

THE FUTURE OF NEH PROGRAMMING

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I found the proceedings of this conference interesting this morning. Now I can consider rural librarianship from the social scientist's perspective. Hopefully this conference will enable us to determine what implications the humanities hold for the rural environment and identify the factors that distinguish rural areas from urban areas.

I think it is important that we become aware of these differences. The Endowment is aware of differences between programs that are implemented in urban and rural settings. On the other hand, it is important to understand that the humanities are the humanities no matter where they are. And they should be used in the process of discovering who we are.

I looked over the program a number of times before I was able to decide what you wanted me to discuss. The basic issues seemed to be the future of The Endowment and the future of the humanities. I will address these issues, but I feel that it is important for us to understand what the humanities are, what The Endowment is, what we do, and what we look for in libraries.

Let me talk first about the business of humanities programming because that is what most librarians are interested in. In order to do that, I must first talk about the disciplines that comprise the humanities. The humanities incorporate the following disciplines:

language (both modern and classical); linguistics; literature in all of its aspects; history; juris prudence; philosophy; archaeology; comparative religion; ethics; and the history, criticism, and theory of the arts. I often hear the phrase, "If you compose it, play it, or paint it, it's the arts. If you talk about doing these things, it's the humanities." Aspects of the social sciences which are humanistic in nature or use the canons of the humanities are also included. These, then, are not necessarily the applied social sciences. If you learn how to use a scalpel or sew a stitch, that is applied science. If, on the other hand, you talk about the history of medicine from Hippocrates on down, that can be a concern of the humanities. We have a programs at John Hopkins' Hospital that deals with both doctors and patients, in the area of ethics and choice. This issue has received national attention due to a court case now pending regarding the life or death of a sick child. That choice is of the humanities; it is not of medicine.

The second part then is the study and sharing of the humanities that we call programming. I think this is what we are here to discuss today. It is essential that programs offer an interpretation of the humanities. If we merely display objects without making an attempt to interpret them, we do not get an idea of how the humanities influence man. Next I would like to discuss ways in which The National Endowment for the Humanities fulfills its mission. The Endowment has several divisions. I will speak about each one of them because I think it is important for you to know about

them.

The Division of Education is specifically concerned with the creation of curricula. It certainly answers the charges levelled by the report "Nation at Risk," just put out by the Commission on Education. This document tells us something--that we must learn to read and write by first learning to speak. We must then speak with a sense of history, philosophy, and ethics because these are the choices that fall into our hands.

My first connection with The National Endowment for the Humanities came about through a grant made to the College Entrance Examination Board. At the time we were setting up programs in libraries throughout the country that dealt with curricula specifically designed for independent study/guidance projects. We do not think that education happens only in a classroom. The Endowment seeks to promote learning through nontraditional educational methods. Most of the funding from the Department of Education will go to educational institutions because they have experience in designing curricula in the humanities. But much of the funding goes to support non-traditional educational programs such as those presented in libraries. We do not see many grant proposals like this coming to us, but I think that rural libraries would be capable of sponsoring this type of programming.

The next division, that of Fellowships, handles proposals involving independent study/research and teaching. It funds grant requests submitted by both individuals and groups. Libraries have tapped these funding sources, but few of them have been rural

libraries. Programs have been funded at large libraries that have research collections like the Huntington, the Newberry Library, and the Folger-Shakespeare Library. These libraries are storehouses of knowledge, and their collections deserve to be studied. I think we should start small in rural libraries. It is important to note that libraries are probably the institution of most note for The Endowment.

The next division that you should know about is that of Research and Research Collections. This particular division should interest librarians. Although we think of research as an "ivory tower" activity, it is much more than this. In fact, the largest part of research is probably bibliographic in nature. Bibliographies are compiled in libraries. A great deal of attention has been given to networking and cataloging functions that stem from places like The Library of Congress and The Inland Consortium of Research Libraries (which has about 125 members). The NEH constantly supports these kinds of projects so that these bibliographic records will be available to all in the very near future. Rural libraries will have access to these records just as Harvard, Yale, and Columbia do at present. This is an important thing to realize. We are not just busy pumping money into libraries for programs, but also for education, and for research.

The next division, the State Programs Division, fulfills an important role on the national scene. It is the federation of these kinds of monies that allows the states to act independently upon what they discover to be their needs. The State Programs

Division has probably as much money as any of the divisions at the NEH, but they dole it out in smaller amounts because they deal with specific states and want as much activity to go on with that money as possible.

I am affiliated with the next division, the Division of General Programs. I don't want you to forget the Office of Challenge Grants at the NEH. This is a place where librarians can go for operating money, money for bricks and mortar and acquisitions. But these funds have to be specifically designed to fulfill the need of the humanities within libraries. We want these funds to be focused on promoting the humanities, but we will give you money for bricks and mortar so books can be housed.

The Office of Challenge Grants works only on a three-to-one match basis. For every three dollars that you raise from non-federal sources to implement a proposal approved through this office, we give you one dollar. That is very important to some of the larger urban libraries. I think it would be important to you also, but we get very few applications from the smaller rural libraries even though we know that they could raise the three-to-one match. So, we are trying to encourage you to apply for these funds.

