

ACTION & INCUBATION GRANT GUIDELINES

The New Jersey Council for the Humanities offers grant funding in two separate streams: Incubation Grants and Action Grants. This document outlines guidelines for both of these funding streams.

- Incubation Grants support the *planning and development* of public humanities projects for audiences in NJ.
- Action Grants are geared toward *implementation and continuation* of public humanities projects.
- Organizations can only apply for one grant per round and must select either Incubation or Action.
- Please note: These guidelines will be updated annually in the summer.

Grant Amount: \$3,000-15,000 | **Project Period:** Up to 12 months

... 2024-2025 DEADLINES ...

ROUND 1

- LOI Period: September 1-30, 2024
- Draft Review Deadline: October 4, 2024
- Application Deadline: October 15, 2024
- Award Notification: By January 10, 2025
- Projects Begin: January 15-March 30, 2025

ROUND 2

- LOI Period: March 1-31, 2025
- Draft Review Deadline: April 4, 2025
- Application Deadline: April 15, 2025
- Award Notification: By July 11, 2025
- Projects Begin: July 15-September 30, 2025

... ELIGIBILITY ...

WHO CAN APPLY?

New Jersey-based nonprofit organizations or government entities, such as a public library, museum, historical society, academic institution, religious group, or community organization are eligible to apply for NJCH grants.

- Organizations that have a mission outside of the public humanities, such as arts and social service organizations, are eligible to apply if the funding would support public humanities work.
- Applicant organizations must have either federal or state tax-exemption. All applicants must have at least one year of verifiable public operation prior to submitting their proposal.
- We do not award grants to for-profit organizations or to individuals.
- Organizations that have an open NJCH grant or other program award (such as Community History, Humanities Lab, Informed NJ, or a Sponsorship) are not eligible to apply for a new award until the final report on the open award has been approved and the award has been closed.
- Organizations may not apply with a fiscal sponsor. Partnerships are allowed, but an eligible institution must lead as the primary applicant on your request.

... INCUBATION VS. ACTION GRANTS ...

INCUBATION GRANTS

An **Incubation Grant** might help you forge a new partnership or deepen an existing one, research a new topic or widen perspective on a current topic, talk to community stakeholders, or learn more about your audience. Whether you are planning a new endeavor or re-imagining an existing program, these grants support the thoughtful preparation of a program prior to implementation.

Please note that being awarded an Incubation Grant does not guarantee funding in the Action Grant stream in the following (or any) grant cycle.

A meaningful question is the start of a great Incubation Grant proposal. We are most interested in hearing about the need you wish to address, your goals as you start this process, and how you plan to proceed. Since these grants support projects in development, we understand that preliminary ideas will change and evolve. Articulating a plan for how you will pursue your goals is critical for a competitive Incubation Grant proposal.

Example Incubation Grant Projects

- Creation of a historic site reinterpretation plan.
- Developing a community archival or oral history project.
- Audience outreach and assessment for new or extant humanities-based programming.
- Humanities-based research as a precursor to the development of an artistic work.
- Planning and development of public humanities programming, such as a facilitated discussion program.
- Research and design for humanities-based exhibitions.

Project team: Part of the Incubation Grant process can be identifying and assembling the humanities experts needed for your project team. Incubation Grant applicants who are still developing their project team should articulate what types of skills or expertise they are still looking for at the point of application and any progress they have made in securing the needed individual(s).

Audience: A strong Incubation Grant project will develop programming with an intended audience through a collaborative process that considers the audience's needs and interests. This process can help you determine whether your project ideas will truly serve your intended audience or to reevaluate your existing programs to better serve a new audience.

ACTION GRANTS

An **Action Grant** can help you implement new projects developed through previous Incubation Grants or other planning processes. Or they can support the continuation or expansion of existing programs. We encourage you to set a bold vision for your programming and program designs. An Action Grant proposal will be able to clearly articulate a program's objectives, plan, and timeline.

There will be very few questions you have left to answer before you're ready to get the show on the road – you know what and who you need to make your project successful and are able to clearly identify the component parts of your project through your grant application and budget. Even very new projects can be appropriate for Action Grants if the planning and development work has been completed and the pilot is ready to go.

Example Action Grant Projects

- Fieldwork for an oral history project.
- Hosting a series of public humanities programs, such as a facilitated reading and discussion program.
- Implementation of humanities-based public exhibitions and tours, both in-person and virtual.
- Supporting associated humanities-based public programming for an exhibition.
- Production of a digital humanities project or other humanities-based multi-media resources.

