



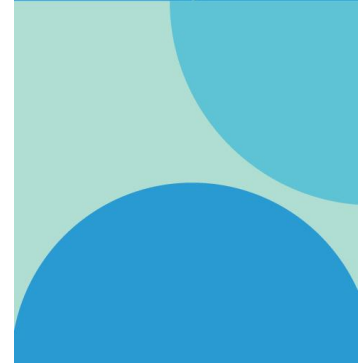
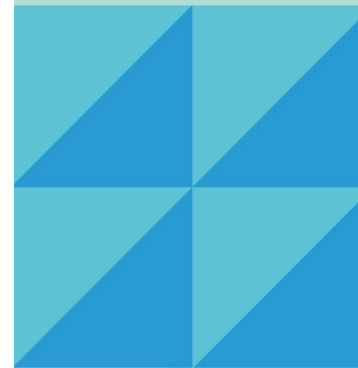
**HumanitiesDC**

**HISTORY**  
**LITERATURE**  
**LANGUAGES**  
**ETHICS**  
**PHILOSOPHY**  
**ARTS APPRECIATION**

# Outline

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- Overview of HumanitiesDC and the humanities
- Overview of Community Culture & Heritage 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

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**Leah Gage**  
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**Lois Nembhard**  
Director of Grantmaking + Programs

- Oversees HumanitiesDC's Community Grants and Public Programs

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# 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.

- Curated Public Programs – Community Journalism, Culture Series, DC Oral History Collaborative (DCOHC), Fellowships
- Community Grants – ~\$900,000 to 50+ grantees across 8 wards; ~10 grants awarded in each category



# What are the Humanities?

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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.

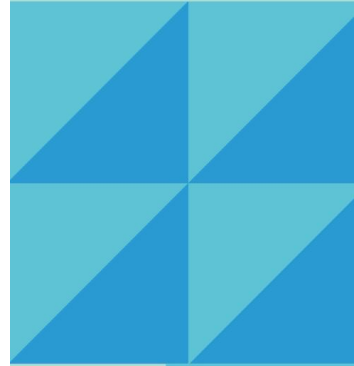
They help us understand...

- ❖ 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](#)

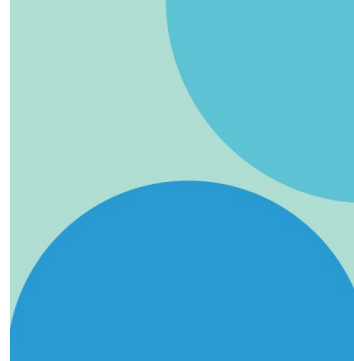
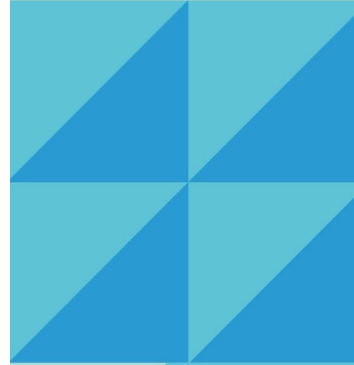
# Community Culture & Heritage

- Eligibility: DC-based individuals, community groups, nonprofit organizations
- Maximum Award: \$10,000
- Project Period: May 1, 2026 – April 30, 2027
- Projects focus on grassroots interpretations of DC history and culture by funding local historians, culture-bearers, and individual humanists who wish to capture and preserve the culture and narratives of their local communities through public humanities projects
  - Ex: panel discussions, multimedia projects, educational materials, videos, lesson plans, tours
- Grantees have a final output by the end of the project period, and they take part in a public showcase in Spring 2027
- [Link to RFP](#), [link to workshop recording/slides](#)
- In 2026 we received 102 eligible CCH applications and will fund ~10



# Fiscal Sponsorship

- Individuals may choose to apply through a fiscal sponsor, but fiscal sponsors are not required for this grant. Fiscal sponsors must meet same eligibility requirements.
- Fiscal sponsors assume all financial and legal obligations:
  - Application submission
  - Funding acceptance
  - Interim and final report submissions
- No more than 10% of the grant award may be used to pay a fiscal sponsor
- Applicants applying through fiscal sponsors must use the fiscal sponsor's organization account within our grants portal
- Eligibility requirements noted in RFP still apply to the fiscal sponsors



# Grant Review Process

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1. **Read list of assigned applications to see any conflicts of interest**
2. **Submit onboarding form**
3. **Read through each application**
4. **Write out quantitative scores and qualitative comments**
5. **Finish all evaluations by March 23 at 12pm**
6. **Virtual, required panel meeting.** Panel number and panel meeting date were provided in email from February 27. 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

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**Monday, March 23  
at 12pm (noon)**



# Weighted Review Criteria

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## **Project description, feasibility, and timeline (25% of score)**

- Clear and detailed description of the proposed project and its activities
- Timeline for completing a public-facing project is within the grant period and is feasible.
- Thematic connection to the humanities
- Achievable goals are described, and applicant has a clear plan for assessing project success

## **Connection to DC (25% of score)**

- Demonstrated significance to the DC community
- Strong thematic connection to Washington, DC or specific DC communities, neighborhoods, or stories

# Weighted Review Criteria

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## **Public Engagement (25% of total score)**

- Clear & effective plan for reaching the target audience
- Inclusive, diverse, equitable, and accessible (defined broadly to include financial, geographic, demographic, cultural and developmental accessibility); explanations for exceptions to this expectation are provided.

