HUMANITIES
/ AT THE CROSSROADS

AN INDIANA CASE STUDY

STANDING AT
THE CROSSROADS

It's one thing to know you're at a crossroads; it's another thing entirely to know where that crossroads is, and what opportunities intersect there.

The first study of its kind, the Indiana Case Study sheds light on the organizations that support the humanities in Indiana and the connections among them. It provides some basic data that simply hasn't been gathered before, helps us better understand where we are today and gives us insights into the opportunities and challenges we face.

In that way, it gives us a sense of the roads that intersect where we now stand, and helps us choose which path we'll take going forward. For example, it guides us toward strengthening and supplementing the networks that connect humanities organizations, increasing the capacity of the organizations themselves and highlighting the organizations' participation in the civic arena.

Perhaps most important, though, the Indiana Case Study gives us a sense of what further questions need to be asked.

As you review the results, please consider what other information you think would be helpful, what conversations you think need to be held, and how the humanities community in Indiana might approach some of our challenges in new, refreshing ways.

I look forward to the conversations the Indiana Case Study will spark — both on a statewide and national level — and to building on the insights that come from it. I am confident that, one day, if we use this data wisely, we will look back at this crossroads not simply as a milestone but as the point from which we began a new journey.

Sincerely,

Keira Amstutz
President and CEO, Indiana Humanities

WHAT IS HUMANITIES AT THE CROSSROADS?

Humanities at the Crossroads is a national initiative to better understand the status and future of the academic and public humanities in America, and to research the ways the humanities have been practiced, transformed, supported, evaluated and justified in the past 50 years.

A part of the national Humanities at the Crossroads initiative, the Indiana Case Study surveyed individuals working with humanities-related organizations to gather basic data and show how humanities organizations connect to each other and to the people of Indiana.

The humanities are at a crossroads in America. In many places, funding is down, constituencies are aging, and humanities organizations struggle to assert their purpose and claim a place in important civic conversations.

While challenges in Indiana are consistent with these national trends, the Indiana Case Study suggests that the Hoosier State's humanities organizations are optimistic about the health and vitality of the humanities in their counties, prepared to convene civic conversations, and willing to collaborate.

As part of the national Humanities at the Crossroads initiative, the **Indiana Case Study** was launched to focus on Indiana's humanities network while at the same time providing a **model project to be emulated by other states.**

The Indiana Case Study surveyed individuals working with humanities-related organizations to **gather basic data** and show **how humanities organizations connect** to each other and to the people of Indiana.

The goal was to "map" the **network of relationships** among the various public and academic humanities sectors and between humanities organizations and the broader community. In addition to understanding the scope and range of humanities programming in Indiana, the survey also asked respondents to share their perceptions of the health and vitality of the humanities in their own counties.

Survey respondents felt the humanities were as **popular** as or **even more popular** than in the past and that these activities contribute to the sense of place which every community is trying to enhance. The findings also reveal the potential for **strengthening** humanities organizations in Indiana, and for building up the **network** of humanities groups.

On the whole, respondents were fairly **optimistic** about the state of the humanities in their communities. Although the survey did not capture the reasons for this optimism, state leaders believe that in some respects **the public humanities contribute to the sense of place** that every community is trying to enhance. Respondents were inclined to be either neutral or positive about the humanities being **accessible for everyone** in their county. However, funding sources for the humanities seem to be flat or in decline.

To learn more and download the full report, please visit: www.IndianaHumanities.org/HAC

HOW THE SURVEY WAS CONDUCTED:

- 2,147 surveys distributed
- 390 complete responses (18.2% response rate)
- 88 counties represented
- 44% from nonprofits
- 17% higher education institutions

Indiana Humanities worked with researchers from **Tufts University's Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement** (CIRCLE) to design and complete this survey.

NINE PREVAILING THEMES

A review of the responses gathered from 390 people affiliated with Indiana humanities organizations revealed nine prevailing themes:

1. Lean and long-standing

2. Money's tight

3. Grown-ups in search of family

4. Majoring in history

5. A civic force

6. The "H" word

7. Where the money is

8. The big three

9. Feeling good

" People attending humanities programs always seem to express an appreciation for the opportunity to be involved in something that expands their understanding of life and enriches their experience of the larger whole."

