Supporting Arts and Humanities Projects

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“How (and Why) to Apply for Grants and Fellowships in the Humanities”

Friday, September 30, 2022, 12 noon to 1:30pm

For more information:
wmich.edu/research/artsandhumanities
Why to Apply

A. For the money
B. For the time
C. For the prestige
D. For the publicity
E. To help you formulate your plans
F. To impress your university
Finding Funding Opportunities

Start with the website of Western Michigan University’s Office of Research and Innovation, both to learn about internal grant programs and for help locating potential sources of external funding: https://wmich.edu/research/funding

Western Michigan University subscribes to a funding database called GrantForward. Faculty members can create accounts to search for funding opportunities in specific areas. The university’s research officers are also happy to advise you as you prepare your external grant application. If you look good, they look good!
Professional organizations are another good source of information about grants and fellowships that might be of interest to scholars in various disciplines. These might include grants available only to members of those organizations as well as grants and fellowships available to scholars at large. Check to see if any scholarly associations you belong to award grants and fellowships.

Don’t miss the website of the Modern Language Association (Resources → Conferences, Fellowships, and Announcements → Grants and Fellowships): [https://profession.mla.org/grants/](https://profession.mla.org/grants/)

The MLA’s listings are especially detailed, so check them out even if you’re not a language or literature scholar. If you want an overview of what’s out there, go to your library and look near the back of an old September (directory) issue of *PMLA*, circa 2009 (right before they moved the grant and fellowships listings online). There you can find (and photocopy) about 17 pages of brief descriptions of opportunities, including instructions for learning more from the granting bodies. Looking here first could save you a lot of clicking around on the MLA website.
Finding Funding Opportunities (continued)

One especially good way to find funding in your field is to ask more experienced colleagues. Perhaps your department offers summer research money or travel grants. Or maybe you have a senior colleague who has won an NEH Fellowship, completed a residency somewhere, organized a public program with support from Michigan Humanities, or spent a semester or year abroad as a Fulbright Scholar. Such people are usually happy to share their experience and advice.
Some Types of Funding Available

A. Grants for public humanities projects
B. Grants and fellowships to access library collections
C. Short-term residencies
D. Smaller research grants
E. Residential fellowships
F. Opportunities abroad
G. Longer-term fellowships not tied to a geographical location
Grants for Public Humanities Projects

Example:

Michigan Humanities:
https://www.michiganhumanities.org/humanities-grants/guidelines-faq-humanities-grants/
Grants and Fellowships to Access Library Collections

Examples:

• Harry Ransom Center (Austin, Texas):  
  https://www.hrc.utexas.edu/fellowships/#external  
  Offers 1-3-month fellowships and travel stipends.

• Huntington Library (San Marino, California):  
  https://huntington.org/available-fellowships#short  
  Offers short- and long-term fellowships, plus travel grants and exchange fellowships.
Short-term residencies

Example:

The Hambidge Center (Rabun Gap, Georgia):
https://www.hambidge.org/guidelines-apply

For an online directory of artists’ retreats, see Res Artis:
https://resartis.org/
General Research Grants (smaller)

Examples:

• Franklin Research Grants (The American Philosophical Society):
  https://www.amphilsoc.org/grants/franklin-research-grants
  Up to $6,000 toward non-commercial research (can be used for travel, supplies, and costs associated with fieldwork). Special fellowships within this grant program support research in London and Edinburgh.

• NEH Summer Stipends (National Endowment for the Humanities):
  https://www.neh.gov/grants/research/summer-stipends
  This is a limited-submission funding opportunity for two months of full-time research and writing in the summer. It’s especially appropriate for early-stage research and late-stage writing.
Residential Fellowships

Example:

• The National Humanities Center (NHC) in Research Triangle Park, NC:  
  https://nationalhumanitiescenter.org/become-a-fellow/

Various universities also have humanities centers, many awarding fellowships both to internal and external applicants.
Opportunities Abroad

The big player here is the Council for International Exchange of Scholars, which administers the Fulbright Scholar programs. You can apply to teach or do research abroad, or a combination of the two. There are also opportunities to conduct professional projects overseas. Explore the online Catalog of Awards to get a sense of what’s out there: https://fulbrightscholars.org/us-scholar-awards

Some universities and government bodies abroad also offer fellowships open to Americans.
Major Fellowships Unrestricted by Location

Examples:

• NEH Fellowships (National Endowment for the Humanities):  
  https://www.neh.gov/grants/research/fellowships  
  Fund 6 to 12 months of full-time research and writing (up to $60,000).

