

CATALYZING THE
HUMANITIES IN
RHODE ISLAND

2014-2019

RHODE ISLAND
COUNCIL *for* *the* HUMANITIES



*The Rhode Island Council
for the Humanities SEEDS,
SUPPORTS, & STRENGTHENS
public history, cultural
heritage, civic education, and
community engagement by
and for all Rhode Islanders.*

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Rhode Island Council for the Humanities strategic plan, “Catalyzing the Humanities in Rhode Island, 2014-2019,” builds on the Council’s successful grant program and partnerships to advance the public humanities in bold and innovative ways. With the mission to **SEED**, **SUPPORT**, and **STRENGTHEN** public history, cultural heritage, civic education, and community engagement by and for all Rhode islanders, the Humanities Council will support projects and programs throughout the state and strategically facilitate shared visions and initiatives that catalyze the humanities community.

The following overarching goals will guide the Council:

- *Cultivate, Engage, and Support our Constituents*
- *Assess, Sustain, and Strengthen Organizational Relationships*
- *Advance Civic and Cultural Leadership in Rhode Island*
- *Make the Case for the Public Humanities, the Humanities Council, and their Impact*
- *Develop the Council’s Resources*

Each goal of the five-year plan identifies specific aims to act upon, and annual plans will guide the Council and incorporate measures of progress. With this plan, the Council addresses the imperative to deepen and broaden access to history, culture, scholarship, and education to enrich and improve the lives of all Rhode Islanders.

VISION AND VALUES

The Rhode Island Council for the Humanities carries out its mission through a partnership between the National Endowment for the Humanities, individuals and organizations throughout the state, and other national organizations.

Over the past five years, the Council has concentrated its efforts and resources on grants for vital and innovative public programs, civic education, and media projects that have reached millions of people in Rhode Island and beyond. These many and diverse expressions of public humanities have provided vital arenas for lifelong learning and built bridges between scholarship and community activity.

The Council will continue to advance the public humanities sector through **GRANTMAKING** as well as through the facilitation of **SHARED VISIONS, COLLABORATION** to achieve sustainability and resiliency, and **PARTNERSHIPS** to bring together resources, to innovate, and to scale initiatives for greater impact.

The goals outlined in this plan will strengthen the Council's role as a catalyzing agent of the humanities community as a whole and connect the need for a stronger and more creative and innovative economy to engagement with the state's remarkable history and culture. These goals reflect the Council's understanding of the challenges facing the humanities sector, as well as our belief in the generative power of the humanities community to inspire and to improve Rhode Island.

FIVE-YEAR VIEW

By carrying out these goals, the Humanities Council will **BROADEN ACCESS** to, and engagement with, the humanities and the state's historical, cultural, and educational assets, help to develop more resilient organizations, **INCREASE CONNECTIONS** between academic and public humanities, **EXPAND SUPPORT** for the Council's sustainability and growth, and **CONTRIBUTE TO POSITIVE CHANGE** in the state.

GOALS

- 1 CULTIVATE, ENGAGE, & SUPPORT OUR CONSTITUENTS
- 2 ASSESS, SUSTAIN, & STRENGTHEN ORGANIZATIONAL RELATIONSHIPS
- 3 ADVANCE CIVIC & CULTURAL LEADERSHIP IN RHODE ISLAND
- 4 MAKE THE CASE FOR THE PUBLIC HUMANITIES, THE HUMANITIES COUNCIL, & THEIR IMPACT
- 5 DEVELOP THE COUNCIL'S RESOURCES

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE GOALS

The Council will develop annual plans that advance the five core goals and their specific aims. Annual plans will reflect the perspective of the Council's board of directors and will result from the staff's creativity and expertise regarding the Council's grantmaking, partnerships, collaborative platforms, and strategic initiatives. Each annual plan will be reviewed in tandem with the Council's budget in September.

1

CULTIVATE, ENGAGE, & SUPPORT OUR CONSTITUENTS

- **SUPPORT** a robust, consistent grantmaking program that implements the portfolio of support for applicants and grantees offered by the Council.
- **EXPLORE** and establish strategic partnerships with organizations that amplify and disseminate grantee projects, providing rich forums for projects to reach a broader community.
- **OPEN** the Council's archive of grants and programs as a resource for showcasing Rhode Island's culture and stories, humanities research, and humanities tools and methods that can be utilized as models today.
- **DEVELOP** the Council's collective impact models to reach diverse constituents and geographic regions across the state.

