



CALIFORNIA DOCUMENTARY PROJECT

Production Grant FAQ

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FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Overview

1. What types of media projects are eligible for a California Documentary Project (CDP) grant?

The California Documentary Project (CDP) grant program supports non-fiction storytelling that centers the experiences, histories, and cultures of a multidimensional California through documentary film, audio, and digital media projects that document, help bring to light, and reveal California's cultures, knowledges, communities, and histories to statewide and national audiences, while drawing on humanities/public humanities methods and tools. There is no restriction on subject matter, except that it must be relevant to California, and documentary productions of any style are eligible. Historical projects should make a clear case for their relevance to contemporary audiences.

Web-based and broadcast series, podcasts, interactive, and multiplatform projects that incorporate a range of media formats, including still photography, are eligible to apply. However, all should capitalize on the interactive potential of the Internet, mobile technology, or other digital media to reach and engage audiences and cultivate user participation. California Humanities is particularly interested in projects that encourage active ongoing collaboration among media makers, humanities advisors, and end users/audiences.

Since 2003, California Humanities has supported a broad range of CDP projects across diverse subject matter in multiple formats and styles. Please visit our [webpage](#) for a list of previously supported CDP projects.

2. Is there a requirement that projects be of a specific length?

No. Projects may be of any length if they are appropriate to the subject matter, make sense with your stated plans for reaching and engaging target audiences, and align with the purpose and parameters of proposed distribution outlets. Shorts, features, multi-part series, micro-podcasts—we like them all!

The Humanities

3. What are the humanities and public humanities?

Broadly, the **humanities** help us explore, understand, and interpret what it means to be human by examining our histories, values, cultures, and beliefs — both our own and those of others.

The humanities encourage us to be curious, listen closely, consider different perspectives, and recognize the complexity and diversity of human experiences in relationship to the world around us. Academic fields such as history, literature, philosophy, languages, gender, ethnic, and cultural studies, as well as the knowledge and lived experiences shared by culture bearers and community historians, contribute to this exploration, understanding, and interpretation. The humanities also encompass art history, theory, and criticism, but not typically the creation of art unless contextualization and/or interpretation are woven in. **Public humanities** extends this work beyond academic settings by engaging different communities in conversations and activities around heritage, traditions, history, culture, and the arts, creating opportunities for people to share knowledge, reflect on their own beliefs, learn from others, and connect the humanities to everyday civic and cultural life through a variety of methods – exhibitions and installations, discussion programs, oral history projects, interpretive tours, traditional ecological knowledge, etc. In this way, public humanities recognizes that knowledge is created and preserved not only within academic institutions but also (and mostly) within communities, and invites people to understand one another, value differences and commonalities, question the stories we tell about ourselves, and strengthen the skills needed to participate in, and build a pluralist society that fosters mutual respect and a sense of shared responsibility.

4. What does it mean to take a humanities approach to a media project?

A humanities-based approach draws on existing knowledge of the topic, incorporates a variety of perspectives, and seeks to foster critical reflection and thoughtful analysis in the audience. It would be valuable to describe the central questions you are asking, identify the three or more primary humanities themes of your project, and explain how you will use the humanities to inform the process of producing your project and your approach. E.g., a project about one of California's many immigrant communities may look at the broader history of immigration to California to establish historical context; how California's experience compares to immigration patterns nationally; and the specific social, cultural, political, and economic impact of immigration on both the primary community and the state of California.

5. Am I required to involve a Humanities Advisor in my project and what do they do?

Yes. At least one humanities advisor must to be actively involved in the project team. A humanities/public humanities advisor can be an academic scholar, a humanities professional, a community historian, or a culture bearer. Advisors should be considered a resource as you develop the project, providing insight, perspective, scholarship, and access to knowledge. Advisors should align with your primary humanities themes, and we encourage applicants to involve additional advisors as appropriate. We encourage advice from a broad range of perspectives and expertise and, in many cases, strongly

recommend enlisting a community-based culture bearer or a community historian as a key project advisor.

