



Mellon Foundation  
Higher Learning 2024 Call for Concepts  
Guidelines

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*The guidelines contained herein are relevant and applicable only to the Higher Learning 2024 Call for Concepts and do not intersect with Higher Learning’s regular Grant Proposal Guidelines posted at Mellon.org.*

*We encourage interested applicants to review the Call for Concepts guidelines in full prior to registering for this call, and we further recommend that applicants gather and prepare the required application components prior to logging into the Mellon online portal to complete the application form.*

## OVERVIEW

In the interest of maintaining a grantmaking portfolio that supports inquiry into issues of vital social, cultural, and historical import, the Higher Learning program at the Mellon Foundation invites ideas for research and/or curricular projects focused on any of the following three areas:

- **Cultures of US Democracy**
- **Environmental Justice Studies**
- **Social Justice and Disciplinary Knowledge**

[See [Grantmaking Areas](#)]

The Mellon Higher Learning team will review all submissions and invite a small number of the most promising ones to be developed into full proposals for potential grant funding.

In consideration of the anticipated volume of concept submissions, we are unable to provide feedback on preliminary concepts.

### Eligibility

#### *Organization:*

To participate in this call for concepts, an organization must:

- Be an accredited, non-profit, four-year, degree-granting institution in the United States that offers liberal arts education.
- Offer multiple degrees in humanities and/or humanistic social science disciplines. [See [Eligible Fields of Study](#)]
- Enroll more than 1,000 full-time, degree-seeking undergraduates.

The following institutions are not eligible to apply for funding, although they may be referenced as partners in applications:

- Institutions based outside the US and its territories
- For-profit institutions
- Fully online institutions
- Research institutes
- Special Focus Institutions, as defined by the Carnegie Classifications  
(This includes medical schools and centers and other health professions schools; engineering and other technology-related schools; business and management schools; arts, music, and design schools; law schools; and seminaries or seminary-like institutions.)

***Principal Investigator:***

The Principal Investigator (PI) should be a faculty member or dean in a program or department in the humanities or humanistic social sciences, or the institution’s provost, and should have the support of the institution’s senior academic leadership. Applications that do not include a CV for the PI will be disqualified from consideration. [See [Application Documents](#)]

Should a proposal be invited and ultimately selected for funding, Mellon’s grantee would be the institution, not the PI. Therefore, institutional support for the project is vital. Applications that do not include a letter of institutional endorsement will be disqualified from consideration. [See [Application Documents](#)]

**Each institution may submit no more than three applications for this call.**

To confirm eligibility for this funding opportunity and gain access to the application form, all interested applicants must submit a completed registration form. [See [Registration](#)]

**Timeline**

<b>Registration forms to be submitted online:</b>	By 3 p.m. Eastern Time on Thursday, November 30, 2023
<b>Application portal logins to be issued to eligible registrants:</b>	Between Friday, December 1 and Thursday, December 7, 2023
<b>Application forms to be available in the portal to registered applicants:</b>	By Monday, December 11, 2023
<b>Completed applications to be submitted in portal:</b>	By 3 p.m. Eastern Time on Thursday, February 15, 2024
<b>Applicants to be notified of their status:</b>	Summer 2024

## PROCESS

### PART I: Registration

To ensure eligibility for this funding opportunity, interested applicants must complete the 2024 Higher Learning Call for Concepts registration form and submit the form by the registration deadline of Thursday, November 30, 2023.

Soon after submitting the registration form, you can expect to receive a confirmation of receipt email from [noreply@fluxx.mellon.org](mailto:noreply@fluxx.mellon.org). If you do not, please first check your spam folder; if the message is not there, contact [fluxxusers@mellon.org](mailto:fluxxusers@mellon.org).

