

## Equity Action Plan Digests: National Endowment for the Arts and National Endowment for the Humanities

Summarized by Madeline Baxter

This is one in a series of Urban Institute digests summarizing federal agencies', subagencies', and commissions' 2022 equity action plans, which were released in response to the Biden administration's January 2021 executive order, Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities Through the Federal Government. The National Endowment for the Arts' equity action plan is available at [https://www.arts.gov/sites/default/files/EquityActionPlan\\_041422.pdf](https://www.arts.gov/sites/default/files/EquityActionPlan_041422.pdf) (PDF), and the National Endowment for the Humanities' equity action plan is available at <https://www.neh.gov/sites/default/files/inline-files/NEH%20Agency%20Equity%20Action%20Plan%20--%20Final%20Public%20Version.pdf> (PDF).

### Overview

<b>What problem are the agencies trying to solve?</b>	Focus on participation in underserved communities (NEA, p. 3; NEH, p. 2), community engagement (NEA, p. 5), accessibility (NEA, p. 7; NEH, p. 2), and improving data collection (NEA, p. 10; NEH, p. 2)
<b>Priority groups</b>	Tribal nations, veterans, Hispanic people, Black people (NEA, p. 2; NEH, p. 5), people at the lowest levels of educational attainment (NEA, p. 2), people with disabilities (NEA, p. 7), populations in nonmetropolitan areas (p. 2-3)
<b>Historic harm mentioned?</b>	No
<b>Partners in implementation</b>	Congress (NEA, p. 5); key opinion leaders, minority-serving institutions, NEA alumni, state and regional organizations (NEA, p. 6); relevant government contracting groups (NEH, p. 11); American Rescue Plan state affiliates (NEH, p. 3); historically Black colleges and universities, Hispanic-serving institutions, tribal colleges and universities, community colleges (NEH, p. 5); other federal grantmaking agencies (NEH, p. 8)
<b>Equity defined as</b>	Not defined beyond executive order

### Pillars and Principles of Equity

<b>Acknowledgement of past harm and present barriers</b>	Gap between program availability and participation (NEA, p. 3); community awareness of informational and financial resources (NEA, p. 5); barriers to identifying, successfully applying for, and managing grants (NEA, pp. 5, 8; NEH, p. 10); the requirement to provide cost share/matching funds (NEA, p. 5); lack of data tools and training for NEA staff to obtain/analyze equity-related data (NEA, p. 10); lack of data-driven framework to analyze grant effectiveness (NEH, p. 5); lack centralized outreach strategy (NEH, p. 7)
<b>Impact goals</b>	Increase participation of underserved communities (NEA, p. 3; NEH, p. 7); increase community engagement (NEA, p. 5); expand accessibility (NEA, p. 7); diversify contracting (NEA, p. 12; NEH, p. 11); simplify grant process to expand program reach (NEH, p. 9)
<b>Actions and activities</b>	Pilot initiative with underserved communities and learning community of grantees leading equity-focused organizations in the arts (NEA, p. 3); developing comprehensive public relations (NEA, p. 5); exploring accommodations in grantmaking process, expansion of translation services (NEA, p. 8); expanding data collection and developing data equity tools (NEA, p. 10); developing agency contracting officer representative training program (NEA, p. 12); hiring directors and associated staff, improving internal data collection (NEH, p. 5); data collection system to establish baseline of support to underserved communities (NEH, p. 6); grant application process review (NEH, p. 10)

<b>Accountability measures and approaches</b>	Alignment with agency strategic plan, FY 2022–26 (NEA, pp. 4, 11; NEH, pp. 6–12); updates published in annual reports (NEA, p. 7); appointing directors and associated senior staff (NEH, pp. 6–12)
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**Note:** For the rubric we used to evaluate these components of the equity action plans, see the appendix to the Urban Institute's 2023 brief "Pathways to Equity at Scale: An Analysis of the 2022 Federal Equity Action Plans and Recommendations for 2023 Plans," available at [https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/2023-03/Pathways%20to%20Equity%20at%20Scale%20Appendix\\_0.pdf](https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/2023-03/Pathways%20to%20Equity%20at%20Scale%20Appendix_0.pdf).

