



WISCONSIN  
HUMANITIES

## EXHIBIT DESIGN

Wisconsin Humanities supports exhibits that encourage an exploration of the human experience, help people to see their place in the human community in new and surprising ways, and spark the joy of discovery.

We accept applications for both the research and production stages of an exhibit. We do not fund exhibits strictly focused on art or the sciences that lack engagement with the humanities.

### Keep the following principles of good exhibit planning in mind:

- Strong humanities exhibits **begin with strong ideas**. Competitive proposals are for exhibits that offer perspectives based on knowledge from one or more humanities disciplines.
- Are individuals involved who have expertise in the exhibit's subject matter? The exhibit team should include **humanities experts** during the planning and design phases.
- An interpretive exhibit organizes the information and supportive materials in a way that **leads the visitor**, while also allowing for individual interpretation and creating space for reflection.
- **Carefully plan for space**. Can exhibit sections stand alone? Or does a visitor need to move through a story in a chronological manner? If this is a traveling exhibit, consider the space limitations of other users and their ability to properly position or light pieces of the exhibit.
- In addition to the exhibit, consider creating **programs for the public** that encourage the exchange of ideas between the humanities experts and the audience.
- **Engage your audience**. Consider adding means for visitors to interact with the exhibit. This might include hands-on displays, open-ended questions in the text, comment cards, and additional materials for finding further information on the subject.



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## A successful application should:

- **State the central idea succinctly** to demonstrate the interpretive understanding of the topic. Identify each main concept and how the exhibit will be organized to reflect it.
- **Provide examples of information that will communicate each concept** such as specific examples of artifacts, photographs, and documents and/or a planned schematic of the exhibit.
- **Demonstrate the role of the humanities.** WH does not fund art exhibits. We can, however, fund strong humanities programming in support of an art exhibit.
- **Include information about the site(s) where the exhibit will be viewed,** the size of the space the exhibit will occupy, and any special features of the space that will be used or modified for the exhibit.
- **Clearly explain expenses and justify them.** Wisconsin Humanities can fund exhibit planning and design. This can include paying for humanities expertise; construction of exhibit panels and platforms; reproduction of copy prints from original photographs; production of label text; reproduction of documents; matting, framing, or mounting of materials; and production of graphic materials, interactive digital displays.
- **Offer opportunities for related programming,** resources or events that encourage reflection.
- **Go beyond numbers in evaluating the project.** Consider qualitative as well as quantitative measures of visitor engagement.



## EXAMPLES OF EXHIBITS THAT RECEIVED WISCONSIN HUMANITIES FUNDING

### 1. **Maritime Lighthouse Tower Humanities Advisors**

A Mini Grant to Door County Maritime Museum & Lighthouse Preservation Society allowed the staff to work with additional humanities experts to guide development of the themes of new exhibits in the new Jim Kress Maritime Lighthouse in Sturgeon Bay. This planning grant ensured that the project provided educational, cultural, and inspirational experiences to the community and visitors.

### 2. **Voting for a Change – The Impact of the 19th Amendment on Our Community**

Neenah Historical Society used a Mini Grant to help create an exhibit and supporting programming to celebrate the passage of the 19th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. The exhibit highlighted the struggle, the process, and the outcome of this monumental moment in our history and how the community and the lives of women both have changed since then.

### 3. **“We Were There-Korea”**

A Major Grant to Wisconsin Vietnam Veterans Memorial Project “The Highground” in Neillsville supported a traveling exhibit that collected the personal pictures, stories, and experiences of veterans. The exhibit also included uniforms and memorabilia, music, and personal veteran interviews.

### 4. **“Wisconsin Funnies: Fifty Years of Comics” Exhibition, Programs and Catalog**

A Major Grant to Museum Of Wisconsin Art in West Bend focused on the relationship between comics and politics. It explored the legacy of Kitchen Sink Press — Wisconsin’s most significant comics publisher. WH funds supported the production of an interpretive exhibit catalog and numerous additional programming opportunities that engaged with artists and publishers, which was made available online due to the pandemic.

### 5. **Plants & Place: Vanishing Flora in the Age of Climate Change**

A Major Grant to Wisconsin Academy of Sciences, Arts & Letters helped fund talks, workshops, and a publication in conjunction with an exhibit of artworks. The artworks were used to explore how changes in plant life shape our sense of place in Wisconsin and public programs further discussed the impacts of climate-driven change.