Project team: It is possible that some or all of the input by some project team members took place during the planning and development process prior to the work included on the Action Grant application. That is acceptable and a brief description of project work done by previous project team members can be included in the application.

Audience: A strong Action Grant project puts your intended audience's needs and interests at the center of the work. Applicants will need to be able to articulate how their project ideas serve their audience(s) and provide concrete examples of how the planning and development process or prior experience led to that conclusion.

Note: The lists above are illustrative, not exhaustive. Not sure which grant is right for your project? NJCH staff are available to help you determine the appropriate type of funding for your proposed project.

●●● YOUR PROJECT ●●●

ABOUT THE PUBLIC HUMANITIES

The *humanities* include familiar disciplines such as history, literature, and philosophy, as well as those less common, such as jurisprudence. The humanities also encompass *art history, theory, and criticism*, but not the *creation or performance* of art.

The public humanities make these pursuits accessible to wide and diverse audiences through a variety of methods – exhibitions and installations, discussion programs, oral history projects, interpretive tours, etc. – that enable audiences to engage in critical reflection on human histories, cultures, values, and beliefs.

YOUR PROJECT TEAM

The project team are the individuals who bring the humanities-based subject matter and practice expertise needed to create rich and nuanced public humanities work. It is important to consider how the knowledge, skills, and lived experience of your team members complement each other as a whole.

Humanities expertise can be found in individuals from a variety of backgrounds:

- Academic humanists – university faculty, graduate students, or researchers who have an advanced degree in a humanities field and are employed by an institution of higher learning.
- Public humanists – those who likely have an advanced degree in a humanities field but are not affiliated with a college or university. They often work as practitioners in non-profit organizations like museums, libraries, or cultural centers, or they may work independently.
- Humanities experts from nontraditional backgrounds – they may or may not possess an advanced degree but are defined by their own communities as keepers of knowledge and cultural resources.

Project team members can serve in a variety of roles, including as an advisor, presenter, researcher, writer, trainer, and/or convener. They can be internal staff and individuals brought in from outside, but all should have deep knowledge of a particular subject or practice.

Competitive grant applications will include a strong project team that reflects subject-matter expertise, significant experience in humanities-based work, and representation from intended audience in the development and/or implementation of the project. If you need help identifying a humanities expert, contact us at grants@njhumanities.org.

WHAT WE DON'T FUND

- Humanitarian aid/social services
- Financial literacy
- Political and social advocacy
- Self-help, wellness, health, and fitness programs
- Projects that do not engage with humanities disciplines/practices, including the creation and performance of art, art education, creative writing, and empirically based social science research or policy studies.

YOUR AUDIENCE

We find that the most meaningful projects are designed for a specific audience, and *we are particularly interested in projects that serve traditionally under-resourced and marginalized populations.*

While these groups differ in each community, we do know that some groups often lack representation in the humanities, including:

- Black, Indigenous, and other persons of color.
- Young people, especially ages 18-35.
- LGBTQ+ people.
- People who live far away from cultural centers like libraries and museums.
- People with disabilities.
- People whose first (or only) language is not English.
- People who are unable to get to programs easily, like nursing home residents, hospital patients, or prisoners.

The most competitive proposals will articulate why this audience is particularly important to your organization and how you plan to engage them in this project. The most competitive projects are made *with* an audience, not *for* them.

... APPLICATION & PROCESS ...

BEFORE YOU START

- **Grant Period:** The period of time during which your grant funds and matching costs will be incurred is called the grant period. All grant periods must begin within three months of receiving an award and projects may last up to 12 months. All grant funds must be incurred during the grant period; no costs incurred prior to the start or after the grant closes may be applied to the grant, including matching funds.
- **Unique Entity ID (UEI):** Applicants will need to have a verifiable UEI from the System for Award Management (SAM.gov) by the application deadline. Organizations may just apply for the UEI; completing the full SAM.gov registration process is not a requirement. To learn more, apply for, or update a UEI, please visit [SAM.gov](https://sam.gov).
- **Account:** Organizations that have not applied for any NJCH funding opportunities since September 2020 will need to create an account in our online award system, available at njhumanities.org/portal. Returning applicants will be able to access the system using their account credentials.
- **Letter Of Intent (LOI):** Once you've decided which grant to apply for, you'll need to submit the LOI using [our online grant system](#). The LOI is an online form (not a separate letter) that requests some basic information about your organization, a short description of your proposed project, and an estimated grant request. The LOI is not competitive but enables NJCH to determine that your organization is eligible to apply for a grant and that your project is appropriate for NJCH funding. *Please note that organizations must begin their applications by submitting the LOI form during the LOI period. No application can be started once that period has passed, even if it is prior to the application deadline.*

