



Helen and Martin Schwartz Prize Nominating Statement

Michigan Humanities (MH) is pleased to present the program series and grant opportunity, Bridging Michigan, for consideration for the 2020 Helen and Martin Schwartz Prize for Outstanding Public Humanities Programming within the category of programs that were developed or adapted as a result of COVID-19.

Program Description

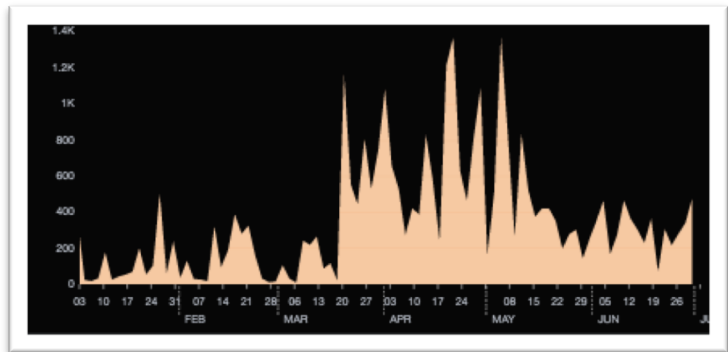
2020 has presented humanities councils with physical challenges that impact engagement and reach, and shortened timelines for determining how to best adapt to new settings and respond to national trauma. The pandemic's impacts pushed a field of work that thrives on personal engagement to video screens and Zoom calls. At Michigan Humanities (MH), an unprecedented commitment to internal diversity, equity, and inclusion work was underway, as was the successful MI Humanities at Home online initiative. With those foundational pieces in place, MH was prepared to act in summer, 2020, by creating *Bridging Michigan*, an online conversation series and funding opportunity centered on the history of systemic inequities, their current impacts on health, education, and Indigenous rights, and the ways that the arts and humanities are active parts of creating real change. Through this comprehensive, mission-driven response to COVID-19's challenges, Michigan Humanities is engaging new audiences across Michigan and more than six other states by delivering action-inspiring, perspective-shifting conversations and providing funding for transformative community work.

Introduction: Project Aims

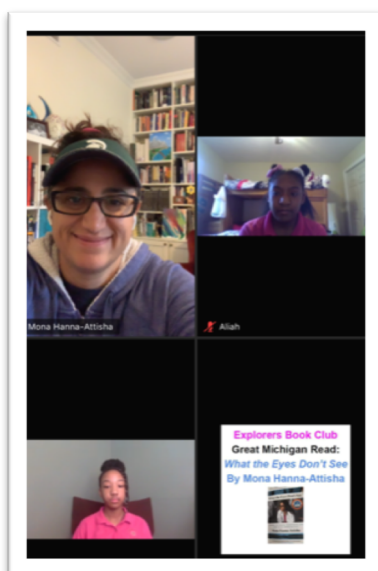
Michigan Humanities truly believes that all external efforts start with deep introspection of who we are, what we do, and how we do it. The MH Board of Directors and staff have participated in careful review and contemplation of the organization's policies, grants, programs, and hiring practices (see addendum). Working over the course of a year with a professional consultant, MH identified core questions and goals aimed at diversifying the organization and focusing on accessibility for partners. This in-depth look not only opened our eyes to changes we could make as an organization, but it also allowed us to be more receptive to the needs of communities. With the guidance of internal examination findings, MH activated a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Action Council, which is led by five humanities scholars and representatives to provide expert review and recommendations to the organization's Board of Directors. In previous years, MH's Heritage Grants Program funded projects that explore local histories of race, ethnicity, and cultural identity in Michigan. This past work helped to inspire a renewed commitment and how we look at the polarization of humanity. That new lens allows us to see how we as a humanities organization can lend support and help bring to light the systemic inequities impacting our state's communities. While we work with the Action Council on Michigan Humanities leadership, policies, and methodologies, we have committed to addressing absolutely essential issues now. Rather than just release a statement of support during these turbulent times, Michigan Humanities made a pledge to present programming and funding opportunities to put words into action. So many organizations in our state have been

doing this work for years, often with very little support. Thus, the idea for the Bridging Michigan reflective community conversation program was created with priorities to illuminate the important conversations and work being done statewide, provide funding to partners, and train even more organizations to take on this important work.

