# ­­Program overview

### An initiative of the National Endowment for the Arts in partnership with Arts Midwest, the NEA Big Read broadens our understanding of our world, our communities, and ourselves through the joy of sharing a good book. Showcasing a diverse range of themes, voices, and perspectives, the NEA Big Read aims to inspire conversation and discovery.

### The NEA Big Read annually provides support to selected nonprofit organizations around the country to host dynamic community-wide reading programs. Each awarded organization works in collaboration with local community partners to develop and conduct engaging virtual and/or in-person events and activities.

### Each NEA Big Read program includes: a kick-off event to mark the start of the program; book discussions; events inspired by the content and themes from the book(s) (e.g., panel discussions, lectures, film screenings); and projects that engage the community and/or respond creatively to the book (e.g., art exhibitions, theatrical and/or musical performances, poetry slams, writing workshops and contests, activities related to collecting and sharing oral/written stories from members of the community). Collectively, events and programming should: reach a variety of audiences; be held in a variety of spaces; when possible, encourage community participants to engage with one another and/or the book; and span a timeframe that makes sense for the community (as short as a week or as long as several months) within the programming period of September 2021 through June 2022.

Selected organizations receive a grant, access to online training resources and opportunities, digital educational resources, and promotional materials designed to support widespread community involvement.

### Grants range from $5,000 to $20,000 each.

Contact Arts Midwest at 612.238.8010 or email [neabigread@artsmidwest.org](mailto:neabigread@artsmidwest.org) with any questions.

# Commitments and values

The National Endowment for the Arts and Arts Midwest are committed to diversity, equity, inclusion, and fostering mutual respect for the diverse beliefs and values of all individuals and groups.

Proposed NEA Big Read events should be open and accessible to all individuals regardless of race, color, physical or mental ability, religion, creed, medical conditions, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, national origin, ancestry, nationality, age, veteran status, marital status, political affiliation, domestic partnership status, or any other protected class under federal, state, or local law.

# Important dates

* Application deadline: Wednesday, January 27, 2021
* Panel review: February – April, 2021
* Grantee notification via email: April 2021
* Grantee orientation and promotional material distribution: Summer 2021
* Grantee programming: Anytime between September 2021-June 2022

# Application accessibility

The National Endowment for the Arts and Arts Midwest strive to provide accessibility services and accommodation solutions to ensure that people of all abilities are included. Arts Midwest staff is available to assist with adapting processes to ensure that people with disabilities have equal opportunity to apply.  
  
Please email Arts Midwest at [neabigread@artsmidwest.org](mailto:neabigread@artsmidwest.org) or leave a message at 612.238.8010 to connect about your needs. You can also visit Arts Midwest’s Accessibility Center at <https://www.artsmidwest.org/resources/accessibility>

# Eligibility requirements

An applicant must:

* Comply with[federal eligibility requirements](https://www.artsmidwest.org/programs/federal_requirements).
* Be a 501c(3) non-profit organization, a unit of local government located in the United States or its territories/protectorates, or a federally-recognized Native nation that share this geography.
* Partner with a community library if the applicant itself is not a library.
* Choose one of six available [reading selections.](https://www.artsmidwest.org/programs/neabigread/books) Applicants that have received an NEA Big Read grant in the past for one of the available reading selections may apply again for the same book, but must provide an explanation for doing so and a description of how they intend to revisit the text with new programming.

Eligible applicants include organizations such as arts centers, arts councils, arts organizations, community service organizations, environmental organizations, fairs and festivals, faith-based organizations, historical societies, housing authorities, humanities councils, institutions of higher education, libraries, literary centers, museums, school districts, theater companies, trade associations, and tribal governments.

Local education agencies, school districts, and state and regional education agencies are eligible applicants. We do not fund individual elementary or secondary schools—charter, private, or public—directly. Schools may participate as partners in projects for which another eligible organization applies. If a single school also is a local education agency, as is the case with some charter schools, the school may apply with documentation that supports its status as a local education agency.

An organization whose primary purpose is to channel resources (financial, human, or other) to an affiliated organization is not eligible to apply if the affiliated organization submits its own application. This prohibition applies even if each organization has its own 501c(3) status. For example, the “Friends of ABC Library” may not also apply if the ABC Library applies.

Organizations may apply for one grant per program year.

Ineligible applications will not be reviewed.

# What to know before applying

* The NEA Big Read grant derives from federal funds and must be matched 1 to 1 with non-federal funds. Eligible items for match may include any combination of earned revenues, private/local grants, in-kind contributions, cash, salaries and wages from the applicant organization and partner organizations.
* Grants are disbursed in an 80%/20% split. 80% of the award arrives near the start of proposed programs and 20% arrives after submission of a final report. An advance payment may be requested to cover direct costs prior to programs starting, such as the cost of book purchases.
* Unallowable expenses include: refreshments, meals (unless as part of speaker per diem), prizes, fundraising costs, alcohol, etc. Contact Arts Midwest with any specific concerns.
* A DUNS number is required. [Look up your DUNS number.](http://www.dnb.com/duns-number/lookup.html)
* An “active” SAM.gov registration is required before funds can be issued. See federal eligibility requirement link above.
* Attendance of adults and youths (separately) must be tracked at events.
* We strongly encourage applicants, especially first-time applicants, to reach out to Arts Midwest before you apply to help you draft a competitive proposal. Arts Midwest manages grant applications for the NEA Big Read and serves as the program manager on behalf of the National Endowment for the Arts. Its experienced staff can answer questions on eligibility and program intent, project development, grant attachment verification, and can, upon request, review your application materials in advance of the deadline.

