

A few hints for writing a stronger grant application

Prepare

- Look at the guidelines for the program to which you're applying. They will tell you what is eligible and what's not, and what an application should contain.
- The web page for each program includes sample applications. Don't take those as models, but as examples of how someone else made the case for her/his project.
- Contact NEH staff with questions. They can help you figure out what program is right for your project. Contact information is on each program web page. For some programs staff will read and comment on draft applications.

Make your case

- The guidelines will tell you the criteria by which your application will be evaluated. Your application should make a case for how your application meets those criteria
- For most NEH programs, the most important criterion is the project's significance. Tell your readers why this project is important. Who should read your work? How will it change the field?
- Locate your project in a larger scholarly context. Know the literature, issues, questions, and controversies on your topic. How are you building on or challenging the work of other scholars in your area?
- Intrigue your readers. Make them want to know the answers to the questions you're asking.
- If you are revising a dissertation, explain how the planned book differs from the dissertation.
- Provide a realistic time line and work plan.

Think about your audience

- Your application will be read by both specialist and generalists. You will need to persuade them that your project is important and that you know what you're doing.
- Make it easy for your readers. Write clearly and concisely. Avoid language that is too abstract, unclear, or jargon laden. Define concepts and terminology.
- If possible, explicitly address the evaluation criteria.
- Balance the abstract and the particular. Tell readers why your project is important, but also provide examples.
- Show them you know what you are doing. Describe your planned methods and sources. Tell them why you are using those particular theories or cases studies.
- Anticipate your readers' concerns and address them.

Attend to details

- Ask colleagues, preferably those who are not in your field, to read a draft application.
- Make sure your bibliography is up to date.
- Proofread your work.
- Make sure your references submit their letters.