## Types of Equity and Related Activities

<b>Procedural</b> (example: expanding language and translation services; simplifying the vendor application process)	Direct reviews of grant forms to identify data gaps (NEA, p. 10); more frequently consulting empirical data about the demographic and geographic characteristics of various target populations (NEA, p. 7); town halls and/or focus groups on disability equity (NEA, p. 8); simplify grant process to expand program reach (NEH, p. 9); new one-year strategic plan from NEH Office of Communications to reach new target populations (NEH, p. 8); access accommodations for grantmaking process (NEH, p. 8); translation of grant guidelines into Spanish every year (NEH, p. 8); outreach to vendors owned by members of historically underserved communities to identify procurement barriers (NEH, p. 11)
<b>Distributional</b> (example: creating new procurement program)	American Rescue Plan state affiliates program (NEH, p. 3); American Rescue Plan competitive open grant program (NEH, p. 3); American Rescue Plan grantmaking program (NEH, p. 4)
<b>Structural</b> (example: policy change via proposing legislation related to an equity goal; changing organizational functions)	Website upgrades, social media utilization, staff training on effective strategies to reach diverse media, and engagement with minority-serving institutions modeled off current initiative with historically Black colleges and universities (NEA, pp. 5–6); incorporation of information on underserved communities (including race and ethnicity) within interactive map for leadership (NEA, p. 11); agency contracting officer representative training program (NEA, p. 11); equity-measurement framework and monitoring strategy (NEA, p. 11); launching equity task force to implement the equity action plan (NEH, p. 5); created NEH Office of Data and Evaluation and Office of Outreach (and hiring of director) (NEH, pp. 5, 7); Equity Task Force working group working toward options for collecting equity metrics from grant applicants and recipients (NEH, p. 6); convening an advisory group of experts to assess any implicit or explicit biases in grantmaking process (NEH, p. 10); convene working group to simplify grant-application process (NEH, p. 11)

## Key Metrics to Measure Progress on Equity

- outputs in underserved communities, long-term strategy for monitoring and evaluating equity action plan (NEA, p. 4) and toward community engagement (NEA, p. 7)
- numbers of applications from organizations serving people with disabilities and Hispanic-serving organizations, and success rates of these applications; number of people who access Spanish-language guidelines and webinars (NEA, p. 9)
- NEA's grant applicants, grantees, and program beneficiaries (NEA, p. 10)
- demonstrated NEA actions to improve equity in response to outcomes data on the effectiveness of NEA equity action plan, number of new or revised questions on grant forms that improve the collection of equity data, number of new or improved data tools providing NEA staff with access to robust data and analytical methods to inform outreach efforts (NEA, p. 11)
- rate of contracts awarded to businesses in historically underutilized business zones and businesses owned by women, veterans, and service-disabled veterans; number of outreach contacts made to these businesses; and the number of these targeted businesses responding to NEA contract solicitations (NEA, p. 13)
- grant effectiveness in reaching underserved communities (NEH, p. 5)
- applicants to agency grant programs, agency's rosters of peer reviewers (NEH, p. 9)
- demographic data for contractors and suppliers, procurement metrics of support for underserved communities (NEH, p. 12)



## Looking Ahead: Key Reflections for Plan Implementation

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Where are the agencies set up for success?	Initiatives align with strategic plans; explicit accountability measures, including repeated reporting and metric tracking; creation of NEH equity task force to implement agency plan (p. 5); intention to increase full-time employees to meet goals; demonstrated thoughtfulness in identifying how their processes could be made more equitable and reach broader populations
Areas for future investment and growth	Balance need for data collection with grantee capacity/burden; ensure agency staff are equipped to use what they are collecting smartly and efficiently; ongoing assessment of how grantmaking requirements may affect equity patterns in applications/success/reporting <i>and</i> how those requirements may affect different groups in different ways; identify the extent to which they can use existing relationships to assist the grantees in incorporate equity into their own processes and practices

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