



THE HUMANITIES

***KEEP US CREATIVE, CONNECTED,
AND IN COMMUNITY*** 

A NOTE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Since its inception in 1974, Illinois Humanities has worked to activate the humanities to foster reflection, spark conversation, build community, and strengthen civic engagement. While the past two years have been challenging, they have shown us that there is no better time for the humanities than right now.

I'd like to take a moment to look back at the indelible impact the humanities had statewide in 2021. Read on as we reflect upon why the humanities matter, what humanities organizations in Illinois have been able to accomplish throughout the pandemic, and how Illinois Humanities' programs thrived and continued to provide free and transformative humanities experiences for all Illinoisans.

I look forward to the future and continuing this vital work in Illinois. We could not do this without the contributions of staff, board, partners, participants, grantees, and funders and I am so appreciative of all their efforts.

Thank you for being a part of our community.

Sincerely,



Gabrielle Lyon, Executive Director



While the past two years have been challenging, they have shown us that there is no better time for the humanities than right now.

Photo by Bruce Morton



Fourth photo by Haley Scott

2021 AT A GLANCE

Illinois Humanities is the only statewide nonprofit *working to activate the humanities to foster reflection, spark conversation, build community, and strengthen civic engagement.*

We provide free humanities programs and grants throughout Illinois, particularly for communities of color, individuals living on low incomes, counties and towns in rural areas, small arts and cultural organizations, and communities highly impacted by mass incarceration.

OUR IMPACT IN 2021

13,100

participants served in 82 counties through grants and public programming.

120

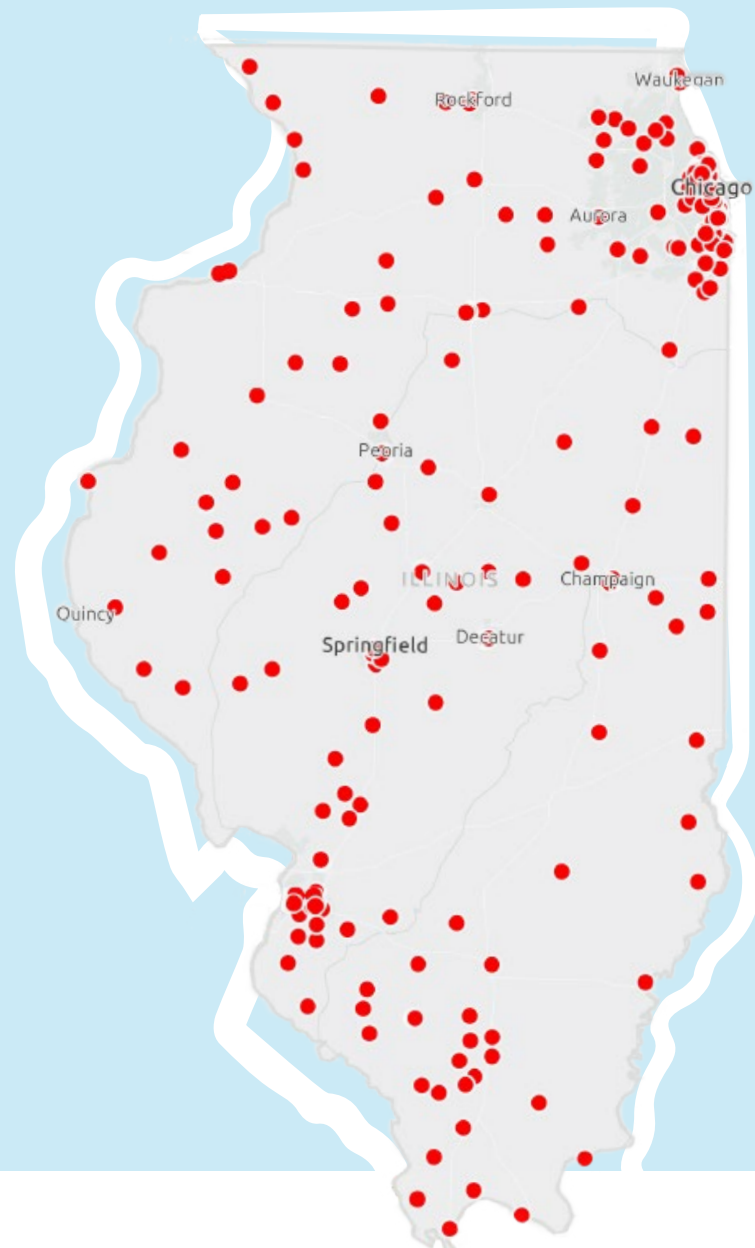
income eligible adults and high school students were provided free education programs and college-credit courses in the humanities.

