

# SHINE Questions to Consider for Narrative Answers

This resource is designed to help SHINE grant writers provide more complete and thoughtful answers to their narrative questions. These questions were designed from past reviewers' feedback in which they expressed a desire for more information from applicants. It is **not** required to answer every question to consider for each narrative question. Additionally, answering every question to consider does not guarantee a high score. Rather, they are designed to help grant writers consider the multiple ways to answer each narrative question by providing reviewers with a *complete* and *detailed* view of your organization by referencing the actions, programs, and choices already underway and the strategic goals for your organization's future.

## 1. Mission Statement

**Provide your organization's mission statement.**

## 2. Centrality of the Humanities to your Organization

**Describe how the humanities is central to your organization's mission and programming.**

Questions to consider:

- For an expanded definition of the humanities, refer to the [SHINE Guidelines](#).
- How does your organization's mission and programming align with [Maryland Humanities' mission, vision, and values](#)?
- Does your organization conduct programming in the humanities as a significant part of its work (>70% of annual programming)? How?
- How do the activities conducted by your organization do two or more of the following?:
  - Explore and elevate our shared stories of the past, present, and future to connect people
  - Preserve, share, and celebrate cultural identities, heritage, and traditions
  - Promote storytelling and enriching communities through dialogue, discussion, and participation
  - Bring people together to encourage thoughtful and accessible programs that value equity, democracy, collaboration, and life-long learning

### 3. Diversity, Equity, Access and Inclusion in Organization Culture

**Describe how your organization prioritizes Diversity, Equity, Access, and Inclusion (DEAI) principles within your organization's culture. Describe how your organization is striving to reflect the demographic of Maryland.**

Questions to consider:

- Consider looking over the [DEAI Toolkit](#).
- Does your organization employ a diversity and equity lens in its hiring and recruitment processes? This could be for employees, board members, interns, or volunteers.
- What DEAI-focused training or educational opportunities are provided to staff and volunteers?
- What challenges has your organization faced in advancing DEAI, and how have you addressed them?

### 4. Organization Programming

**Describe up to five of your organization's most successful programs of the last few years.**

Questions to consider:

- How does your organization's programs support your mission?
- Does your organization participate in any collaborative practices, like partnerships or community-led input, for programs? If so, describe them.
- If your organization is newly formed, describe any future programming and the planning process.
- If your organization is less than 4 years old, describe the founding of the organization.

### 5. Organization Audiences

**Describe your organization's typical audience over the last five years.**

Questions to consider:

- What are the key demographics (age, gender, race, socioeconomic status, geographic location, etc.) of your typical audience?
- Have there been notable changes in your audience over the last five years?
- How are you fostering engagement with your current audience?

### 6. Representation in Organization Narratives

**Describe how the narratives of communities underrepresented in the humanities are represented within your organization's programming.**

Questions to consider:

- What is unique about your organization to engage with communities underrepresented in the humanities?
- What specific programs, projects, or initiatives are designed to elevate their narratives?
- How does your organization ensure that the narratives are told authentically and respectfully?

## 7. Outreach

**Describe the strategies, approaches, and specific actions your organization is utilizing to expand your current audience. Please include the ways in which your organization engages with communities traditionally underserved by the humanities.**

Questions to consider:

- How does your organization seek feedback from your audience to improve or evolve programs?
- Has your organization identified any barriers to participation? What are the changes needed to remove or address them?
- What are the strategies your organization is using to build greater community trust, broader participation, and dialogue across differences?

## 8. Use of Funding

**Describe how your organization intends to use all of the funding that would be provided through this grant between January 2026 to September 2026. Please elaborate on the impact this funding would have on your organization, and the communities you serve.**

**Please note: This is in no way binding. After the funds are distributed, your organization will have the flexibility to use the funds for any of the authorized general operating expenses.**

Questions to consider:

- What specific expenses will the funding cover (e.g., staff salaries, rent, utilities, program development, marketing, technology, evaluation)?
- Are there any new or expanded efforts this funding would make possible?
- How would these funds support your short- and long-term goals?
- How would general operating support funding help you respond to emerging needs or invest in capacity building?