



Grant Guidelines

Information for Prospective Applicants

Updated: February 4, 2021

Since 1974, Virginia Humanities has awarded more than 4,000 grants, supporting tens of thousands of activities reaching audiences in every corner of the Commonwealth and beyond.

Any non-profit organization may apply for Virginia Humanities grant support, with preference given to those located within the Commonwealth of Virginia. Grants are made to organizations based *outside* the state only for projects that take place within Virginia's borders.

Special consideration is given to organizations that have not received a Virginia Humanities grant previously and especially to organizations that are applying for a grant for the first time.

Mission and Purpose

Virginia Humanities grants support projects that explore the stories of Virginia—its history, people, communities, and cultural traditions—as well as issues and questions that impact the lives of Virginians in the present day.

We are particularly, but not exclusively, interested in projects that address the following themes:

Equity and Democracy: Exploring the ways our democratic ideals both are and are not reflected in the histories of Virginia and its communities;

Amplifying Virginia's Stories: Exploring the lives, histories, and traditions of communities who are new to Virginia and/or whose stories have been excluded from previous narratives;

Cultures and Communities in Transition: Exploring the challenges faced by Virginia and its communities during times of economic, social, cultural, environmental, and technological change.

Goals of the Grant Program

Grants and grant making are central to the work of Virginia Humanities. The goals of the Grant Program are:

- 1) To encourage the development of high-quality education programs in the humanities.
- 2) To support accessible programs that reach the broadest possible audience in Virginia.
- 3) To support the work of humanities organizations in Virginia—museums, public libraries, historical societies, colleges and universities, and community-based organizations.
- 4) To explore the stories that define Virginia and its people and address the issues that are most important to communities in every part of the state.

Our grants:

- respect and draw from many sources of knowledge and expertise
- honor diverse opinions and perspectives
- encourage broad public engagement and participation
- address a wide range of topics of interest to Virginians
- acknowledge the complexity of Virginia's past—and present
- create opportunities for personal exploration and community dialogue
- forge new relationships and/or build on existing ones
- serve, whenever possible, as catalysts, opening doors for future programs

The Humanities

The humanities explore and express the human experience: the difficult stories of our shared past and those we honor and celebrate. They include reading, writing, storytelling, research, and many forms of dialogue and conversation, and draw from the fields of history, literature and folklife, among others.

They are not static or remote from everyday experience. They belong to every person, regardless of education or cultural background. They include ancient wisdom and traditions from every culture; and they are continuously being refreshed by new discoveries, ideas, and creative works.

The humanities are tools that help us understand the past and seek our own personal answers to the questions that define what it means to be human: questions about freedom and responsibility, the importance of tradition, the meaning of community, and about who we are—and aspire to be, as individuals and communities—in times of rapid social and technological change.

What We Fund

NOTE: While COVID-19 restrictions are in place, special consideration will be given to applications for projects designed to deliver programming on digital platforms.

Virginia Humanities grants may be used to support any of the following (partial list):

- Exhibits—physical and/or online
- Films—including script development, pre-production, and production phases
- Podcasts and radio programs
- Lectures and lecture series
- Community forums and public discussions—including book or film discussions
- Conferences and symposia
- Digital media projects—including website development
- Institutes and similar programs for teachers
- Development of curriculum resources for classroom use
- Print publications—brochures, interpretive maps, exhibit catalogs, books
- Oral histories
- Festivals and interpretive performances
- Research—leading to programs having a direct public audience
- Planning
- Other formats and activities not listed above

Restrictions on Funding

Virginia Humanities grants may **not** be used to support the following:

- Advocacy or political action; programs that promote a particular policy or point of view
- Creative or performing arts, unless used in a supporting role to enhance discussion
- In-school programs or projects whose **sole** audience is children or youth
- Courses for credit, except those designed especially for teachers
- Research except to support programs having a direct public audience (an exhibit, e.g.)
- International travel
- Refreshments or entertainment; alcoholic beverages
- Awards or gifts
- Meals, other than necessary travel expenses for project personnel
- Building construction, restoration, or renovation
- Expenses outside the grant-period and/or the approved budget

Types of Grants

Virginia Humanities offers two kinds of grants, designed to serve the widest possible range of applicants.

Summer and Winter Grants

These grants are awarded in two cycles each year, as follows:

- Summer Grant Cycle
 - Letter of Intent Due: May 15
 - Application Deadline: July 15
 - Decisions by Mid-September
- Winter Grant Cycle
 - Letter of Intent Due: November 15
 - Application Deadline: January 15
 - Decisions by Mid-March
- Maximum request: \$20,000
- Most Summer and Winter grants are in the \$5,000–\$10,000 range
- Additional requirements for requests greater than \$10,000 (see Application Procedures, below)

Rolling Grants (formerly “Discretionary” Grants)

These grants are awarded between regular cycles—see above.