In March, 2020, following the onset of the pandemic, we had experienced how lives would be changed by COVID-19. The ways in which we interacted with one another transformed overnight into a virtual landscape. People were home. Their only connection to friends and loved ones was often a screen. If there was ever a time when the humanities were called to serve, it was now. The way we approached our work however, had to change. We couldn't engage in community conversations, book clubs, museum exhibits, or library programs. How do we present humanities content when gathering together was impossible? Michigan Humanities' MI Humanities at Home initiative was born. People were turning to social media to connect with the world around them, and it was a platform that was ideal for meeting people where they were at—at home. Michigan Humanities staff began curating content that brought humanities to their daily lives. Starting on March 20 and continuing every day until July 1, Michigan Humanities presented three different humanities-themed campaigns each day including virtual tours, book reviews, highlights of humanities programming, bedtime stories read by MH Board and staff, library partners, and well-known celebrities. This curated collection is also housed on the MH website. Reach and engagement on social media skyrocketed. MH was able to leverage its statewide network of followers to support partners and promote not only the work being done by Michigan Humanities, but by humanities organizations across the state.



Reach of MH's Facebook posts, January, 2020, through July, 2020. Note the significant increase following the launch of MI Humanities at Home in late March, 2020.



Dr. Hanna-Attisha meeting virtually with young readers from the Merze Tate Explorers in summer, 2020.

Michigan Humanities' signature program, the Great Michigan Read, was also embarking on virtual programming. Author tours and other events with Dr. Mona Hanna-Attisha that were usually conducted in person were gaining popularity in the virtual landscape. Following the success of MI Humanities at Home and the virtual author tours, it was decided that this programming model could be replicated with varying topics that were timely and on the minds of Michiganders. The program would be pivotal in supporting the essential conversations needed for inspiring civil discussion and drawing attention and care to unjust issues. Bridging Michigan was then transitioned to a virtual initiative that includes community conversations featuring humanities professionals and community leaders partnering together to discuss the systemic inequities that are currently plaguing Michigan communities, virtual facilitation training, and grant funding to support the creation and continuation of responsive, community-level work.

Financial Structure

Michigan Humanities used general operating funds to carry out the program goals. The Bridging Michigan honoraria of \$500 per speaker and partner grants of up to \$1500 were made available from general operating funds that were earmarked for community conversations and grant making, respectively. In the months ahead, community conversation funding will also be utilized to support virtual facilitation training.

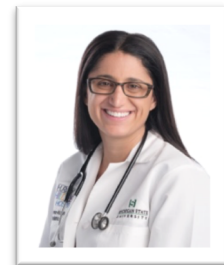
Programmatic Structure

To create a humanities-centered series that could be responsive to local, statewide, and national conversations in a short timeline, MH began by identifying specific areas of systemic inequities that were tied to people's experiences throughout the summer of 2020, and that were also connected to MH's existing programs and partnerships. This initial list included the complex history of systemic inequities, their current impacts on health, education, and Indigenous rights, and the ways that the arts and humanities are active parts of creating real change. Through additional input from the Board of Directors and staff team members, the scope of the initial set of focus areas grew to include mass incarceration and capacity-building through organizational diversity, equity, and inclusion practices. Today, the list for future conversation topics continues to expand.

Bridging Michigan guests

For the first three events, MH identified the following featured guests, and asked who each guest would prefer to be in conversation with. The guests, selected conversation partners, and areas of focus included:

- **Dr. Mona Hanna-Attisha**, pediatrician, activist, and author of the 2019-20 Great Michigan Read, *What the Eyes Don't See*. Hanna-Attisha is the founder and director of the Michigan State University and Hurley Children's Hospital Pediatric Public Health Initiative, and an associate professor of pediatrics and human development at the MSU College of Human Medicine. She has been named one of *Time* magazine's 100 Most Influential People in the World for her role in uncovering the Flint water crisis and leading recovery efforts, and *USA TODAY*'s 100 Women of the Century. She was one of the first to question if lead was leaching from the city's water pipes after an emergency manager switched the city's water supply in 2014.



