2021

Summary of Activities

FEDERATION OF STATE HUMANITIES COUNCILS
ADVOCACY

The Federation's advocacy efforts focused on the annual appropriations cycles for fiscal years 2021 and 2022 and included developing unified humanities advocacy messaging with other humanities advocates for increases in support. Additionally, casemaking drawn from CARES council funding data supported Federation advocacy for the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) and the councils to receive further relief funding through the American Rescue Plan (ARP).

AMERICAN RESCUE PLAN AND SHARP

- Sustained advocacy by the Federation, National Humanities Alliance (NHA), and other humanities organizations, bolstered by CARES impact data, resulted in $130 million allocated to NEH of which 40 percent ($51.6 million) was earmarked for the Federal/State Partnerships (F/SP) Office at NEH to support the state and jurisdictional humanities councils in 2021.

FY 2022

- For FY 2022, Federation advocacy helped lead to strong bipartisan support in the House with $201 million proposed in House NEH appropriations, including more than $61.8 million for the NEH F/SP Office despite former President Trump's rescission package proposing to shut down the agency in early 2021. (President Biden withdrew the rescission package.)
- Senate proposed appropriations included $187.5M for NEH with $55.28M to the NEH F/SP.
- President Biden's budget request included $177.55M (a $10M increase over FY 2021) for NEH with $54.376M to the F/SP (a $3M increase from FY 2021).
- The Federation worked with House Reps. David E. Price (D-NC) and Steve Stivers (R-OH), and Senator Jack Reed to solicit support for House and Senate Dear Colleague Letters.
- Coordinated council communications with House and Senate Interior subcommittee members on multiple bills including FY 22 appropriations, infrastructure, and reconciliation.
- Participated in and supported partner advocacy days, including Humanities Advocacy Day (NHA), and Museum Advocacy Day (American Alliance of Museum).
- Coordinated virtual witness testimony for the House Interior Appropriations Subcommittee hearing on “The Effects of COVID-19 on Arts and Humanities Organizations” with Caleb Cage (Nevada Humanities), and Ulysses Slaughter (Pennsylvania Humanities).
- Submitted written testimony to House and Senate Interior Appropriations subcommittees.
- Provided updates to councils on upcoming bipartisan bill to formalize NEH's role in the study of civics and government and need for additional investment. Bill is co-sponsored by Rep. Dan Kildee (D-MI) and Rep. Ashley Hinson (R-IA).

"I believe the humanities councils are essential to statewide recovery efforts and support from Congress will be critical." Caleb Cage, March 25 House Subcommittee Hearing.
In 2021, the Federation helped facilitate one of the largest congressional requests for the humanities community and NEH. This unprecedented and bold ask was bolstered by strong support from national humanities partners resulting in a coordinated request of $225 million for NEH, including $70 million for the Federal/State Partnership during each organization’s national advocacy events in February and March 2021, including the Federation’s annual Humanities on the Hill (HoH), which was virtual in 2021, that saw a record 200+ people from 47 humanities councils.

- Researched, collected, and developed online advocacy materials to aid in councils’ conversations with Hill staffers, Senators, and Representatives, including an Advocacy Handbook, position paper, talking points, event FAQs, registration guides, updated congressional lists, and a council brief that highlighted data, impact, program areas, and tips on scheduling and conducting virtual Hill visits.
- Hosted a pre-event webinar featuring Americans for the Arts Grassroots and Government Affairs Manager Lauren Cohen, Vermont Humanities Executive Director Christopher Kaufman Ilstrup, and Humanities Kansas Executive Director Julie Mulvihill
- Planned and executed the first-ever virtual HoH, including a Members briefing and debrief, congressional reception, and orientation.
- Created a dynamic and seamless virtual experience for the 2021 HoH Congressional Reception, complete with live and pre-recorded guest speakers, including U.S. Poet Laureate Joy Harjo, Phillips Collection’s Director and NEH National Council Member Dr. Dorothy Kosinski, Representatives David E. Price (NC-4), Chellie Pingree (ME-1), and Steve Stivers (OH-15), and Senators Jack Reed (RI), Roger Wicker (MS), and Susan Collins (ME).
- Participated in regular consultations with legislative counsel, Legislative Committee, national partners, foundations, and Congressional members to stay apprised of political, leadership, and appropriation updates to inform materials, advocacy, and communications.

