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## About the Rhode Island Council for the Humanities

The Rhode Island Council for the Humanities seeds, supports, and strengthens public history, cultural heritage, civic education, and community engagement by and for all Rhode Islanders. As the only dedicated source of funding for public humanities in Rhode Island, the Council is proud to support museums, libraries, historic sites, schools, preservation and historical societies, community and cultural organizations, individual researchers and documentary filmmakers to bring Rhode Island's stories to life and to amplify the state's many diverse voices. A private nonprofit 501(c)3 organization, the Council is supported by federal funds from the National Endowment for the Humanities as well as by individuals, corporations, and foundations. Visit [www.rihumanities.org](http://www.rihumanities.org) for more information.

## Grantmaking

The Council's grantmaking program funds nonprofit organizations and individual researchers to stimulate new research in the humanities, spark thoughtful community exchange, build new audiences for the humanities, innovate new methods in the humanities, and advocate for the importance of the humanities for a lively and engaged democratic public. The Council's regular grantmaking has focused on vital and innovative public humanities projects and documentary film and media that have reached millions of people in the state and beyond. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Humanities Council created two ad hoc, federally funded emergency relief grantmaking programs to offer general operating support to humanities and cultural organizations statewide. Since its founding, the Council has supported over 800 community organizations through more than 1,900 grants, distributing over \$9.6 million. Major grants to nonprofit organizations are awarded annually, while mini grants are awarded quarterly.

## Strategic Initiatives

Strategic initiatives are specifically scoped projects undertaken by the Council to contribute to Rhode Island's culture, humanities, and arts communities and the wellbeing of the state. Strategic initiatives take advantage of the Council's position as the sole dedicated public humanities funder and NEH affiliate in the state, and are typically undertaken with external partners.

### Culture Is Key: Strengthening Rhode Island's Civic Health through Cultural Participation

The Humanities Council has supported civic education through our grants and initiatives for decades. In 2020-2021, the Council undertook *Culture Is Key*, an initiative to understand, test, and evaluate the role of cultural organizations in strengthening our state's civic health. *Culture Is Key* was supported by the Rhode Island Foundation, the Federation of State Humanities Councils, and the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation. The *Culture Is Key* report focuses on the potential to help renew civic life through the practices of cultural organizations in communities. The report includes a summary and analysis of an 18-month inquiry into connections between civic health and the public activities of nonprofit cultural organizations.

Learn more and read the full report at: [rihumanities.org/program/culture-is-key/](http://rihumanities.org/program/culture-is-key/).

### RI Civic Health Index

Building on the foundation of the *Culture Is Key* report, in 2022, the Rhode Island Council for the Humanities is conducting the first-ever data-driven Civic Health Index for the state. Many factors impact civic health, including community participation and community well-being. The Index will provide baseline context and information about diverse Rhode Islanders' connections to civic life, and help the state to understand the current status of civic health and innovate new paths forward, together.

This initiative is supported by the "A More Perfect Union" initiative of the National Endowment for the Humanities and is being produced in partnership with the National Conference on Citizenship and the RI Department of State, as well as individual Community Partners and advisors.

### Rhode Tour

Rhode Tour is a free smartphone application and website that tells stories about Rhode Island, making history matter today. A joint initiative of the Rhode Island Council for the Humanities, Brown University's John Nicholas Brown Center for Public Humanities and Cultural Heritage, and the Rhode Island Historical Society, Rhode Tour brings mapping technology, sound, images, videos and well-told stories together to engage visitors, residents, and students.

With 36 tours and close to 350 stories produced, the app also helps small historical sites and scholars get authentic and relevant stories out to the public without reinventing the digital wheel.

Learn more about Rhode Tour and download the app at: [rihumanities.org/program/rhode-tour/](http://rihumanities.org/program/rhode-tour/).

## **Rhode Island Expansion Arts Program**

Supported by a collaboration between the Rhode Island Foundation, the Rhode Island State Council on the Arts, and the Rhode Island Council for the Humanities, the Rhode Island Expansion Arts Program (RIEAP) offers funding and organizational assistance to community-based, culturally diverse arts, culture, and humanities organizations.

RIEAP supports small organizations whose programs and missions center on the cultural practices and traditions of Rhode Island's diverse peoples. In seeking to build the capacity of these organizations, RIEAP recognizes the broader role they play in strengthening their communities including cultural preservation, education, and youth development.

Workshops include governance, financial management, fundraising, marketing and audience development, documentation and evaluation, leadership development, and strategic collaborations and partnerships. Funding fosters greater connection across the arts and humanities as well as professional development for a broader network of RIEAP-eligible arts, cultural, and humanities organizations.

Learn more about RIEAP and the current cohort and alumni organizations at:

[rhodeislandexpansionartsprogram.org/](http://rhodeislandexpansionartsprogram.org/).