APPLICATION PROCESS

- If your organization and project meet the basic eligibility requirements, you will be invited to submit a full application. Once your LOI is approved, an invitation will be sent via email and the full application will be accessible in the grant system.
- Please note that by default the proposal will only be accessible to the primary applicant, even if other members in your organization have an account in our system. If you need other project team members to have access to the proposal, we recommend using the **Collaborate** feature in our grant system.
- Final applications must be submitted through our online system by the deadline listed in the grant guidelines. Materials submitted late will not be considered except under significant extenuating circumstances, and written notice of late submission must be made to NJCH in advance of the deadline.
- Once your final application is submitted, you will not be able to make any changes. If you submit in error, please contact us at grants@njhumanities.org to reset your application.

ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

- **For large institutions such as colleges, universities, or municipalities,** a department or division counts as an organization. For example, both a library and a historical society from the same municipality or two different departments from the same university would be eligible to apply in a single grant round. However, NJCH may limit the number of grants a single large institution receives to ensure that available funding is spread equitably across the state.
- **Academic institutions** will need to demonstrate meaningful public engagement and partnerships *beyond the institution* to have a competitive proposal.
- **Organizations with missions outside of the humanities** (such as arts institutions, social service organizations, or neighborhood groups) are welcome to apply for an NJCH grant. However, only applications that center humanities-focused work will be competitive.

BUDGET AND USE OF FUNDS

- All project costs must be reasonable, necessary to accomplish project objectives, and incurred during the grant period.
- The budget submitted must include all project costs, not only those charged to NJCH grant funds, but also those that will be supported by the applicant organization or by other funding sources (matching funds – more information below).
- Values assigned should be reasonable in relation to rates paid for similar work, current market prices, or fair rental charges.
- NJCH re-grants federal funds that it receives from the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH). Please consult your organization's accountant or auditor to determine if you are subject to certain governmental audit requirements as a result of your receipt of these federal funds.
- Applicants must follow standard accounting procedures for all grant awards.
- Since grants may be subject to NJCH and NEH audit, grant recipients must maintain financial records for at least three years following submission of the final report.

INELIGIBLE COSTS

- General operating support.
- Work outside of the humanities, including the creation or performance of art; creative writing, autobiographies, memoirs, and creative nonfiction; and empirically based social science research or policy studies.
- Scholarly programs directed to a limited audience or individual scholar research.
- Direct social action or political advocacy, including the advocacy of a particular program of social or political action, support of specific public policies or legislation, and lobbying.
- Re-grants, prizes, awards, and projects that provide academic credit, scholarships, fellowships, or regular course offerings.
- The purchase of land or facilities, capital projects, construction, or renovation.
- Acquisitions of major equipment over \$10,000 in value.
- Alcohol and entertainment costs.
- Fundraising activities, contributions to an endowment, and the repayment of loans or debts.
- Overlapping project costs with any other pending or approved application for federal funding, including an open or pending NJCH Incubation or Action Grant.
- Costs incurred prior to or after the grant period.
- Unallowable expenses as defined in [2 CFR 200 Subpart E – Cost principles](#).

MATCHING FUNDS REQUIREMENT

Matching funds are the portion of the project costs not covered by the NJCH grant. The Council requires the applicant to provide a minimum 100% match for the funds requested from NJCH.

Matching funds may come from the applicant organization and/or third-party sources (individuals, foundations, corporations, etc.) other than the National Endowment for the Humanities.

Matching funds may come from any combination of in-kind contributions (donated goods or services), monetary contributions, or from the applicant's operating budget. Matching funds may be applied to any budget category EXCEPT indirect costs.

INDIRECT COSTS

Also known as “administrative costs” or “overhead,” indirect costs are incurred through the execution of an organization's day-to-day activities, but cannot be attached to anything specific. Most applicants elect to charge the de minimis rate of 15% of modified total direct costs as allowed per the [Uniform Guidance](#).

- Applicants that have a Negotiated Indirect Cost Rate Agreement (NICRA) with the federal government may use the appropriate rate established by NICRA or may elect to charge the de minimis rate.
- Organizations using a negotiated indirect cost rate must provide a copy of their current NICRA form to NJCH.
- Organizations are not required to include indirect costs as part of their budget, but most follow this guidance if they elect to do so. Indirect costs may not be applied to the required matching funds.

