Digital Capacity Grant
Guidelines and FAQ

Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, organizations have pivoted to offering creative, accessible, and free online humanities platforms and programs. In many cases, these programs have found audiences far beyond traditional in-person attendees. While digital divides remain, virtual and hybrid programs reach over entrenched barriers like accessibility of locations, neighborhood segregation, competing responsibilities for working people, and more. Even when possibilities for re-opening improve, virtual platforms and programs will continue to be a space for the humanities to grow and find new audiences.

This winter, Mass Humanities is offering grants for public humanities projects that build organizations' digital capacity and increase digital access to the humanities. Digital capacity grants will enable organizations to develop their digital profiles and programs, assess their impact, and weave digital access into the array of humanities programs regularly available to public audiences. Potential eligible projects could include an online series that improves on past programs through staff training and new equipment; staff training and equipment for a hybrid program that enables interaction between in-person and virtual attendees; digitizing and improving accessibility for high-demand collections or media; working with photographers and videographers to create interactive virtual tours.

Timeline
Applications will open noon, January, 14th and close on February 7th at 11:59pm. Mass Humanities will notify recipients the week of March 29th.

Amount of Funding
Applicants can request up to $5000 in project funds. For projects awarded grants, Mass Humanities will award requests in full.

Who is Eligible to Apply?
Applicant organizations must be
- A 501(c)(3) non-profit or fiscally sponsored association
  or
  A state or federally recognized tribe

- In compliance with state and federal regulations which bar discrimination on the basis of race, gender, religious creed, color, national origin, ancestry, disability, age, or sexual orientation, and which require accessibility for persons with disabilities. Specifically:
  - The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA)
  - Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (Section 504)
  - Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964
  - Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972
  - The Age Discrimination Act of 1975

Applicant organizations with open Mass Humanities grants (except recipients of 2020 Support Grants) must submit final reports for their grant by January 29th to be eligible for Digital Capacity Grants. Recipients of 2020 Support Grants who have not completed their final reports may still apply.

Applicants cannot be
- Individuals
- Government agencies or entities
- Universities, colleges, or academic departments
- Schools or pre-schools
- Political or advocacy organizations
- Religious organizations, though they may serve as a fiscal sponsor
- Media organizations or filmmakers

Applicant organizations cannot apply to Mass Humanities for the same project under a different grant line. (For example, an organization cannot apply for a Digital Capacity Grant and a Bridge Street Sponsorship for the same three online programs).

What Kind of Projects Are Eligible?
To be eligible a project needs to
- Have defined goals and completion date
- Be open to the public or K-12 students.
- Serve Massachusetts residents (though out-of-state participants may also attend)
- Be free for participants or users
- Meaningfully engage with the humanities
- Use digital programs or platforms for the humanities components of the project

What we cannot fund:
- Work undertaken or supplies purchased before or after the grant period
- Fundraising activities, capital campaigns, or organizational strategic planning
- Programs that do not serve Massachusetts residents
- Courses or professional development for participants (cost of training for project staff is allowed)
- Re-grants to other organizations
- The promotion of a particular political, religious, or ideological point of view
- Lobbying or advocacy for specific public policies or legislation
- Direct social service, e.g., counseling, therapeutic, legal, or medical services
- The creation of professional art or artistic performances
- Ticket costs if the revenue from ticket sales goes to the sponsoring organization
- Cost of entertainment, food, or alcohol
- Scholarships or prizes

Requirements for project budgets:

- Any equipment purchased with MH funds must be used for the publicly accessible humanities components of the project.
- Applicant organizations must at least equally match the amount of funding requested of Mass Humanities through a combination of cash and in-kind contributions. That is, a project that requests $5000 from Mass Humanities must provide at least $5000 in cash or donated services from non-Mass Humanities sources. An organizations' own funds and contributions of cash are known as the "cash-share." Contributions of donated time, supplies, or services, are known as the "in-kind share."
- At least 10% of a project's funding match must be in cash-share (as opposed to "in-kind share").
  - o Applicants may not use other Mass Cultural Council funding (e.g. a Local Cultural Council Grant) to make their 10% cash-share.

Review Criteria

Proposals will be reviewed by Mass Humanities board and staff for the following:

- Potential public interest in and impact of the project
- Centrality of the humanities to the project
- Viability of the project plan
- Potential for the project to advance the applicant organization's digital capacity for future humanities engagement.