6. Who qualifies as a Humanities Advisor?

- Academic scholars (individuals with an advanced degree in a humanities discipline or individuals teaching or researching in a scholarly institution, e.g., professors, some curators, and librarians).
- Independent advisors (individuals who have researched, written and/or spoken about a humanities topic and are considered experts in their field, e.g., journalists, artists, curators, non-professional historians).
- Community advisors/culture bearers (individuals who, through lived experience, training, and/or belonging to a community, carry the knowledge, wisdom, and collective historical memory of the group, e.g., tribal or neighborhood elders, practitioners of traditional cultural forms, community leaders, etc.)

7. Can a current California Humanities board member serve as a Humanities Advisor on a project?

Yes, if they avoid any action that could be interpreted as a use of California Humanities board membership to further their own interests or those of an affiliate institution. California Humanities board members who are named in a proposal or significantly involved with the creation of a proposal may not vote on or participate in discussion of that proposal. In addition, they may not receive honoraria, salary, or other payment for consultation in a California Humanities-sponsored or -funded program.

8. How can I locate a Humanities Advisor?

Check with a local higher education institution (college or university), do a web search on your topic, and/or connect with the community whose story you are centering. For more support on this for the second round, contact Program Officer Cinthia Carvajal at ccarvajal@calhum.org.

Applicant Organization Eligibility & Responsibilities

9. Does California Humanities fund individuals?

No. Individuals seeking funds for a project must be fiscally sponsored by a tax-exempt entity, preferably one based in California.

10. Who is eligible to apply for a CDP grant?

Only California-registered 501(c)(3) nonprofit entities or California residents being fiscally sponsored by a tax-exempt entity can apply.

11. Does the non-profit applicant organization need federal 501(c)(3) status?

Yes.

12. Is California residency required to be eligible for the California Documentary Project grant?

Yes. Because we want to support the work of California media makers, California residency for the project director and the applicant organization (if not fiscally sponsored) is required. We also prefer project personnel to be California-based to the extent possible.

13. Does fiscal sponsorship with an eligible nonprofit entity need to be confirmed by the application deadline?

No, applicants in the Letter of Intent stage are not required to confirm fiscal sponsorship. However, if invited to submit a full proposal for the second stage of review, applicants will be required to confirm fiscal sponsorship by the full proposal deadline.

14. What are the responsibilities of the applicant organization or fiscal sponsor?

The applicant organization or fiscal sponsor must approve the proposal submission, be willing and able to administer grant funds in conformity with the terms of the grant agreement, and accept full responsibility for undertaking and supporting the project as outlined in the proposal.

If a grant is awarded, the Authorizing Official of the applicant organization, project director, or fiscal sponsor will receive the award packet, and must sign the grant agreement, and return it to California Humanities, along with other required award documents, before funds can be disbursed. The applicant organization or fiscal sponsor is the entity responsible for overall fiscal and compliance matters to California Humanities for the duration of the project. Project directors and fiscal sponsor organizations should have a clear written agreement, such as a Memorandum of Understanding, to ensure mutual accountability.

15. Can an organization apply for or receive more than one grant from California Humanities at a time?

An applicant organization cannot submit more than one application on its own behalf per deadline, have more than one application pending review, or receive more than one grant from California Humanities at a time. Organizations that have applied for and received

multi-application fiscal sponsor status from California Humanities may also submit multiple applications on behalf of their fiscally sponsored projects. If you have questions about an organization's status or eligibility, please contact Grants Manager Elisa Kutza at ekutza@calhum.org.

16. How can an entity be certified as a multi-application fiscal sponsor?

An organization must meet the following criteria and provide documentation of the following to be certified as a multi-application fiscal sponsor:

- Have an existing fiscal sponsorship program in place
- Have personnel to manage fiscal sponsorship duties
- Have solid finances
- Have tax-exempt status

Documents needed for review:

- Description of the organization (mission, history, leadership, board)
- Description of fiscal sponsorship program
- Sponsor/Sponsored MOU template
- IRS tax-exempt letter of determination
- Have a current California Secretary of State registration
- California Department of Justice Charity registration
- Audited financial statements (if unable to provide this, then provide current board-approved financials and most recent 990)
- At least two letters of support from sponsored parties

For more information, contact Grants Manager Elisa Kutza at ekutza@calhum.org.

