



NEVADA  
HUMANITIES

# NEVADA HUMANITIES

## Five-year Program Plan 2007 – 2011

### BACKGROUND

Nevada Humanities is one of 56 state humanities councils that receive an annual operating grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities. Between 1972, when it was created, and the late 1980s, the organization's mandated focus was almost exclusively on "regranting" the federal funds to non-profit organizations in Nevada for projects that increased public understanding and appreciation of the humanities. During the next twenty years, Nevada Humanities, a non-profit organization, expanded its funding base and became a programming as well as a grant-giving organization. A number of successful and popular programs were developed, including book festivals, an award-winning model youth program, and presentations of first-person historical narratives called Chautauqua. Now, in response to level federal and state funding, and greater competition for audiences and donations, Nevada Humanities is developing new courses of action based on needs in the community, newer technologies, and more creative and efficient uses of staff. This more strategic and targeted approach to programming is designed to better serve Nevadans and to build a more sustainable organization.

### NEW DIRECTIONS

During 2006, the board of trustees and staff worked with a planning consultant for the full year to carefully assess their programs and activities, review their mission and vision, study community needs, and develop strategies for achieving their goals and objectives. The culmination of the year of planning was the adoption of this five year program plan.

This document presents Nevada Humanities' plan to take a leadership position in addressing the goals set by the board at its April 2006 meeting:

- 1. To create community through conversation and to encourage civic engagement**
- 2. To encourage critical thinking and reflection**
- 3. To preserve and make accessible Nevada history**
- 4. To strengthen cultural organizations**

The plan also addresses challenges expressed by the site visitors who participated in the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) five-year review of Nevada Humanities, which also took place in 2006. The report prepared by NEH and the site visitors emphasized the need to build a strong humanities program in Las Vegas over the next five year period, which, they noted, would require new strategies. New initiatives that deal with big issues will be needed to increase the visibility and impact of Nevada Humanities. The site visitors also noted that the Online Nevada Encyclopedia offers strong possibilities for new outreach and new humanities based influence in Nevada, although it also presents considerable challenges.

The plan presents a shift or change in direction. To implement the plan, staff will need to focus their attention strategically on: 1) grass roots organizing of activities related to civic engagement, which will be supported in part through the regrant program, 2) continued development of the Nevada Online Encyclopedia (ONE), and 3) expanding and diversifying the revenue base to support a growing and dynamic organization with sustainable programs.

The program plan assumes that the annual operating grant from NEH and the appropriation from the State of Nevada, the two sources of revenue for administrative expenses and grants, will remain level, and that new initiatives will need to be carried out with existing staff and existing resources until additional resources are secured.

*20/20: A New Vision* is the conceptual framework for announcing the new directions and for documenting achievements. The *20/20* framework looks ahead in a visionary sense to the next generation when, ideally, all Nevadans will be more fully engaged in the intellectual, civic, and cultural life of their communities.

## MISSION AND VISION

Nevada Humanities envisions a state

- **where every citizen is fully engaged in the intellectual, cultural, and civic life of the community in which they live**
- **where contentious public debate is replaced with dialogue that searches for shared values and the common good**
- **where spaces and opportunities are created for reflection and sharing information and perceptions**
- **where the idea of the public square is re-invigorated**
- **where humanities scholars reconnect with their public or civic purpose**

The role of Nevada Humanities is to use the traditions and tools of the humanities to help build a more engaged citizenry. The humanities offer perspectives from philosophy, literature, history, the arts, religion, and the social sciences. They can offer historical background and a wide range of perspectives on issues as well as methodologies for engaging people in discussion and reflection. Humanities disciplines are rooted in an ancient tradition of asking questions about the common good and what constitutes a just society.

## COMMUNITY NEEDS

During the planning process in 2006, Nevada Humanities held focus group meetings and examined the changing nature of the state as part of its assessment of needs. Of particular interest was the Harwood Institute's report called "On the American Frontier: Las Vegas Public Capital Report" which identifies a number of issues in Las Vegas, though these can be applied to Nevada more generally:

- **Challenges of growth, individualism, and fragmentation are more pronounced in Las Vegas than in other communities**
- **Las Vegas needs more entry points or ways for people to connect with one another**
- **There is a need for more leadership in working together for the benefit of the entire community**

The decline of the "public square," or "bowling alone," is an issue that has concerned community leaders for well over a decade.

## A PROGRAM THAT RESPONDS TO NEED

Nevada Humanities will develop strategies for encouraging community-based activities that broaden perspective and intellectual curiosity. Nevada Humanities is particularly interested in activities that bring people from different backgrounds together to learn from one another through conversation and discussion about issues that matter to them and to their communities.