# Grant awards

Eligible organizations may apply for a grant ranging from $5,000 to $20,000. These grants are federal funds from the National Endowment for the Arts (CFDA No. 45.024: Promotion of the Arts Awards to Organizations and Individuals). Grants are cost shared and must be matched on a 1-to-1 basis with nonfederal funds such as private grants, in-kind contributions, and earned revenue. Some examples of matching funds can be staff salaries, volunteer hours, or event ticket sales. Please see the [proposal budget instructions](https://bigread.s3.amazonaws.com/application/FINAL_ProposalBudgetInstructions.docx)for more information.

If awarded, the applicant will enter into a grant agreement with Arts Midwest. The grant amount may be less than the amount requested in the applicant's proposal and rounded to an even dollar amount.

Funding may support:

* Supplies, artistic fees, speaker fees, project overhead costs, promotional fees, salaries, venue rental fees, travel costs, book purchases, and other expenses directly related and necessary to conducting a community-wide multidisciplinary arts program.

Funding is not available for:

* Overlapping project costs between federal awards, whether received directly from a federal agency or indirectly, such as through a state agency or other entity.
* Programs restricted to any organization's membership; programs must be promoted and available to the general public.
* Payment for facilities, purchase of capital equipment, or non-project related administrative expenses.
* Fellowships or cash prizes.
* Capital improvements or construction, purchase of capital goods, purchase of real estate property, or endowments.
* Expenses to purchase alcoholic beverages or to pay associated costs (servers, insurance, liquor licenses, etc.)
* Entertainment costs, such as opening parties, receptions, or fundraisers designed to raise funds for your own organization and on behalf of another person, organization, or cause.

# Reading selections

Applicants must choose one of six reading selections from the [2021-22 NEA Big Read list](https://www.artsmidwest.org/programs/neabigread/books) as inspiration for programming. Exploring the theme of American history and culture, these six titles together present an array of voices, perspectives, time periods, and genres that can help us as a nation to reflect on where we’ve been, where we are today, and where we’re going.

In addition to these titles, applicants may choose to develop certain events and/or activities around other literary titles that relate in some way (thematically, historically, etc.) to the NEA Big Read book for the purpose of broadening audience participation. These “companion” titles may span other genres, such as YA, children’s books, poetry, graphic novels, etc.

Copies of the reading selection are not provided along with the grant award. Applicants should articulate in their proposal a plan to acquire and distribute sufficient copies of their books using the NEA Big Read grant or other funding sources.

# Digital resources and promotional materials

Digital resources in webpage and PDF format will be available for download for grantees to share with their communities in Spring 2021. These resources feature a Reader Guide with information on the featured book and author, with some translated into Spanish, and a Teacher’s Guide with lesson plans and handouts.

Grantees also receive free promotional items including three full-color NEA Big Read banners and a set of bookmarks to promote their programs. These will be available to grantees in August 2021.

# Program requirements

Successful NEA Big Read programming should encourage reading and discussion of the selected NEA Big Read book and companion title(s) on a community-wide scale. Virtual events are allowed.

Your NEA Big Read program proposal must include the following:

1. **Diverse and imaginative events and literary activities held at a variety of spaces. Specifically:**
   * A public kick-off event to launch the program (e.g, book giveaways around town, mayoral proclamation, outdoor concert/festival/parade, art exhibition opening).
   * A minimum of 5 book discussions in a variety of spaces (virtual or in-person), at least two of which focus on the NEA Big Read reading selection.
   * At least two presentations inspired by the content and/or themes of the selected book (e.g., panel discussions, lectures, film screenings, etc).
     + If you are considering an author visit as part of your programming, please be aware that honoraria and availability vary by individual. Other considerations for satisfying this requirement would be a presentation by someone that’s knowledgeable about the book, author, time period, or themes.
   * At least two projects that engage the community and/or respond creatively to the selected book or companion title (e.g., art exhibitions, theatrical and/or musical performances, poetry slams, writing workshops and contests, collecting and sharing oral/written stories from members of the community).

Note: Event types may be combined (e.g., a kick-off event can include a presentation session and a discussion of the book).