## **Capacity and Personnel (15% of total score)**

- The Project Director is capable of directing the project, as demonstrated by experience and role definition
- Humanities Scholar has relevant qualifications and their role is clearly defined
- If other team members are identified, reasoning for their involvement and an explanation of their role(s) is provided

## **Budget (10% of total score)**

- Use of funds is clearly described
- All expenses are directly tied to project activities and are allowable

# Scores

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- Scores are from 0 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

# Scoring Guide


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- 10: Applicant fully responded to all questions in detail, and/or their response meets or exceeds all of the stated review criteria.
- 7-9: Applicant responded to most questions, and/or their response meets most of the stated review criteria. Responses lack some details.
- 4-6: Applicant responded to some questions, and/or their response meets some of the stated review criteria. Responses lack key details.
- 1-3: Applicant responded to few questions, and/or their response meets few of the stated review criteria. Responses lack most details.
- 0: Applicant didn't respond to any questions, and/or their response doesn't meet any of the stated review criteria. Responses are not detailed at all.

# 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.

clear plan

9,990 characters left of 10,000

Measuring Success Score\* 

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
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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
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Example of a strong comment & score

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

# Comments, cont'd

<b>Effective comments are:</b>	<b>Poor comments:</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Concise, easy-to-read and understand</li><li>• Presented in constructive manner</li><li>• Specific to individual proposal</li><li>• Reflect your experience and expertise</li><li>• Realistic about capacity of applicant</li><li>• Highlight application's strengths and identify areas for improvement</li><li>• Relevant to each section of the application being reviewed</li><li>• Analyze rather than summarize or paraphrase</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Make derogatory remarks</li><li>• Question applicant's honesty or integrity</li><li>• Offer or ask for irrelevant or extraneous information</li><li>• Offer limited explanation or detail</li><li>• Reflect personal biases</li><li>• Penalize an applicant because you feel the organization does not need the money</li><li>• Copied over or summarized applicant's answer without analyzing</li><li>• Don't reflect scores</li></ul>

# Effective Comments

The role of the Project Director is clearly stated. Her credentials include being a writer with extensive work in the public schools and community working with youth. The Humanities Scholar is credentialed as a book critic for prestigious organizations. Other team members are defined and described as qualified for their roles in the proposed project.

The application did not provide any specific metrics related to success but indicated plans to conduct internal audits, focus groups and attendance tracking within meetups/workshops.

The budget is well-structured and appropriate for the project's scope. The allocation of funds to honoraria, salaries, audio editing, transcription, and website development is reasonable and directly supports the proposed activities. The budget narrative offers a clear justification for each expense. However, further detail on the "Other" category (\$3,350) would provide greater transparency.

## Strengths:

- This project is very place-based/focused on DC.

## Areas for Growth:

- There is no mention made of how this documentary will be shared with the community or how they will benefit from its creation.

- The activities section also doesn't outline what the actual activities although the timeline does mention a potential collaboration with Howard University to present some of this in class.

# Poor Comments

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Very good overview.

[copies entire applicant response into comment] Unclear.

Unclear who the target is. Mentions trying to help kids struggling with depression. **No coherent response provided.**

**I have a lot of concerns about how this was presented,** and the fact the director and scholar were seen as such identical roles as the decision to copy/paste the exact answers in full in both places. This included a significant portion about a topic 'outside of my area of expertise' that does not include a conclusion or reaction to a presentation that feels relevant to the inclusion in this answer. **Overall, feels very off.**

No complaints

- clear plan but lacking details of specific

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# Time for the evaluation questions!

Link: [How to access/review evaluations in grants portal](#)  
(listed as Instructions for Completing Intake Form on website)

# Introduction, Instructions, Reviewer Panel

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## Scoring Guide:

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- 0: Applicant didn't respond to any questions, and/or their response doesn't meet any of the stated review criteria. Responses are not detailed at all.

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.

# Activities

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- Are the activities clearly outlined and relevant to the project?
- Will funded activities only happen during the grant period?
- Does the timeline make sense? Is it too ambitious, or too vague?