The topics and issues can range from America's role in the world to neighborhood concerns, and from matters of family and relationships to national or state public policy issues. The range of topics is endless, but the commonality is informed engagement, in dialogue that is rooted in historical and philosophical traditions explaining who we are and how we are different. The discourse should lead to a greater sense of what we share in common.

Activities may include public forums; dialogues that cross the boundaries of religion, ethnicity, occupations, and neighborhoods; discussions of books, films, performances, and exhibited art work; the creation of performances or art works to generate discussion; and media or web-based programs that bring diverse points of view to a broader audience.

Activities must be planned with and moderated by academic or community scholars. Creative projects are encouraged, and may be modest or community-wide in scope. Through its website, Nevada Humanities will share summaries and results of community-based discussions and dialogues with others.

## GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The eight strategic objectives adopted by the Board of Trustees to further the mission and goals of Nevada Humanities during the next five years are to:

1. **Create and support meaningful programs based in the humanities that encourage conversation and discussion on issues of importance to people's lives, their communities, our state and our nation.**
2. **Reach and engage new audiences statewide, with particular attention to Las Vegas. Offer points of entry and a variety of formats that welcome new residents, youth, and other underserved audiences.**
3. **Encourage critical thinking and reflection; raise the level of discourse and civility.**
4. **Preserve and make accessible Nevada history and heritage.**
5. **Establish Nevada Humanities as a source of expertise and leadership.**
6. **Strengthen cultural organizations.**
7. **Increase financial resources and develop a sustainable revenue base to protect existing programs, to keep pace with population growth, and to allow Nevada Humanities to exert a greater leadership role.**
8. **Build a strong and sustainable organization that has good management practices and appropriate policies and procedures.**

## ACTION STEPS AND MEASURES OF SUCCESS; RESOURCES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

1. **Create and support meaningful programs based in the humanities that encourage conversation and discussion on issues of importance to people's lives, their communities, our state and our nation.**
  - Revise grant guidelines to emphasize civic engagement and conversation; actively communicate change in direction to former grantees and new potential applicants.  
**Measure of Success: An identifiable shift in orientation of grant applications.**
  - Re-direct existing programs (Chautauqua, book festival) to emphasize engagement and dialogue.  
**Measure of Success: Issues or topics are deemed significant by the board.**

- Research best practices related to civic engagement.

**Measures of success: New initiatives are developed, and board and staff or outside evaluators report high level of audience engagement in these projects.**

- Develop proposals for collaborative projects in order to stretch resources and expand impact.

**Measure of Success: New partnerships are formed around key programming initiatives.**

### Resources and responsibilities

- Part of the NEH general operating grant is dedicated to a grant program
- The time of two professional staff members, one in each office, is assigned primarily to program development. This includes coordinating programs carried out directly by Nevada Humanities, assisting potential grant applicants, researching best practices, identifying key issues and approaches, and enlisting the help of partner organizations.
- A program committee comprised primarily of members of the board of trustees is charged with making recommendations to the board regarding new initiatives as well as oversight and evaluation of existing programs and projects.
- The strategy of developing partnerships and collaboration around key grant or programming activity will stretch resources further and expand impact.

## 2. Reach and engage new audiences statewide, and offer points of entry and a variety of formats that welcome new residents, youth, and other underserved audiences.

- Seek out individuals and organizations that have contacts and networks with new or underserved constituencies, and convene members of these groups for discussions about programming in their communities. Contacts should include, among others, minority groups, organizations that reach youth, rural populations, new residents, and other underserved groups.

**Measure of success: Audience demographics include new or underserved audiences and reach ethnically, geographically, socially and economically diverse audiences.**

- Encourage creative use of formats to appeal to different audiences.

**Measure of success: Expansion of methods and formats used for program delivery.**

- Encourage re-use or adoption of successful programs, such as Young Chautauqua or Lifescapes, by other organizations to reach new audiences.

**Measure of success: Existing programs and resources reach new audiences.**

- Use media to reach new audiences, e.g., the Online Nevada Encyclopedia, interactive websites, podcasting, programs on Hispanic radio, distance learning networks.

**Measure of success: Changing audience demographics and increased numbers of people reached.**

**Resources and responsibilities**

- Outreach to new audiences is an integral part of program development.
- Budget includes funds for developing a website that can be used for program delivery and communication; staff who are familiar with technology and its uses.
- A Board of Trustees committed to diversity and willing to assist with outreach.

