

STATE HUMANITIES PLANNING COMMITTEE

P. O. BOX 230

MUNCIE, INDIANA 47305

HISTORY OF DEVELOPMENTS LEADING TO A NATIONAL ORGANIZATION  
OF STATE-BASED COMMITTEES IN THE HUMANITIES

By

Edgar F. Shannon, Jr.

For several years before 1975, the National Endowment for the Humanities supported an annual meeting of the chairpersons of the various state-based committees in order to provide them with current information and to foster the state-based program by an interchange of ideas and experiences. During these early years it was possible for all members of all state-based committees to gather at an annual meeting.

As the state-based program expanded and as each of the 50 states formed committees, a steering committee to identify common concerns of state committees as a whole became necessary. The first such committee was a Program Planning Committee comprised of six state chairpersons and formed in 1974. The Program Planning Committee's initial meetings were in Springfield, Missouri, and in Pensacola, Florida, later that same year.

The meetings focussed on the need for the pooling of experiences and expertise, the value of regional meetings, rotation of committee membership, strengthening the public policy issue requirement, enlisting the active involvement of academic humanists, the relationship of the program to the National Endowment for the Humanities, and how best to take this new endeavor to the grass roots and reach the public at large.

#4 CORINTHIAN BUILDING, 2810 ETHEL AVENUE, MUNCIE, IN 47304  
PHONE: 317/288-2460

At the annual meeting in Washington, D. C., in 1975, the chairpersons specifically addressed themselves in workshops to proposed language interpreting and amplifying the six national guidelines of NEH for administering the state-based program. Both the program for the meeting and the draft language for the guidelines had been prepared by a Program Planning Committee of chairpersons led by Russell Fridley, Minnesota. As a result of the discussions and recommendations of the chairpersons at this annual meeting, the amplifying language of the guidelines was refined by the committee and later distributed to the state committees for their use.

The Program Planning Committee continued its work by meeting July 8, 1975, in Chicago. There the Committee discussed the best means for keeping each state-based committee informed of developments affecting the state-based programs. Because of their interest and involvement, five chairpersons from the committee, led by Russell Fridley, testified November 13, 1975, before a joint hearing of the Senate and House sub-committees at the request of the chairmen, Senator Pell and Congressman Brademas. These individuals spoke in support of the positive accomplishments of the state-based programs. On February 13, 1976, the Program Planning Committee, composed of seven chairpersons, met in Chicago to discuss the need for the state-based committees to create a representative organization to speak for their collective concerns.

These examples of national effort and cooperation among the chairpersons and state-based committees in developing and strengthening the state-based program in the humanities itself, along with various other evidences of growth and maturing of the program throughout the fifty states, led a number of chairpersons to believe that the time had come to consider forming some kind of association of state-based committees to supplement and extend their common purposes, to continue to support and advance the state-based program in the humanities, and to assume a number of co-ordinating and administrative tasks that were difficult or impossible for the staff of NEH to fulfill.

Such a conclusion was the formal outcome of the February 13, 1976, meeting in Chicago of the Program Planning Committee consisting of seven chairpersons. The group designated Martin D. Schwartz, Indiana, to convey its views to the state chairpersons and to conduct by mail an election of an ad hoc Program Planning Committee, which would apply to the Endowment for a planning grant to prepare materials for informed discussion at the 1976 annual meeting of chairpersons concerning the advisability of forming a national organization.

In a letter of March 30, 1976, Martin D. Schwartz conveyed this information to the fifty chairpersons. In response, they elected the following committee, which received a planning grant from NEH:

R. Duane Andrews, Oregon  
Russell Fridley, Minnesota  
William McInnes, California  
Thomas O'Connell, Massachusetts  
Martin Schwartz, Indiana  
Jean Walz, South Dakota  
Prince Wilson, Georgia

This ad hoc Planning Committee met initially in Chicago on June 1 - 2, 1976. Martin Schwartz was elected chairman. In a memorandum dated June 10, he informed all state-based chairpersons that, at the annual national meeting scheduled for Seattle in August, the Committee would present, for discussion and action as determined, a proposal to form a national association of state-based programs. The Planning Committee committed itself to having a working paper in the hands of each chairperson not later than July 15, in order for there to be consultation with members of the state committees and response to the ad hoc committee before their presentation at the meeting in Seattle.

On June 23 - 24, the ad hoc committee met in Denver to refine the document proposing a national organization and mailed it to each chairperson on July 9, with an enclosed questionnaire for response to details of the working paper and to the idea of forming an association.

On August 11 - 12, 1976, the national meeting of chairpersons (or their representatives) of State-Based Humanities Committees convened in Seattle. At the initial luncheon meeting, Martin Schwartz, Indiana, presented the rationale for the agenda of the meeting and for the proposal to form an association of state committees and other humanities groups. In the afternoon there were two concurrent discussions on the pros and cons of such a move. Considerable concern developed reflecting a determination to protect the integrity of the state-based committee structure and to define the boundaries of action of the national organization, focussing primarily on serving the specific needs of the committees.

The following morning, the meeting continued in plenary session, heard the reports of both groups as well as a summary of concerned criticism of the previous day, and after further discussion voted to endorse the formation of an association in order to enhance the effective operation of the state-based programs in the fifty states. The motion carried by a vote of 43 in favor, 1 opposed, and 4 abstaining.

To implement this decision, the meeting voted to establish an Interim Committee of 15 persons to proceed with the purposes and structure of such an organization and to report to the chairpersons of the state-based committees no later than January 1, 1977. The motion carried by a vote of 45 in favor and 2 abstentions. The meeting voted further that the seven original members of the ad hoc Planning Committee continue on the Interim Committee and elected eight additional members as follows:

Alice Dieter, Idaho  
Edgar Shannon, Virginia  
George H. Bair, North Carolina  
John N. Terrey, Washington  
Thomas E. Langevin, Ohio  
Abbott A. Leban, Pennsylvania  
Raymond H. Thompson, Arizona  
Rosalyn Oakes, Vermont

The new Interim Committee met that same afternoon in Seattle and elected Martin Schwartz, Indiana, chairperson and Jean Walz, South Dakota, vice-chairperson. The Interim Committee decided to continue the effort with the office in Muncie, Indiana, to prepare a request for continued planning support from NEH, and to set a date for another meeting in the fall.

On September 4, Martin Schwartz sent a memorandum to the chairpersons of all state-based committees, setting forth an outline of the agenda and decisions that would be required at the next meeting of the Interim Committee and asking for comments and suggestions by October 1.

The Interim Committee met in Chicago on October 15 - 16, adopted and submitted a request to NEH for continued support for the work of the Interim Committee and drafted a Constitution and By-Laws plus an agenda concerning necessary business to be transacted in Tucson, Arizona, on November 22 - 23.

The Interim Committee met in Tucson on November 22 - 23. After preliminary discussion, the Committee proceeded to refine the Constitution and By-Laws and then to accept the final form for distribution. It also decided to draft a series of questions and answers derived from the concerns of the chairpersons on the Interim Committee and from those conveyed to these individuals by others. These were finally constructed and the Committee next considered the matter of a history of the effort to found a national organization. Finally, the name "Federation of Public Programs in the Humanities" was accepted after much discussion. The Committee adjourned with the understanding that each member of each state-based committee would receive a packet containing a cover letter, a copy of the approved Constitution and By-Laws, a list of questions of answers, and a history of the origins of the national organization by January 1, 1977.