– Survey respondent
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1. LEAN AND LONG-STANDING

You don't have to be big to thrive in the humanities in Indiana. While 83% of surveyed organizations are at least 20 years old and 22% have been around for a century or more, the majority of organizations are small: 63% reported having five or fewer full-time staff members, and 29% have no full-time staff.

THE IMPLICATION:
Stability and resourcefulness are hallmarks of Indiana organizations.

"We are a library that offers a wide range of services including education, entertainment, information, genealogy, history, community service, meeting places, etc."

– Survey respondent

2. MONEY'S TIGHT

Drawing funding from multiple sources doesn't make funding plentiful. Nearly 90% of respondents said funding for the humanities is either flat or in decline, even though most organizations seek funding from three or more sources. These sources include individuals (64%), foundations (47%), state government (41%) and the federal government (21%). Almost 43% get support from the for-profit sector.

THE IMPLICATION:
Organizations will have to find creative approaches to increasing revenue as funding for cultural nonprofits continues to lag behind other sectors.

"For any humanities program to flourish, it needs to have drama and be easily promoted. Promotion costs [money]. Many do not have funds to invest in this kind of outreach and connect."

– Survey respondent

3.GROWN-UPS IN SEARCH OF FAMILY

Who is involved in the humanities in Indiana? According to survey respondents, adults (for 62% of responding organizations), families (51%), senior citizens (53%) and a "general audience" (54%) are their primary constituents. Who would organizations like to attract? Families (100%) and teens (36%). Who are NOT their constituents? Low-income, minority or immigrant communities — less than 30% of the organizations say they primarily serve those groups. Moreover, there is often a disparity between the proportion of groups served and the makeup of boards and staffs, especially with regard to children and teens, low-income, minorities, senior citizens, and individuals with disabilities.

THE IMPLICATION:
Organizations can expand audiences and fill a void by designing special programming and engagement opportunities for new and more diverse constituencies.

"We find that people will come to programs on many subjects but sometimes we feel we are reaching the same group of people. We would like to find a niche and topics that generate more interest."   *– Survey respondent*

4. MAJORING IN HISTORY

Among Indiana humanities organizations, history dominates the conversation. More than 69% of respondents offer programming related to local history, with 48% covering state history and 47% providing services related to family history, including genealogy and cultural heritage. Other topics that get attention include architecture (27%), art (26%), literature (24%) and archaeology (22%).

THE IMPLICATION:

History will continue to be an important component of the humanities conversation, but Indiana organizations could branch out to explore many different topics in the humanities.

"History-related programming is probably the most popular. Next would probably be projects related to world cultures, especially those represented in our community."
- Survey respondent

5. A CIVIC FORCE

Most survey respondents said they work to build civic identity and bring people together for conversations around mutual interests. They do this by engaging in community events, connecting to institutions such as libraries and schools, and celebrating cultures.

THE IMPLICATION:

Humanities organizations play an active role in convening civic conversations.

"I think that people appreciate the opportunity to come together and discuss pertinent topics. I do believe they see these activities as enrichment and community building opportunities."
- Survey respondent

6. THE "H" WORD

For most organizations, championing the humanities means not uttering the word humanities. More than three-quarters of respondents said they never (51%) or only sometimes (27%) use the term "humanities" with their constituents.

THE IMPLICATION:

Humanities organizations will continue to struggle with how to explain what they do. Talking about programs, rather than terminology, could help bring the meaning of "the humanities" into focus for the general public.

