

ISSUE 39 | WINTER 2025

RAPPORT

HELPING PEOPLE EXPLORE WHAT CONNECTS US AND MAKES US HUMAN



**MARY C. LÓPEZ INSPIRES
A COMMITMENT TO THE
HUMANITIES AS SHE
ACCEPTS THE 2025
SOWER AWARD**

PG 2



**GOVERNOR'S
LECTURE
RECAP &
PHOTOS**

PG 5



**SMITHSONIAN
SPARK! TOUR
BEGINS IN
NEBRASKA**

PG 12

RAPPORT

ISSUE 39 | WINTER 2025

UPCOMING EVENTS

- DUE**
JAN 2 MINI GRANT APPLICATIONS DUE
(Details on our website)
- DUE**
JAN 15 MEDIA GRANT APPLICATIONS DUE
(Details on our website)
- JAN**
16 HN WINTER BOARD MEETING
Lincoln
- START**
FEB NEBRASKA WARRIOR WRITERS WORKSHOPS
Lincoln, Omaha, Online
(Dates to be announced)
- DUE**
MAR 2 MINI AND MAJOR GRANT APPLICATIONS DUE
(Details on our website)
- MAR**
TBD NEBRASKA FORUM DAY
Lincoln
(Details to be announced)
- JUN**
26-27 "WEAVING A NATION" NEBRASKA CHAUTAUQUA
Hastings

IN THIS ISSUE

Mary López on the Humanities.....	2
Budget cuts for HN in 2026	3
2025 Governor's Lecture Supporters ..	4
2025 Governor's Lecture.....	5
Thank You, Donors!.....	6
"Weaving a Nation" in Hastings	8
Introducing Nebraska Forum	8
In Memory.....	8
Grant Spotlight: "Abraham's Bridge" ..	9
Recent Grants.....	9
One Book One Nebraska	10
Thank You, Legacy Donors!	10
Meet Anika!	10
A Note from Erin L. Moran.....	11
Spark! Nebraska tour to begin	12

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"WHERE YOU STAND DEPENDS ON WHERE YOU SIT."

While accepting the 2025 Sower Award in the Humanities, Mary C. López delivered an inspiring call to action. Here are the remarks she delivered on October 21, 2025.



Photo: Ron Coleman

I want to thank Humanities Nebraska and the selection committee who had the wonderful — but difficult

— task of choosing just one honoree from a group of worthy nominations. And finally, Jonathan Benjamin-Alvarado for your beautiful gesture of nominating me for this honor.

When I was thinking about what I would say tonight, I thought it made sense to illustrate why the humanities are so

influential and important to our lives. What better way than sharing an example of how the humanities have influenced me — a story from my own life — and one that gives meaning to one of my favorite sayings that I learned long ago: "Where you stand depends on where you sit."*

1950s, my mother was a great storyteller. Sometimes the stories were repeated numerous times, but the six of us as her children listened respectfully and now wish we could hear those stories just one more time.

One story she told many times was about growing up during the Depression. Due to the death of my grandfather, my mom's family was thrust into a form of being poor, like so many other families, but not destitute. They had their home and had food to eat. But not everyone did.

My mom frequently told us a story of men who would come to her family home asking for food. My grandma would quietly show them where to sit on the porch and prepare them a meal on the same china the family used. My mom did not leave that part of the story to be ignored. She emphasized that my grandma treated the men with dignity by using the same dishes the family ate from. My grandma didn't make a big deal out of it and when the men were finished eating, she told them goodbye, collected the dishes and took them in to the wash basin.



Mary López
with her
nominator,
Jonathan
Benjamin-
Alvarado

When I was a child growing up in rural America in the

*Rufus E. Miles, Jr., "Miles's Law"



Above: Mary with her husband Rodrigo and grandchildren Nora, Claire and Ben. Right: Mary with her mother, the late Fran Wunder.