320

grants awarded for public humanities programs across Illinois.

\$1.4M

in COVID-relief funding.



WHY DO THE HUMANITIES MATTER IN ILLINOIS?

- Every county in Illinois is home to a humanities organization.
- Humanities programs uniquely support participants to come together for dialogue, reflection, and to imagine what kind of society we want in our state.
- Public humanities organizations drive significant revenue in Illinois — the sector contributes \$26.5 billion to Illinois' economy and over 190,078 jobs.¹



Public humanities organizations provide experiences which enable participants to increase their civic engagement and aspire to improve the common good.²

¹ Americans for the Arts Action Fund. (2022). *Why the Arts Matter in Illinois* [Fact sheet]. <https://www.artsactionfund.org/illinois>

² Helicon Collaborative. "Creative Placemaking Field Scan #4: Environment and Energy; Farther, Faster, Together: How Arts and Culture Can Accelerate Environmental Progress" ArtPlace America, (February 2018), <https://heliconcollab.net/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/Farther-Faster-Together-1.pdf>.



SPARKING CONVERSATIONS THAT MATTER

In 2021, Illinois Humanities increased civic engagement around issues that impact Illinoisans — like addressing mass incarceration, easing the divide between rural and urban communities, and promoting democracy in America.



ENVISIONING JUSTICE

Envisioning Justice leverages the arts and humanities to envision alternatives to the enduring injustice of mass incarceration. In 2021, we:

1. Created a space where Illinoisans across the state could share their experiences with mass incarceration through **Visions of Justice**, a dynamic eight-part video series highlighting stories from seven system-impacted communities (East St. Louis, Chicago, Decatur, Galesburg, Urbana-Champaign, Bloomington-Normal, and Carbondale). Visions of Justice asked people who have first-hand experience with the carceral system, ***‘What does a truly just society look like? How does it feel? How do we get there?’***
2. Created a virtual **Rapid Response Series** designed to bring people together when the pandemic kept us apart and to highlight the ways that system-impacted artists, humanists, and organizers were responding to and interpreting the issues of the day.
3. Supported the growth and development of the **Envisioning Justice Network**, a coalition of arts and humanities organizations that is building collective power toward the abolition of the carceral state.

Awarded \$190,000 in grants to 28 organizations and individuals



ROAD SCHOLARS SPEAKERS BUREAU

Our Road Scholars Speakers Bureau brings free, high-quality cultural programs to communities across the state. Illinois writers, storytellers, historians, folklorists, musicians, living history actors, and others share their expertise and enthusiasm on topics like history, archaeology, and politics that are thought-provoking and engaging.

- **28 Road Scholar speakers**
- **44 programs including 9 in Spanish and 2 in Mandarin**
- **140 free presentations each year on topics ranging from the histories of antislavery and universal suffrage to the music of the civil rights movement**

Photo by Carolina Sánchez



MUSEUM ON MAIN STREET

Museum on Main Street enables organizations in small communities with populations of 25,000 or less to host Smithsonian Institution-produced exhibitions and offers organizations various opportunities to expand their capacities.