Mass Humanities will prioritize

- Small organizations (approximately 5 full-time equivalent employees or fewer)
- Geographic distribution of funded projects
- Variety of funded projects

Reporting and Publicity

- Funded projects will receive 90% of their award upon submitting their grant contract. Remaining funds will be awarded upon completion of a brief final report on project outcomes, public engagement, and use of funds.
- Funded projects will be required to submit an events report.
- Funded projects that need to make major changes to the scope, timeline, format, key project staff, or budget changes of more than $500 per-line item should submit a "change request" form in the online grants system for approval.
- Funded projects will acknowledge Mass Humanities and the Mass Cultural Council in publicity.

How to Apply

If your organization is a 501(c)(3) and you have applied for a Mass Humanities grant on its behalf in the past, log in to the system and start the application.

If you or your organization is new to Mass Humanities, you will need to create an account. To create an account, you will need to know your organization's address and tax-ID number.

If your organization has applied to Mass Humanities in the past using a fiscal sponsor, please reach out to grants@masshumanities.org to assist you in updating your account information.

Log in to the application system [here](#).

FAQ

What are the humanities?
The humanities are the tools by which we comprehend the past, forge new ideas, and express ourselves as participants in a free society. Traditionally they have been defined by fields of study including: literature, language, history, philosophy, archaeology, comparative religion, law, ethics, interpretation of the arts, and social sciences that use humanities methods. They also include cultural heritage, community-based history and storytelling, and informed civic discussions. Of course, new humanities fields and topics emerge all the time. What they share is a focus on understanding the human experience in context.

What about interdisciplinary projects?
Mass Humanities welcomes projects that link the humanities with other fields. Interdisciplinary approaches include

- Arts and Humanities: Arts and humanities go great together. The humanities provide context to deepen our understanding of the arts. Mass Humanities does not fund professional performances or works of artistic expression, but we do fund projects that engage arts audiences or participants in humanities based discussion and reflection.

- Policy and Humanities: By understanding who we are, we can make informed choices about how we live. Mass Humanities supports projects that engage the complex historical and ethical perspectives we need to make important choices. Instead of prescribing policy solutions or a single point of view, Mass Humanities-funded projects empower participants with the knowledge to understand the choices they face.

- Social Sciences and Humanities: More and more, humanities approaches are being used in fields that once were considered sciences, such as economics, political science, anthropology and geography. Humanities approaches in these fields and others should emphasize qualitative questions about the human past and present as opposed to quantitative models of behavior

What do you mean by "advance the applicant organization's digital capacity?"
Digital capacity grants should enable the applicant to try something new with digital formats, to build on what they are already able to do. For example, at the completion of the project, the applicant organization's staff and/or constituents could have new skills, partnerships, or platforms applicable to future digital or hybrid projects; or the applicant organization could have acquired and learned to use new equipment that they will also apply to future projects.

Can I apply to create or update my organization's website?

An organization whose mission is based in the humanities may apply to create or update its website if its current site and digital profile is severely limited in its functionality. Any website project should increase access to and awareness of the applicant's humanities content.

Can a Digital Capacity Grant pay for online programming related to a theatrical production?

A Digital Capacity Grant cannot fund a theatrical performance, but it can fund free humanities programs related to a performance if the performance is also free or if the humanities program is of interest to audiences regardless of their ability to access the performance. Either way, applicants will need to make a case for public interest in the humanities program.

Can I also apply for a Bridge Street Sponsorship?

Organizations can apply for a Bridge Street Sponsorship if that application is for a separate project. For example, a historical society could apply for a Bridge Street Sponsorship for three online programs it is planning for May, 2021. It could not apply for a Digital Capacity Grant for the same programs. However, it could apply for a Digital Capacity Grant for different program where it is experimenting with hybrid audience interaction models.

If I'm awarded a Digital Capacity Grant, can I apply for another Mass Humanities Grant before I submit my final report?

It depends on the type of grant. Some smaller grants and special initiatives, like Reading Frederick Douglass Together, are available to applicants that have not yet submitted a final report for their other grant. Most grant lines, however, are not available to applicants who have not submitted final reports.

I'm not sure if my project is eligible. Can I talk with someone?

Mass Humanities staff are happy to answer questions. On January 21st, from 12-1pm, Mass Humanities will host a webinar to review the grant guidelines and application, and take questions from attendees. Please send inquiries to grants@masshumanities.org.