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# Federation of State Humanities Councils

## STRATEGIC PLAN, 2015-2019

Founded in 1977, the Federation of State Humanities Councils is the member association of the 56 state and jurisdictional councils. The councils are independent nonprofit organizations that conduct and fund humanities programs that engage millions of citizens in community and civic life.

### Our Mission and Key Roles

The mission of the Federation is **to represent and strengthen the state humanities councils.**

*In fulfilling this mission, the Federation plays several key roles:*

- \* **Advocacy.** The Federation is the national voice of the state humanities councils. It articulates the councils' value and represents their interests with Congress, the National Endowment for the Humanities, and other national organizations.
- \* **Connection.** The Federation unites the state humanities councils into a community of common mission and mutual learning. It provides tools and opportunities that enable councils to share information, expertise, and inspiration.
- \* **Support.** The Federation strengthens councils by providing services and information that improve their management, governance, advocacy, and fund raising capabilities.

### Our Guiding Principles and Core Values

Through the humanities we discover who we are: diverse communities in one nation, one nation in a diverse world.

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

The state humanities councils play a vital role in ensuring that humanities programming reaches all Americans, expanding minds and transforming lives.

The state humanities councils, through their connection to communities and organizations in every corner of their states, are essential entities for extending the reach of the National Endowment for the Humanities.

The state humanities councils have a greater impact when they are united in purpose and voice through their national association.

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*In support of these guiding principles, the Federation staff and board seek to exhibit and promote these core values:*

- \* **Civility.** We value careful listening and respectful dialogue in all our communications, especially when viewpoints differ.
- \* **Transparency.** We are committed to openness, clarity, and accessibility in all our interactions with members.
- \* **Innovation.** We promote and share creative ideas and entrepreneurial practices.
- \* **Consultation.** We value the ideas, viewpoints, and advice of member councils and engage them as fully as possible in our activities and decision-making.
- \* **Inclusiveness.** We encourage a diversity of opinion and a range of interests and backgrounds in advancing the work of the councils and the Federation.
- \* **Collaboration.** We believe we gain strength when we join with other organizations of similar mission and values.
- \* **Service.** We are committed to providing councils the tools and opportunities that will strengthen them as organizations.

### **The FSHC Today: Looking to the Future**

The Federation of State Humanities Councils was founded in 1977, primarily as a vehicle for exchanging information and ideas among the still-young state humanities councils. The Federation and the councils have never stopped evolving, but their history of steady growth and increasing sophistication has been punctuated by periods of rapid and dramatic change. Due to the lingering recession, the rise of budget cutters in Congress, and changes in council leadership, we are now in such a period.

The Federation has traditionally pursued opportunities for the councils primarily in response to member requests. Although this approach promotes transparency and an engaged membership, it renders the Federation more reactive than innovative. In recent years, its members have recommended that the Federation play a stronger leadership role, seeking and evaluating opportunities for the councils and presenting promising ones to the membership. To assume this leadership position, the Federation must increase its visibility, since securing more opportunities for the councils will require forging new partnerships.

The arrival of a new chairman at the National Endowment for the Humanities also calls for the Federation to take a more active leadership role. For the past few years, councils have worked to position themselves as full partners of the NEH rather than simply a distribution network for humanities programs. As the Washington presence and collective voice for the

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councils, the Federation must continue to vigorously advocate for a stronger, more equal partnership. The transition to a new NEH chairman offers a fresh opportunity to do so.

Finally, the Federation must re-evaluate its own resources. Since its founding, the Federation has relied almost entirely on council dues and registration fees for its revenue, and the organization has operated with only three to five staff members. With expanded expectations for services and the need for additional staff to provide them, the Federation cannot operate indefinitely within the current funding constraints. Over the next few years, the Federation must find ways to secure the additional resources, both financial and human, that will enable it to have the impact it envisions.

### **The FSHC in 2019: More Vocal, More Visible, and More Vital than Ever**

Five years from now, FSHC will be an even stronger leader, empowering the state councils to have a greater impact on the citizens and communities they serve.

FSHC will be widely recognized as the national voice of the councils and a leader in the public humanities. In national dialogues about the public humanities, FSHC will be at the table, injecting the councils' perspective.

FSHC will increasingly leverage its unique ability to serve as a single portal to a national network of 56 state and jurisdictional councils and, through them, to millions of Americans of all races, classes, ages, and education levels. Because of FSHC's compelling advocacy, more federal officials will understand and value the councils' vital role in promoting an engaged and informed citizenry, fostering pride in place and history, and reclaiming the lost art of working and reasoning together.

Through innovation and collaboration, FSHC will generate opportunities and provide tools that equip the councils to strengthen their advocacy, improve their operational effectiveness, promote their financial sustainability, and demonstrate their community impact, individually and collectively.



### **Our Goals and Strategies – in Support of the Vision**

#### **1. Position the Federation to be more widely perceived and leveraged as the voice of and connection to the state humanities councils**

- Strengthen the FSHC's role as convener

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- Build relationships with philanthropic, cultural, educational, and other national organizations
  - Strengthen the connection between the academic and the public humanities
  - Raise the Federation's profile through strategic communications
  - Seek opportunities to provide information about the councils and the public humanities

## **2. Articulate and demonstrate the value of the councils' work**

- Advocate for increased federal funding for the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) and the Federal/State Partnership
- Collaborate with other national humanities organizations to spread common messaging that broadens public understanding of the humanities
- Collect and share narratives and data that show the councils' impact

## **3. Advance the Federation's and the councils' partnership with NEH**

- Forge unified positions to present to NEH on behalf of the councils
- Consult with NEH about the councils' needs and interests
- Strengthen the Federation's relationships with all NEH divisions and offices
- Seek a greater role in NEH's planning and decision-making about issues that affect the councils, including new initiatives

## **4. Strengthen councils by facilitating information exchange, providing capacity-building tools, and fostering relationships**

- Promote and facilitate the transfer of ideas, the spread of best practices, and the pioneering of creative strategies among state councils
- Be a clearinghouse for materials on key issues such as strategic planning, data collection, governance, needs assessment, fundraising, and program evaluation
- Cultivate relationships with national organizations and federal agencies beyond NEH to increase funding, programming, communications, and other council resources

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- Foster a sense of community among council executive directors

**5. Effectively steward the Federation's resources and ensure their alignment with strategic priorities and council expectations**

- Maintain the staff required to serve the councils through effective recruitment, retention, and succession planning
- Seek opportunities to increase revenue by generating contributed and earned income
- Engage FSHC board members as resources, advisors, and connectors
- Enlist council staff and board members to advance the Federation's strategic goals
- Improve capabilities for data gathering and sharing