

**THIRD ANNUAL REPORT TO CONGRESS UNDER PL 106-107
NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE HUMANITIES
GRANT STREAMLINING AND SIMPLIFICATION ACTIVITIES
May, 2003 through May, 2004**

The National Endowment for the Humanities is pleased to report its accomplishments in streamlining its internal grant application and administration procedures and in improving services to applicants and grantees.

I. Participation in the Government-wide Streamlining and Grants.gov Efforts

The National Endowment for the Humanities is actively participating in all facets of the HHS-sponsored Grants.gov project and in a number of other inter-agency groups. These include the Federal Grant Streamlining Program Interagency Pre-Award and Post-Award Working Groups, and two of their subgroups, one tasked with development of the Performance Progress Report and the other for the development of the Federal Financial Report form; the Research Business Models Subgroup preparing a performance progress report for research and related agencies; the Grants.gov Stakeholders group; the Cultural Agencies Workgroup, which has devised an application data set for the cultural agencies; the Grants Network; the Grants Management Line of Business Task Force; and the Interagency Electronic Grants Committee. Involvement in these working groups allows us to stay informed and find additional opportunities to participate in streamlining activities.

NEH has provided formal comments on every Grants.gov and PL 106-107 initiative that has been announced in the *Federal Register* over the past year and has provided extensive preliminary comments on each initiative as well before the request for comments appeared in the *Federal Register*. NEH has reviewed and provided comments on: the FIND policy and the funding announcement format and data elements; the policy for use of the DUNS number as the universal identifier; and the proposed Research Cross Agency Data Set.

In July of 2003, NEH was a participant in the formal pilot phase of the Grants.gov initiative for the "Apply" function. NEH staff tested all aspects of the "Apply" function by downloading and submitting application packages, and then retrieving applications from the Grants.gov portal to download into the NEH computer system. Extensive comments and feedback on these functions were then submitted to the Grants.gov staff along with suggestions for improvement of all aspects of the process. In the fall of 2003 and spring of 2004, NEH successfully built, tested, and deployed the interface necessary for the agency to accept electronic applications from Grants.gov and import them directly into NEH's Grants Management System. This was in preparation for the August launch of the first two NEH's grant categories to be available on Grants.gov APPLY.

II. Internal Efforts to Create an Environment Conducive to Grants Streamlining and Simplification and Assess Impact of Changes

General Approach

The National Endowment for the Humanities continually works to improve the effectiveness and performance of its grant programs through staff evaluations and the solicitation of advice about procedures and guidelines from the humanities practitioners who serve as panelists in the agency's merit review process. In addition, visitors to and users of the NEH website at www.neh.gov are invited to provide comments and suggestions on our programs, guidelines, forms, and instructions.

NEH management holds monthly meetings with the Division Directors and Office Heads, where updates on grants streamlining efforts and ideas for new initiatives are discussed. In addition, the NEH's Chief Information Officer holds regular meetings attended by representatives of each NEH office to discuss on-line grant application and other electronic projects and initiatives that are underway both government-wide and within the agency.

NEH has streamlined the internal agency clearance process, which is the mechanism by which all grant application guidelines and forms are reviewed and updated every year. The roster of clearing officers includes two members who are NEH's representatives to the Federal Grant Streamlining Program Interagency Pre-Award and Post-Award Working Groups. As a result, all NEH guidelines have been revised to be consistent with the latest government-wide initiatives on grants streamlining.

III. Implementing the Recent Changes Affecting the Pre-Award Process

A. Grants.gov FIND

NEH participated in the pilot that tested the "Find Grant Opportunities" on the Grants.gov storefront. NEH now has all of the agency's funding opportunities posted on Grants.gov FIND. When new funding opportunities are posted on the NEH website, they are also posted on Grant.gov FIND.

B. Announcement Template

NEH staff reviewed the draft template for grant announcements in its early stages and were impressed with the approach being proposed. In the spring of 2002 the NEH decided to adopt the proposed template for all its guidelines for the year and began to rewrite program guidelines to accommodate the format of the template. Acknowledging that subsequent review of the draft

template by other federal agencies and public comment on the notice of the template in the *Federal Register* could lead to changes, the staff nevertheless was confident that the overall approach to the template would gain approval because of its clarity and logical order of presentation and that any further changes could be easily accommodated. Therefore the programs and publications staff began the process of re-writing NEH program guidelines to be consistent with the template. At the end of May of 2003, all NEH guidelines had been re-written to follow the announcement template as it appeared in the *Federal Register* notice.

C. The Grants.gov Portal and Electronic Applications

In June of 2002, after an extensive e-government review process, NEH replaced its aging legacy grants system with a new relational database called GMS (Grants Management System). One of the key features of GMS is its ability to import and store application materials received electronically. This past year, nearly half of the agency's grant applications were received electronically via our website. The electronic data was then imported into GMS, effectively eliminating the need to hand-key the data. In addition, since we had the application materials in an electronic format, we were able to do many of the evaluations via the web as well. NEH panelists could come to a secure portion of the NEH website, log in, and then view application materials and submit their evaluations.

The capabilities of GMS have also put us into an excellent position to receive applications from Grants.gov. The NEH has been actively participating in the Grants.gov project. Our agency successfully built, tested, and deployed a "system to system interface" that allows us to receive applications electronically from Grants.gov and import them directly into our GMS system. This interface was built in-house at no cost. We have also worked with Grants.gov to place two of our grant competitions onto the Grants.gov website to enable the public to apply electronically. The first of these grant competitions, our "Grants for Stabilizing Humanities Collections" program, has a deadline of October 1, 2004. The second program, "Challenge Grants," has a deadline of November 1, 2004.