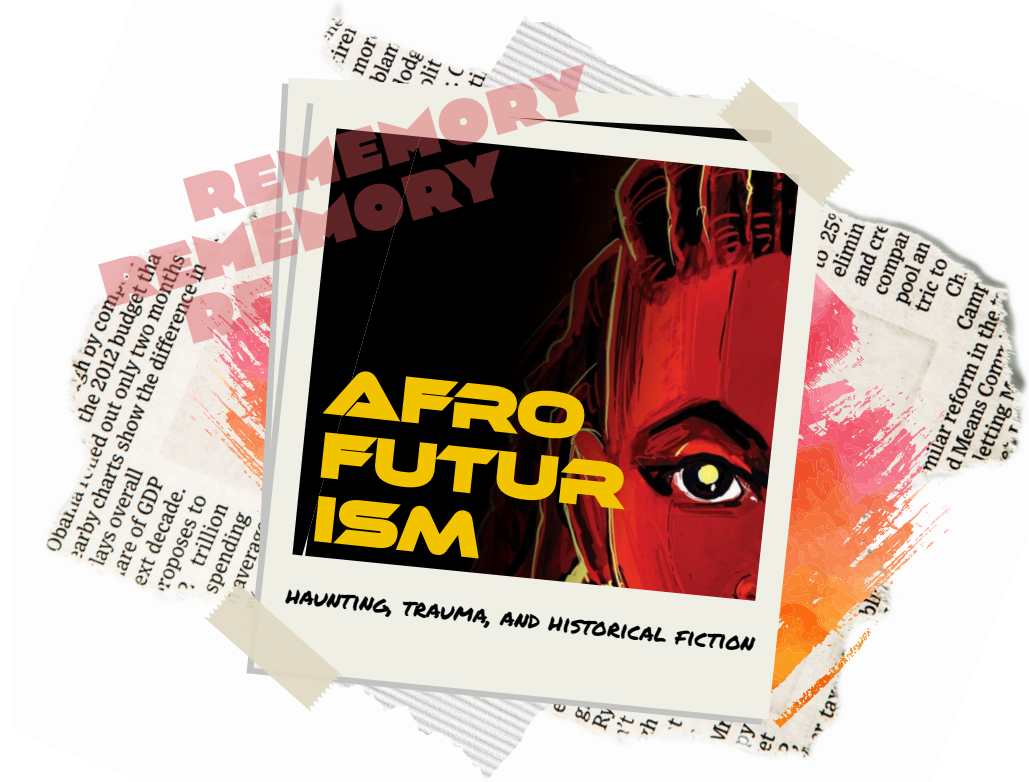
Our latest exhibition, *Voices and Votes: Democracy in America*, opened at the Madison

County Historical Society in Edwardsville and toured Illinois through March 2022. Other host communities included Salem, Savanna, Jacksonville, Clinton, and Murphysboro.

Illinois Humanities assisted these communities in planning locally focused companion exhibitions and public programs, and a concurrent tour of

the **Illinois Freedom Project** exhibition, which discusses the pursuit of civil rights by and for Black Americans in Illinois from the French Colonial period to the mid-20th century. The Illinois Freedom Project opened at the Wood River Museum in Wood River (near the Edwardsville exhibition) and also visited Salem, Thomson, Winchester, Clinton, and Carbondale.

3,629 Illinoisans engaged with Museum on Main Street in 2021



LONG OVERDUE BOOK GROUPS

Illinois Humanities creates a welcoming space for Chicagoans from many different backgrounds to grapple with the “long overdue” conversations that come from reading a book together through our free, community-based Long Overdue Book Groups.

Between November 2021 and April 2022, Long Overdue Book Groups participated in a series of programs focusing on

three groundbreaking novels: Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*, Octavia Butler’s *Kindred*, and Alejo Carpentier’s *The Kingdom of This World*. This series, titled **Rememory: haunting, trauma, and historical fiction**, is part of and funded by the NEA Big Read initiative.

The series fostered unique, community-based, literary experiences throughout Chicagoland by including monthly community book

group meetings (in both English and Spanish); access to free copies of the books (in both English and Spanish); and a series of five virtual events that coincide with the themes of these novels. Events included writing workshops, a virtual tour of the collections at the Art Institute of Chicago, a discussion on Afrofuturism, and a workshop on oral histories.

“At this time in Illinois’ history, when it often seems as though our internal differences are irreconcilable, or that the challenges we face as a state are insurmountable, it’s easy to forget that our problems are never just our own. We forget that what unites us are the aspects of our lives that touch every corner of our state, from Chicago to Carbondale, and from Galesburg to Urbana-Champaign.”

— Meredith Nnoka, *Envisioning Justice Fellow*

Photo by Haley Scott



Photo by Jonathan Mathias

SUPPORTING ILLINOIS' CULTURAL ECOSYSTEM

Through grantmaking and capacity building, we support public humanities programming across the state and increase connection and collaboration among arts, cultural, and humanities organizations and the people who make the programs happen.

2021 GRANTS BY TYPE

Illinois Humanities funds projects that bring people together for inquiry and conversation. Our funding activates the humanities to help build community resilience, promote lifelong learning, and boost civic engagement.