## Board Listing

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## Staff Biographies

### **Elizabeth Francis, PhD (she/her/hers)**

Executive Director

[Elizabeth Francis](#) leads the Humanities Council's promotion of public history, cultural heritage, civic education, and community engagement. Elizabeth has expertise in building partnerships and initiatives that bring together humanities scholars, community members, public humanities practitioners, and policymakers in economic and cultural development. Deeply interested in the connection between public participation in cultural activities and overall civic health in communities, Elizabeth recently co-authored [Culture is Key: Strengthening Rhode Island's Civic Health Through Cultural Participation \(2022\)](#). Elizabeth earned a PhD in American Studies at Brown University and a BA at Hampshire College. She worked at Brown for over 10 years in Corporate and Foundation Relations. She has taught at and currently serves on advisory councils at several universities and is a member of three nonprofit boards in Rhode Island. Elizabeth is serving as Secretary of the State Commission for the commemoration of the 250th anniversary of the American Revolution.

### **Rachael Jeffers (she/her/hers)**

Associate Director of Engagement

As Associate Director of Engagement for the Council, Rachael focuses on strategic communications and outreach efforts to deepen engagement with the public humanities in communities across the state. She is passionate about communicating the value of public humanities programs both locally and nationally and draws inspiration from the courage of communities willing to use the humanities to address challenging and pressing issues in creative ways. Rachael joined the Humanities Council team in 2016 as Development & Communications Officer, bringing experience in annual giving, strategic communications, volunteer management, social media and marketing, grant writing, and development events. Under her leadership, the Council has increased its brand recognition; enhanced awareness of the public humanities and its value to Rhode Island's creative economy; developed engaging marketing efforts for the Council's initiatives including: *Rhode Tour*; *XIX: Shall Not Be Denied*, *Why It Matters*, *Culture Is Key*, and the *RI Civic Health Index*; and has grown the annual Celebration of the Humanities into a successful fundraising event that showcases the value and strength of Rhode Island's humanities sector. Her ability to see the big picture of the Council's impact and build connections rooted in collaboration serves her well in developing the new engagement role at the Council. Prior to joining the Council, Rachael worked with advocacy, education, and cultural organizations in Washington, D.C., New Hampshire, and Maine. She holds an MA in Public Humanities from Brown University and a BA in History from Guilford College with minors in Peace and Conflict

Studies and Community Studies. Rachael is an avid amateur photographer, outdoor enthusiast, and traveler. When not at work or exploring museums she can usually be found on walks with her energetic dog Kensi.

**Sophia Mackenzie (she/her/hers)**

Associate Director of Development

As Associate Director of Development, Sophia brings more than 10 years of experience developing and implementing high-performing fund development programs to the Council team. Sophia joined the Council team in February 2021 and is applying her leadership and successful fundraising experience to support the Council's individual giving, donor relations, and capacity-building initiatives in ways that connect Rhode Islanders and inspire cultural and civic participation. Prior to joining the Council, Sophia served for four years as the director of development at New Urban Arts. Previous experience includes working with such cultural organizations as the Portland Art Museum and Northwest Film Center in her home state of Oregon. Sophia holds a BS in Political Science from Southern Oregon University and an MA in Socially Responsible Businesses and Sustainable Communities from Goddard College. Sophia recently completed the Professional Fundraising Certificate Program through Boston University and the Institute for Nonprofit Practice Core Program through Tufts University. She sits on the board of directors of Partnership for Philanthropic Planning - Rhode Island and volunteers with Urban Greens Food Cooperative. Sophia believes that philanthropy is a joyful and generous act—a way to engage deeply with our unique passions, support shared values, and invest in the riches our community has to offer. Among other things, Sophia enjoys traveling, reading, knitting, bargain-hunting, and spending time in the great outdoors with her dog Lucy and husband Tom.

**Scott Raker (he/him/his)**

Associate Director of Operations

As Associate Director of Operations, Scott brings his background in arts and culture management to the logistical and strategic development of the Rhode Island Council for the Humanities. Originally from Seattle, Scott came to New England to study at Bowdoin College, receiving a BA in Government and Legal Studies. With a passion for performing arts, he then pursued an MFA in acting from the Brown University/Trinity Repertory Program. He has worked and performed with numerous theater companies in New England and New York, gaining teaching, producing, and administrative experience along the way. Scott's interest in arts and culture led him to the arts service nonprofit Fractured Atlas, which assists artists nationwide with the business aspects of their work. He became the Director of the Fractured Atlas Insurance Program, which provides accessible and affordable coverage for individual artists and organizations, and managed their visa letter service, which assists international artists applying to enter the U.S. This role provided him with significant experience managing projects, data, budgets, and staffing. In 2016, Scott and his family happily returned to Providence from New York. He is thrilled to support the Council's broader mission of civic and community engagement in Rhode Island.

