

A THUMBNAIL HISTORY OF THE STATE HUMANITIES PROGRAM

In the early years, the Endowment's efforts were concentrated upon establishing programs of support for the institutions and practitioners of the disciplines of the humanities. Periodically, the Endowment was asked by Congress to consider a public program in the states, usually in connection with reauthorization hearings.

In 1970, the Endowment undertook to experiment with a state program. From the beginning, the state program involved volunteers, who would be enlisted in the effort out of conviction that the task of bringing the humanities to a wider public was worthwhile and challenging. The first six grants were made to committees constituted in three ways: two grants were made to state arts councils which had shown some interest in the humanities to develop the program as a part of their program (Oklahoma and Maine); two were made through the cooperation of university continuing education or extension divisions (Missouri and Georgia); two were made to committees created de novo, as subsequently became the standard practice (Oregon and Wyoming.).*

*The committees that had been created as part of state arts councils (Maine and Oklahoma) asked, independently, to be severed from the parent arts council when it became clear to both parties that the humanities program was so distinct from the other business of the arts council that a formal relationship was no longer helpful. Both committees became independent volunteer committees on the national model. The two committees formed through the help of university continuing education (Missouri and Georgia) did not have a formal tie to the parent institution, and evolved naturally into independent volunteer committees.

The Endowment chose to work with new, volunteer committees for several reasons. To begin with, every state had a number of tax-supported and private agencies with a partial interest in the humanities, and nearly equal claims to be selected as the agency for an Endowment program in the state. These included the state historical societies, state archives, various museums, state and private libraries, universities, state arts and humanities councils. These existing groups, however, were designed to support only one or a few of the disciplines of the humanities, or were designed for more than one purpose (e.g., a library or a state arts council). A new organization was a way to give many of these groups a voice and at the same time address all of the humanities.

In addition, a new organization could have a single focus on the task of increasing public understanding and appreciation of the humanities. This focus could be emphasized by capitalizing on the strength of American voluntarism--that is, by engaging the work of a group of citizens who were united through a common sense of purpose and a conviction that this task, single in focus and encompassing all of the humanities disciplines, was worth the expense of their time and effort.

The basic principles of the program were, for the most part, in place from the beginning, and were considered formally by the National Council in February, 1972. The state-based program had six principles that formed the backbone of the program in each of the states. Those principles were:

1. The humanities should be central to all aspects of the committee's program.
2. Scholars in the humanities should be involved centrally in each project funded by the state committee.
3. All grants of a state committee should support projects dealing with public policy issues.
4. The committee should have a carefully chosen state theme, and the theme should be central to each project.
5. Projects should involve the adult, out-of-school public.
6. The committee objectives should be achieved by making grants.

Each state committee used its grant from the Endowment to: (1) hire a small staff (typically an executive director and a secretary in the first years), and (2) to make grants (called "regrants" by the committees and the Endowment) to non-profit groups and organizations in the states that submitted applications successfully meeting the criteria listed above.

From FY 1971 through FY 1976, the staff at the Endowment, i.e., the staff of the state-based program of the Division of Public Programs,

helped to sustain the committees in operation, and to develop committees in additional states. By August, 1975, 50 state committees were operational. Puerto Rico was added in May, 1977, and initial contacts have been made with the District of Columbia and the territories. States were brought into the program as the budget permitted, and in such a way as to enlarge the number of operational states without reference to region. Thus, among the last group of states to become operational were Utah, New York, California, and Virginia.

The process used to help create a state committee was the same in each instance (after the first six grants). The staff of the state-based program would conduct some preliminary library research into the resources and institutions of the state under consideration, and consult with others in the Endowment. A list would be prepared of names of individuals to be contacted, often totalling well over 100 persons. A program officer would then conduct an extensive series of telephone calls. He or she would describe the state-based program, seek advice about who might be particularly capable of taking part in the creation of such a program, seek advice about special concerns, opportunities, and issues that should be taken into account when attempting to begin a program in that state.

As a result of these calls, the staff would recommend to the Director of the Division of Public Programs the names of individuals who might

be invited to Washington for a day and a half of more intense discussion of the program. The Director would select about 6 persons to invite to Washington in the expectation that they would be a catalyst for the committee in their state. This catalyst group would come to Washington, be briefed, and then discuss the program and its potential in their state in detail. They would be invited to return to their state, expand their numbers, apply to the Endowment for a planning grant, and begin the process of shaping a program for their state.