My mom “sat” there in the kitchen as a witness, and it later shaped where she “stood” on issues like caring for people who needed help. Those stories were one of my first lessons of “Where you stand depends on where you sit.”

By bringing that story alive for me, my mom invited me to a form of time travel — to “sit” on my grandma’s porch with those men and experience their feelings of being provided care and dignity at a time in this country when so many people lived in poverty and despair. That story changed forever where I “stand” on caring for people who find themselves in need.

What does this have to do with the importance of the humanities? Well remember, I did not witness this firsthand. It was family lore, the stories my mother told us that shaped us. It could also have come from a novel, a history book, a film, or a lecture.

The humanities allow us to experience the places, people, and history that may or may not ever be part of our own experience in life. It is why the word “human” is at the root of the term humanities. It is how we get to better know the people — past, present and to come — who are our fellow inhabitants of this planet.

Where you stand depends on where you sit. Let the humanities take you to sit beside all kinds of people in all kinds of places and at times past, present and to come. Experience the beauty, sorrow, and possibility. You might be surprised to find yourself sitting in places you never dreamed of before and, as a result, standing for things that make the world a better place for all of us. Thank you.

ADAPTING WITH BUDGET CUTS FOR FY 2026

A message from Executive Director Chris Sommerich

The sudden termination of federal funding by DOGE this past spring left Humanities Nebraska and all other state humanities councils uncertain as to the extent they can continue providing grants and programs. At its September board meeting in Red Cloud, our board of directors approved a budget for FY2026, starting November 1, that includes cuts to programs and grants in the face of continuing uncertainty about federal funding.

HN has received operational funding support from the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) for more than 50 years. HN has also worked for decades to diversify our revenue sources. We have steadily increased support from individual donors, private foundations, and businesses.

HN has also worked alongside the Nebraska Cultural Endowment (NCE) and Nebraska Arts Council to build a public-private partnership that is unique in the nation in leveraging private donations with state funds, all in support of arts and humanities programs. So far, these other revenue sources have helped HN avoid the drastic cuts or staff terminations that many other humanities councils have experienced since March.

Last year's budget passed by the board had included \$955,000 in operating support from NEH, out of a \$2.4 million total budget. It was consistent with past federal funding that has long had bipartisan support in Congress. The DOGE termination happened halfway through our fiscal year, and thus half the funding was unexpectedly lost. Adapting to that for the remainder of the year is a true success story, but hard decisions had to be made for the coming year.

The FY2026 budget calls for HN to make up for the loss of nearly a million dollars in NEH funding through increased support from private donors and the NCE, state support (which has remained level), and funding drawn from HN’s reserve and investment accounts held by our Foundation. It also requires cuts to programs, grants, and operations of approximately \$300,000.

Continued on next page

BUDGET CUTS

continued from page 3

HN budget cuts for 2026 include:

- Reducing the grants awarded to local non-profits by \$44,000
- Reducing Speakers Bureau expenses by raising the booking fee from \$50 to \$75 and limiting organizations to only one application per year (savings: \$37,800)
- Reducing the budgeted number of Prime Time Family Reading programs statewide from 50 to 40 (savings: \$60,000)
- Reducing Summer Reading Kit distribution statewide from 500 to 220 (savings: \$40,960)
- Reducing budgets for Chautauqua, Nebraska Forum, Nebraska Warrior Writers, and National History Day-Nebraska (cost savings: \$54,000)
- Reduction in staffing by half of a full-time position
- Other reductions to administrative expenses

HN remains committed to its core mission of helping people explore what connects us and makes us human, and to our belief that the humanities should be accessible to all. The restoration of federal funding would enable us to reverse the cuts and even return to our former growth trajectory. If it is not restored, the HN board will have to look at more drastic cuts in 2027.

Thank you for standing with us.

