CARES Act Grant FAQs

Grant

Where does the funding for the Maine Humanities Council’s CARE Act Relief Grants come from?
Our grants are part of the $2.2 trillion federal Coronavirus Aid Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act passed by Congress and signed into law in late March 2020. The National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) received $75 million for emergency relief efforts and allotted a significant portion of those funds to its network of state humanities councils, including the Maine Humanities Council, for distribution across their regions.

How much money can we apply for?
Eligible organizations can apply for up to $7,500.

Are there any restrictions on the amount we ask for, knowing that $7,500 is the maximum allowed?
No.

Are matching funds required?
No. The emergency relief grants are for general operating expenses only and do not require matching funds.

Do the grants need to be used for humanities projects?
No. Grants are for general operating expenses only, such as salaries, rent, utilities, supplies, and equipment. The CARES Relief Grants are intended to aid non-profit humanities-focused organizations that are facing financial hardship due to COVID-19. Organizations seeking humanities project support should apply for an MHC Mini Grant.

When will we find out if we receive a grant?
Applications will be reviewed and decisions announced via email during the week of June 8th.
Eligibility

Who IS eligible to receive one of MHC’s CARES Act Relief Grants?
These funds are intended to support Maine non-profit organizations that provide significant humanities programming and are facing hardship due to economic impacts related to the coronavirus. This includes 501(c)(3) organizations registered in Maine, Maine tribal organizations, Maine public libraries.

Who IS NOT eligible to apply?
Individuals; for-profit organizations; organizations solely focused on the arts; political or advocacy organizations; government agencies; universities, colleges, academic departments; public, private, or parochial schools; entities with significant public funding. Organizations may not apply through a fiscal sponsor to meet eligibility requirements.

If we have received loans from SBA and PPP programs, or applied for funding from other sources, will that be factored into final decisions for the CARES Act Relief Grant?
Yes. Applicants are required to list relief funds secured and/or applied for through other CARES Act programs or other sources. This information will be considered by our review team in final decisions.

We already have a grant from MHC. Can we still apply for a CARES Act Relief Grant?
Yes. If you meet the eligibility requirements, please apply.

We want to apply for a grant from MHC later this year. Can we still apply for a CARES Act Relief Grant?
Yes. If you meet the eligibility requirements, please apply.

We have never worked with MHC before. Can we still apply for a CARES Act Relief Grant?
Yes. If you meet the eligibility requirements, please apply.

We have received grants from MHC before. Does that mean we are automatically eligible to apply for a CARES Act Relief Grant?
No. Past MHC grant recipients are not automatically eligible. While MHC grants support humanities-based projects, NEH’s CARES Act eligibility guidelines require that an organization provide humanities programs to the public as a significant part of its mission. Please make sure you express how your organization is humanities-centered in your application.

What counts as financial hardship?
Hardship includes, but is not limited to, an organization facing permanent closure, loss of paid staff, loss of venue or workspace, and/or new expenses incurred due to the coronavirus.

Our organization operates in the summer, so our losses will occur after June 15th, 2020. Can we still apply?
Yes. You may apply and explain this in your application, but please know that the priority is to provide relief for immediate needs. We selected the date range of March 16-June 15, 2020 to reflect the intention of NEH that these funds be used to provide immediate relief for organizations currently experiencing financial hardship.

My organization is not a museum, historical society or library. Could we still be eligible?
Any Maine non-profit organization may be eligible if it provides humanities programs to the public as a significant part of its mission. Organizations that define their mission as social service, arts, etc. must present strong evidence that the humanities are central to a significant portion of its programming.

My organization is attached to a University or a municipality. Could we still be eligible?
If your organization has its own governing board, budget, and staff, and is independent from your umbrella organization, you can apply if you meet the other eligibility requirements. We encourage you to reach out to MHC staff regarding your specific situation before applying.

Can friends groups of organizations apply?
Yes, if you meet other eligibility requirements.

Can we apply through a fiscal sponsor?
No. All eligible organizations must apply directly.

My organization is not eligible for the CARES Act Relief Grants, but is at risk of closing if it does not find additional funding. Can an exception be made for us?
Unfortunately, no.