The Division of General Programs consists of three entities. The first is the media program. The media program funds discreet projects for television and radio. But this is done with the understanding that the programs will be aired through public broadcast systems. This division does not fund projects designed to produce

media for the classroom. It does not fund the production of slide/tape presentations to be shown in library halls. It is designed specifically for those things that will be produced to go on public broadcast channels. These programs do not have to receive national exposure. There are small public broadcast units which are regional or statewide, as well as the national systems like PBS.

The second subdivision within the Division of General Programs is that of museums. Museums not only house material culture and art, they also interpret these artifacts. The artifacts aren't just displayed, they are interpreted through the use of catalogs, tours, and signs. I might add that libraries formerly received program funding through a separate subdivision of their own. But this category has been merged with the museum subdivision.

The third subdivision within the Division of General Programs is called Special Projects. Special Projects has three offices: The Office of Program Development, The Office of Youth Projects and Younger Scholars, and the Office of Libraries. Libraries apply to us using the same guidelines as those used for Program Development, but their office has a discreet amount of money to be presented through the grant-making activities of the NEH. Special Project funds are used to produce imaginative programs that present all areas of the humanities to the general public. These projects introduce and interpret the humanities to the public at large.

One objective of this conference is to encourage you to explore the possibility of making the ideas stored between the covers

of the books housed in your collections come alive for the general public. The humanities involve the search for connections and relationships in human history. They include the study of ideals, values, and experiences which provide the context for understanding both the past and the present. Both human and material resources are used in studying the humanities. The materials used include books and other texts as well as art and artifacts. The human resources include those professionals whose lives are devoted to the study of the humanities.

Programming in the humanities must deal with humans. The humanities include those branches of learning that deal with the way human beings feel, think, and behave and with what they consider to be important and valuable. The humanities differ from the arts which focus on the product as well as creative skills. The humanities differ from the sciences which concentrate on describing man's environment. The humanities have as their central concern the meaning and the purpose of human life and freedom, the relationship between man and the state and the moral consequences of human action. Those are the themes we want programming to reflect.

I would like to make a point here. A humanities scholar is someone who is involved in teaching or research in some area of the humanities and is usually employed by an academic institution. The terms "humanist" and "humanitarian" should not be confused. We get proposal after proposal that has this as its central problem. Human welfare and service does not represent the humanities. When officials at NEH use the word "humanist" they are speaking

of one who is trained in one area of the humanities, they do not refer to someone who is motivated by the desire to promote the good of mankind.

Now that I have discussed the mission of the various divisions of the NEH, I would like to offer a few remarks about The Endowment in general. The National Endowment for the Humanities was created by Congress in 1965 to support projects of research, education, and public activity in the humanities in recognition of the fact that the study of the humanities can make our country a more civilized nation. The humanities are not necessarily concerned with improving the quality of life; they do not involve changing the government to make conditions better. The humanities do require us to study the past and to assess it thoughtfully in order to form our own conclusions.

Public programs in rural and urban settings alike should work toward accomplishing one or more of the following objectives: fostering an appreciation of cultural works; illuminating historical ideas, figures, and events; or promoting an understanding of the disciplines of the humanities. Grant proposals should focus on one of these three objectives.

When I mentioned that the humanities include the interpretation of cultural works, I was not referring to artifacts. I referred to cultural works such as music and paintings and the illumination of historical ideas, figures, and events. Simply stated, we would call that history. History includes biography. Biography by nature is history. I think it is important to point that out.

The third programming objective seeks to promote an understanding of the disciplines that comprise the humanities. This opens a lot of doors but not, we hope, Pandora's boxes. Programs may focus on any specific discipline.

Programs may involve any or all of the three areas mentioned above. We are not active programmers at The National Endowment for the Humanities. We support those people who are active programmers. I am excited when I receive imaginative proposals dealing with ways to present the humanities to the general public. Libraries hold "pride of place" as an institution of the humanities. They house our books, records, and thoughts. How can these materials be accessed? As librarians, you should be concerned with facilitating access to these materials. Our mission is to encourage reading, discussion, and interpretation of humanistic themes.

I would like to discuss some proposals which have recently been funded that demonstrate successful projects in rural areas. In 1980 a project was funded for the rural libraries of Vermont. This program encouraged citizens to read five books chosen specifically to address a particular theme. This particular project was not modeled on the Chicago Great Books idea. It did not encourage people to read Plato or Dante or Shakespeare. The books chosen were modern novels written by prominent authors, several of whom were from Vermont.

How did this program work? The librarians in these towns remarked to their patrons, "We are going to read these books. Would you like to join us?" The grant bought paperback editions to give

away. This program was loosely based on the RIF (Reading Is Fundamental) program. Scholars from nearby academic institutions in both New Hampshire and Vermont, met together and planned ways of presenting this program in a curriculum mode. They went to rural areas to hold discussion groups. These discussion groups were not very successful to begin with. At first only four or five people came to the discussions. After they discovered that the discussions concentrated on literary themes, more people began to attend. Attendance rose to forty or forty-five. In one instance, an entire town of 150 people attended the book discussions at the local library. They asked the librarian to arrange for baby-sitting. The librarian decided that this presented an ideal opportunity for storytelling.