28

Envisioning Justice Grants

254

Emergency Relief and Recovery Grants

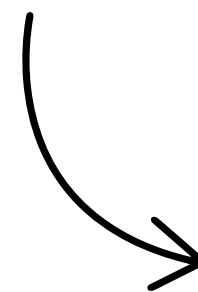
40

Community Grants

18

Activate History Microgrants

TOTALING



340
Grants with
\$1,789,250
in funding

COVID-19 RELIEF AND RECOVERY

At a time when the impacts of COVID-19 continue to devastate communities across the state, Illinois Humanities awarded its largest grant pool in the organization's history for pandemic relief and recovery:

\$1.4M

in COVID-19 relief and recovery funding

254

organizations received grants

72

counties represented

2021 awards support public humanities organizations in communities whose residents have been particularly hard hit by the pandemic, and which are often bypassed by traditional funding streams due to their size, organizational capacity, or geographic location.

In March 2021, we released *On Wisdom and Vision*, a report highlighting the impact of COVID-19 on public humanities organizations in Illinois and raising awareness about our community's impact on communities we serve.

Read the full report:
ilhumanities.org/covid19report

GRANTEE SPOTLIGHTS

BLACK ALPHABET FILM FESTIVAL

“You make our work possible. Illinois Humanities has been a great support system over the years.” — Adam McMath, Black Alphabet Film Festival

Black Alphabet Film Festival (BAFF) is Chicago’s premier film festival for the Black LGBTQ+ community. BAFF’s mission is to promote social equity, awareness, and education in all aspects of life for the Black LGBTQ+ community through the use of media and the creative arts. Funding from Illinois Humanities supported screenings of Black LGBTQ+/SGL-produced and directed films focused on the inequities faced by the Black Alphabet community during the COVID-19 pandemic.

FARWELL HOUSE

Farwell House is an arts organization that hosts exhibitions, workshops, and cultural events, as well as artist residencies. It is located in a house built in 1867 by an agricultural merchant in Frederick, an unincorporated community of fewer than 200 residents near the Illinois River in western Illinois’ Schuyler County. Funding supported “Object of My Affection,” which worked with residents of the Frederick area to identify a physical object that has been especially important or meaningful in her or his life. Artists associated with Farwell House photographed the participants with the objects and conducted interviews as the basis of an exhibition.

THE JACOBY ARTS CENTER

“To me, the humanities, culture, and the arts are about humans not just surviving, but thriving and cultivating resilience. The arts and creativity are vital in shaping our community’s future and economic viability. The arts strengthen our social ties, values, identity, and creativity — which all increase economic and emotional investment in our community so that we can all thrive. The arts make all of our lives better, our neighborhoods richer and our community stronger.” — Rachel Lappin, Jacoby Arts Center

The Jacoby Arts Center is committed to nurturing and promoting the practice and appreciation of the arts through education, exhibits, cultural programs, and community outreach initiatives. Funding support allowed the Center to partner with other local cultural, community, and economic development entities to expand upon and engage the public with “Untold Black Stories: A downtown Alton visual listening tour,” a project conducted by AllTown USA and StoryCorps.



NOT IN OUR TOWN



THE HUB ARTS & CULTURAL CENTER



PEORIA RIVERFRONT MUSEUM



CHICAGO RACE RIOT 1919 COMMEMORATION PROJECT (CRR19)

“Honestly, my heart skipped a beat knowing that others in the community recognize what we are trying to accomplish and are willing to help us to successfully attain these worthwhile educational and cultural goals for our low income beneficiaries and the education of culturally supportive information for the greater Springfield and Sangamon County area.”

— Illinois Humanities’ grantee partner Shatriya Smith, Garvey Tubman Cultural Research Center, Springfield, Sangamon County



PROMOTING ACCESS, SPARKING CREATIVITY

Ensuring the humanities are accessible to all Illinoisans is central to our mission and programming. To remove barriers to engagement, our programs are always free for participants and several offer stipends, meals, and transportation assistance.



THE ODYSSEY PROJECT

Now in its 20th year, **The Odyssey Project** enables income eligible adults to earn college credit through free humanities courses and alumni programs. Designed to “meet people where they are,” Odyssey provides literature, philosophy, art history, and U.S. history classes in English and Spanish in

the neighborhoods where participants live and work. In addition to supporting critical reading, writing, and discussions, Odyssey provides the kinds of support adult learners often need to succeed, including assistance with transportation, childcare, and technology.