If eligibility requirements are satisfied, you will receive a login for the Mellon portal to gain access to the application form. Logins will be issued via email from [noreply@fluxx.mellon.org](mailto:noreply@fluxx.mellon.org) between December 1 and December 7. If you already have a portal login that is linked to your current institution, a new one will not be issued. You will subsequently be notified via email from [noreply@fluxx.mellon.org](mailto:noreply@fluxx.mellon.org) when the application form is available in the portal, which will be no later than December 11.

If eligibility requirements are not met, your registration will be declined.

[See 2024 Higher Learning Call for Concepts [Registration Form](#)]

### PART II: Application

***ONLY THE REGISTERED APPLICANT WILL HAVE ACCESS  
TO THE APPLICATION FORM IN THE MELLON PORTAL***

***Prior to logging into the Mellon portal to complete and submit the application, we recommend that applicants review the form and the instructions below, and then gather and prepare the required components to be entered in the form. A PDF version of the application form can be viewed [here](#).***

To be considered for funding, applicants must complete ALL fields of the 2024 Higher Learning Call for Concepts application form (with the exception of the “Additional PIs” section), upload the required documents, and submit the form by the application deadline. (Some fields will have been prepopulated from data provided in the registration form.)

### ***Contact Information:***

#### **Principal Investigator (PI)**

The PI is the person responsible for the overall oversight of the grant activities and serves as the project lead and/or as the primary creative or scholarly steward of the grant project.

The registered applicant will display as the PI on the application form and **cannot** be changed.

#### **Grant Management Contact**

The Grant Management Contact [GMC] should be the person who would be responsible for managing the proposal submission process if a proposal is invited – for example, an individual from Sponsored Programs, Foundation Relations, etc.

#### **Additional PIs**

Each proposal must have a single, lead Principal Investigator [PI] who would serve as the main organizer of the proposed project at your institution. The PI is entered at the registration stage of the Call for Concepts process. [See [PI Eligibility](#)] However, Co-PIs may be identified if relevant. (Please note that if a proposal is invited, a Co-PI named on the application would not automatically have access to the proposal in Fluxx.)

### ***Project:***

#### **Project Concept Note**

- The concept note field is subject to character limits. The note should be approximately 1,000 words; the text field will not accept more than 8,000 characters, including spaces. We suggest drafting the concept note in a Word document, which would provide a word and character count. The draft can be copied and pasted into the application form in Fluxx.
- The note should describe your ideas for a potential project, including the rationale and specific activities it might involve. The note should clearly state the necessity of the planned work, its goals, potential impact, and the fitness of the institution and/or network to the proposed work. [See [Project Parameters](#)]

#### **Budget Estimate and Description**

- Enter the estimated budget total for your project (numerical entry). The maximum budget allowed for this call is \$500,000. [See [Outcomes](#)]
- The description field should provide a list of the types of expenses the grant would fund – e.g., stipends, course releases, fellowships, workshops, etc. It is not necessary to provide estimates. The text field is subject to character limits and will not accept more than 800 characters, including spaces. [See [Allowed and Disallowed Expenditures](#)]

### **Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI)**

Applicant institutions should have a demonstrated track record of successfully pursuing DEI efforts on their campuses. Provide a brief paragraph (approximately 250 words, or no more than 2,000 characters, including spaces) outlining those efforts. Optionally, you may also provide a website link.

### **Humanities**

Applicant institutions should have a demonstrated track record of excellence in the humanities. Provide a brief paragraph (approximately 250 words, or no more than 2,000 characters, including spaces) outlining those efforts. Optionally, you may also provide a website link.

### ***Documents:***

Upload only the following two documents:

- Endorsement letter from the applicant institution's provost/chief academic officer (in a PDF). **REMINDER: Each institution may submit no more than three applications for this call.** The letter, on the organization's letterhead, should be addressed to:

Phillip Brian Harper  
Program Director, Higher Learning  
Mellon Foundation  
140 East 62nd Street  
New York, NY 10065

The letter should reference the name of the registered PI; include the project title, a brief summary of the proposed project, and the amount requested; and indicate that the project has institutional endorsement.

