

NEH Summer Stipend Competition Helpful Hints for Proposal Preparation

The following information and advice comes from a number of faculty members who have reviewed proposals for the NEH Summer Stipend Program. Please consider these comments as you develop your proposal.

Project Parameters

Your project does not have to be completed in two months. It can be a component of a larger project.

Most projects are three to five years in length.

Projects involving travel are not more competitive than other types of proposals.

The topic of the project should be central to the humanities. Projects with a marginal relationship to the humanities will be reviewed but probably will receive a low score.

Panelists are looking for projects that are "inspired." It is not necessary for the project to be "novel," but an "imaginative" project is more likely to be funded than a "solid" project. Panelists are looking for something beyond the typical.

Avoid fishing expeditions.

Present thoughtful questions.

Know the literature.

Avoid trendy slick projects (shine without substance). Everyone shouldn't be doing it.

Narrowness is the single biggest flaw in proposals that are not funded.

Use terms that resonate in your field.

Define the theoretical problem. Explain why it is important and what you are going to do to resolve it.

The proposed project should make a significant contribution to the field of the humanities.

Stylistic elegance is not as important as clarity.

Credentials

Panelists do not rate proposals from applicants with 12-month appointments differently than applicants with 9-month appointments.

Non-teaching administrators need not be nominated and can apply as independent scholars.

Panelists do not review nominated proposals differently from proposals that have not been nominated.

Support Materials

Panelists do consider the stage of the faculty member's career in evaluating publications.

A short resume is acceptable for junior faculty. However, a junior faculty member with a large number of publications is impressive.

Letters of recommendation must be current.

It is not necessary to have a person from the applicant's current institution serve as a reference. References should know the applicant's project well. Panelists want expert testimony, not a reference from an administrator, unless this person is a humanities scholar.

The quality of the applicant's references does count, e.g., what is said and who says it.

Always follow directions, e.g., reduce your vita to two pages.

Other

Don't resubmit the exact same proposal from a previous year. Even though reviewers are told that they should treat every application as "new", reviewers have memory of rejected proposals.

Those who resubmit a revised proposal have about the same rate of success as first timers.

If you get an award—Send NEH a copy of anything you publish!