For the inaugural Bridging Michigan conversation about **the impacts of systemic inequities on health and education**, Hanna-Attisha chose **Stephen Henderson**, host of Detroit Today on WDET, the city's NPR affiliate, and a Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist. His resume includes stints at the Detroit Free Press, the Chicago Tribune, the Baltimore Sun, and four years covering the Supreme Court for Knight Ridder's Washington Bureau. Henderson's reputation and ability to have fact-based, fair and compelling conversations makes him a leading figure in the Detroit community.



- **Eric Hemenway** is an Anishnaabe/Odawa from Cross Village, Michigan. He is the Director of Repatriation, Archives and Records for the Little Traverse Bay Bands of Odawa Indian, a federally recognized tribe in northern Michigan. Hemenway works to collect and preserve historical information for LTBB Odawa. That information is used to support the LTBB government and create educational materials on Odawa history, such as: exhibits, signage, publications, presentations, curriculums and media. He is an emeritus member of the MH Board of Directors.



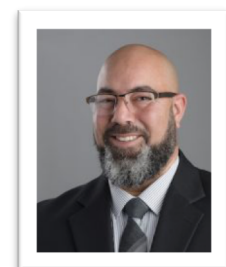
For the second Bridging Michigan conversation about **the history and current state of Native mascots**, Hemenway chose **Matthew L.M. Fletcher**, Foundation Professor of Law at Michigan State University College of Law and Director of the Indigenous Law and Policy Center. He sits as the Chief Justice of the Poarch Band of Creek Indians Supreme Court and also sits as an appellate judge for several tribal communities. He is a member of the Grand Traverse Band of Ottawa and Chippewa Indians, located in Peshawbestown, Michigan. Professor Fletcher is the primary editor and author of Turtle Talk, a leading law blog on American Indian law and policy.



- **Dr. Paul Elam** is Chief Strategy Officer of Michigan Public Health Institute and is responsible for diversifying the organization's portfolio to address cutting edge issues that affect the health and well-being of our society. His deep understanding of youth violence and prevention, crime and justice, and child maltreatment is nationally recognized. His current leadership efforts include mentoring and training professionals from historically underrepresented groups in culturally responsive and equitable engagement to ensure that the people who are most impacted are at the center of conversations which seek to find solutions to problems affecting them.



For the third Bridging Michigan conversation about **the history and impacts of mass incarceration**, Elam chose **Troy Rienstra**, Director of Outreach with Safe & Just Michigan where he works to advance the organization's outreach program by elevating the voices of people directly harmed by the effects of crime and punishment. He is responsible for outreach activities to crime survivors, formerly incarcerated individuals, and their family members, and the faith community. He also serves as director of Nation Outside, a formerly incarcerated led criminal justice advocacy organization focused on elevating the voices of formerly incarcerated people in the formation of policy. Rienstra completed 22 years of a life sentence in Michigan.



- **Katena Cain** is a Management Consultant skilled at helping diverse groups and communities think creatively and collaboratively together. She empowers people to translate conflict and differences into creative breakthrough. Katena specializes in leadership and team development, board governance, strategic planning and



communication. She is skilled in Cognitive Coaching, is a certified Bridges Out of Poverty trainer, and is a co-creator of a statewide Diversity, Inclusion and Equity toolkit. Her ongoing clients represent a broad range of groups, including police departments, local municipalities, schools, religious institutions, social services and human services.

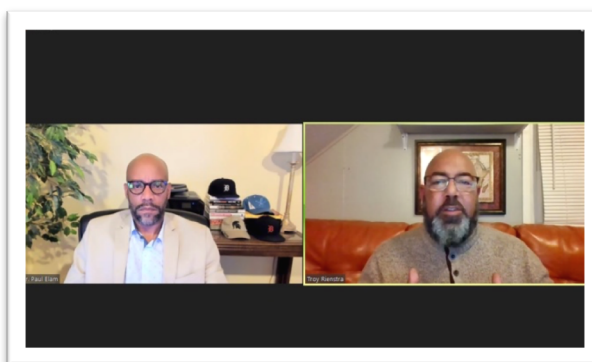
For the fourth event and final virtual Bridging Michigan offering of the 2019-20 fiscal year, MH decided that Katena's presentation would take on a workshop format, which she would present independent of a conversation partner. Cain has worked with the MH team over the past 18 months as a consultant for organizational diversity, equity, and inclusion, and will present a workshop titled **"Advancing Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion at Your Organization."**