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ZAHN MCCLARNON, BIRD RUNNINGWATER SHARE PERSONAL INSIGHTS AT 30TH ANNUAL GOVERNOR'S LECTURE

On Tuesday, October 21, the 30th annual Governor's Lecture in the Humanities brought together two Native Americans involved in the entertainment industry — N. Bird Runningwater and Zahn McClarnon — to discuss “Indigenous Storytelling through Film and Television.”

Runningwater, who is Cheyenne and Mescalero Apache, and McClarnon, who is Hunkpapa Lakota and a graduate of Omaha Central High School, each shared how the representation of Native peoples in film and television has evolved through the course of their careers.

Toward the end of their conversation, both in-person and online audiences submitted thoughtful questions. These were moderated by Alana Stone, curatorial specialist for Vision Maker Media.

More than 1,000 people attended the lecture in person or by live-stream with the help of Nebraska Public Media. Held at Omaha's Holland Performing Arts Center, the event included presenting the 2025 Sower Award in the Humanities to Mary C. López.

At a benefit dinner immediately prior to the lecture, a record-setting \$252,620 was raised to support HN programming. HN board members Carol Wang and Beth Whited chaired the event. Special partners included Nebraska Commission on Indian Affairs and Vision Maker Media.

HN is grateful to presenting sponsors Beth & Amnon Dotan, Anne M. Hubbard, Lance & Julie Fritz, Beth & Kelvin Whited, Union Pacific, and the many other benefactors and sponsors listed on the previous page.



Photos by Ron Coleman

THANK YOU TO OUR DONORS

Gifts received between August 1, 2025, and October 31, 2025.

Many donors make multiple gifts throughout the year. Cumulative giving for the year is listed in our annual report.

You can join these generous contributors and help people across the state explore what connects us and makes us human.

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SAVE THE DATE! 4.9.26

Patron's Circle donors are invited to an celebratory event in gratitude for their support on Thursday, April 9, 2026, in Omaha. Notices with time, location, and program details will be mailed to Patron's Circle donors in early 2026. For questions about how you can become a member of the Patron's Circle, please contact Erin L. Moran: erin@humanitiesnebraska.org.

NEW! NEBRASKA FORUM ON GLOBAL ISSUES

In April, Brown University discontinued the Choices Program, which had been the source of curriculum for Capitol Forum on America's Future (CF) since 1998.

HN's CF program manager Kristi Hayek Carley and some participating teachers have worked together to continue to provide this important experience for Nebraska high schoolers. A new collection of resources will guide teachers and students as they explore five refreshed areas of interest: Global Conflict, Migration, Technology, Climate Change & Energy, and Trade & Economics.

Nebraska Forum on Global Issues continues the tradition of enabling high school students to develop a better understanding of democratic principles and cultivate critical thinking skills. The program culminates with delegations from each participating school gathering in Lincoln for more peer-to-peer discussions and opportunities to interact with elected officials.

HN also continues its commitment to keep offering the program to schools at no cost by covering travel costs, substitute teacher costs, and meals for participants. Watch for more information on the HN website.



**Weaving
a Nation**
Nebraska Chautauqua

Hastings • June 26 & 27, 2026

*Free family fun with an educational thread
in observance of the nation's 250th anniversary*

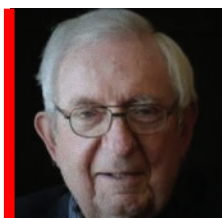
WORKPLACE GIVING

GIVE NEBRASKA is a coalition of 75 diverse nonprofits working to build a vibrant, creative, and healthy community by connecting donors to causes they care about. HN appreciates those who designate gifts to us through Give Nebraska.



For more details, please visit
givenebraska.org

IN MEMORY



REX LE ROY GERMAN | 1934-2025 Rex German passed away September 28. The Cozad native began a career in teaching before he took over managing the family business, Nebraska Plastics. Under his leadership, the company helped develop the first above-ground PVC irrigation pipe. Education and community service remained important to Rex. He served on the Cozad School Board and the boards of Cozad Power, Nebraska Diplomats, the Dawson County Historical Society, and the Henri Museum. Rex was a Nebraska Humanities Council board member 1990-1993.



