



Request for Proposals: Fundraising Consultancy for the Federation of State Humanities Councils (2026)

Project Title: Strategic Fundraising Plan and Implementation

Project Budget: \$90,000/12 months

Issued By: Federation of State Humanities Councils

Issue Date: March 13, 2026

Deadline for Proposals: April 12, 2026

Contract Term: 12 months

About the Federation of State Humanities Councils

Founded in 1977, the Federation of State Humanities Councils ("Federation") is the national membership organization for the 56 state and jurisdictional humanities councils. The Federation advocates for increased investment in and engagement with the national network of humanities councils. We support, connect, and amplify the work and voices of our members, demonstrating councils' value for communities and their collective impact on civic health and cultural vibrancy. The Federation is governed by a 15-member volunteer Board of Directors. At an Annual Business Meeting, member humanities councils review and vote on proposed Board members and Chair, annual budget, and annual work plan.

Project Goal

The Federation seeks to expand its capacity to raise funds to support and sustain the national network of non-profit humanities councils. Our priority is the development and implementation of specific strategies designed to secure major grants or gifts for the network in the \$1m-\$15m range, with a focus on private foundations, corporations, and large individual donors in the United States. Changes to federal funding in the past year make this an urgent priority for the Federation and its member councils.

About State and Jurisdictional Humanities Councils

Our nation's 56 state and jurisdictional humanities councils are nonpartisan 501(c)3 nonprofit organizations established in 1971 by Congress to make outstanding public humanities programming accessible to everyday Americans. Councils are funded in part by the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH).

State humanities councils share a track record of supporting education, cultural infrastructure, and public programs rooted in democratic practices. In each area, humanities councils address gaps in the landscapes in their states, developing and supporting programs for historically underserved communities. Because every state has its own needs and cultures, the councils vary in the ways they meet their missions.

Project Background

In 2024, the 56 state and jurisdictional humanities councils worked with more than 5,000 local partners in communities across our nation, reaching nearly 43 million residents through programs and grantmaking. With a total annual investment of more than \$50 million in direct grants in 2024, the councils continued their unparalleled support for the nation's cultural life, reaching local audiences in every corner of the country.

On April 2, 2025, at the direction of the Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) and with no advance notice, NEH discontinued all funding to its state and jurisdictional affiliates. A relationship that began more than 60 years ago was destroyed, quite literally, overnight. The termination of NEH's five-year operating grants to the councils represents a direct threat to the nation's cultural infrastructure and vitality.

The cuts came in the middle of the councils' fiscal years, leaving the organizations without the funding necessary for operations or programming. The immediate total losses are estimated at \$37.2 million, nearly 60% of NEH's \$65 million in annual grants to the humanities councils, resulting in the pause or cancellation of over one third of programs and over 60% of all council grantmaking programs. These grant programs fund vital cultural infrastructure like local museums, rural libraries, and community nonprofits.

Despite a federal district court delivering a preliminary injunction on August 6, 2025 ruling that the termination of humanities councils' operating grants in April by the NEH was unlawful, funds have not been reinstated. The case is proceeding, but there will still be a long way to go before any legal resolution.

While emergency funding from the Mellon Foundation in 2025 ensured no councils have closed their doors, nine months without full funding has caused staff layoffs, cancelled programs, and rapid fundraising to cover gaps. The Federation and its members face an urgent need to diversify and strengthen revenue streams to ensure long-term sustainability. The Federation is seeking a fundraising consultant to develop and begin implementing a

strategy that will build a more resilient and diversified financial future for the council network.

Scope of Work

The selected consultant(s) will perform the following activities:

- Discovery and Assessment: Review the Federation's current fundraising efforts on behalf of the council network and their results.
 - This will include: Taking under consideration the individual fundraising councils are doing and integrating awareness and sensitivities to existing relationships with national foundations and existing and ongoing conversations councils are having individually and in smaller groups.
- Strategy Development: Based on the assessment, present a multi-year fundraising plan that details specific strategies for private funders. The plan should include timelines and measurable goals for \$1m-\$15m gifts.
- Prospect Research: Identify a target list of new prospective funders, such as private foundations, corporations, and large individual donors, that align with the humanities councils' shared mission, as well as regional or thematic strategies councils are engaging
- Reporting: Deliver a final written report detailing the plan and a verbal presentation to the staff, Board, and membership.
- Implementation Support: Work closely with the Federation's staff, Board, and humanities council members to implement the plan: drafting outreach materials and grant proposals, coaching staff and Board on best practices, donor cultivation, and solicitation.
 - This will include the creation of toolkits and training for the staff/board/committee who will continue the work beyond the end of the 12-month contract.