• ACLS Fellowships (American Council of Learned Societies):  
  https://www.acls.org/competitions/acls-fellowships/  
  Currently restricted to non-tenured faculty and especially appropriate for them. Funds 6 to 12 months of full-time research and writing (up to $60,000). Fellows without tenure-track appointments may perform a limited amount of other work during their fellowship term.
General Advice

1. Apply for several grants at once.
2. Expect to invest significant time in the process.
3. If you are not immediately successful, don’t give up.
4. If the granting agency allows you to see the reviewers’ comments after the competition, be sure to ask for them.
5. Ask to see winning proposals.
6. Seek the advice of program officers.
7. Start early and revise your application several times.
8. Try to view the application process as an experience that can be rewarding regardless of the outcome of the competition.
Components of an Application: Cover Sheet

Carefully consider the title of your proposal and any brief synopsis of it that you are required to write. These will be your reviewers’ first impressions of the proposed work.
Components of an Application: C.V./bio

a) Include anything you can relate to your project, even if such experience is not strictly academic.

b) Explain any references that might be obscure, especially in the Honors and Awards section.

c) Be sure there are no typographical errors.

d) Try to make every field work to your advantage.

e) Do not exceed the page limit.
Components of an Application: Project Narrative

a) The narrative must be an example of your best writing and give reviewers a taste of what they could expect in the finished book.

b) Follow precisely any instructions regarding presentation.

c) Tailor your narrative to the specific requirements of each granting agency.

d) Be sure to address all criteria listed in the application instructions.

e) Pitch your remarks to a general audience.

f) Situate your proposed research in the context of other scholars’ work and explain how it will make an original contribution to your field.
More on the Project Narrative

g) Provide a detailed plan for how you will spend the time and/or money if your application is successful. Be realistic and as specific as possible.

h) Remember that timing is key. The sweet spots for securing external funding are near the beginning and near the end of a large project.

i) Strive to instill reviewers with confidence that your project will, in fact, be completed.

j) When discussing your approach to your subject, try to develop at least one extended specific example of it in your chapter outline to help reviewers grasp your methodology.
Even more on the Project Narrative

k) Show your project description to as many people as are willing to read it. Make a point of soliciting reactions from people in your discipline but not in your specific field. People outside your own discipline can also offer useful perspectives.

l) Clarity is essential. Signpost your narrative clearly, explain any references that may be unfamiliar, and concentrate more on getting your point across than on impressing readers.

m) Make sure that the proposal is free of mechanical and typographical errors.
Components of an Application: Letters of Recommendation

a) It is more impressive to have letters from senior scholars in your field than from your dissertation director or colleagues.

b) Ask references to recommend you for several different fellowships or in successive competitions. Once a letter is written, it’s relatively easy to update it (even repeatedly).

c) Make the process as painless as possible for your references by giving them plenty of time (a month is optimal), a list of the fellowships you’ve applied for (with descriptions, deadlines, and instructions for submitting their letters), and copies of your application materials.
More on Letters of Recommendation

d) Check back with your references a week or so before the application deadline to make sure they have everything they need from you (i.e., to make sure they haven’t forgotten your request).

e) Whether or not your application is successful, let all your references know the outcome of every competition they supported you in.

f) It’s more important that your references know you and your work well than that they be big names in the field—but it’s great if all those things are true.

g) Don’t pressure potential references to write a letter for you if they seem hesitant.
Even more on Letters of Recommendation

h) Choose references who can write well and comment knowledgeably on your plans.

i) Don’t forget to thank all your letter writers because they are doing you a big favor.
The Review Process

A. Review criteria are crucially important.
B. Competition is stiff.
C. Many applications are eliminated from serious consideration on technicalities.
D. Most evaluation panels are made up of academics. Successful applications must appeal to scholars in a wide range of sub-fields.
E. Often, an evaluating panel only sees one part of a bigger picture.
F. Panelists tend to give the highest ratings either to applications in their own area of expertise or to well-written applications that are far removed from their own field. The person on the panel who knows the most about what you do will be either your best friend or your worst enemy in the committee meeting.
G. Detailed applications fare best. It’s especially important to make it clear what work you have already completed and what remains to be done.
The Takeaway

You can’t win if you don’t play.

Don’t get discouraged. If at first you don’t succeed, keep applying—don’t take “no” for a final answer!