



The news of the proposed elimination of the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) comes at precisely the moment we feel the most grateful for the agency’s support.

On Thursday morning, as the budget proposal made headlines, we were busy preparing for Friday’s opening of “1917: How One Year Changed the World” in Philadelphia.

Co-organized by the [National Museum of American Jewish History](#), and the [American Jewish Historical Society](#) the exhibition looks back 100 years to explore how the events of a single year brought about political, cultural, and social changes that reverberated throughout the world and provoked America’s most stringent immigration quotas to date. While anchored in the past, the exhibition asks questions that have striking contemporary relevance — Who is an American? Does the United States have a duty to defend other nations? Is it patriotic to criticize the government?

Without a generous \$325,000 grant from the NEH, this exhibition would not have materialized.

The impact of NEH's funding for "1917" goes far beyond a set dollar amount. Getting an NEH grant is like getting an Academy Award. It gives the project a sort of *hechsher*, a seal of approval from a respected entity. An NEH grant signals that the exhibition has been thoroughly vetted and represents the very best of humanities programming — offering visitors serious scholarship, artifacts, and subject matter. This endorsement proves useful for securing further funding. It also holds the recipient accountable; the grantee is mindful of fully delivering on the project and fulfilling the public responsibility that comes with the grant. Furthermore, the NEH encourages fruitful collaborations between institutions.

NEH's role in "1917" exemplifies the Endowment's invaluable commitment to supporting projects that bring the humanities to life for all audiences. "1917" examines a consequential year through the eyes of American Jews. Yet, rather than promoting Jewish culture to Jews, the exhibition presents topics relevant to all ethnic minorities: American identity, citizenship, inclusion, and our nation's place in the world.

With the help of the NEH, we are able to mount exhibitions that capture the triumphs and pitfalls of our past in order to better navigate our future. We are always appreciative of NEH's meaningful work, but never more so than today. We stand with our colleagues in the arts and culture field to support the continued good work of the NEH and its sister institutions — the National Endowment for the Arts and the Institute of Museum and Library Services.

Ivy Barsky is the CEO and Gwen Goodman Director of the National Museum of American Jewish History. Rachel Lithgow is the Executive Director of the American Jewish Historical Society.