“It really is life-changing. Most of the things in my life that are really working well can be traced back to something or someone from Illinois Humanities and The Odyssey Project.”

— Nicole Bond, Odyssey Project Alumna, poet, artist, and educator

In 20 years, we’ve reached more than 1,200 students, and 73% have gone on to participate in additional higher education experiences.



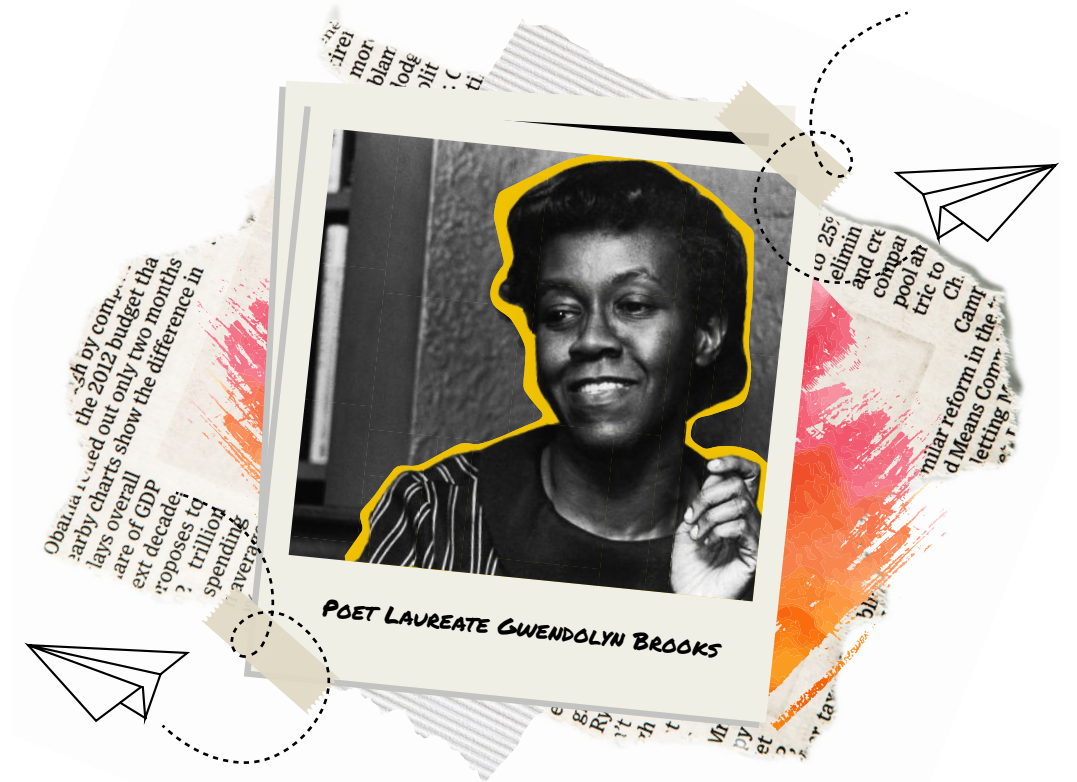
SOJOURNER SCHOLARS

Illinois Humanities nurtures high school students' intellectual pursuits and supports their emergence as critical and creative citizens through **Sojourner Scholars**. The program addresses the limited access to college-readiness programs and advanced-placement classes for public high school students in low income neighborhoods by offering college-level courses in U.S. history, literature, writing, and community-based research. Access to this

type of college-level instruction early in high school helps ensure students not only get to college but thrive once there.

The theme for Sojourner Scholars' summer of 2021 was *Chicago Luminaries*, and the Scholars shone throughout the season — as interlocutors, researchers, interpreters, and artists. Scholars learned about the life and legacy of Ida B. Wells-Barnett, Gwendolyn Brooks, and Mayor

Harold Washington. Year 2 Scholars utilized the Mood Tracker Tool — a journal format self-check-in — to find poems from the Gwendolyn Brooks collection that corresponded with the moods they were experiencing. They then crafted original poetry to pair with the Brooks poems which resulted in *The Sojourner Scholars Mood Tracker Poetry Project*, a powerful outlet for students to wrestle with the social-emotional impact of the pandemic.