- Short (1-2 page) CV for the Principal Investigator [PI] (in a PDF).

Please note that, once uploaded, documents cannot be deleted by the applicant; to amend or delete documents, contact [fluxxusers@mellon.org](mailto:fluxxusers@mellon.org).

### ***Submission:***

- To access the application in the Mellon portal (Fluxx), follow the instructions provided in the notification email.
- To work in the Fluxx application form, you must first click EDIT; then click SAVE when done.
- Complete all sections of the application form in the fields provided.
- Do not click SUBMIT until you have completed the application and are ready to submit to Mellon.

## **PART III: Outcomes**

We anticipate allocating up to \$10 million for this call for concepts (with anticipated grant amounts ranging between \$250,000 and \$500,000); the final number of proposals selected will depend on the number and substance of the submissions. Mellon Higher Learning staff will review all submissions and invite a small number of the most promising ones to be developed into full proposals for potential grant funding. Full proposal invitations will be issued during the summer of 2024, and final grant recommendations will be presented for consideration in September, October, and November of 2024.

## **PROJECT PARAMETERS**

### **Funding and Duration**

Envisioned projects should be achievable with contributions from Mellon of \$250,000–\$500,000. Grants will start on the first day of the month following approval and may have durations of up to three years. (For example, grants approved in October 2024 will start on November 1, 2024 and should end by October 31, 2027.)

### **Grantmaking Areas**

#### **Cultures of US Democracy**

O, let America be America again—  
The land that never has been yet—  
And yet must be—the land where *everyman* is free.

—from Langston Hughes, “*Let America Be America Again*” (1936)

Extending well beyond a discrete set of governmental practices, democracy additionally encompasses the circumstantial conditions that enable those practices to flourish, including a generalized capacity for thoughtful deliberation; broad respect for, acceptance of, engagement with, and even fostering of difference; and a prevailing ethic of reciprocity. Humanities scholars are especially well equipped to consider how such conditions—which are specifically cultural functions rather than properly political matters—can best be achieved, nurtured, and sustained within the increasingly complex and fractured society that is the United States. Work in this vein might explore what a democratic ethos is and how it comes to be; trace the manifestation of that ethos in certain artistic and cultural (or countercultural) practices (e.g., collective jazz improvisation); review imaginative strategies for negotiating demographic pluralism (e.g., speculative fiction, in either literary or cinematic form); or consider methods for promoting habits of intensive individual or collective reflection (e.g., contemplative retreat), among

numerous other possibilities. We welcome submissions from scholars working in all areas of the humanities, particularly those seemingly far removed from questions of political philosophy and democratic theory.

### **Environmental Justice Studies**

Rapidly accelerating environmental degradation is the paramount existential threat of our time, and its differential effects make it an urgent social justice concern. Recognizing that the social, cultural, and ethical dimensions of this crisis demand deep and sustained attention from humanities thinkers, Mellon's Higher Learning program seeks to support the most vital humanities-based environmental justice work currently underway at colleges and universities across the country. Understanding "environment" to encompass everything with which humans interrelate, we invite ideas from scholars engaged in elaborating and promoting just outcomes for populations rendered environmentally vulnerable through factors of race, class, gender, ability, geography, and their intersection. Given that questions of environmental justice touch nearly all aspects of life today, we welcome humanities-grounded projects that focus on specific systems (such as food, water, or health), ones that engage interrelated systems in a given community/locale, and ones that come at this topic through discrete analytical or disciplinary lenses (such as disability studies, literary studies, art-historical approaches, etc.). The strongest applications will center the co-creation of advanced humanities knowledge by academic constituencies and partner cohorts from affected communities.