ROGER LEWIS | 1949-2025 Roger Lewis passed away October 15. Born in Fremont, he earned a journalism degree from Midland Lutheran College (now Midland University) and an MBA from the University of Nebraska before moving on to a career in advertising and public relations. A leader in community activities, Lewis served as board president of several organizations including Immanuel Health Systems, the Fontenelle Forest Association and Ballet Omaha. He also served on the boards of the Child Saving Institute, the Nebraska Foundation for the Humanities (2002-2009) and others.

GRANT SPOTLIGHT: ABRAHAM'S BRIDGE

In 2021, filmmaker Elinor Pierce partnered with Omaha's Tri-Faith Initiative to apply for a HN grant to help plan a documentary film about Tri-Faith's story. During the mid-2000s, religious leaders from Jewish, Muslim, and Christian faith communities cooperated to create a shared space that's unique in the world. Temple Israel, the American Muslim Institute, and Countryside Community Church each have their own houses of worship on the Tri-Faith campus in Omaha, connected with each other and a shared interfaith center by a circular bridge.

The bridge provided a metaphor and title – *Abraham's Bridge* – to the documentary film, which shows some of the struggles the three faith communities face as they seek to support their own

worshippers while also crossing divides to build relationships. The film touches on the common ground of a community garden as well as the deeply personal and painful divisions surrounding the October 7 attack and Israel-Hamas war. In 2024, Pierce partnered with the Miller Center for Interreligious Learning & Leadership at Hebrew College to apply for another HN grant to develop a discussion guide that helps groups use the film as a focal point for conversations in classroom and community contexts. A college instructor who was one of the first to test-teach the discussion guide said that her students were deeply moved by the film and that they were amazed to see “what is possible when people dare to



Courtesy photo

move beyond fear, hatred, and boundaries to thinking about how to share in human experiences – and, especially, how to place the acknowledgement of each other's pain – at exclusion, at violence, at loss – at the center of our engagement with each other.”

For more information about the film, including future screenings, visit abridgefilm.com.

RECENTLY AWARDED GRANTS

African Culture Connection, Omaha, \$15,000 for the 2025-2026 “African Kingdom & Authentic Cultural Experience” • **Arnold Area Historical Society**, Arnold, \$2,000 for a Veterans Day program • **Asian Community and Cultural Center**, Lincoln, \$5,000 for “Untold Migrant Stories” and \$500 for a Harvest Moon festival • **Completely KIDS**, Omaha, \$3,168 for the Museum Explorers Club • **Dr. Susan La Flesche Picotte Center**, Walthill, \$5,000 for Native American exhibits • **The Durham Museum**, Omaha, \$10,000 for “The Negro Motorist Green Book” exhibit • **El Museo Latino**, Omaha, \$5,950 for its 2025-26 lecture series • **Empowering Families**, Scottsbluff, \$1,925 for a Native American cultural retreat • **Joslyn Castle & Gardens**, Omaha, \$4,913 for the 2025 Art and Literary Festival, “Harlem Renaissance” • **Museum of American Speed**, Lincoln, \$1,900 for a Nebraska BMX Hall of Fame celebration • **Nebraska National Guard Museum Society**, Seward, \$8,900 for “Faces of Rushmore” during the America 250 celebration • **Nebraska Poetry Society**, Omaha, \$1,200 for its 2026 reading series • **Nebraska Public Media Foundation**, Lincoln, \$3,200 for a screening and discussion of the Ken Burns documentary, “The American Revolution” • **Nebraska Writers Collective**, Omaha, \$7,000 for the National Youth Poet Laureate Commencement and community visits • **Omaha Performing Arts**, \$12,400 for O-pa Culture Talks • **Opera Omaha**, \$2,000 for the Poetry & Music Project 2025-26 • **Partners for Livable Omaha**, \$2,000 for the “OurStory” exhibition at Joslyn Castle • **Stone Soup Productions**, Washington, DC, \$2,000 for a virtual discussion about the Federal Writers' Project in Nebraska as part of “The People's Recorder” series • **Together We Achieve Miracles, Inc.**, Omaha, \$6,500 for an exhibit, “Walking through Memory Lane with African American Activists” • **University of Nebraska-Lincoln Board of Regents**, \$8,500 for the “BISON” exhibit at Morrill Hall and \$6,905 for the 50th annual Center for Great Plains Studies conference • **University of Nebraska at Omaha Board of Regents**, \$5,400 for the “Enchanted Cathedrals” lecture series • **Vision Maker Media**, Lincoln, \$13,800 for its 50th anniversary film festival

