Request for Proposals: Strategic Planning Consultant

Mass Humanities invites proposals from experienced strategic planning consultants or teams to lead a streamlined, decision-focused planning process, concluding by September 2027, that produces a three- to four-year strategic plan. Proposals are due **Nov. 25**.

About Mass Humanities

Founded in 1974 as the state affiliate of the National Endowment for the Humanities, Mass Humanities is an independent grantmaker and program provider that uses history, literature, philosophy, and other humanities disciplines to strengthen civic life across Massachusetts. Headquartered since 2025 in Holyoke, we fund and partner with libraries, museums, schools, and community groups in every corner of our state, with a focus on communities that have limited access to humanities programming. We are supported by the National Endowment for the Humanities, Mass Cultural Council, and private sources; led by an executive director and a small staff; and governed by a volunteer board of 25 directors.

Our Needs

Mass Humanities starts from a strong foundation based on more than a year of financial scenario planning, evaluation work, and the piloting of new program models. Following several years of growth in our programs and revenue shaped by our 2021-2024 strategic plan, the disruption of federal funding in 2025 led to the development of a new, integrated approach to our work as a grant-maker, convener, and producer of original content. We piloted this approach in 2026 and need a plan to clarify the goals, structure and resources needed to advance this model, grow our partnerships, and broaden the audience for humanities-based storytelling in Massachusetts.

As a result, we seek to engage in a focused process with clear boundaries. The plan should answer five questions:

- **Our role.** How do we remain an accessible, publicly funded grantmaker while investing actively in a few focus areas? How do we understand our role within the cultural, governmental, and philanthropic sectors in Massachusetts and nationally? How does our Holyoke base contribute to our strategy?
- **Storytelling.** What restructuring and resource development is necessary for Mass Humanities to evolve from a grantmaker to a narrative organization that funds, partners and provides services for individuals, foundations and corporations seeking to broaden the stories Massachusetts tells, collects, and shares?

- **Focus.** Which communities and themes get priority in the next 3-4 years? Are there audiences or sectors where humanities programming would find more resources and support? Which current programs do not fit within our new focus areas?
- **Governance.** How should our board, advisory groups, and committees contribute expertise to staff-led programs, and what board composition and structure does the strategy require?
- **Sustainability.** How do we diversify revenue as federal funding becomes less reliable, and what areas of our work will we stop, narrow, or defer?

Scope and Approach

We prefer a compressed process. Rather than a long series of monthly meetings, we want deliberation and decision-making concentrated in a small number of well-designed sessions. Please propose the shortest schedule that still gives the Board real choices; the timeline below is an outer boundary, and a faster one is welcome.

The consultant will design and facilitate the process and synthesize what we learn; the Board will set the strategy with insights from the staff, and the executive director will lead implementation. We anticipate a short discovery phase, two full-Board working sessions (one to frame the evidence and choices, one to choose among options with their financial consequences stated), and a drafting phase with a first-year roadmap. We welcome design-thinking methods, such as prototyping and scenario testing.

Board-staff collaboration is central. A small planning committee of Board members and the executive director will guide the process. We especially value creative ideas for keeping Board and staff co-invested during planning and for carrying that partnership into implementation.

Timeline and Deliverables

When	Milestone
Dec 2026	Consultant selected; planning committee formed
March 2027-May 2027	Discovery: survey, interviews, community input, working session with Board
May-June 2027	June Board working session to review evidence and choose a direction
July–August 2027	Draft plan, first-year roadmap, and monitoring approach; committee and staff review
Sept 2027	Board approval

The final deliverable is a concise plan stating the role we will play, three to five priorities, what we will stop, narrow, or defer, implications for staffing, partnerships, and funding, a first-year roadmap with owners, and a simple way for the Board to monitor progress.

Who We Are Looking For

- **Sector experience** with cultural, humanities, or philanthropic organizations
- **A design-thinking mindset** and comfort with creative, human-centered methods
- **Board-staff collaboration expertise** that outlasts the plan
- **Disciplined facilitation** focused on decisions

Proposals, Selection, and Submission

Please submit a proposal of eight pages or fewer, plus attachments, that includes your approach and proposed schedule (including how you would compress the process, use design thinking, and engage the Board, committee, and staff), team biographies, three references, a not-to-exceed fee with the Board and staff time you expect to need, and any relationship with Mass Humanities, its Board, or its advisors.

Proposals are due **11.25.26** with finalist interviews on **Dec. 7-9**. Please send a single PDF to **Diane Feltner** at **dfeltner@masshumanities.org**, who can also answer questions. Mass Humanities welcomes proposals from firms and consultants of all backgrounds, including those led by people of color and others underrepresented in the consulting field.