●●● EVALUATION ●●●

HOW MANY PROJECTS GET FUNDED?

Due to the competitiveness of each award cycle, we typically fund at a rate of about 30%. This means that just over two-thirds of all the applications we receive will not be funded in the average grant round. Many strong applications are not funded in each round - simply because we run out of funding, before we run out of great work to fund!

HOW ARE PROJECTS EVALUATED?

Proposal review and assessment is conducted by NJCH's Grants Committee, which is composed of humanities professionals who work as scholars and practitioners throughout the state of New Jersey at libraries, museums, historical societies, arts organizations, or educational institutions. Each grant proposal is evaluated on the following criteria:

PROJECT PLAN & OUTCOMES

- *Incubation:* Project identifies clear goals and is supported by a plan. Applicant indicates willingness to adjust based on discovery during the process.
- *Action:* Project identifies outcomes, is supported by a well-conceived plan, and is ready to be implemented.
- Proposal indicates assessment criteria and connects that effort to the project's goals and intentions.

AUDIENCE & OUTREACH

- *Incubation:* Project may work towards identifying an audience within clear parameters, and involving that audience in its design.
- *Action:* Project is designed to serve a clearly defined audience, and engages that audience in its conception and execution.
- Project seeks to engage underrepresented or under-served audiences, and/or finds ways to bring people of different backgrounds and experiences together.
- The organization is well-suited to work with the target audience, and has clear strategies for connection and outreach.

HUMANITIES CONTENT & PROJECT TEAM

- Project deeply engages with the humanities and relies on informed resources to pursue complex questions and ideas.
- Project creates opportunities for learning, pushing participants towards broader perspectives.
- Project content encourages critical thinking and opportunities for dialogue or response.
- The expertise and experience of the project team is well-suited to the project, or the organization has clarified how an appropriate project team will be recruited.

BUDGET & CAPACITY

- Budget requests reasonable costs that reflect the project goals and deliverables.
- Budget shows thoughtful consideration of what will be needed to execute the project.
- Proposal clearly demonstrates the organizational capacity necessary to do the work proposed.
- Project is connected to the organization's mission and objectives.

••• HOW WE CAN HELP YOU •••

WORKSHOPS

Each year, NJCH offers a variety of workshops to current and potential grantees and program partners. Offerings are updated regularly as new opportunities become available. In addition to grants workshops, NJCH offers individuals and organizations opportunities for professional development, skill and capacity building, learning, and networking through our [In the Weeds](#) program.

SPEAK WITH NJCH PROGRAM STAFF

NJCH Program Staff are available throughout the grant cycle to answer your questions and discuss your project. Please contact us at either 609.695.4303 or grants@njhumanities.org. We can answer simple questions quickly via phone or email. We also recognize there are instances where more in-depth guidance and discussion is needed and offer organizations the opportunity to schedule one-on-one meetings with NJCH program staff. Contact us via email to schedule a meeting.

DRAFT REVIEW

Organizations invited to submit an application may submit one draft for review by the draft deadline. NJCH staff will typically provide written feedback on your draft proposal, but it can be incorporated into scheduled meetings. We do not require complete applications for draft review. Draft applications should be sent to grants@njhumanities.org as Word, Excel, and/or PDF documents.

If you are unable to complete the full application by the draft review deadline, a completed budget and partial narrative is often more useful than a complete narrative and no budget.

An easy way to create a PDF of your draft application is to click the “Application Packet” button on the application page of our online grant system.

TIPS & TRICKS

- **Tell us what you want us to know.** Individuals evaluating your application may not know anything about your organization, your project, or your community, even if you have received funding from NJCH in the past.
- **NJCH grants are for projects.** A project is a discrete piece of your work. A successful application will make clear how the project is distinct within your organization’s broader activities.
- **What you are doing matters as much as why you are doing it.** Successful applications have clear goals and deliverables that evaluators can easily identify in your narrative. The most competitive proposals are often the most straightforward.
- **Your budget tells a story, too.** How you spend your money is a strong indicator of your goals and values. The expenses in your budget should reflect your project plan.
- **On time is better than perfect.** Our system will not allow you to submit the application after the deadline.
- **Your audience is the heart and soul of your project.** Who are you serving? What role do they play in your project, and for your organization?
- **Keep it simple.** Avoid generalizations, flowery language, and hyperbole. Don’t write more than you need to. And don’t forget to proofread!