- Proposals may be submitted at any time. Decisions typically within 2-3 weeks.
- Maximum request: \$5,000
- Most Rolling grants are in the \$2,000--\$3,000 range
- Rolling grants support:
 - Planning
 - First step(s) or phase(s) in a larger project
 - Programs or activities that take place before the next Spring or Fall Grant review period

Letters of Intent

Beginning August 1, 2020, applicants for Summer and Winter Grants are required to submit a Letter of Intent.

Letters of Intent begin the application process on May 15 or November 15 and are required before approval to advance to full application stage (July 15 or January 15). Letters will be used to assess eligibility and enable Virginia Humanities staff to provide more timely advice to prospective applicants.

Letters should be no more than one page and must be submitted online (see instructions in the online application). They should *briefly* describe the project; its relationship to the mission of the applicant organization; and why (from the applicant's perspective) it merits grant support from Virginia Humanities. The letter should also include a tentative project timeline.

Prospective applicants will receive a response within two weeks, with advice regarding next steps in the application process.

Application Procedures

Note: Beginning immediately and until further notice *all* grantees must agree to follow applicable CDC and Commonwealth of Virginia guidelines for social distancing, covering any and all events or in-person gatherings supported by the grant.

Virginia Humanities grant applications are submitted online. See and follow instructions in the [online application](#). Note that first-time applicants will need to set up an account.

All grant applicants are strongly encouraged to submit a draft proposal for staff review and comment at least three weeks prior to the formal application. Staff is available to advise prospective applicants by phone or in-person and to answer questions before the draft is submitted.

Applicants for Summer and Winter Grants in amounts greater than \$10,000 **must**:

- a) discuss the project idea with staff prior to submitting a draft proposal;
- b) submit a draft proposal for staff review and comment; and
- c) provide a detailed plan for extending the impact of the funded project beyond the grant period—for multiplying and ensuring its long-term impact.

This plan should be included in the proposal narrative (see Creating a Strong Proposal, below).

Draft proposals are submitted via e-mail (grants@virginiahumanities.org) and should include the following:

- a) Brief Project Description
- b) Full Project Narrative (see Creating a Strong Proposal, below)
- c) Itemized Budget presented on the required Budget Form

Do not submit resumes/ CVs, letters of endorsement, or other supporting materials in the Draft stage.

Applicants are also required to submit a Cover Sheet with digital signatures of the Project Director and Financial Officer (see Application Form).

Applicants will receive an automated acknowledgement when the proposal has been formally submitted. This acknowledgement does not guarantee that the proposal is complete, only that it has been received. All applicants will be notified by phone or e-mail as soon as possible, once a decision has been made.

Note: Virginia Humanities will consider applications submitted in languages other than English. For non-English applications a longer review and consultation period may be necessary. Prospective applicants should contact Virginia Humanities grant staff (through an English-speaking interpreter or representative) well in advance of the projected application date.

Creating a Strong Proposal

The core of every proposal is the Project Narrative. There is no prescribed format for the Narrative—it should reflect the character of the project and the work being proposed.

Most proposals should include the following. See specific instructions on the application form itself.

- 1) A statement of need or opportunity, including the origins of the project idea and the need(s) it is designed to serve; why the project is important or especially timely now.
- 2) A brief history of the project, with any relevant background on the current request.
- 3) A concise description of the specific work or activities/programs for which funding is requested.
- 4) An explanation of how the humanities are central to the work being proposed.
- 5) Information on key project personnel and their roles, in particular the roles of the humanities scholars who will be contributing to the project—as speakers/presenters, consultants, or otherwise.

Note: our definition of “humanities scholar” is not limited to university-based professors or researchers: it also includes community historians who have developed strong expertise and knowledge in a particular field of the humanities—local history, traditional arts or cultural studies, for example.

- 6) A work plan for the project. Note that a separate project schedule/timeline is also required (see application form). How will the work of the project move forward from the point of funding to the completion of all the programs/activities for which funding is requested? Who is responsible for the various parts of the work plan?
- 7) A discussion of the intended audience(s) for the project and a detailed promotion plan that normally includes both general and targeted strategies for reaching out to these audiences. Note that for some projects (script development for a documentary film, for example) there may not be an immediate audience. In cases like this, instead of outlining specific promotion strategies, the proposal should identify the eventual targeted audience(s) and include a brief explanation of how those audiences will be reached (local/regional broadcast and community screenings, for example).

