

MEMO TO: DICK LEWIS
FROM: MARTY SCHWARTZ
DATE: JULY 18, 1997
RE: ESTABLISHMENT OF THE FEDERATION

By the middle of 1975, NEH had created enough state-based programs to assess their effectiveness by comparing them with each other. Some were doing better than others. A few were aggressively and innovatively making grants, others seemed reluctant to experiment with new ideas.

NEH brought state chairs together in Washington from time to time to exchange ideas and share problems as well as successes. From these early meetings it became clear that there was little understanding about what other states were doing. A few state programs were in an exploratory, creative mode. Others were groping for direction. Unfortunately, there was no organized communication among the states so that there was no common source of information to be tapped.

Periodic national meetings were not a satisfactory way to exchange information and it became obvious that a clearing house was essential for informing everyone of the best programs underwritten by the various states.

NEH officials were concerned about spending public money in ill defined ways and were anxious therefore to assist those states who needed examples and model programs to emulate.

One day I received a call from John Barcroft, who was heading up the state based programs in NEH. He asked if I would chair an "interim committee" of several other state chairs whose purpose would be to serve the needs of the state programs for communication, exchange of information and ideas, and in effect be a "professional trade association" for the state programs. He indicated that NEH would provide a small grant to this committee for professional, clerical and general housekeeping functions. I was able to enlist two history professors from Ball State University and a secretary. We immediately began talking with other state chairs and had several meetings around the country with the committee participants. All agreed there was an urgent need for an organization to serve the state councils and most of our discussions for the formation of what came to be the Federation were hashed out at several meetings prior to the formal organization meeting in Minneapolis in the fall of 1977. Prior to that time, Tom Langevin,

chair of the Ohio council, and Abott Leban of the Pennsylvania council functioned with me as a personnel sub-committee. After a careful search we selected Steve Weiland as first executive director of the soon to be born Federation.

Interestingly, even the name we finally agreed on, the "National Federation of State Humanities Programs" was a difficult choice. We tried to define various classes of membership in the new organization. It was never originally intended that membership be limited only to state committees or councils alone. A few on the interim committee felt that individual and certain organizational memberships should also be part of this new structure but like many other ideas, the operating reality proved that the Federation was strictly a creature of state programs and not other categories of memberships.

The choice of Minneapolis as the seat of the Federation was another debate. There were those who felt that if we set up shop in the Washington, DC area we would somehow be overwhelmed by the NEH or politicized by "beltway" virus. Minneapolis seemed a reasonable choice even though there were problems of transportation and distance from other parts of the country. Nevertheless, we assumed we would somehow be more democratic and all embracing of both smaller and larger states if we began in Minneapolis.

At the outset there was a fear in some of the states that the Federation might open a wedge between the individual states and the NEH -- that the states could lose some of their autonomy which had been a keynote of NEH instructions when the state programs were created. They were to be independent, self-perpetuating bodies. This fear obviously turned out to be groundless.

However, in some of the early Federation board discussions there was also a concern among some academics from larger and more prestigious universities that the state programs were not involving the best and brightest academics in their programs and that only junior faculty were visible activists.

Edgar Shannon of the University of Virginia was particularly concerned that the state programs not be relegated to junior faculty only, but that higher profile academics involved with other NEH activities, like publications, research and films also be active in these state programs.

Then there was the question of funding. From the outset, several of us agreed that Federal funding from NEH was not etched in stone; that private funding from an involved citizen constituency would ultimately have to be the basis for continuity of state councils. That concern was not a serious one in the early days but was recognized as a potential

future problem. The Federation was expected to be a player in whatever ultimately evolved in terms of policy formulation, joint action, and of course, while we understood that lobbying was forbidden, nevertheless the Congress and the State Legislatures clearly had to be informed of what was going on in their constituencies. We were aware that our political instincts would have to be carefully limited. Since we were creatures of NEH, exploring private funding resources might in some way jeopardize the money that was already being allocated to us. Also there might be something vaguely disrespectful to our mentor if we did much to consider private funding. I sensed a reluctance from many councils to engage in long range financial planning.

That was the reason for my original gift to the Foundation which I regarded as a pump-priming contribution to the Federation which might stimulate others to give as well. There was certainly no attempt to suggest how the funds could be best used, but Helen and I were very pleased by the board's decision to create an annual prize for the best state program in our name.

The success of the Schwartz prize as a competitive stimulus has far exceeded even our most optimistic expectations.