GWENDOLYN BROOKS YOUTH POETRY AWARDS

Nature
*You hear the rustling of leaves
 light and airy, grass green.
 Jagged trunks, so strong and bold.
 Squirrels with bushy tails, a dark hazel,
 hide their nuts for the winter
 and scuttle along branches.
 You may not know this
 but they also like to eat birdseed.
 Birds chirp so vigorously:
 chip chip chip chip chip chip*

*High pitched but calming to the mind.
 It feels so familiar, like the wind.
 If we don't take care of this
 there will be no such thing as us.*

— Amelia Richards, 3rd grade, Berwyn
 Our **Gwendolyn Brooks Youth Poetry Awards** continue the tradition begun in 1969 by Illinois Poet Laureate Gwendolyn Brooks of an annual poetry competition for youth K-12 across Illinois, including home schooled students and youth in juvenile detention centers.



Photo by Haley Scott

OUR COMMUNITY

We could not do our work without the contributions of staff, board, and partners. In 2021, we welcomed new faces and strengthened our commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion.

LIVING OUR VALUES

While all of Illinois Humanities’ programs are grounded in a social justice approach, the organization wants to further build systems based on a shared vision of racial equity and inclusivity. In 2021, we entered a three-year partnership with the consulting group Social Current to bring an anti-racist and equity framework to all endeavors including program development and delivery, grant-making, operations, staff recruitment, retention and professional development, communications, outreach, and partnerships. Recent action steps include:

- Implemented a new compensation philosophy and salary bands which reflect our commitment to minimally paying staff the “Housing Wage” as determined by the National Low-Income Housing Coalition each year.
- Adopted an Indigenous Land Acknowledgement, a fundamental step to support Indigenous rights and cultural equity.
- Completed a baseline survey of staff and board and implemented ongoing training.

NEW FACES

In 2021, Illinois Humanities named professional folklorist, civic leader, and educator Sue Eleuterio as Board Chair.

An Illinois Humanities board member since 2013, Eleuterio has conducted fieldwork, research, and public humanities programming with cultural and ethnic groups across the United States. Her work includes developing exhibits, performances, folk arts education workshops, and residencies in schools, along with professional development programs for teachers, students, adults, and artists for schools, museums, arts education agencies, and arts organizations across the United States.

She is the former Co-Chair of the Chicago-based Crossroads Fund Board of Directors and has extensive experience in philanthropy and grant-making. Eleuterio has previously served on panels for the National Endowment for the Arts as well as for the Illinois, Wisconsin, Missouri, Indiana, Iowa, Minnesota, and New York State Arts Councils.

Eleuterio serves as an adjunct faculty member at Goucher College’s Masters in Cultural Sustainability program and as Director of the Graduate Virtual Writing Center.





LOOKING FORWARD

Join us this year for free public humanities programming. Join a Long Overdue Book Group, bring a Road Scholar to your community, attend an event, or apply for a grant. Together, we make public humanities happen in Illinois.



In March 2022, we launched Envisioning Justice RE:ACTION, a virtual exhibition and activation kit featuring commissioned works from Illinois artists and humanists, accompanied by action prompts to encourage users to surface visions of justice that can spark action around addressing mass incarceration.



A new roster of Road Scholars Speakers Bureau members — Illinois writers, storytellers, historians, folklorists, musicians, and living history actors, among others — will share their expertise and enthusiasm with people throughout our state.



This spring we announced a new grant and community building initiative targeting humanities and arts organizations in rural Illinois communities. This summer we will share new data on how the COVID-19 pandemic is impacting our grantee partners across the state.



In August, we'll celebrate the winners of our Sixth Annual Gwendolyn Brooks Youth Poetry Awards — poets can submit their work through May 6.



This fall, we'll continue our Long Overdue Book Groups and explore the diverse Indigenous heritage of North America, while opening a conversation about different experiences of Native survivance.



Throughout the year, we'll expand our capacity building trainings and workshops for grantee partners working to strengthen Illinois' cultural landscape.



We'll announce the hosts of the next Museum on Main Street exhibition Spark! Places of Innovation which will highlight innovation in rural America from the perspectives of people who have lived it.



We'll welcome a new cohort of Odyssey Project participants who will participate in free college-level courses in the humanities. The Odyssey Project application portal opened on March 1.



In May, we'll hold our annual Public Humanities Awards, a free virtual event honoring those in our community who embody the humanities in action.

The year ahead is full of new initiatives, events, and opportunities. Join us and experience the change-making power of the humanities!

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