17. Can an organization apply for a new grant if it has previously received a California Humanities award?

An organization that has previously received a grant from California Humanities may apply for a new project once the previous grant has been satisfactorily closed (that is, all project activities have been completed and a final report has been submitted and approved by California Humanities). Organizations that are California Humanities-approved multi-application fiscal sponsors, colleges, universities, and arts councils are exempt from this rule. To help us support as many people as possible, if you received funding in the last round, please wait one cycle before applying again.

Project Director

18. Who should be the Project Director and what is that person's role?

In most cases, the project's director, producer, or executive producer should serve as the grant-designated Project Director for the grant application. If, for any reason, the individual listed as project director is not the director, producer, or executive producer, please explain. In this case, you should also specify who the primary creative force behind the project will be and submit a media sample that reflects this individual's work. Please note that if funded, the individual listed as project director will be California Humanities' official primary administrative contact throughout the grant period.

19. Can an individual serve as Project Director on more than one California Humanities grant at a time?

No. An individual can only serve as project director on ONE active California Humanities grant at any given time. If an individual is already serving as a project director on a California Humanities-funded project, that person must complete the project and submit a final report before applying for another grant. Please note that final reports require approximately two weeks for approval and should be submitted well in advance of the next grant deadline.

Requested Funds

20. What is the maximum amount an applicant can request for a CDP Production grant?

Eligible applicants may apply for funding of up to \$50,000, though CDP Production Grants typically range from \$20,000 to \$50,000.

21. Are matching funds required?

Yes, a 1:1 match with cash and/or in-kind contributions from non-federal sources. These funds and in-kind contributions do not need to be in place at the time of application, but if a grant is awarded, should be spent on project-related activities during the grant period before the grant's end date. Cash on hand for use during the award period, and/or secured commitments to provide funds, labor, equipment, services, or other material support to the project during the award period are all eligible sources of matching contributions. Cash or the value of goods, services, and labor spent on the project before the start of the grant (April 2027), however, cannot be counted toward the required match.

22. What does in-kind mean?

In-kind refers to any contribution of labor, materials, goods, or services donated to the project. It can include the contribution of paid staff time; volunteer hours; office space; use of

equipment for administrative or programmatic purposes; materials donated for production, publicity, promotion, or evaluation; public program items, including refreshments; and travel, lodging, and meals for project staff or participants – at fair-market value of these contributions.

23. Can federal funds be used towards the match?

No. Funds from National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH), National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), or other federally assisted programs may not be used for the match.

24. Is there a project budget limit for this grant?

No.

25. How are funds disbursed?

If awarded a CDP Production grant, 60% of the grant funds are disbursed upon approval of signed award documents; 30% are disbursed upon review and approval of the first interim report; and the final 10% of funds are disbursed upon review and approval of the second interim report.

26. What costs are eligible for support?

Eligible costs include but are not limited to:

- Salaries and professional fees for production staff and technical consultants
- Honoraria and stipends for humanities advisors
- Production and post-production expenses, including travel, equipment (rental, unless purchase cost is less), supplies, and administrative expenses directly related to the project
- Public program expenses and publicity
- Fiscal sponsor or indirect administrative fees (up to 10% of your total California Humanities grant)

Submitting an Application / Applicant Support

27. How do I apply for this grant?

The application process for CDP R&D Grants is two-tiered. First, submit an LOI form through an online process. If the application is selected for the second round, the applicant will be invited to submit a full proposal. To start a new application for the first tier or to return to one already in progress, use the following link to the grant portal: ch-grants.smapply.io/

28. Does California Humanities conduct informational webinars?

Yes. California Humanities will offer an informational webinar before the grant deadline; its recording will be available on our website. We strongly encourage applicants to attend. Check our website for information about upcoming webinars.