**NATIONAL HUMANITIES CONFERENCE 2021**

- Issued Save the Dates for the 2021 National Humanities Conference (NHC) taking place November 11-14, 2021 and call for proposals with option for virtual or in-person sessions.
- Pivoted in-person NHC to virtual within one month, securing 35+ virtual sessions for a record 800+ attendees from 50 states and five territories. Welcomed 405 first-time attendees.
  - Developed and launched a mobile app for the conference used by 700+ attendees.
  - Launched the 2022 NHC planning process for Los Angeles, CA with first committee call.
  - Negotiated the Detroit contract to 2025 without penalty including moving AV services from 2021 to 2022, avoiding penalties of $287,000+.
WEBINARS

- Identified, coordinated, and hosted a four-part Wednesday Webinar series focused on DEIA and council work. On average, each webinar saw 60+ attendees from across the council community. (More information under Racial Equity Work at the Federation).
- Partnered with Lumina Foundation CEO and author Jamie Merisotis and Puerto Rico Endowment for the Humanities Executive Director Margarita Benitez to conduct “Human Work in the Age of Smart Machines” webinar with Federation President Phoebe Stein as moderator.
- Hosted a Virtual Onboarding Discussion with Marcum’s Partner-in-Charge for Human Resources Simone Putnam, where presenters spoke about how their organizations have been dealing with handling hiring and retaining new staff (30 participants live).
- Hosted a webinar featuring five humanities councils executive directors who discussed state funding and advocacy (32 participants live).

OTHER FEDERATION EVENTS

- Identified and engaged Susan Eads Role as the 2021 Annual Business Meeting (ABM) parliamentarian; worked with her to update the ABM script as well as procedures for the virtual meeting.
- Issued call for Schwartz Prize nominations with updated criteria given the enduring pandemic; organized virtual awards presentation featuring the voices, images, and program descriptions of nominated councils and presented the 2021 Schwartz Prize award to Nevada Humanities and Minnesota Humanities Center.
- Hosted a new Executive Director Orientation with six new directors: Alabama Humanities Alliance, Humanities DC, Wyoming Humanities Council, Florida Humanities, Ohio Humanities, and Maryland Humanities.
- Conducted three virtual Federation Board meetings and numerous virtual Committee meetings.
- Hosted six Program Staff Meetings on various programming areas and needs, including environmental humanities programming, “A More Perfect Union” planning, “Coming Out of COVID” logistics and policies; and, supported a virtual council program staff retreat attended by 69 council staff.
- Supported ten virtual Humanities Communications Network gatherings with council communications and development staff.

The humanities strengthen the civic, cultural, and social fabric of society by fostering understanding and promoting an engaged citizenry.

Federation Guiding Principle
PARTNERSHIPS

NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE HUMANITIES

Held regular meetings with NEH Federal/State Partnership (F/SP) Office Director Karen Kenton, Acting Chairman Adam Wolfson, and senior NEH staff and served as the liaison between NEH and our membership as well as a council advocate on pressing issues including new administration updates, NEH leadership changes, the NEH funding formula for councils, NEH compliance requirements, National Council actions, and the new Outcomes & Activities Report.

- Welcomed NEH Acting Chairman Adam Wolfson to Federation Board meetings
- Coordinated meetings with all council directors and Kelsey Coates, NEH’s new Chief of Staff
- Promoted several NEH F/SP events with councils, including coordinating quarterly Fed/State Partnership Office Hours with Karen Kenton beginning in fall 2021, a walk-through of SHARP templates in December 2021, and other NEH events such as information sessions on “A More Perfect Union” and virtual workshops to connect councils with NEH program staff.

NATIONAL HUMANITIES ALLIANCE

The Federation and NHA continue to work closely together to host the National Humanities Conference and coordinate advocacy efforts, including participating in each other’s advocacy events, collaborating on monthly humanities newsletters to congressional staffers, and cross-promoting each other’s initiatives. Federation President Phoebe Stein serves on the NHA board.

AMERICAN ACADEMY OF ARTS AND SCIENCES

Continued to engage with “Our Common Purpose: Reinventing American Democracy for the 21st Century” initiative. President Phoebe Stein participated in an AAAS virtual event, “Telling Our Regional Story,” with Representative David E. Price, Associate Professor of History at UNC Chapel Hill William Sturkey, and Pfizer-Pratt University Professor of Political Science at Duke University and American Academy Fellow John Aldrich. The conversation was moderated by James B. Duke Distinguished Professor of Political Science, Professor Public Policy, Dean of the Graduate School, and Vice Provost for Graduate Education Paula D. McClain. This virtual program was featured in the winter issue of the AAAS Magazine.

OTHER ACTIVE PARTNERSHIPS

- Innovation Collaborative
- American Association of State and Local History: "Making History at 250"
- SITES/Museum on Main Street
- Heritage Emergency National Task Force
- National History Day
- The Pulitzer Prizes
- Cultural Advocacy Group
- WETA: rebroadcast of "Asian Americans"
- American Alliance of Museums
- Humanities Indicators
- Educating for American Democracy
- Made By Us
- National Humanities Center
Throughout the year, the Federation promoted council Democracy and the Informed Citizen programs and podcasts through social media, e-newsletters, and in blogs related to the initiative. Federation President Phoebe Stein moderated a panel hosted by Virginia Humanities entitled, “The Future of Journalism, the Fate of Democracy,” as part of the initiative, and with the support of a Grants Administrator, the Federation collected councils’ final reports, prepared, and filed a collective interim report for Democracy and the Informed Citizen, which was accepted by The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation.