"We rarely use the term 'humanities' as it has an academic slant and we have many more audiences beyond those of an academic bent. We use specific terms such as book discussions, movie showings, author visits. We might identify a visiting presenter as a 'notable humanities scholar' or mention humanities award winners."
- Survey respondent

> "People don't realize how starved they are for deep thought and ends-free conversation."
>
> - Survey respondent
> **INDIANA CASE STUDY**

> "I tend to talk about the humanities as that area of knowledge that helps us live BETTER, not just LONGER."
>
> – Survey respondent
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7. WHERE THE MONEY IS

A comparison of regions across Indiana showed diversity in terms of organizations' size and funding resources. In the Indianapolis area, a large portion of organizations are relatively young, incorporated nonprofits with annual revenues of $1 million or more. The Gary-South Bend region joined the Indy Metro area as home to organizations with revenues exceeding $2.5 million a year. At the other end of the spectrum, the Lawrenceburg-New Albany region has the highest percentage of organizations with revenues under $1 million – a third of the organizations there reported revenues under $50,000 – and only a small percentage of organizations in the Evansville region receive funding from multiple sources, with the most common source being the federal government.

THE IMPLICATION:
Funding for the humanities in Indiana varies considerably from region to region, with the southern part of the state having a more limited scope in total resources.

"I believe the community as a whole believes humanities related activities are very beneficial to the community and its residents. I'm not sure the majority feel a need to help financially support the programs though. I also don't think we do enough as a community to educate the public on the need to financially support the organizations and programs."
– Survey respondent

8. THE BIG THREE

While many humanities organizations collaborate, most are not tightly linked. However, they do have a model for networking: a large cluster that engages 73% of Indiana's humanities organizations. Interestingly, all of those connections can be traced back to three organizations: Indiana Humanities, Indiana Historical Society and Indiana Landmarks. The survey results suggest that smaller organizations seeking to connect to the larger network could work through public libraries, museums, local historical societies and community foundations.

THE IMPLICATION:
Three Indianapolis-based organizations hold together the Indiana humanities network. Organizations in all parts of the state should seek to expand and strengthen local, regional and statewide networks.

"Library programmers probably aren't aware of the types of programs that [Indiana Humanities] could help them provide and I would be willing to help raise awareness in that realm."
– Survey respondent

9. FEELING GOOD

Despite the challenges facing humanities organizations, most respondents said they are optimistic about the future. They were inclined to be either positive or neutral about the humanities being accessible for everyone in their county, and they believe the humanities are as popular as in the past or becoming more popular.

THE IMPLICATION:
Humanities organizations' positive attitude about the future should help them make the most of growth opportunities.

"I think many people see the humanities as an opportunity to learn more about our growing multi-cultural society and a positive means to bring people together from diverse backgrounds to create better understanding. Among our board and stakeholders this is held as a very high priority!"
– Survey respondent

The last theme — feeling good — might be the most important asset Indiana's humanities organizations have going for them. That positive spirit will help the organizations remain focused on their goals and maintain stability. However, the organizations (and the humanities in general) do face real challenges that will require adaptations in the years to come, from changes in the way they seek funding and collaborate to changes in the audiences they attract and the way they define themselves.

WHAT NOW?

As is the case with most studies, the Indiana Case Study prompts as many questions as answers. Based on survey findings, all of us in the humanities community in Indiana must address the following questions:

How can we bolster the capacity of humanities organizations with small or volunteer staffs and limited funding sources, especially in the southern regions of the state?

How can we further illuminate the "role" public humanities play in society, based on the nature and format of the types of activities they engage in?

How can we promote and share strategies for engaging teenagers and youth populations in humanities organizations, leveraging the expertise and skill of youth development organizations?

How can we work to improve the board and staff composition of humanities organizations so as to be more reflective of the populations served?

How can we find ways for humanities-related organizations to convene and partner with one another?

THE INDIANA CASE STUDY IS JUST THE BEGINNING.

It provides data and information that will allow Indiana's humanities organizations to better understand where they stand and what they must do in order to remain strong and relevant. At the same time, it provides peers across the nation with an example of how a state's humanities organizations might assess their own situations and, as a result, strengthen themselves, their humanities communities and, ultimately, help to strengthen the perception and impact of the humanities across the United States.

Humanities at the Crossroads is a national initiative to better understand the status and future of the humanities in America, and to research the ways the humanities have been practiced, transformed, supported, evaluated and justified in the past 50 years.

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