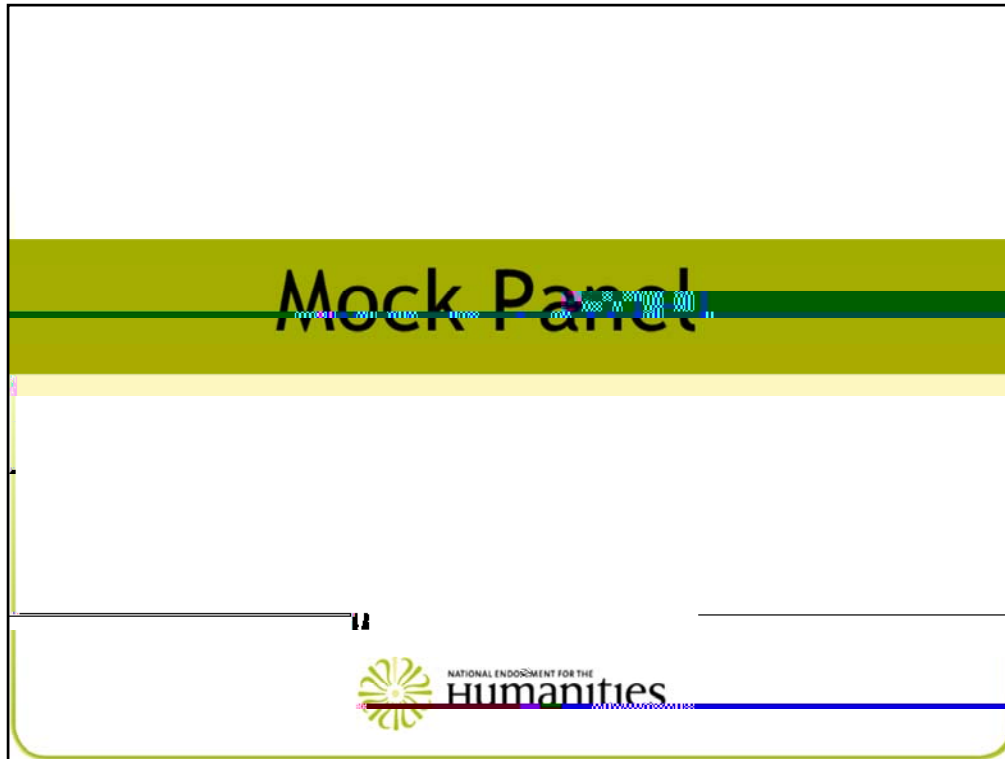


I mentioned at the end of the last session that the acceptance rate for many of our programs is pretty low. In this session we'll focus on ways to improve your odds. The key to that is understanding how applications are reviewed, so we will run a mock panel. I'll then offer some hints on writing a good application. I'll focus today on fellowships and summer stipends, which I imagine a lot of you are interested in. The criteria are somewhat different for the other grant programs, but the basic process is the same. And what we say here may be useful if you are applying to other foundations, too.



As I mentioned in the first session, the heart of the NEH's work is the peer review process—we ask scholars from across the country to help us evaluate the quality of applications to find the most excellent ones. We'll demonstrate that process by having a mock review panel here today. I've invited three local faculty to act as panelists. We'll do what we normally do in a panel session. At this point, go to **OPENING REMARKS**

Evaluation Criteria for Fellowships and Summer Stipends

1. The intellectual significance of the project and its value to humanities scholars, general audiences, or both.
2. The quality or promise of the project's interpretation.
3. The quality of the conception and definition of organization and expression.
4. The feasibility of the proposed approach and plans.
5. The likelihood that the applicant will complete the project.



Rating Scale

- VC
- G Good
- SM Some merit
- NC



Stages of Review

Peer
Review
Panel

Council



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Mock Paper Review Page

Application 1: "Monastic Recruitment, Novitiate
Training, and Monastic Life in
Twentieth- and Twenty-first-century Sri Lanka"

Application 2: "A Colored Man's Constitution and the
Impact of Writing"

Application 3:





The mock panel gives you an idea of how our panelists consider applications.

Prepare

- Think of this as a multi-year process
- Study the guidelines
- Look at samples
- Talk to program officers



As your faculty development or grant office people will tell you, you should think of grant seeking as a multi-year process. Think about your planned research in the longer trajectory of your career. Anticipate a research leave or a sabbatical several years ahead of time. The grant process is lengthy and you mainly should anticipate the

ones for the program to which you're applying. They might also change slightly year to year.

The web site also contains samples of previously successful applications. Don't use them as a model, but as an example of how someone else made a case for their project. They can help you think about structure and form.

Talk to program officers. That's what we're there for. Ask questions, discuss ideas, etc. We can't read drafts for the fellowship or stipends program (too many), but we do for the others.



The application is a tricky document. It is different genre from a journal article or a book proposal. We were never taught how to write them in graduate school. Think of it as a rhetorical enterprise, making a case for your project.

Start with the evaluation criteria. The reviewers will use those to assess your application. You might even explicitly address them in your narrative—“The project is significant in this way” or “I will disseminate the project in that way.”