Why It Matters: Civic & Electoral Participation

The Federation promoted council programs throughout the year related to the “Why It Matters: Civic and Electoral Participation” national initiative funded by The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation. The initiative explores civic participation as it relates to electoral engagement in a multivocal democracy. Programs were conducted in 43 U.S. states and territories throughout the course of the initiative, which ran from October 2020 through spring 2021. During the project, the Federation worked with WolfBrown to host two focus groups and six webinars, including with Professor Peter Levine of Tufts University and John Carnwath of Wolfbrown (see list in data and evaluation section).

#WhyCivicsMatters & whycivicsmatters.org

Additionally, the Federation worked with Wolfbrown and Simple Web Solutions to design, develop, and launch WhyCivicsMatters.org, a website archive of 256 council-conducted “Why It Matters” programs as well as a social media campaign #WhyCivicsMatters that saw engagement from a variety of national partners, including NHA, Made By Us, AAAS, Phi Beta Kappa, and more.

Finally, the Federation and WolfBrown surveyed councils to help inform the “Why It Matters” final report, which analyzed 1,000+ events, broadcasts, publications, exhibits, and other programming created through the grant program, of which 94 percent were offered online. The final report was accepted by The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation.
HUMANITIES IN AMERICAN LIFE

Organized around six topic areas—environmental humanities, rural communities, race/racism/social justice, Indigenous culture, civic engagement, and humanities during crises—the Humanities in American Life internal initiative resulted in 36 interviews, features, and shareable blogs from 51 individual state and jurisdictional humanities councils as well as conversations with 46 program staff members, an archive of 200+ council programs related to the focus areas, several public-facing workshops, webinars, guest lectures, and a presentation on the effects of the pandemic on the humanities and arts. The initiative ended December 2021 but resulted in a strong foundation for the Federation’s future media and public relations efforts. An interim report was accepted by The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation in 2021.

MAKING MEANING: WHY HUMANITIES MATTER

The centerpiece of the “Humanities in American Life” initiative, the Federation launched its first-ever podcast, “Making Meaning: Why Humanities Matter,” on the role the humanities have played during the pandemic and in our recovery. This six-episode season included representation from 19 states and jurisdictional territories, 12 interviews, featured stories from African Americans, Asian Americans, Cuban Americans, Native Americans, and an immigrant from Pohnpei in the Federated States of Micronesia. The topics were drawn from the “Humanities in American Life” focus areas.

Activities Included:

- A survey of councils before initiating the podcast project (received 150 members’ input)
- Hiring LWC Studios to produce the podcast
- Collecting stories from member councils to feature (23 submissions)
- Launching the podcast trailer in October 2021 and the full six-episode season in November 2021 including introducing a multilingual format with Spanish-language episodes
- Generating soundbites and quote graphics to promote the podcast across Federation communications channels

Highlights:

- Ranking in the top 30% of podcasts based on average downloads
- Earning listeners across major platforms including Apple, Stitcher, and Spotify
- Capturing international audiences in Canada, France, Russia, and the Netherlands

This podcast is wholesome in the best sense of the word. It tackles some of the thorniest issues of our time (climate change, systemic racism) in substantive interviews that are also encouraging and inspiring. The host, Sydney Boyd, is incisive and compassionate. The show reminds me of Mr. Rogers’ advice to “focus on the helpers” in times of crises. I am left with a deeper appreciation of how much the humanities and powerful acts of storytelling have to offer our present moment. (Review on Apple Podcast)
RACIAL EQUITY WORK AT THE FEDERATION

The Federation issued its first statement on its DEIA commitment in summer 2021 and worked with Federation board members and council directors and staff to host six meetings of the Federation’s Racial Equity Working Group. In July, the Federation coordinated and underwrote a full-day racial equity training with Race Forward for Federation Board Members and staff. Throughout 2021, Federation staff met weekly for racial equity readings and discussions that included two books: “How to Slowly Kill Yourself and Others in American” by Kiese Laymon (2020 edition) and “Minor Feelings” by Cathy Park Hong; and 40+ articles on Black, Latino/x, Asian, and LGBTQ+ experiences and racism in the workplace. Other racial equity work this year:

- Launched a new LGBTQ+ google listserv for members
- Hosted 35 virtual sessions at NHC 2021 focused on diversity, equity, inclusion, and access
- Supported a virtual meeting of council program officers on programming around race and racism; event was hosted by Minnesota Humanities Center
- Reviewed Federation staff hiring processes to identify ways to further demonstrate the our DEIA commitment through HR operations; this resulted in a change in job description and posting strategy that generated a stronger candidate pool
- Committed to re-evaluating Federation bylaws and chair and board election processes to determine how to improve in attracting and maintaining a more diverse board