This program was very popular and we have been trying to find out why it was ever since. We have to come to grips with the fact that people do want to read. They want someone to provide direction in these discussion groups, and they want to talk about their own experiences as they relate to what they have read.

The discussions were planned. Specific questions were raised but then the channelled discussions became wide-open. This program was so popular that it was tried again in many of the rural towns in Massachusetts and New Hampshire. With that in mind, we have since given \$962,000 to the American Library Association to discover if they can do this on a nationwide scale.

So, our support of this program grew from the \$22,560 granted for the original proposal to \$950,000 to see if this type of

programming could be implemented on a nationwide scale. This money was granted to support projects in small towns in rural America, not projects for Manhattan, Pittsburgh, or Philadelphia.

Another successful project sponsored in Vermont involved a study of genre literature. Patrons read westerns and learned to distinguish between good books and mediocre books. They learned to judge books by evaluating the strength of the plot. They found that good books did not just deal with tales of white horses and black costumed cowboys, but that they communicated the values of American life. Use your imagination to pull people together. Offer them alternatives to mass market fiction, introduce them to solid books dealing with the humanities, and get them excited about new ideas.

Let me tell you a little about the review process used at The National Endowment for the Humanities because it is different in its approach from any other foundation. A preliminary proposal generally arrives on my desk and that is the first step. We give advice to those who submit these informal queries and to those who submit formal preliminary proposals. The deadlines for these kinds of proposals vary. The program that I represent has two deadlines a year, usually in February and August. It takes a proposal about six months to be processed after that deadline. These deadlines apply to full-blown proposals.

After the formal proposal comes to us, it is reviewed by a panel of peers. These panels usually include humanities scholars but they may also include other resource people like librarians.

Every panel that reviews proposals submitted by libraries includes a librarian. If the proposal involves designing exhibits, a museum representative is included on the panel. If a proposal calls for the production of slide-tape shows or videodiscs, we bring in media people to sit on the reviewing panel (even if the media is not intended for public broadcast).

The scholars who sit on these reviewing panels are selected for various reasons. Some are selected because they have expertise in some aspect of public programming, others are selected because of their expertise in subject areas. Panels generally include literature and history scholars.

After the proposals have been reviewed by the panels, we send them to specific outside reviewers. Again, these outside reviewers include scholars, librarians, museum officials, or media people. We consider the panel's comments and the reviewer's recommendations. Then our staff sifts all of the evidence and tries to draw some conclusion as to whether a proposal should be recommended or not.

Our recommendations go before the National Council on the Humanities, a twenty-six member group appointed by the President. Members serve overlapping terms of six-year duration. They sift through all of our recommendations, read the proposals, meet to discuss them if necessary, and make recommendations to the Chairman. The Council meets four times a year (in November, February, May, and August). After one of these meetings has been held, we let you know whether or not you will receive a grant.

Proposals are submitted to the Chairman, Dr. William Bennett,

who makes the final signature on the awards. That process takes us about six months. This explains why awards are made six months after the application deadline. The Guidelines state that you may submit proposals "for projects beginning after a certain date." We need that six months from the date of submission to complete this strict review process. No proposal is approved until it has gone through this review process.

I want to direct your attention to the Guidelines. There is an inelligibility section which lists what we don't fund. We do not fund acquisitions except as they relate to the programs that you are planning. This question comes up every day: "Can you give me some money to buy books?" No, I can't. The Guidelines elaborate on this a little. We do not fund special collections or original cataloging. We try to point that out in the Guidelines. Nor do we fund networking, online services, microphotography, computer access, or preservation. Some conservation is funded by research when necessary, particularly in the larger libraries that have manuscript collections in need of preservation.

Eligible projects are ones that are geared toward encouraging the general public to read, understand and appreciate the best books. Your ideas on how to accomplish this are as valid as mine. It is no accident that some of the most popular projects supported by the NEH, such as reading groups, lectures, exhibits and other kinds of interpretive programs are very successful. Your patrons want to participate in these programs, but often they just don't know how to become involved. Rural libraries should be one of

the primary access points because they represent the only network in America that is constant. They are the only facilities in most small towns that offer this type of cultural activity. They provide more than just everyday information. They provide thought-provoking information and that is important.

According to Chairman William Bennett, in many places books are merely filling space. The ideas they contain are not filling heads. If you can encourage patrons to read these books by engaging in programming, the Endowment will have accomplished its objective.

QUESTION FROM THE AUDIENCE:

Q. I would like to know if support for these projects is limited to American communities or does The National Endowment for the Humanities provide support for projects in communities outside of the United States?

A. The Division of General Programs funds projects only in the continental United States and its territories. However, some research projects may fund international travel. I have a proposal before me now from Simmons Graduate School of Library Science that will involve producing a videodisc on the "Emperor I" digs in China. So, we do support some international travel. But the proposals must originate from the United States or one of its territories. We have done a number of projects in Puerto Rico.