Apart from these catalyst groups, the Endowment has had no role in selecting individuals for membership in the state committees. From 1971 until late 1976, the Endowment's stipulations were that committees should be broadly representative of their state, and consist of three groupings of equal size: one-third administrators of cultural and educational institutions (who might be expected to help the committee organize and administer a Federal grant and a grant-making activity, as well as serve as a voice for the institutions of the humanities); one-third scholars in the humanities (who might be expected to be sensitive to the substance of the humanities); one-third representatives of the general public (who might be expected to be sensitive to the public response to suggested programs).

During the planning period, the catalyst group would: (1) expand its membership from the original group to one of from 12 to 20 members;

(2) employ a temporary staff; (3) conduct a series of meetings throughout the state to which were invited organizations, groups, and individuals to discuss the program, determine what might be a successful state theme, and create preliminary interest in making applications to the committee. When the process of planning and consultation was complete, the committee would apply to the Endowment for operational funds. The planning period ranged from 6 months to a year or more, with the average probably 8 or 9 months.

Committee operations were at first very informal, with committees conducting business according to some form of Robert's Rules and a shared sense of purpose. By-laws were developed as the result of experience, and all committees now have them. A number of committees have incorporated as non-profit corporations in their state, and many have applied for and been granted "tax-exempt" (IRS 501.c.3) status.

The state committees that came to the program in later years could build on the experience of the older committees, and, by 1975, newly formed committees began operation in a professional manner, often with a number of applications awaiting consideration at their first operational meeting. Committee staff size has grown, so that the average staff consists of an Executive Director, an Assistant Director, and two clerical positions. Every committee has a fiscal agent, with

the most agents being a college or university, banks, CPA's, or other independent firms.

The committees have benefited greatly from donated services. Frequently a college, university, or civic organization will provide quarters for the new program without cost, or at token cost. In the same way, fiscal services and supplies have been donated by educational institutions, historical societies, banks. Endowment policy required a match, in cash or in-kind, for all Endowment program funds. Committees, in turn, required such a match from their regrantees.

Committees vary considerably in the scope of their activities, with committees making an average of 40 regrants in FY 1976, and the range running from about 15 regrants (in Idaho) to more than 100 (Indiana). The average regrant cost in FY 1976 was about \$6,000, with many small grants of less than \$500, and a few for more than \$50,000 (usually for television projects). A typical regrant is for a series of activities; for example, a regrant to a small public library to conduct a program of panel discussions on public access to the broadcast media might involve bi-weekly meetings for two months, and thus eight events.

Our data is not sound, but we think a conservative estimate would be that each regrant produces an average of about 5 events. Thus, in FY 1976, at least 10,000 "events" sponsored by state committees took place throughout the nation.

The reauthorization legislation signed by President Ford in October, 1976, had four effects on the state program:

1. to be eligible for funding, each committee is required to submit a plan setting forth its procedures in such a way as to provide assurance to the Chairman that the committee is in compliance with the law;
2. each committee is freed of the necessity to comply with Endowment programmatic guidelines; each committee is given the responsibility to create a program "which meets the standards enumerated in subsection (c) of this section...." Subsection (c) states the authorization for the National Endowment, and, hence, the state committees may conduct any humanities program that NEH may conduct;
3. the Endowment is required to devote at least 20% of its definite funds to the state program, and each eligible committee is assured at least \$200,000 per fiscal year according to a funding formula; and
4. each committee is placed in a formal relationship to state government because the state government is given the options of: (a) matching the Federal grant and

appointing half of the members of the committee, or (b)
appointing two members to the state committee.

The submission of a compliance plan for purposes of eligibility meant, for most states, a recodification of its by-laws and policies. The intent of this portion of the law is to insure mechanisms of accountability and responsiveness in each committee. The budgetary implications of the law are not profound, because the Endowment had obligated at least 20% of its definite budget to the program each year, beginning in FY 1975. Some state committees had grants of less than the amount the formula required, however, and all of those discrepancies have since been removed.

The committees are now in the process of exploring the implications of the programmatic freedom provided by the law, and there should be new funding opportunities in every state by late spring of 1973. Each governor has been informed of the choices provided to the states by the legislation. This information came by letter from the Endowment and subsequent contact from the state committee. Thirty-five governors have appointed persons to their state committees.

The effects of the law were: to insure some forms of committee accountability to the citizens of its state; to provide assurance that the program and each committee within it would receive a certain amount of funding each year; to give each committee the freedom to

determine the humanities program it wished to provide for the state; and to give state governments at least two methods of participating in the activities of the state committees.

In April, 1977, the Office of State Programs was created, reporting directly to the Chairman. The state program is the Endowment's largest single program in terms of budget. In addition to the Acting Director, there are 5.5 program officers, a program specialist, and three permanent clerical positions in FY 1978.