# Connection to the Humanities

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- Is there a clear connection to the humanities?
- Prompts we give applicants are below. They might not answer every question:
  - How will you use the humanities to support DC residents' efforts to explore and navigate the history, culture, relationships and topics that shape our community?
  - Why did you choose to explore these humanities disciplines?
  - How do the humanities help you or your project ask or answer big questions that help us understand our world?
  - How do the humanities enable your project to make connections or build empathy across communities?
  - How will the humanities allow your project to challenge assumptions about DC or its residents?
  - Additional connections or contributions to the discipline

# Measuring Success

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- Applicants decide for themselves what success looks like and how to measure it
- Are the goals/impacts of the project achievable?
- Did the applicant explain how they plan to assess the project's success? How clear is this plan?
- Does the proposed assessment actually measure what the applicant has defined as success?

# Connection to DC

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- Will the project be significant to DC residents, culture, history, etc.?  
Ex) not just a festival that takes place in the city, but includes DC filmmakers

# Outreach Strategy

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- Does the outreach strategy make sense? Is it feasible?
- Is the plan directed at the target audience?
- Can the target audience really be engaged in the project  
Ex) q+a sessions, survey feedback
- Are partners/collaborators mentioned specifically, or referred to generally?  
Ex) “will reach out to community organizations” vs. naming specific organizations and their roles
- If organizational partners are identified, do they fulfill key roles?  
Ex) marketing firm

# Inclusion and Accessibility

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- Is the applicant thoughtful about accessibility?  
Ex) discounted tickets, metro-accessible locations, virtual options, open to the public\*
- Why is this project geared to this target audience?
- If an applicant proposes a festival/event/conference/meeting/gathering and/or they are an organization with 15+ staff members, they answered questions about ADA Compliance. These responses are reviewed by HumanitiesDC staff, not reviewers. The applicant may allude to this plan throughout the application.

# Capacity and Personnel

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- Project director in charge of overall project, shapes goals and activities. Might be hands-on and/or delegates to others.
  - Ex) background in project management, leadership, or with direct experience in project output
- Team and collaborators work with project director on overall project or specific tasks. Not required!
  - Ex) multimedia expert, assistant, exhibit curator
- Humanities scholar/community expert is knowledgeable about the proposed subject matter to inform the project design, implementation, and/or evaluation. Academic, life, professional experience, etc.
  - Ex) college professor, knows everyone on the block, research experience

Does it make sense why these people were chosen to work on the project? Are their roles explained? Do personnel have the necessary expertise to carry out the activities?

# Budget Clarity and Allowability

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- Does the applicant explain the budget clearly?  
Ex) these funds will pay the project director and curator
- Are there any unallowable expenses?
- Lump sums are ok, some applicants provide calculations

# Allowable/Unallowable Expenses



**100% of awarded grant funds must be applied to direct program costs, including...**

- Salary/wages
- Stipends/honoraria
- Consulting Fees
- Recording equipment
- Virtual presenting platforms
- Space rental
- Project supplies and equipment
- Project transportation
- Project publicity and promotion
- Fiscal sponsor (up to 10% of award)

**The grant program CANNOT fund:**

- Any non-program-related costs
- General operation expenses (rent, overhead/indirect, utilities)
- General office supplies
- Food and beverages
- Tuition and scholarships
- Debt reduction
- Re-granting
- Funding to government agencies

# Optional Comments

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- 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

# Number of Hours

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- Last section of evaluation
- Use whole numbers and/or decimal points  
Ex) 1.5 hours, 0.75 hours, etc.
- Helps HumanitiesDC track reviewer hours for our own records and funding requests. May also help you track your own volunteer hours.

# Application Questions Not Visible to Reviewers

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- How applicant found out about grant opportunity
- Previous grants experience with HumanitiesDC
- Contact info other than the applicant's
- Proof of age/DC residency for individual applicants
- Fiscal sponsor letter of confirmation
- *ADA Compliance* section
- Authorized signature

# General Tips/Instructions

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- 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!
- Be honest. If you truly believe that an applicant's response is "amazing" or "terrible", reflect that in your score/comment. Don't be concerned about how many projects we can fund.
- Don't compare applications to each other; each application should be reviewed as standalone
- Don't conduct your own research about an applicant/project; focus on what's in the application
- Look for consistency throughout the application. Ex) if a specific activity is mentioned in the description, is it referred to in the timeline? Reflected in the budget?



# Implicit Bias

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- 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.

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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](#): resource to help recognize bias during reviews

# Post-Review Period

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- 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, internet search for news, concerns from reviewers
- During staff review, slate sent to board with overview of full review process. Board votes on process, NOT grantees.
- Funding decisions are sent out approximately ten weeks after application deadline, and full list of grantees sent to reviewers
- Grantees receive funds approximately two weeks after notification
- **\$125 honorarium per grants cycle to reviewers who submit all evaluations before the deadline (March 23 at 12pm) AND attend the panel meeting. More information to come.**





**HumanitiesDC**

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