**3. Encourage critical thinking and reflection and raise the level of discourse and civility.**

- Seek out and find ways to utilize writers, scholars, journalists, artists, educators, and community leaders who think deeply.  
**Measure of Success: A growing list of knowledgeable and talented resource people are involved in humanities activities.**
- Encourage scholars to use their knowledge, skills and expertise for the public good, and create opportunities for scholars and public audiences to come together to learn from each other.  
**Measure of Success: The number of scholars involved with humanities activities increases.**
- Re-institute humanities awards to publicly recognize and reward civically engaged scholars and community leaders.  
**Measure of Success: Recognition by Nevada Humanities is valued and held in high regard.**
- Develop the Online Nevada Encyclopedia as a resource that encourages critical thinking and reflection through interpretive essays and graphics and linkages.  
**Measure of Success: ONE is recognized as a source of information about significant issues.**

**Resources and responsibilities**

- A high level of commitment by board and staff to civic reflection, and to the intellectual quality of programs.

**4. Preserve and make accessible Nevada history and heritage.**

- Expand the Online Nevada Encyclopedia (ONE).  
**Measures of success: ONE becomes a vital resource for education, tourism, preservation, and scholarship; number of visitors to the website increase exponentially. Awards received.**
- Encourage and support new research that documents Nevada history and heritage.  
**Measure of success: Grant projects create public products, such as books, exhibits, website.**

**Resources and responsibilities**

- In addition to staff dedicated to ONE, resources include a community advisory committee, editors, numerous contributors, in-kind support from the Department of Cultural Affairs and Nevada System of Higher Education, collaboration with schools and cultural institutions throughout the state, and the relationship with Twelve Horses.
- A board ONE committee responsible for meeting regularly with the ONE staff to discuss content, marketing, and fundraising.
- A competitive grant program that supports public programs on Nevada history and heritage.

**5. Establish Nevada Humanities as a source of expertise and leadership.**

- Assume a major role in convening individuals and organizations to work toward common purpose, and support convening activities or collaborations organized by others.  
**Measure of success: Growing circle or network of individuals and organizations with a vested interest in and connection to Nevada Humanities.**
- Show organizations, cultural and other, how to incorporate the humanities into their programs and demonstrate the benefit to be gained.  
**Measure of success: Humanities programming and humanistic discussions adopted by diverse organizations, e.g., professional groups, service clubs, or arts and heritage organizations.**
- Be a voice for the centrality of the humanities in public and private life.  
**Measure of success: Staff members invited to serve on steering committees. Awards received.**
- Seek as much media coverage as possible: regularly send out press releases, maintain contact with reporters, appear on radio and television shows.  
**Measure of success: Media coverage increases**
- Be seen: request and accept invitations to make presentations to service clubs, nonprofit groups, etc.  
**Measure of success: Number of public presentations by board and staff.**
- Be seen: attend all programs supported with grants; attend activities and events of other organizations that are part of the humanities network.  
**Measure of success: Number of programs attended by board members and staff.**
- Make ONE an ever growing and evolving resource.  
**Measure of success: ONE is the world-wide portal for information on Nevada**

**Resources and responsibilities**

- Responsibilities in this area lie with all board members and staff. Board members should

be advocates for Nevada Humanities and serve as liaison with other organizations with which they are affiliated. The executive director and programming staff should be able to make a strong case for the benefits of public humanities programming.

## 6. Strengthen cultural organizations.

- Place information on the website, such as how to do outcome based evaluation, that is helpful to grantees and potential grant applicants.  
**Measures of success: Quality of grant requests and final reports improve; number of first time applicants and users of services increases.**
- Provide training and exposure to best practices in governance, assessment, etc. through support of state-wide conferences such as Oasis, targeted workshops, or online learning.  
**Measures of success: Sessions well-attended and ranked highly in terms of their usefulness.**
- Train organizations to see humanities programming as a way to expand their influence and effectiveness.  
**Measure of Success: Number of grant writing workshops and staff contacts with potential grantees and partner organizations.**
- Seek additional resources for cultural organizations, e.g., state funding for history museums.  
**Measure of success: Public funds for cultural activities increase.**

## Resources and responsibilities

- The website, once it is redesigned, can serve as a resource library.
- Staff assigned to program development understand the potential of humanities programming for organizational capacity building.

## 7. Increase financial resources and develop a sustainable revenue base to protect existing programs, to keep pace with population growth, and to allow Nevada Humanities to exert a greater leadership role.

- Participate in advocacy efforts of the Federation of State Humanities Councils to protect and increase base-line public funding; visit key elected officials at the state and federal level at least once annually; form a friends group to serve as advocates for increased funding.  
**Measures of success: Public funding for the humanities increases, and elected officials are aware of Nevada Humanities, its public purpose, and its achievements.**
- Create opportunities for businesses to invest in the humanities.  
**Measure of success: An increase annually in sponsorships, underwriting, and donations of cash and in-kind from businesses and corporations.**

- Craft a compelling case for support and use multiple opportunities to encourage giving: online donations, remittance envelopes in newsletters, informational brochure distributed at programs, annual solicitations, and events held annually in the north and the south to raise visibility and attract new “Friends of the Humanities.”