Because of MH's commitment to supporting the state's humanities community and representing Michigan's diverse communities, it is critical for the featured guests to be Michiganders, and to represent diversity in age, ethnicity and race, gender, geographic origin within the state, and professional affiliation. Additionally, the guests chosen are immediately and intimately connected to the topics that are being discussed. They are, as is commonly said, "doing the work" that the chosen areas of systemic inequities address. Featured guests speak from their lived experiences, and engage with conversation partners with complementary expertise and knowledge.

Event structure

During each Bridging Michigan conversation on Zoom's webinar platform, the event structure and timeline follow a consistent pattern:

- 7-7:05 pm: An MH staff member welcomes the attendees, shares the organizational mission, and introduces the Bridging Michigan initiative. Another staff member introduces the featured guests.
- 7:05-7:45 pm: The two speakers are in dialogue and featured together on screen, without a moderator.
- 7:45-8 pm: Following their conversation, an MH staff member returns to pose questions from the attendees submitted through the webinar Q&A feature and the registration form.



Dr. Paul Elam and Troy Rienstra in conversation.

With the exception of the upcoming workshop, which will be a daytime event to best accommodate workday schedules for attendees, all Bridging Michigan events take place on Thursdays at 7 pm (Eastern time zone).

Conversation planning, content, and documentation

In the weeks leading up to a Bridging Michigan event, MH staff confer with the featured guests to arrive at four to five guiding questions that are discussed by the two guests over the course

of the 40-minute conversation. At the center of the event's questions is a connection to the humanities and how the humanities can play a role in creating change.

The event is also shaped by attendee feedback during the registration process. As attendees register for a Bridging Michigan event, they have the opportunity to share their questions for the featured guests. In the days leading up to the event, MH staff share those attendee-generated questions with the featured guests so that they have insight into the audiences interests and the content of the Q&A portion leading up to the event.

The guiding questions for each conversation event are included below, as well as the focus areas for the featured workshop.

Dr. Mona Hanna-Attisha & Stephen Henderson (August 13)

- How do laws and policies enacted decades ago still shape the present day and future? Why is it important to learn from our history?
- How does access to one resource affect access to another?
- How does a lack of political representation contribute to environmental injustice and other threats to public health?
- What roles do you play in your daily work to address these systemic inequities?
- What role can the arts and humanities play in creating change?

Eric Hemenway & Matthew L.M. Fletcher (September 3)

- What are the historical origins of Native mascots for sports teams?
- Why are mascots detrimental?
- Why don't other races have mascots?
- What can be done on a local and national level? How can a deeper understanding of history help address this issue?

Dr. Paul Elam & Troy Rienstra (October 1)

- What is the history of mass incarceration, and how did the US get to be #1 in the world for number of incarcerated individuals?
- Who does mass incarceration benefit? What problems does mass incarceration intend to solve and isn't solving?
- What does it mean to live in a "supervised society" with limited choices? And how does this inequity affect life after incarceration? What are the collateral consequences?
- What humanities practices are necessary towards restoring justice involved individuals' relationship with society?

Katena Cain (October 22)

The workshop includes:

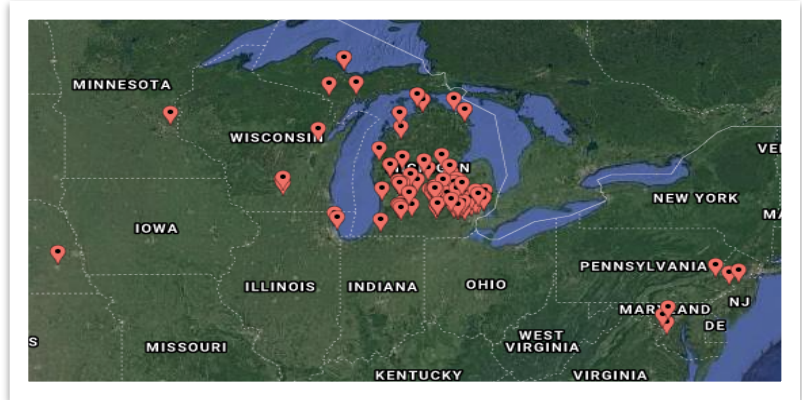
- Questions to ask as you begin diversity, equity, and inclusion work within your organization;
- potential hurdles to anticipate;
- and how to set goals and advance the work.

