

## September 24, 2020 Muse-ings

### *Intro:*

This month's muse-ing comes from Michele Anstine, who is Executive Director of Delaware Humanities. She provides some insight into how state humanities and arts agencies have been supporting museums with funds from the CARES Act passed early this year.

### *Piece by Michele Anstine:*

In April, the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) received \$75 million of the \$2.2 trillion CARES Act economic stabilization plan in order to aid cultural institutions impacted by the coronavirus. Forty percent of that funding came directly to the 56 state and jurisdictional humanities councils to help sustain operational needs. Delaware Humanities received \$406,800. Unlike regular NEH funding, the CARES funding could be used directly for operational needs such as paying staff, maintaining properties, and paying for utilities -- the real needs emerging from the pandemic.

The NEH charged humanities councils with distributing funds through a competitive process. Delaware Humanities responded by first talking with leaders at the Delaware Division of the Arts, recipient of CARES funding from the National Endowment for the Arts, as well as the Delaware Alliance for Nonprofit Advancement (DANA), and the Delaware Division of Historical and Cultural Affairs. Following DANA's work, we crafted a general survey to determine needs specifically among nonprofit humanities institutions. From this survey we saw that most cultural organizations in Delaware are small, and many have worked diligently over the last few decades to create at least one professional position or expand professional staff by one or two, and Delaware Humanities prioritized helping these essential staff positions remain in place. We planned to focus on institutions with annual budgets below \$500,000 and paid employees.

We identified and reached out to cultural institutions through the Delaware Museum Association, state legislative representatives, press releases, e-mails, and our website. We also hosted informational sessions to assist with the application process. Through two rounds of funding, Delaware Humanities awarded 34 grants between \$2850 and \$10,000. First round grant recipients had the opportunity to receive another \$5000 through a video social media challenge, by responding to the question "How do you hope to see your organization recover and adapt for the future?" and generating at least 50 unique interactions on Facebook. With the second round of funding, we had a better understanding of the organizations that would apply for funding, and the emphasis on budget size was relaxed to accommodate institutions with larger budgets.

In the end, fifty-seven percent of grantees receiving 58% of funds were small organizations with paid staff members; another 29% of grantees receiving 27% of funds were all-volunteer or small organizations receiving funding to be used for other needs, including personal protective equipment and other supplies promoting safe reopening. Museums, libraries, historical societies, and cultural organizations all ranked among the recipients. The majority of grant funds are being used to pay employee salaries, rent, maintenance needs, and utilities.

Our distribution methods, awards, and recipients were to some extent unique, though other states did prioritize small annual budgets. The ability of each state's humanities council to respond effectively to needs in their state is a strength that humanities councils bring to the NEH. Most funds were distributed for basic operational needs, although some councils also specifically addressed changing programming needs with CARES Act funding. Many state councils had more requests than funding right off the bat. Others, like Delaware, conducted more than one round of grants and adjusted guidelines to fit needs that emerged with time.

Managing the distribution of NEH CARES funding in Delaware has also reinforced our awareness of ongoing needs. Many Delaware cultural institutions need help building capacity to operate as nonprofit organizations, apply for grant funding, and successfully manage funding and ongoing programs. As a result, in the coming three years Delaware Humanities will be strategically focusing resources to assist grantees, program partners, and other cultural institutions to strengthen their organizations from within. Delaware Humanities' strategic plan includes the addition of a program officer, and internship opportunities will be available to research and implement new programs within this timeframe.