**Measure of success: Revenues and number of individual donors increases each year; donors increase their level of giving.**

- Research funding opportunities from corporations and foundations for new initiatives and to support ONE.

**Measure of success: Number of grants received.**

- Develop plans and mechanisms for making ONE self-sustaining.

**Measure of Success: Steady support through donations or an endowment.**

### Resources and responsibilities

- A board comprised of members who all take responsibility to be advocates with public officials and business leaders, to facilitate contacts with philanthropists and potential supporters, to take an active role in encouraging friends and colleagues to become friends and supporters, and to make generous annual contributions appropriate for their level of income.
- A resource development committee and a board development committee that provide leadership and training in fundraising and advocacy.

## 8. Build a strong and sustainable organization that has good management practices and appropriate policies and procedures.

- Adopt the highest standards in governance and management practices and procedures.

**Measure of success: Documents outlining processes and procedures in place and up to date.**

- Develop strategic plans and the mechanisms for measuring success.

**Measures of success: Progress is made in meeting goals set forth in strategic plans, which are evaluated annually and revised as needed.**

- Acquire the tools and provide the training for using technology to increase efficiency, allow for targeted communication, provide opportunities for feedback and interaction, and to assist with program delivery.

**Measure of success: All staff proficient in the use of databases and the Internet.**

- Expand staff as resources allow. Use volunteers, student interns, shared positions, and independent contractors to meet staffing needs in addition to regular full-time and part-time staff. Include funds in the budget for coordination and implementation of any new or expanded programs or initiatives.

**Measure of success: Staff is adequate and has the necessary skills to carry out the board approved programs and activities. Personnel increase proportionally as programs and audiences grow.**

- Cultivate board members who will be strong advocates for the humanities and active fundraisers.

**Measure of success: Number and quality of nominations for board membership.**

- Review and update job descriptions for board and staff regularly to reflect current board directions and skill sets needed, and adopt a succession plan for the replacement of the executive director.

**Measures of success: Seamless board rotation and staff transition.**

## Resources and responsibilities

- These are primarily leadership issues for the board of trustees and executive director. The board development committee has responsibility for board training, the executive committee for annual evaluation of the job performance of the director, the director for keeping job descriptions up-to-date and working with staff to set performance goals, etc.

## APPENDIX

As part of the planning process carried out in 2006, the board of trustees discussed stakeholders, or to whom, in order of importance, Nevada Humanities is accountable or serves.

The board also listed certain assumptions and examined some of the risks involved in changing direction.

## STAKEHOLDERS

- **Citizens of Nevada**
- **Program partners**
- **State Legislators and Congressmen**
- **National Endowment for the Humanities – Grantees/Scholars**
- **Nevada Humanities Board of Trustees**
- **Nevada Humanities staff**

## ASSUMPTIONS

- Programs carried out by Nevada Humanities are very staff-time intensive, and the return is low in terms of audience numbers compared to audience numbers from grant projects, though the quality is uniformly high.
- Nevada Humanities does not effectively take credit for the projects it funds.
- It is difficult to raise funds for administration; any new programs or directions must be carried out with existing staff and current resources.
- Greater leadership will require more attention to fundraising.

## RISKS TO CONSIDER IN CHANGING DIRECTIONS

Risk ID	Risk Description	Mitigation Strategy
1	Keeping the humanities, not public affairs, central.	Careful crafting of grant guidelines to define the difference between humanities programming and public affairs. Careful review of grant applications by humanities scholars. Cultivation of scholars and facilitators who know how to incorporate the humanities into discussions of contemporary issues.
2	Alienating humanities scholars. Humanities scholars can provide perspective but not answers, and often feel uncomfortable dealing with contemporary issues.	Seek creative ways to use scholars and their expertise.
3	The interest in public engagement among the general public may not be as great as the board's perception of the need.	Think creatively about programming, involving the arts, oral history, and other forms and mediums.
4	The word "conversation" has already been appropriated by a number of other organizations and may be overused.	Seek other words to describe and define the unique humanities approach to civic engagement.
5	Similarly 20/20 is much used—a Google search lists hundreds and hundreds of programs, organizations, etc.	Consult with PR professionals about developing distinctive design elements to make 20/20 compelling and unique.
6	Lack of resource people to use as group leaders, facilitators.	Provide training.
7	Limits involvement of humanities scholars.	Cultivate scholars in other fields who have humanistic interests and instincts.
8	Alienates former grantees, partners, whose programs and projects no longer fit with the new guidelines.	Seek creative solutions for working with past grantees and partners; cultivate new prospective grant applicants.
9	Audiences identify with grantee, not Nevada Humanities.	Build identification with Nevada Humanities through promotion and reporting of results of grant projects. Claim ownership of the cumulative benefit to the state.