When permitted by the featured guests, conversations are recorded and shared on the Michigan Humanities website and via post-event emails to all registrants. Recordings have

received significant post-event engagement, including nearly 400 views to date of the conversation about the history and current state of Native mascots.

Program audiences and public impact

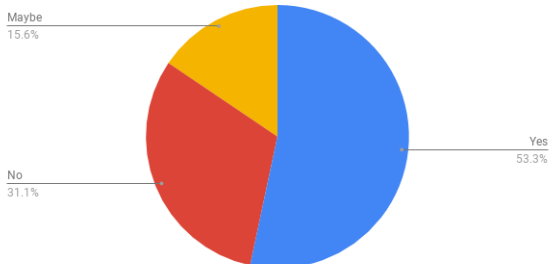
Bridging Michigan's past events and upcoming workshop reach across and beyond the state. From August to October, a total of approximately 130 people attended the first three events via Zoom, with an average of 43 attendees per event and the geographic distribution pictured here.



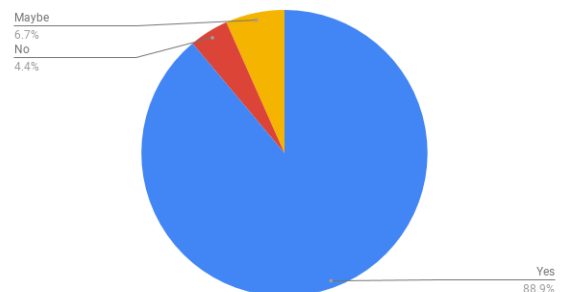
To ensure that the event is promoted to those who are and are not yet familiar with MH, a combination of promotional tactics are used. A media release announced the launch of Bridging Michigan in summer, 2020, and each event is promoted through the MH website, free and paid social media, MH e-news, distribution to library listservs and the FSHC listserv, and the MH network of Board of Directors members, staff, featured speakers, and partners.

Following each virtual event, attendees are invited to take a brief survey ([available here for review](#)) to share their feedback, which will help MH shape future programs. Quantitative feedback includes the following highlights focused on changes in perspective, acquiring new knowledge, being inspired to act, and interest in attending another Michigan Humanities event.

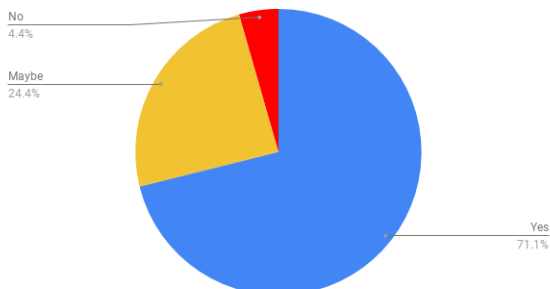
Did attending this event change your perspective on the issue/topic?



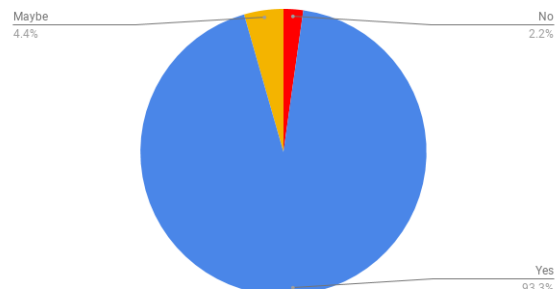
Did you learn something new?



Were you inspired to take action?



Would you attend another Michigan Humanities event?



Of the **nearly 90 percent of survey respondents who indicated that they learned something new**, sample responses about that knowledge acquisition include:

- How to engage my community on discussing the issues of inequality and systemic racism.
- I learned what type of infrastructure needs to be in place as a country to help with systemic inequities.
- More effective ways of framing the issue of mascots; firsthand perspectives.
- How to be more sensitive to words used that describe another culture and race
- The changes that can take place for returning citizens to help them adjust to the community and be a benefit to themselves and those around them.