2

ASSESS, SUSTAIN, & STRENGTHEN ORGANIZATIONAL RELATIONSHIPS

- **ENHANCE** Rhode Island's relationships with national funders and organizations that promote and support the humanities.
- **BUILD** the network of Rhode Island's higher education humanities centers and other bridges connecting universities to the community, across sectors and disciplines.
- **UNDERSTAND** Rhode Island's linchpin organizations in the areas of business, civics, K-12 education, arts and culture, and libraries in order to align and distinguish the Council's efforts as a collaborative agent of change.
- **STRENGTHEN** the partnership between the Center for the Book, libraries, reading communities, and the Council.

3

ADVANCE CIVIC & CULTURAL LEADERSHIP IN RHODE ISLAND

- **LEAD** the state's public humanities sector through facilitating research and development, catalyzing innovation, and implementing new methods and applications.
- **PROMOTE** public humanities in and across multiple sectors, mobilizing and connecting organizations, people, and resources to address community challenges and opportunities.
- **SOLIDIFY** and expand the role of the Council as a resource for statewide policy and planning.
- **ESTABLISH** and convene an advisory group of cultural, governmental, educational, civic, and economic development leaders to gain input and cultivate champions for the humanities.

4

MAKE THE CASE FOR THE PUBLIC HUMANITIES, THE HUMANITIES COUNCIL, & THEIR IMPACT

- **ENHANCE** branding and name recognition of the Council as an independent nonprofit and resource for public humanities and culture.
- **PROMOTE** the humanities as a distinctive data set in policy and planning at state and national levels and invest in tools that measure the impact of the humanities sector.
- **ESTABLISH** the Council's voice as a trusted source of comment, evaluation, and engagement with issues of civic, cultural, and public interest in Rhode Island.
- **DEEPEN** relationships with local, state, and national government officials and solidify their support for the value of the humanities in Rhode Island.

5

DEVELOP THE COUNCIL'S RESOURCES

- **DIVERSIFY** revenue sources to match the Council's aspirations and growth and build the public-private partnership, leveraging public funds to attract support from national and state funders, the business community, and individuals.
- **PROMOTE** a culture of philanthropy that engages volunteer leadership—including time, expertise, and financial support—to enhance the sustainability and growth of the Council.
- **DEEPEN** the perception of the Council's stability and permanence.
- **INVEST** in the development of staff, board, scholars, and volunteers in order to produce and retain public humanities professionals, innovators, and ambassadors.

MEASUREMENT OF PROGRESS

The Council will measure progress toward achieving the goals of the strategic plan by:

- *Translating the mission, vision, and overarching goals of the strategic plan into a comprehensive set of objectives and performance measures that are both qualitative and quantitative*
- *Connecting the goals to the work plans and professional development of the staff*
- *Incorporating the perspective of the Council's stakeholders, including board members, grantees, partners, collaborators, and state and national leaders*
- *Learning from the innovations and lessons of the previous year's actions and adjusting specific aims and operational tactics accordingly*
- *Identifying and addressing the challenges and opportunities resulting from the Council's work in the humanities sector*

PROCESS FOR CREATING THE PLAN

Brought together in January 2014, the Strategic Planning Committee started off with a wide-ranging discussion of ideas, models, and challenges both locally and nationally. Based on this discussion, the Committee, composed of three board members and two staff, asked, “How does the Council have impact?” and “How does it make that impact?” resulting in a map of the methods and desired outcomes for the Council’s work. The Committee then condensed this map into five overarching goals.

Various members of the Council’s board offered suggestions and provided perspective, and the Council’s staff drafted specific aims for each overarching goal.

Valuing the Council’s collaborative relationships with many parts of the Rhode Island community, in June the Committee hosted two **HUMANITIES LAB** strategy sessions. Sixty participants—including staff, board, grantees, leaders of cultural organizations, community members, and representatives from the National Endowment for the Humanities—heard an overview of the Council’s work and discussed challenges and opportunities as suggested by a series of imagined headlines on a broadside titled *The Rhode Island Visionary*. The reporting on these headlines generated exciting approaches to the potential of the public humanities in Rhode Island.

Based on an outline shared with the Council’s staff and board, the strategic plan was then drafted by the Council’s executive director.

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Touba Ghadessi <i>Wheaton Institute for the Interdisciplinary Humanities at Wheaton College</i>	Ken Orenstein <i>RI Council for the Humanities Board Alumni</i>	<i>*in addition to Council board and staff</i>

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