For almost all NEH grant programs the most important criterion is significance. Tell the evaluators why the project is important and how it will change the field. You might start by thinking about the target audience for the book. Who should read it? Scholars? In what field? How will it change the way they

understand the topic or the way they do their own research?

As part of making a case for your project's


the second month of my fellowship working in the Mencken papers at the Baltimore public library; I have been in contact with the librarians there and know what it's in the collection."

Panelists are not convinced by fishing expeditions. The comments most often found on the evaluations of applications not recommended for funding are "unfocused" or "vague." Also, be realistic about what you're going to do in the grant period.

Evaluators—whom are fellow scholars—can be skeptical when an applicant promises to write a whole monograph in a year.

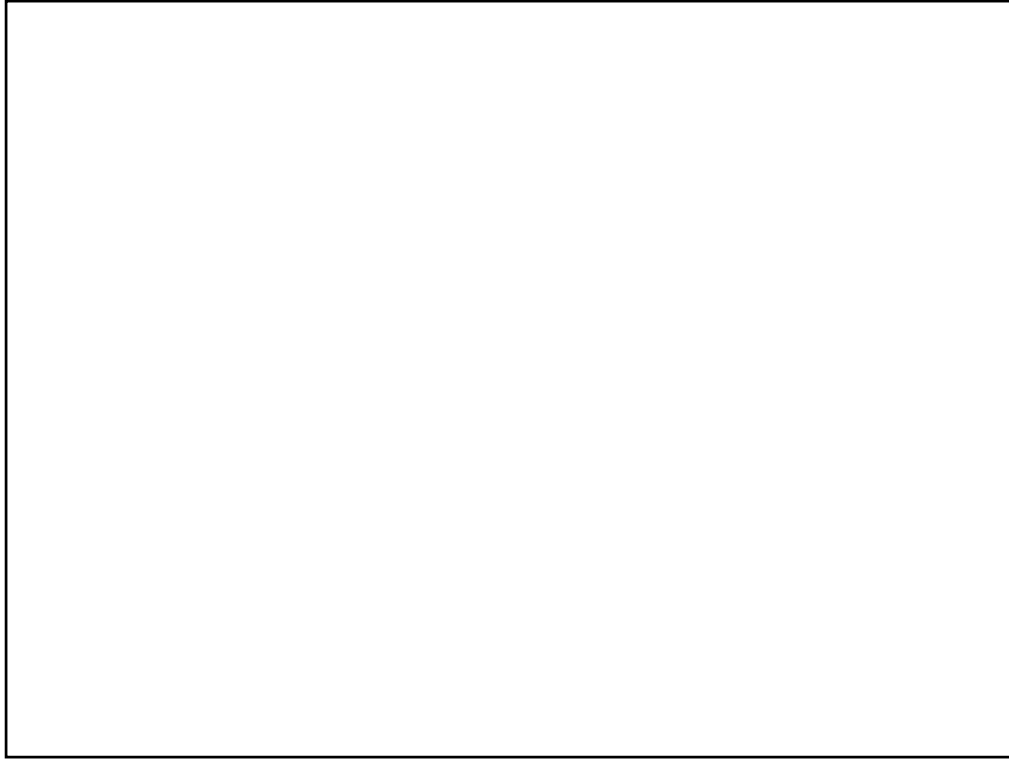
Think About Your Audience

- For the application: Generalists and specialists
- Don't make it hard on them, make it clear what you're doing
- Explicitly address the criteria
- Balance abstraction and precision
- Show them you know what you're doing
- Anticipate and answer their questions



Think carefully about your audience. Who is the audience for the application? It is panelists, who are faculty like you, NEH staff members, and members of the National Council on the Humanities. All these folks have some background in the humanities, but in a variety of fields. Your application must inform them effectively about your project, no matter how far away it is from their own interests. You may be working in art history, but on the Council we have philosophers and political scientists as well as art historians. They

panelist might raise, and answer them. Panelists may ask, why is this question important? Why this case study and not another? Can this scholar really do the planned work in the scheduled time? Answer those questions before they ask them. If you've been working on a project for a while you know the potential pitfalls. Anticipate panelists by raising those concerns and addressing them yourself.



Finally, the NEH is a bureaucracy and bureaucracies pay attention to details. Your application will be stronger if you pay attention to details too.

Draft your application early—don't wait until the last minute—that may be apparent in the quality of your application. Get comments from

current literature on their topic.

Proofread! You don't want your wonderful idea to be overwhelmed by silly spelling errors. And make sure that you are sending us an application designed for the NEH—don't send us an application that is written for some other funder. That happens.

Talk with your letter writers. The more they know about the project, the better they can be as advocates for your work.

think of it as a multiyear process. Ask for the panelists' comments and—more importantly—pay attention to them. Our experience is that resubmissions are more likely to be successful the second time around, because the applicants have clarified and strengthened their application.

Questions?

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Humanities

Finally, let me repeat something I said at the beginning. NEH program officers are fellow scholars and they want to help support your work. That's why we