24
GRANTS

\$135,161
TOTAL

ONE BOOK ONE NEBRASKA 2026 TITLE REVEALED

Nebraska Center for the Book has announced **"The Antidote"** by Karen Russell as the 2026 One Book One Nebraska selection. People across the state are encouraged to read and discuss it with their friends and neighbors. Public libraries will join other literary and cultural organizations in planning book discussions, activities, and events related to this book.

Support materials to assist with local reading/discussion activities will be available after January 1, 2026, at onebook.nebraska.gov.

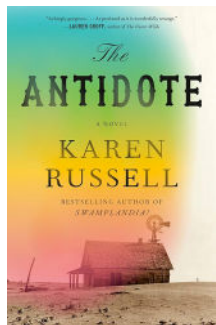
Updates and activity listings will

be posted on the One Book One Nebraska Facebook page.

One Book One Nebraska is sponsored by Nebraska Center for the Book, Humanities

Nebraska, and the Nebraska Library Commission.

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Join fellow visionaries by becoming a Legacy Donor when you include Humanities Nebraska or the Nebraska Cultural Endowment in your will or another planned gift. Legacy Donors help ensure every Nebraskan has access to the arts and humanities for generations to come. To join these donors, please contact Erin L. Moran at erin@humanitiesnebraska.org or 402.474.2131.

**Honors deceased Legacy Donors*

NEW
INTERN

MEET ANIKA KEESE

Anika Keese joined HN as a social media/communications intern this autumn. The Lincoln native is a junior at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, where she is studying advertising and public relations with minors in psychology and English.

What interested you about working at HN? I have always had a love and passion for the humanities from a young age. I knew the mission of HN

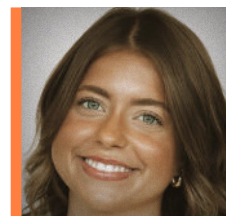
resonated strongly with what I believe in and that I could truly feel like the work I was doing would make a difference.

What's your go-to humanities hobby? I enjoy reading, watching movies, and crafting with friends during my free time! I love to design and work with digital media as well.

What are your future career plans or goals? I plan to

graduate with my Bachelors in Journalism and find a job locally in the advertising and public relations field.

Until then, I will continue pursuing further experience in the field and travelling abroad during the summer of 2026 to expand my worldly view.



THERE'S STILL TIME TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE IN 2025!



*A message from Erin L. Moran,
Director of Development*

It's hard to believe that the holidays are right around the corner, and we are preparing to close out another year. As we begin to wind down 2025, we reflect on both the challenges and the triumphs that this year brought. As Chris shared in his message earlier in this issue (pg. 3), this has been a year unlike any other in our 52-year history. Although it has been extremely hard to envision what things look like without the reinstatement of NEH funding, we are forging ahead with our mission.

Even with present uncertainties, it has also been a time for hope and growth, especially in the realm of private donor support. Not only have HN supporters met the call, you have far exceeded it! We are so thankful for your continued support of our work in bringing our programs to Nebraskans statewide.