What can CARES ACT Funds be used for?
These funds are to assist with financial hardship due to the effects of the coronavirus. They are intended to assist with operating costs. This could include, but is not limited to, rent/mortgage payments, payroll, utility bills, new expenses incurred due to the coronavirus, and other payments that affect the viability of the organization. Please refer to our website for MHC resources you can utilize to support your programming needs.

What are some examples of Coronavirus-related expenses that may be allowable?
- Sanitizing/ deep cleaning building/space
- Increasing wi-fi ability so people can use it in the parking lot
- Modified programming due to COVID-19
- Paying for extra staff time due to lack of volunteers
- Getting Zoom or equipment / accounts needed in order to conduct business
- Please note that this is not an exhaustive list.

Are there activities these funds CANNOT be used for?
Yes. The NEH prohibits the use of federal funds for activities that promote political/religious viewpoints, lobbying, construction, land purchases, fundraising, and more. See the grant guidelines; contact us with any questions regarding funding restrictions.
Will there be another opportunity to apply for CARES funds for hardships occurring after June 15th?

We do not know. It will depend on whether Congress allocates further funding for cultural organizations. Should this happen, we will announce this. We encourage you to sign up for our e-newsletter to receive updates and learn about other opportunities.

What are the humanities?

According to the NEH, the humanities include, but is not limited to, the study and interpretation of the following: language, both modern and classical; linguistics; literature; history; jurisprudence; philosophy; archaeology; comparative religion; ethics; the history, criticism and theory of the arts; those aspects of the social sciences which have humanistic content and employ humanistic methods; and the study and application of the humanities to the human environment with particular attention to reflecting our diverse heritage, traditions, and history and to the relevance of the humanities to the current conditions of national life.

In practice, humanities programming typically involves people in learning, thinking, and talking about important aspects of their own and especially other people’s experience of living. Humanities programs typically use stories about what people, real or imaginary, have done and how they have lived or might live; ideas about how things are or could be; as well as poems, art, music, or important or interesting objects to ground discussions, exhibitions or presentations.

We don’t use the word “humanities” in our mission statement. Is that a problem?

No. To be eligible you must do a significant amount of humanities programming.

How do I know if my organization is doing “significant” humanities programming?

Please describe your programming as requested in the application and make your case.

Whom should we contact if we need help determining whether we are eligible to apply or have trouble filling out the application?

Review the grant guidelines and FAQ, then reach out to Maine Humanities Council grants staff with remaining questions. Because we are working remotely, we ask that you email your questions to Jerome Bennett and Lizz Sinclair at grants@mainehumanities.org. Please be sure to include your phone number in case we need to call you.

Application

You said the application must be completed in one sitting. Can the form be downloaded so that we can draft our answers first?

The application form can be previewed and printed. We also suggest writing your answers into a word document as you work through it. You can then copy and paste your answers into the boxes on the application.
Does the character limit on the application boxes include spaces?
Yes, it does.

When are applications due?
Applications must be submitted before midnight on Friday, May 15th. (We advise submitting before 3pm that day in case you have any questions for staff or run into difficulties.)

Can we mail you the application?
No. Because of the volume of applications we are receiving, all CARES applications must be submitted electronically.

How will I know if my application was received?
You will receive an automatic response letting you know that your application was received soon after you submit it.

What kind of paperwork will we need to fill out if we are awarded a grant?
If your organization receives a grant, you will need to sign and return an agreement; you must provide a DUNS number in the agreement. If you don’t have a DUNS number yet, you can apply for one, free of charge, online.

Does my organization need a DUNS number in order to apply? How can I find out if we already have one?
You do not need to have a DUNS number to apply, but we will need to have your organization’s DUNS number before you can receive funds. We suggest applying for a DUNS number as soon as possible. While the application process is pretty straightforward, it may take some time to receive it. You may acquire a DUNS number for free from the DUNS Request Service website where you can also check to see if your organization already has a number.

If I get my DUNS number after I have sent in my CARES Act Relief Grant application to MHC, should I send it to you?
Please wait. If your organization is awarded funds, we will ask you for the DUNS number when we contact you about your award.

Will we need to do any reporting?
Yes. We will ask you to complete a final report this fall. While we are still determining the details that you’ll need to provide, expect to include a narrative describing the impact of these funds on your organization as well as how you spent the funds.

Further Information
Please email questions to grants@mainehumanities.org. Please allow a day for us to respond.