Sector-Specific Knowledge

The consultant must have a track record of success with organizations that operate in the cultural and humanities space.

- Understanding the funding ecosystem: They should be familiar with the dual-source funding models typical of many humanities organizations, which often rely on both government support and private philanthropy.
- Mission-driven storytelling: The consultant should demonstrate an ability to translate the abstract impact of humanities programs—like civic engagement and community

building—into compelling stories that resonate with individual, corporate, and foundation donors.

- Strategic guidance for grant funding: A history of navigating and advising on large-scale grants from major foundations like the Mellon Foundation is highly valuable, especially given recent emergency funding.

National-Level and Network-Based Experience

The Federation is a national membership organization, not a local one.

- Multi-stakeholder approach: The consultant should understand how to build a fundraising strategy that uses a national umbrella organization as the focal point for garnering support to sustain 56 member councils in different states and jurisdictions.
- National fundraising campaigns: The consultant should have experience with large-scale fundraising campaigns that require a national scope, reach, and network.
- Working with a Board and staff: The consultant needs to effectively coach the Federation's leadership on executing a national strategy.

Evidence of Results

Ultimately, the Federation wants to see results.

- Demonstrated impact: The consultant should be able to provide clear, quantifiable examples of how their work resulted in increased fundraising capacity and revenue for past clients.
- Capacity-building success: They should show how they've not just raised money for a client but also trained and empowered the organization's staff and Board to continue successful fundraising after the engagement ends.

Budget

The total budget for this project is not to exceed \$90,000. Proposals must include a detailed and fixed-price budget for the deliverables outlined in the Scope of Work.

Proposal Submission Requirements

To be considered, proposals must be submitted electronically in a single PDF file to jobs@statehumanities.org by 11:59pm ET on April 12, 2026 and should not exceed ten pages. It must include the following:

- Consultant/Team Background: Qualifications and relevant experience, including a history of working with national or federated nonprofit organizations as well as a

track record of seven figure/principal level gifts. Identify the project lead and key personnel.

- Approach and Methodology: A narrative outlining your proposed approach to the scope of work, including a timeline with benchmarks.
- Work Samples: Provide examples of past fundraising strategy work, preferably with organizations of a similar scale or mission.
- Budget: A detailed budget with a fixed price for the outlined deliverables. Include any proposed hourly rates for additional services.
- References: Contact names, phone numbers, and email addresses for three references from clients for whom you have performed similar services.
- Conflict of Interest: Disclose any potential conflicts of interest with the Federation of State Humanities Councils or its member councils.

Selection Process

Proposals will be reviewed by a committee composed of Federation staff, Board, and humanities council members. Finalists will be invited for interviews.

Timeline

- RFP Issued: March 13, 2026
- Submission Deadline: April 12, 2026
- Review and Interviews: April 13-May 1
- Selection and Award: May 8
- Project Start Date: May 18, 2026
- Meetings with stakeholders: May-June 2026
- Plan Delivery: July 29-30, 2026 (at Federation Board Meeting in Washington, DC)
- Final Report & Training Materials: August 14, 2026
- Support for & Management of Asks: August 2026-May 2027

Learn more about the Federation at www.statehumanities.org.

The Federation of State Humanities Councils does not and shall not discriminate based on race, color, religion (creed), gender, gender expression, age, national origin (ancestry), disability, marital status, sexual orientation, or military status, in any of its activities or operations. These activities include, but are not limited to, hiring and firing of staff, selection of volunteers and vendors, and provision of services. We are committed to providing an inclusive and welcoming environment for all members of our staff, members, volunteers, subcontractors, and vendors.