### **Social Justice and Disciplinary Knowledge**

Scholarly fields and disciplines are never merely "academic," in that they aim to illuminate aspects of the world at large, well beyond the academy itself. Inasmuch as that larger world has always been characterized by various forms of division and inequity, even the most seemingly hermetic fields of inquiry must inevitably confront considerations of social justice in their respective areas of focus, manifest not only in the objects, ideas, methods, and communities they engage but also in their sense of disciplinary mission and cultural norms. We seek ideas for projects that best exemplify how specific disciplinary or interdisciplinary fields of study are equipped to reckon with issues of social justice, given the particular investigative and analytical methods they deploy. While we welcome submissions from across the humanities, we are especially interested in applications grounded in long-standing fields such as art history, classics, history, languages and literatures, musicology, philosophy, and religious studies. Preference will be given to projects that reflect explicitly on the relevant discipline's or interdiscipline's particular capacity for social justice analysis as well as its limits in this regard, and that propose concrete pedagogical, research, and/or community-engaged efforts that have transformative potential for the institution and the wider field.



## Eligible Fields of Study

Please note that this list may not comprise every eligible discipline for this call for concepts. If you have questions regarding disciplinary eligibility, kindly email [HLcall@mellon.org](mailto:HLcall@mellon.org).

American Studies

Ancient Civilizations

Anthropology (excluding physical anthropology) and Archaeology

Architecture (historical or theoretical focus)

Area Studies (humanistic focus)

Art History

Classics

Communication (theoretical focus)

Comparative Literature

Comparative Religion

Cultural Studies

English

Environmental Studies: The study and application of the humanities to the human environment with particular attention to reflecting our diverse heritage, traditions, and history and to the relevance of the humanities to the current conditions of national life.

Ethics

Ethnic Studies

Film, Cinema and Media Studies (theoretical focus)

Fine Arts

Foreign Languages and Literatures, both modern and classical

Gender and Sexuality Studies

Geography (excluding physical geography)

History

History of Science/Science Studies

Interdisciplinary Studies: Interdisciplinary areas of study may be eligible if they have one or more eligible fields at their core.

Linguistics

Literature

Medieval Studies

Musicology, Ethnomusicology and Music Theory

Performance Studies (theoretical focus)

Philosophy and Political Theory

Religious Studies

Rhetoric

Sociology (qualitative)

Theater (theoretical focus)

Urban Studies

## Allowed Expenditures

Grant awards may be used for purposes such as (but not limited to):

- Course releases for participating faculty (alternatively, faculty stipends or salary supplements will be considered on a case-by-case basis)
- Course development funds
- Funds for the implementation of experimental projects
- Funds to support costs associated with workshops and reading, discussion, and/or action groups
- Postdoctoral fellowships
- Travel and convening expenses, such as speaker honoraria, catering, and childcare and eldercare expenses
- Undergraduate research fellowships/stipends
- Equipment necessary to the undertaking (see [Disallowed Expenditures](#) for exceptions)
- Up to 10 percent of funds to program operational administrative and occupancy costs directly tied to the grant-funded activities

## Disallowed Expenditures

Grant awards may not be used for purposes such as (but not limited to):

- Overhead and indirect costs. (No more than 10 percent of the grant funds may be used for administrative and occupancy costs directly tied to the grant-funded activities. [See [Allowed Expenditures](#)])
- Capital and equipment costs, including laptops, printers, etc.
- Undergraduate tuition or scholarships, financial aid, or study abroad opportunities
- Graduate student tuition
- Real estate
- Business class travel
- Projects grounded primarily in the quantitative social sciences or STEM fields
- Projects with a primarily international focus. [Any international aspect of the proposed intellectual work must be pursued in a comparative fashion alongside US-oriented content.]
- Support for K-12 education
- Support for lobbying activity or similar attempts to influence local, state, or federal legislation
- Activities to influence the outcome of any election of any candidate for public office or to conduct a voter registration drive

**Inquiries about the program and applications must be sent to [HLcall@mellon.org](mailto:HLcall@mellon.org).**

**We are unable to assist via telephone.**