- 8) Discussion of outcomes, benefits, and short and long-term impact. How will your community/Virginia/the nation be better as a result of our having supported this project? What are its contributions? Will this project lay the foundation for other programs to follow?

Note that proposals for Summer/Winter grants of \$10,000 or more **must** also provide a detailed plan for extending the impact of the funded project beyond the grant period—for multiplying and ensuring its long-term impact.

Review Process and Criteria

Applications are reviewed on a competitive basis. Funding decisions are made by the Virginia Humanities Board of Directors.

In making its decisions, the Board considers the following:

- Significance of the project, including new or innovative approaches and formats
- Overall prospects for success
- Use of and contribution to the Humanities
- Involvement of Humanities scholars including community historians and tradition Bearers.
- Immediate and long-term impact on a well-defined target audience, or audiences, which may and generally should include the General Public
- Past record of the applicant organization, with special consideration given to those who have not received VH grant support previously (or in recent years)
- Relationship of the project to our established goals and interests, including:
 - Statewide service/coverage (geographic distribution of grants)
 - Diversity of subject focus and organizations funded
 - Reaching previously under-served regions or communities
 - Exploring Virginia's history, especially perspectives that have been excluded from previous narratives

Meeting any or all of these criteria does not guarantee funding. Each year, Virginia Humanities receives many more deserving requests than we can support, and difficult choices are required.

If a request is *not* funded, staff will contact the applicant organization—usually the designated Project Director—to explain the reasons for the decision. Resubmissions are sometimes encouraged, but encouragement to resubmit is not a guarantee of future support.

If a request *is* funded, the Grant Period normally begins the day the decision is made. Staff will contact the applicant/grantee organization to discuss next steps.

Normally, applicants will be notified within ten (10) days following any action taken by the Board. Inquiries about the status of proposals during the review period are strongly discouraged.

Frequently Asked Questions

Can I apply for funding as an individual?

No. Only incorporated non-profit organizations are eligible to apply.

Does my non-profit organization have to have the 501(c)(3) status?

No, but it must be an incorporated non-profit.

Does the non-profit organization have to be located in Virginia?

No. Non-profit organizations located outside of Virginia are eligible to apply if their project takes place and is likely to reach a significant audience within the Commonwealth **and** it explores topics or issues directly related to Virginia.

If the application deadline falls on a weekend or holiday is my proposal still due that day?

Yes. Applications are submitted online and we close the application window at 5pm on the day of the deadline.

What are the stipulations and requirements if we receive a grant from Virginia Humanities?

All requirements are included in a Grant Manual, which can be reviewed/downloaded online at: <https://virginiahumanities.org/grants/>

What is Cost-share?

All Virginia Humanities grants must be matched with at least an equal amount of Cost Share, which can be in the form of cash or in-kind contributions from non-federal sources.

Cash cost share is any monetary donation to the project, usually though not necessarily from “outside” or third-party sources (another grant, for example).

In-kind cost share refers to any non-monetary contribution to the project, including but not limited to volunteer time, unreimbursed travel, facilities use, and project-related salary costs not paid by the grant.

The value of time donated to the project should be estimated by the applicant based on local market rates.

Are Indirect Costs eligible for funding?

Virginia Humanities grants require a budget of program-related costs. Itemized administrative costs related to the project are permitted.

Do I need to have all participants and other key project personnel confirmed at the time the application is submitted?

We recommend identification and confirmation of key project personnel when the proposal is submitted. If this is not possible, identify/confirm as many of the key personnel as feasible, and inform Virginia Humanities Grant Program staff *by email* as soon as the missing confirmations have been received.

Who is considered a “Humanities scholar”?

The term “Humanities scholar” may include:

- Teaching or research faculty at a college or university (including community colleges)
- Community historians or independent scholars who are widely acknowledged as experts in the history of their communities
- *Professional librarians, writers, and others who have an established record of research and/or scholarship in the Humanities
- Persons representing various cultural traditions—a Native American tribal chief, for example, or a traditional artist—if they are recognized as spokespersons for their traditions.

I’ve run into a problem with the online application. What should I do?

Contact the Virginia Humanities Grant Program staff for assistance and technical support at grants@virginiahumanities.org.

Assistance, Questions, and Staff Support

Staff is available to consult with and advise prospective applicants; and to answer questions about the online application. Draft proposals are strongly encouraged in *all* cases and are required for requests greater than \$10,000.

For further information, contact:

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