**Julia Renaud (she/her/hers)**

Associate Director of Grants & Strategic Initiatives

Associate Director of Grants and Strategic Initiatives Julia Renaud believes that public history, cultural heritage, civic education, and community engagement—the work of the public humanities—are integral to nurturing, strengthening, and inspiring all communities in Rhode Island. As such, she is thrilled to support and amplify the work of public humanities practitioners and organizations, as well as contribute to the Council’s own strategic initiatives, in her role. Since joining the Council in June 2020, Julia has developed and implemented several responsive grantmaking programs, including the American Rescue Plan Act-funded Rhode Island Culture, Humanities, and Arts Relief Grants (RI CHARG) general operating support program, which distributed \$968,000 to 121 non-profits in a historic partnership with the Rhode Island State Council for the Arts. She also co-authored the Council’s recent [Culture Is Key report](#) with Executive Director Elizabeth Francis and Civic Health Fellow Julia Lazarus, and leads the Council’s current initiative to develop Rhode Island’s first-ever Civic Health Index. Prior to joining the Council, Julia worked in cultural nonprofits in New York and Providence as an archivist, educator, curator, and public historian. Originally from the San Francisco Bay Area, Julia holds an MA in Public Humanities from Brown University and an AB, summa cum laude, in American History and Literature with a minor in History of Art and Architecture from Harvard University. The devoted co-guardian of a cranky black cat, Julia enjoys karaoke, historical tourism, and the beach.

**Micah Rodriguez (they/them)**

Program Coordinator

Micah Rodriguez brings a decade of nonprofit sector experience to support the Humanities Council's development, communications, and grantmaking programs. In their role as Program Coordinator, they bring their attention to detail, equity-based values, and collaborative systems-thinking to bear on operations and workplace culture initiatives. Prior to joining the Council team, much of Micah's work focused on supporting arts and culture organizations throughout Rhode Island. While at AS220, Micah served as Development & Grants Manager where they were co-creator of [Brighter Worlds: Confronting Violence Through Youth-Oriented Media](#), an international exchange between AS220 and IZOLYATSIA, an arts organization in Kyiv, Ukraine. The project was supported by the American Alliance of Museums and the U.S. State Department and brought together youth in Rhode Island and young people displaced by conflict in Ukraine to envision a bold, new world through creative expression. Most recently, Micah joined the advisory council for a nonprofit start-up based in their home state of New Jersey. Micah has a B.A. in Political Science from Rhode Island College with a self-directed minor combining politics with studio art, creative writing, and sociology. Their passion for storytelling and writing led to co-founding [How it Ends Studio](#), a Providence-based production studio with close friend and fellow writer Stephanie Resendes. As a team, they launched their first project, *How it Ends*, an immersive, mystery audiodrama podcast in 2018. How it Ends Studio signed to the [Rusty Quill Podcast Network](#) in 2021 and plans to release their third season in mid-2022. Micah is excited to lend their background in production and project management to support the Council's expanding engagement initiatives. Micah is a queer Puerto Rican Providence transplant by way of New Jersey, California -with a few other detours- and has called Rhode Island home since 2006. Among many other things, Micah is an avid tabletop roleplaying

game player and game master, amateur archer, and dedicated cat-parent. In their free time, you can find them writing campaign sessions, reading tarot, picking up new hobbies, petting cats, and laughing at clever internet memes.

**Melissa Wong (she/her/hers)**

Grantmaking Program Coordinator

As Grantmaking Program Coordinator at the Council, Melissa supports the Council’s community with all aspects of applying for, receiving, and reporting on their public projects and research grants. Melissa’s favorite part of her job is supporting public humanities work in Rhode Island and inviting friends to join her. Melissa brings a growing passion and interest for trust-based philanthropy and participatory grantmaking practices and values to her work. Prior to joining the Council in February 2021, Melissa was a dancer at Festival Ballet Providence for seven years and holds a B.A. in Chemistry from Smith College. Currently, she also serves as a co-director for Rhode Island Women’s Choreography Project, providing resources and performance opportunities for emerging choreographers. Melissa has a deep interest in continually building her leadership skills as a 2022 Fellow of New Leaders Council of Rhode Island and through pursuing a Nonprofit Management Certificate through Harvard University Extension School (her favorite class is Nonprofit Leadership and Community Engagement). When Melissa is not at the Council or working on other projects, she sparks joy by playing tennis, baking new-to-her recipes, and being the best auntie to her sister’s guinea pigs, Norman and Flash. Additionally, Melissa has a strong track record - as a Ravenclaw - in the cooperative deck-building game, “Harry Potter: Hogwarts Battle.”

## **Resources for Promotion**

### **Text**

When referring to the Rhode Island Council for the Humanities in press releases, print, website, social media or other pieces please use full name on first reference and the Humanities Council upon next reference. Please do not use the acronym (RICH).

### **On Social Media**

Tag the Humanities Council on Facebook, Instagram, &/or Twitter at @rihumanities

### **Logos**

Grantees and others may download the Humanities Council’s [logos and guidelines by clicking this link](#). For any questions, contact Rachael Jeffers at [rachael@rihumanities.org](mailto:rachael@rihumanities.org).