the humanities as a significant part of their work.

- The applicant demonstrates that their programming is successful and responds to the needs and desires of its core audience.

- They describe how they define and measure success and demonstrate that their programming has been successful; if a new organization, they include an explanation for their program model and a plan for evaluation.

- The applicant's work plays an important role in the humanities landscape of DC.

Weighted Review Criteria (cont'd)

Community Outreach, Access, and Inclusion (50%)

- The applicant clearly defines and demonstrates an understanding of the community it serves.

- The applicant has programming and services that are inclusive and accessible. This includes, but isn't limited to, financial, geographic, demographic, cultural, and physical inclusion and accessibility.

- The applicant's leadership and staff represent its core audience and the community it serves. Or, the applicant offers a reasonable explanation for why it does not and/or includes plans to increase representation.

- The applicant describes effective methods to reach and engage its target community.

Scores

- Scores are from 1 to 10, with 10 the highest possible score

- Scores must match comments!

- Staff will calculate weights of your scores. If you want to do these calculations, you can plug your scores into the score calculators included in each evaluation form. Staff will use these same formulas in our own calculations.

- Staff will send out final, weighted scores before the panel meeting

- Staff mostly use the scores to determine grantees

Comments

Comments:
1. justify/match scores

2. help staff with funding decisions

3. are given to applicants if requested

Measuring Success*

The goals or impacts of the project are achievable and clear. The applicant has a clear plan for assessing the project's success.

• While the outcomes are not fully measurable, the applicant has set targeted attendance goals with thorough plans to monitor foot traffic and website traffic.

• Since there are also plans to survey attendees, the description would benefit from details on how the surveys will be physically collected and evaluated.

• Since this is a 4-part series, the plans to assess the event's success would be strengthened with evaluations following each event to inform the success at the following.

9,508 characters left of 10,000

Measuring Success Score*

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |

Example of a strong comment & score

Measuring Success*

The goals or impacts of the project are achievable and clear. The applicant has a clear plan for assessing the project's success.

clear plan

9,990 characters left of 10,000

Measuring Success Score*

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |

Example of a comment that does **not** match the score

Comments, cont.

Effective comments are:	Poor comments:
• Concise, easy-to-read and understand • Presented in constructive manner • Specific to the proposal • Reflect your experience and expertise • Realistic about capacity of applicant • Highlight application's strengths and identify areas for improvement • Relevant to each section of the application being reviewed • Analyze rather than summarize or paraphrase	• Make derogatory remarks • Question applicant's honesty or integrity • Offer or ask for irrelevant or extraneous information • Offer limited explanation or detail • Reflect personal biases • Penalize an applicant based on a perceived lack of need • Copied over or summarized applicant's answer without analyzing • Comments don't reflect scores

Time for the evaluation questions!

Link: [How to access/review evaluations in grants portal](#)

Introduction, Instructions, Reviewer Panel

Scoring Guide:

- 9-10: Proposal has *ideal* responses for the stated criteria. A truly outstanding fit in most, if not all, respects.
- 7-8: Proposal has *good* responses. Answers are strong overall, though possibly raise a few concerns.
- 4-6: Proposal has *adequate* responses. Answers have strengths, but they don't meet the highest standards outlined in the review criteria.
- 1-3: Proposal has *unsatisfactory* responses. Answers don't sufficiently address the questions.

Remember to note your reviewer panel on each evaluation!

Evaluations should be primarily based on applicant's responses to the listed questions at the top of each weighted section, but also review the rest of the application for more context.

Mission and Programming

- Is the organization's mission focused on the humanities? Is their track record?*

- What does success look like, and is their programming successful? Or, do they at least have a plan for how to evaluate success?

- Is their programming related to/reflective of their core audience's needs?

Significance to DC

- Why does the organization exist in DC rather-than somewhere else? How is its mission uniquely connected to DC?

- Who accesses this organization's work, and who is it important to?

- If this organization ceased to operate, what might be lost?

Community Outreach, Access, and Inclusion

- Did the applicant describe the core audience/community served? What evidence did they provide that they are reaching their intended audience?