29. Is there a time limit for project completion?

Yes. The maximum term for a CDP Production grant is three years from the start of the grant period.

30. What does relevant technical or substantive expertise mean for this grant?

California Humanities requires the involvement of personnel knowledgeable about the medium(s) your project will employ, e.g., filmmakers, radio producers, web designers, content developers, etc. Your proposal should demonstrate that project personnel have prior experience with the proposed project medium(s).

31. Can I use my own budget form?

When a full proposal is invited, you will be required to use and submit a provided California Documentary Project Production Grant Excel budget template.

32. What is the deadline for this grant?

First-tier applications, or LOIs, must be submitted electronically via the California Humanities' grant portal by 5 PM PST on Wednesday, October 14, 2026. **Late applications will not be reviewed.**

33. When will the online application be available?

The application form will be available through the California Humanities grant portal (ch-grants.smapply.io/) on Monday, September 14, 2026. Read the guidelines thoroughly before starting your application. Applicants have until the published deadline to complete and submit an application. The online application form will be deactivated after 5 PM PST on the deadline date.

34. Does California Humanities provide accessibility accommodations for applicants with disabilities?

Yes. Applicants requiring accommodations may contact Grants Manager Elisa Kutza at ekutza@calhum.org or call and leave a message at 415.391.1474.

35. How will I know that my application was received?

Applicants will be notified of receipt of their application by email.

36. When will awards be announced?

Notification of decisions for the first round will be sent to the Project Director by email on Monday, December 14, 2026. If invited to submit a proposal for the second round, applicants will be asked to submit proposals by Monday, February 1, 2027. The grant period officially begins in April 2027.

Review of Applications

37. If my application is unsuccessful, can I apply again with the same project?

Yes, subject to newer conditions and eligibility requirements.

38. Can I apply for this grant if my project is already in post-production?

No. The project must still be in the production stage to be eligible.

39. Can grant funds be used for post-production expenses?

Yes, but not solely for post-production. The California Documentary Production grant is designed to propel projects towards completion while involving humanities advisors at the earliest date possible. California Humanities expects grant recipients to utilize funds primarily, but not exclusively, for production expenses.

40. If funded, what are California Humanities' grant requirements?

Along with notification of award, grant recipients will receive detailed grant management and reporting instructions. Grantees will be expected to familiarize themselves with all requirements as outlined in the grant agreement and supplemental grant administration materials. Among other things, grantees will be required to submit a grant agreement signed by the authorizing official of the applicant organization or the fiscal sponsor, and the project lead; participate in California Humanities' grant learning and evaluation activities for the length of the grant, such as interim and annual narrative and expenditure reporting, conversations with the Programs Staff, cohort calls; provide a full resolution digital file of the completed production as a download or on a drive; collaborate with California Humanities on exhibition and promotional opportunities when possible; and match funds during the grant period by at least a 1:1 ratio in non-federal funding and/or in-kind contributions. Please review guidelines for more information.

41. How should we acknowledge California Humanities if funded?

Any tangible product of grant activity (film/video/audio productions, websites, public reports, exhibits, etc.) must credit California Humanities. If funded, specific credit language and logo requirements will be detailed in the grant agreement.

42. What are California Humanities' expectations for the distribution of a project?

As a state partner of the National Endowment for the Humanities, California Humanities expects that funded projects will be made available for broad distribution to the widest possible audience through multiple means. This may include, but is not limited to, public and community screenings and events, educational distribution, film festivals, public media broadcast, online distribution, and more. We hope that projects licensed for distribution through streaming platforms will also provide free public access through additional means.

Other Questions**43. Where can I learn more about California Humanities?**

More information about California Humanities is available on our website at calhum.org.

44. Whom should I contact if I have questions about eligibility, grant guidelines and requirements, or the CDP grant program in general?

Contact Program Officer, Cinthia Carvajal, at ccarvajal@calhum.org.

45. Whom should I contact if I have questions about the online application process and reporting?

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