Wednesday Webinar Series:

The Federation continued its Wednesday Webinar series focused on DEIA throughout 2021 resulting in four new webinars for members:

- “Operationalizing Racial Equity Work at Nonprofits” (60+ attendees)
- “Decolonization: Why It Matters for Humanities Organizations” (50+ attendees)
- “How Are We Doing With DEI? Belonging, Breathing, and Becoming in the Workplace” (55 attendees)
- “Native Peoples 101: Approaches to Working With and For Tribal Nations” (70+ attendees)

“THE HUMANITIES HELP US FIGURE OUT HOW OUR DIFFERENCES CAN BE COMPLEMENTARY INSTEAD OF COMPETITIVE AND LET US MOVE FORWARD WITH GOOD IDEAS BASED ON A COLLABORATIVE APPROACH.” ULYSSES SLAUGHTER, PHC MARCH 25 WITNESS TESTIMONY
The year kicked off with a transition of the Federation’s Development Committee to the Development & Communications Committee, including an updated Committee charge. Former Board Chair Bill Tsutsui chaired the committee which supported the Federation through several initiatives: Humanities in American Life, Making Meaning podcast, website redesign, social media campaigns, a year-end appeal, and NHC support donations and sponsorships. In addition, the Federation continued to manage and host seven Google Groups to facilitate communication among members.

**Development Activities**

- Raised nearly $20,000 in donations for the Federation, $11,000 of which were secured in the Federation’s 2nd annual year-end appeal (up from $5,000 in 2020).
- In collaboration with the National Humanities Alliance, secured $8,000 in sponsorships for the National Humanities Conference, exceeding the goal set by the NHC Planning Committee and Development & Communications Committee of $5,000 for 2020.
- Raised $1,500 from Federation board and staff to contribute toward a matching gift fund to help make the conference more accessible by offering more support to NHC attendees. Due to moving NHC 2021 to a virtual format, the funds are being carried over to the 2022 conference.

**Communications Activities**

- Designed and implemented several social media campaigns to raise awareness of council programs, grants, and community impact.
  - #WhyCivicsMatter to complement the launch of whycivicsmatters.org resulting in follower and engagement increases across all Federation social media channels, including among our major partners: Phi Beta Kappa, NHA, Made By Us, AAAS, etc.
  - #SHARPSpotlight in fall 2021 to highlight NEH SHARP funding impact by the councils.
  - #MakingMeaningPodcast in November to highlight our first-ever podcast launch resulting in the podcast placing in the top 30% of 2021 podcasts.
  - #HumanitiesinAmericanLife continued from 2020 to highlight council programs and focus areas developed through “Humanities in American Life” Mellon-funded initiative.
  - Others included our virtual Humanities on the Hill #HoH22 and National Humanities Conference #VirtualNHCC2022 events, which saw higher than average attendance.
- Wrote and published 55+ blog and news stories, distributed 12 monthly newsletters, eight Humanities on the Hill newsletters, and maintained regular communications on Federation activities, deadlines, and updates through seven member Federation Google listservs.
- Saw top-tier open rates across all Federation newsletters with an average open rate of 32% (average industry open rates range from 16-22% with 30% or above considered top-tier).
- Worked with the Federation’s Legislative Counsel to issue 45+ This Week on the Hill advocacy updates to 220+ members
- Collaborated with NHA to issue monthly joint humanities-focused newsletters to 440+ congressional staffers, Senators, and Representatives
- Developed and issued RFP to engage a website redesign firm and engaged openbox9 as our website developer and designer.
In 2021, the Federation underwent a staffing restructuring, hired three new team members and began work to hire a fourth new member. Additionally, the Federation welcomed four new board members in January as a result of the 2020 Nominating Committee work and issued a call for candidates through the 2021 Nominating Committee which resulted in three new board members being elected to the board in November 2021 to begin their service in 2022. Other activities included:

- Regular “coffee break” meetings with Phoebe and council executive directors
- A new “Membership in the Federation” FAQ document
- Coordination of office hours between NEH and Federation membership
- Establishment of a special committee appointed by the Board Chair Susan McCarthy on Bylaws & Governance
- New 2021 Board Members: Dr. Terri Jett (IN), Dr. Stuart Rockoff (MS), John Phillip Santos (TX), and Sherry Paula Watkins (NC)
- Successfully prepared for and executed the Federation’s financial audit
- Maintained online and internal council directories
- Promoted new council leadership across Federation communications channels

"Leading is not about having the answers - it’s about marshaling the resources, supporting others, and helping to get at a solution." (Phoebe Stein, Leading Maryland podcast)