- Is programming inclusive and accessible?
  - Ex: free or discounted programming, publicly accessible events, efforts made to reach a broader public

- Do leadership and staff reflect the core audience/community served? Do they have plans to increase representation?
  - Team members local to and part of the community they serve
  - Board and/or advisors' experience/expertise reflect mission of the organization
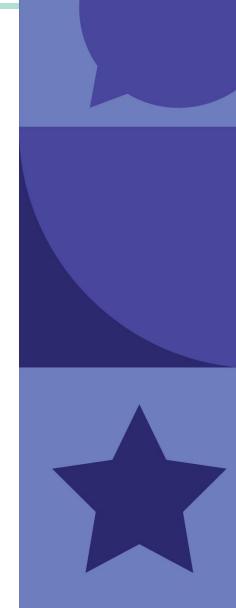
Optional Comments

- Additional Comments for Applicant: overall thoughts or suggestions, would also be shared with applicant if they request comments

- Additional Comments for HumanitiesDC: will not be shared with applicant. This is to note general or specific thoughts/concerns/questions just for staff about the application

Application Questions Not Visible to Reviewers

- How applicant found out about grant opportunity
- Financial statement
- Budget narrative
- Accessibility section
- Authorized signature

General Tips and Instructions

- Start evaluations as early as possible to finish by deadline. You'll have time after the panel meeting to revise scores/comments. ***Tell us as early as possible if you need to drop out!!***

- Don't be overly harsh or provide too much leeway, which is a tricky balance!

- Provide constructive comments: "amazing response" or "unclear plan" --> "applicant has a clear plan for assessing program success" or "recommend providing more details about how events are marketed to the intended audience"

- Be honest, trust your experience and expertise. Ensure your feedback is reflected in the comments.

General Tips and Instructions, Cont.

- Don't be concerned about how many projects we can fund.

- Don't compare applications to each other; instead, try to honestly and consistently apply scoring rubric to the responses. Think of each application as standalone.

- Don't conduct your own research about an applicant/project; focus on what's in the application

Implicit Bias

- Attitudes or stereotypes that affect our understanding in an unconscious manner.
- Activated involuntarily, without awareness or intentional control. Can be either positive or negative. Everyone is susceptible

How implicit bias can influence your review:
- Prior knowledge or experience with applicant (not necessarily conflict of interest)
- Personal experience with project's content, history, location, audience, etc.
- Thoughts about writing style, polished "good grammar"
- Opinions on sex/gender, race/ethnicity, sexuality, disability, etc., as well as project content

Implicit Bias, cont.

To limit implicit bias:

- You are a reviewer, not a critic
- Focus on content of application as written
- Frame comments as recommendations
- Don't compare applications to each other
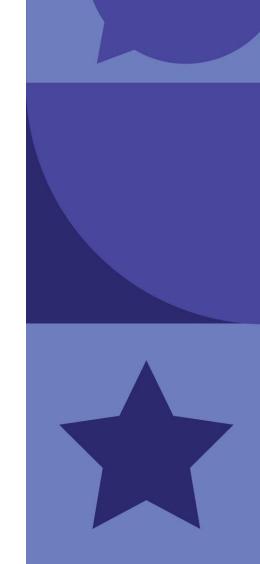- Adhere to review criteria

Chicago Beyond Mirror Tool: useful to think about how to recognize bias during reviews

MIRROR TOOL

MIRROR TOOL	COMMON TYPES OF BIAS						SCORING RUBRIC			
	Beauty Bias	Affinity Bias	Halo/Horns Bias	Confirmation Bias	Contrast Bias	Additional notes	Criterion #1	Criterion #2	Criterion #3	Criterion #4
Application name/#	I notice...	I notice...	I notice...	I notice...	I notice...	I notice...	Insert score	Insert score	Insert score	Insert score

Post-Review Period

- Staff discussion to choose highest-scored applications in each panel up to how much budgeted for each grant program

- Staff review of likely grantees, including budget review, GuideStar/Charity Navigator, internet search for news, concerns from reviewers

- During/after the staff review, slate of selected awardees are sent to board with overview of full review process. Board votes on process, NOT grantees.

- Applicants are notified; grant acceptance and disbursement process, and full list of grantees sent to reviewers, then publicly acknowledged.

- **$125 honorarium per grants cycle to reviewers who submit all evaluations before the deadline (May 29 at noon) AND attend the panel meeting. More information to come.**

- **Open House July 9 – Save the Date!**

HumanitiesDC

Hillary Steen, Community Grants Manager

grants@humanitiesdc.org