As we enter the holidays and wrap up this year, a reminder of ways you can give back to HN:

- Via online portal or QR code (above): humanitiesnebraska.org/donate *Note: to sustain your*



A great 2025 memory with Nebraska State Poet Jewel Rodgers

positive impact on the humanities in Nebraska, you can also become a recurring donor. Our platform allows you to choose frequency of giving.

- By check or DAF to be mailed to: Humanities Nebraska 215 Centennial Mall South, Suite 330 Lincoln, NE 68508

- Gifts of stock: Please reach out to Erin (erin@humanitiesnebraska.org) *Note: any verification or online information needed for DAF's/stock donations can also be sent to Erin.*

As always, if you have questions or if there is anything else we can help with, please reach out to Erin erin@humanitiesnebraska.org or Hannah hannah@humanitiesnebraska.org.

Thanks again for being a champion of HN — we couldn't do what we do without you!



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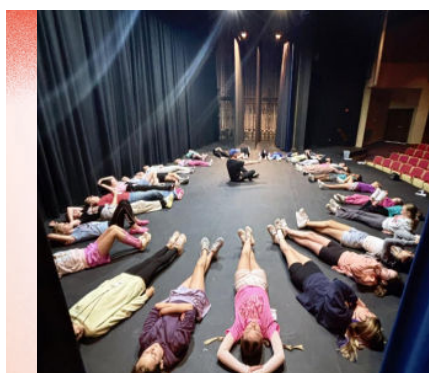
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TO UPDATE ADDRESS OR CANCEL SUBSCRIPTIONS,
402.474.2131 or **INFO@HUMANITIESNEBRASKA.ORG**

SPARK! SMITHSONIAN EXHIBITION TOUR BEGINS IN JUNE 2026

People are problem-solvers. Sometimes we invent. More often, we innovate—we introduce a fresh idea or an invention into use in some way that creates a new way of doing or thinking.

“Spark! Places of Innovation” highlights innovation in rural America from the perspective of the people who lived it. The exhibition features stories, art, photography, artifacts, and interactives from more than 30 communities across the nation gathered via a crowdsourcing initiative. Each examined existing assets, characteristics, people, resources, and history to tackle the challenges of today with creative solutions.

“Spark! Places of Innovation” is part of Museum on Main Street, a collaboration between the Smithsonian Institution and State Humanities Councils nationwide, and based on an exhibition by the Smithsonian's Lemelson Center for the Study of Invention and Innovation.

The Nebraska tour will start in Broken Bow on June 13, 2026, and travel to other communities through March of 2027. Previous Museum on Main Street exhibitions sponsored by Humanities Nebraska have brought many Nebraska residents together to explore, discuss, and enjoy.

Communities hosting the exhibit will share their own innovation challenges and successes. For example, the Haigler Community Foundation plans to invite field trips and discussion groups to experience the exhibit, and to host brainstorming groups that will come up with new innovations and projects for their community. In the opposite corner of the state, the Verdigrée Public Library is planning a display of local innovative artifacts and involving a nearby senior center to collect personal stories about the innovations older Nebraskans have experienced over time.

SPARK! PLACES of INNOVATION
NEBRASKA 2026-2027

Smithsonian

Broken Bow
June 13 – July 25, 2026
Custer County Historical Society and Museum

Chadron
August 3 – September 11, 2026
Dawes County Historical Society

Haigler
September 21 – October 30, 2026
Haigler Cornerstone Center

Madison
November 9 – December 18, 2026
Madison Public Library

Verdigrée
January 5 – February 13, 2027
Verdigrée Public Library

Aurora
February 23 – March 27, 2027
Plainsman Museum

The tour schedule is:

Support for Museum on Main Street has been provided by the United States Congress. Local statewide and community-focused sponsorships are now available. If you or your business or organization would like to sponsor Spark!, please contact Erin L. Moran, director of development at 402-474-2131 or at erin@humanitiesnebraska.org.

Learn more at
HumanitiesNebraska.org/programs