Of the **more than 70 percent of survey respondents who indicated that they were inspired to take action**, sample responses about their next steps include:

- I will talk with friends about assuring that local boards and organizations include representation of First People.
- Challenge others who use stereotypes, logos, language, etc. that can be harmful and hurtful.
- Starting a book club to bring different perspectives through stories.
- Continue discussions about how to address systemic inequities.
- Informing our students if environmental injustice

This data indicates that even though we are all separated by distance, attendees' virtual connection to the featured guests has resulted in new knowledge about the impact of systemic inequities on the health and education of Michiganders, the long history of Native mascot usage, and the collateral consequence of mass incarceration. Further, it shows that even though attendees are arriving at virtual events with existing beliefs and experiences, and an understanding of their relationship to the topic, they are leaving with changes in perspective and, perhaps most importantly, the desire to take action in these critical areas of systemic inequities.

Looking ahead: grants, facilitation training, and additional programs

The grant funding component of Bridging Michigan is currently underway, with applications being submitted now and throughout the months ahead. MH invites projects from across the state that address different themes and use a variety of public humanities formats, including reflective conversations, reading series, film screenings with discussions, web projects, walking tours, documentary films, public lectures and panels, and the creation of exhibits.

MH staff are actively planning for the continuation of the conversation series, and through collecting feedback from the MH Board of Directors members and staff, this growing list of potential conversation topics centered on systemic inequities has been developed for FY21:

- Women in politics
- Generational wealth building
- Immigration policies and their impact on Michigan communities
- BIPOC and disability representation in arts and culture
- Women's suffrage, in conjunction with the Michigan tour of *Voices and Votes*

Additionally, MH is planning to support the development of similar conversations on regional levels through providing conversation facilitation workshops in FY21. In response to local

needs and in coordination with nearby partners, Michiganders can feel empowered to host and be part of dialogue with one another. In addition to capacity-building in the area of facilitation, the following workshop topics have been suggested through conversations with previous and current grantees:

- Assembling diverse and inclusive panels
- Equitable practices for interviewing/oral histories
- Accessibility and virtual events

Michigan Humanities' unprecedented commitment to bridging divides through conversations, funding, and capacity-building to address systemic inequities will continue to grow into 2021 and beyond. We look forward to the recommendations of the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Action Council that will be made in May 2021 to the MH Board of Directors. We are a nimble organization, driven by the ability to adapt and support solutions to critical humanities issues in Michigan.

Event recordings and additional details about Bridging Michigan can be found [online via the Michigan Humanities website](#).

Addendum

The MH Board of Directors and staff had two engaging and thorough sessions with a DEI management consultant, who led team members to investigate the following key questions through ongoing internal work.

Staffing

- Are we representative of who we would like to serve?
- Are we hiring people like us because it is easier?
- What biases do we have that hold us back from being a more diverse staff?
- Do we need to expand our spheres of influence to recruit new staff members?
- Is our organizational culture inclusive of all areas of diversity?
- What additional training do we need?
- Who is our champion?

Policies

- Are we using gender neutral language?
- Does everyone have the resources to carry out this policy?
- How might our unconscious attitudes and assumptions about ____ be playing out in this policy?
- How might this policy inadvertently advantage some and disadvantage others?
- Is this policy necessary?
- What diverse perspectives are instrumental in developing these policies?

Programming

- Are we ensuring that our programs are accessible to diverse needs?
- Can our programs be attended if participants only access public transportation?
- Are we ensuring meaningful representation through our programming? How often?
- Are we intentional about our commitment to DEI when evaluating our programs?

Grantmaking

- What are your current grantmaking trends?
- How diverse are your applicants?
- How strict are we with regards to: budgets, tracking, reporting, grammar?
- What is our process for coaching and mentoring grantees?
- What supportive services do we offer grantees (capacity-building, webinars, revise/resubmit opportunities)

Board

- Are we representative of the community we want to serve?
- What commitment have we made to be more diverse and inclusive?
- What additional training do we need?
- How do we plan to embed DEI into future planning and strategy efforts?
- What spheres of influence need to be increased?
- What additional training needs to occur?