

1989

## Sub-Grants (1989-1990): Memorandum 01

John Hammer

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The **NHA** National Humanities Alliance**COPY**

23 June 1989

## MEMORANDUM

TO: Mary Bain

FR: John Hammer *John Hammer*

RE: Severe problems for key humanities institutions that will result from a blanket prohibition on use of the regrant mechanism(s)

Current Situation - Use of the regrant mechanism by NEH has evolved over many years as an important and well safeguarded component of NEH's overall program. Advantages of the current arrangements include:

o NEH's regrant arrangements are with major institutions. The regrant institutions as a group constitute virtually the core of the infrastructure supporting scholarship in this country.

o Grant application and review processes at the regranting institutions are as rigorous or even more rigorous than the procedures employed by NEH.

o There is no evidence that abuses have occurred in the grant awarding processes any of the regrant institutions.

o The regrant institutions in many instances are providing services that could not be carried out directly by NEH such as the ability to respond rapidly to scholarly opportunities, maintenance of in-depth knowledge of scholarly areas and scholarly situations in other countries.

o The regrants help to sustain institutions that are critical to scholarship. Financially, NEH funds both sustain the small fellowship programs that facilitate scholarly access to specialized collections and provide underpinnings for raising matching funds from private sources.

o Regrants, although mostly less than \$100,000 annually for most participating institutions are a cornerstone for planning the sustained involvement of outside scholars in the development and use of collections.

o Regrants are a major guarantor of the pluralism and variety in sources of support for scholarship. Typically, in the centers for advanced study regrants program, the NEH regrant funds provide 30 to 40% of the fellowship funds directly but in addition are the catalyst for an additional 30 to 40% secured from other private sources on the basis of NEH matching requirements.

(continued)

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o Several of the regrant programs provide services that the NEH is not equipped to carry out. These include the focussed expertise to facilitate scholarly exchanges and selection of strongest scholars to use and contribute to specialized collections. In addition, for those regrant activities that the NEH could take on directly, almost without exception, the costs would be higher.

Safeguards for the Present NEH Regrant Process - Over the last year under the leadership of Mrs. Cheney, a thorough review of regrants has been conducted for the National Council on the Humanities. (See attached NHA report on the review). In the Alliance's view, the studies of regrant activities have been a very responsible and useful.

A clear outcome of study is that NEH has excellent safeguards in place for the integrity of the regrants. There has been no evidence of abuses in the program. At this point, the only question before the Council is whether in all instances the regrant process is the best alternative in terms of efficiency.

Likely Outcomes of a Decision to Terminate Use of Regrant Mechanisms at NEH:

o **Reduced Diversity** in sources of support for humanities activities would also reduce the range and diversity of projects supported.

o **Increased Federal Presence and Higher Costs** NEH's administrative appropriations would have to be increased substantially to allow staff necessary to process the significantly larger number of directly handled grant requests -- at least \$1 million and perhaps as much as \$2 million annually. Such a mega-NEH would significantly increase the direct federal role in decisions on support of scholarly activity (i.e., a considerably more central and centralizing federal role).

o **Weakening and/or Dissolution of Key Private Institutions** - Substantial reductions in support of central institutions supporting scholarship would be inevitable. Many key institutions would be weakened; a few may cease to exist.

A sampling of the anticipated impact on selected institutions:

o **The American Council of Learned Societies** would suffer short-term problems with the loss of regrant funds for its core programs (Approximately \$400,000 per year). Already in place is a plan to cease using regrant funds beginning in 1991. The loss here is that ACLS will be supporting scholarship at well under 60% of the level possible with NEH regrant funds.

ACLS also shares responsibility with other institutions for three programs that are a) of critical importance to the American

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scholarly enterprise, and b) in varying degrees dependent upon NEH regrants: 1) The international Research and Exchanges Board (see IREX below); 2) Committee on Scholarly Communication with the Peoples Republic of China; and 3) Joint Committees on International and Foreign Area Studies (see the Social Science Research Council below)

o **International Research and Exchanges Board (IREX).** The NEH regrants are the base upon which senior U.S. humanities scholars participate in exchanges with the USSR and other East European countries (\$825,000 per year). The exchanges are complex, requiring case by case negotiation to secure access to archives, libraries, research institutes and so forth. IREX provides a unique blend of scholarly and practical exchanges expertise and the ability to respond rapidly to changing circumstances. Loss of the NEH regrant funds would cause the immediate collapse of the American end of the exchanges in the humanities. Since the programs are reciprocal, Soviet and other East European programs would be suspended shortly thereafter.

o **The National Humanities Center.** Discontinuation of NEH regrants would be very damaging. While NEH provides approximately 30% of the NEC fellowships (\$240,000 annually), the NEH money is the lever that prods 30 to 40% of the private funds used annually for fellowships. Because the fellowships are the heart of this center for advanced study in the humanities, selection of fellows by another institution, if feasible at all, would be considerably less desirable in terms of the institution and its mission.

The NHC would also be hard pressed to continue to offer the annual seminars for secondary school humanities teachers that are currently funded through NEH Seminar grants. A key feature of these highly regarded programs is NHC's responsibility for the selection of the 40 teachers who participate each summer.

o **The American Antiquarian Society** would be seriously weakened by the loss of the NEH regrant funds (\$60,000 annually which constitutes 80% of all AAS fellowship funds and the only funds permitting long-term support, i.e., 6 to 12 months). The NEH funds support residence at AAS so that scholars not only have access to the unique collections but also enjoy the productive collegiality that a residential program makes possible. The regrant funds are also enormously beneficial to the AAS as an institution.

o **The Newberry Library.** The NEH regrants are at the core of the Newberry's education program. (\$130,000 annually supports six or seven long-term fellowships, i.e. 6-12 months. The other 60 fellowships are for short-term access. The NEH regrants have been a major factor in drawing private support for fellowships). NEH funds have been vital to Newberry's transformation from a

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regional resource to a major national center for scholarship. Loss of Re grants would weaken this institution's ability to provide access to scholars and to gain the vitality such scholars bring to the institution

o The **Social Science Research Council**. NEH re grants provide support for the Joint Committees on International and Area Studies (In recent years, \$300,000 annually for fellowships that has been matched by the Ford Foundation. In addition, re grants have provided support for research planning by the committees. These re grant arrangements have been decreasing and are currently planned at approximately \$150,000 for fellowships only). Loss of the re grant funds would be highly detrimental to the already endangered work of the joint committees.