1. **Community partnerships**
   * Applicants must partner with a library (if the applicant itself is not a library). Higher education applicants must partner with a library that is not directly affiliated with their institution.
   * Applicants must partner with various community organizations in order to reach beyond their primary constituent base and include audiences of various abilities, ages, cultural backgrounds, educational levels, and occupations.
   * Applicants should actively promote their programming through digital and print channels as well as other public relations/marketing efforts to ensure strong community participation and inclusivity in NEA Big Read activities by individuals of various abilities, ages, cultural backgrounds, educational levels, and occupations. To this end, organizations should consider partnering with local radio, print, TV, social media, and other media outlets, as applicable.

Examples of potential partners include local community and arts organizations, institutions of higher education (community colleges, HBCUs, and universities), correctional institutions, K-12 schools, libraries, bookstores, local businesses, military installations, museums, senior centers, social service organizations, and youth groups.

**In addition, each organization receiving a grant must:**

* Conduct activities between September 1, 2021 and June 30, 2022.
* Call its program “NEA Big Read” (e.g., NEA Big Read: Minneapolis).
* Cost share/match the grant at least 1 to 1. Please refer to the [proposal budget instructions](https://www.artsmidwest.org/sites/default/files/ProposalBudgetInstructions_0.pdf) for more information. Matching funds can consist of staff salaries, volunteer hours, in-kind contributions, additional grants, cash, ticket sales, etc.
* Participate in an online orientation with other program participants in June 2021.
* Use and distribute the digital resources (see Digital resources and promotional materials section).
* Provide information to be posted on [the Arts Midwest website](https://www.artsmidwest.org/programs/neabigread/grantees).
* Comply with all crediting requirements. This includes consistent crediting of the NEA Big Read, the National Endowment for the Arts, Arts Midwest, and any additional sponsors.
* Comply with all reporting requirements. Grantees must adhere to multiple deadlines including providing data before and after their community activities. Grantees will be required to submit a final report within 45 days of their final activity with event attendance statistics, partner organization data, media and promotional examples, and narrative responses about their programming.
* Comply with all federal grant regulations, including providing organizational audit information if required by federal law. Please review the [Assurance of Compliance](https://www.artsmidwest.org/sites/default/files/AssuranceJune2020_0.docx) document.
* As necessary, seek legal permissions for activities and promotional materials from publishers (author photos, book jacket art, publishing excerpts of text from the book, etc.).

# How to apply

To apply for an NEA Big Read grant you must complete an intent to apply form online after which you will receive an invite to the NEA Big Read online community and a link to the application. The online application must be submitted on or before January 27, 2021.

Please refer to this [application checklist](https://bigread.s3.amazonaws.com/application/FINAL_ChecklistForApplicants.docx)to guide you through the application process.

We recognize that some elements of a proposal may be tentative, but you should be as specific and thorough as possible. It is difficult for panelists to assess your program without detailed information on proposed activities, partners, venues, dates, etc.

Remember: Arts Midwest staff can review applications for technical accuracy prior to formal submission with sufficient advance notice.

# Application contents

The online application will ask for the following information via text fields.

1. Applicant organization: Employer Identification Number, DUNS number, and an active registration with SAM ([sam.gov](http://www.sam.gov/)).
   1. Registration for DUNS and SAM is free but will take time to complete. [Find out more information about verifying your organization's DUNS number and confirming or activating your registration with sam.gov](https://www.artsmidwest.org/programs/federal_requirements). Contact your local [Procurement Technical Assistance Center](http://www.aptac-us.org/sam-registration/) for free specialized help with the SAM.gov registration process.
2. Grant request amount (between $5,000 and $20,000).
3. Your proposed program's start and end dates. Programming must occur between Sept. 1, 2021 and June 30, 2022.
4. Your chosen book (one of six available on the NEA Big Read list).
5. Proposed number of book discussions (must be at least 5).
6. Proposed total number of events (including book discussions).
7. Total number of partner organizations (pending and confirmed).

# File Uploads

You will upload several files. Document uploads must be an MS Word, MS Excel, or PDF document. It is highly recommended you work on these documents offline via the templates provided and visit the online application when you are ready to complete the application. Errors in formatting may have an adverse effect on your application.

Format ALL upload documents (except tax and budget documents) as follows:

* US Letter paper size (8.5 x 11) in portrait orientation with at least 0.75 inch margins
* A text font equivalent to Times 12-point or larger (15 characters per inch)
* Do not use header and footer fields within your documents

Required files:

* Organization description narrative (one upload – one page)
* Project description narrative (one upload – no more than three pages)
* Project partnerships narrative (one upload – no more than two pages)
* Project partnership support letters (two to five uploads – no more than two pages each)
* Project personnel narrative (one upload – one page)
* Project budget (one upload on provided template – one page)

[Download this zip file with upload templates.](https://bigread.s3.amazonaws.com/application/ApplicationMaterials.zip)

# Organization description narrative (one upload – one page)

* Briefly describe your organization's mission, history, and achievements.
* Describe the impact of your organization's experience with presenting community-wide programming that demonstrates an ability to conduct a successful NEA Big Read.

# Project description narrative (one upload – no more than three pages)

* Provide a rationale for your chosen NEA Big Read book. (Applicants that have received an NEA Big Read grant in the past for one of the available reading selections may apply again for the same book, but must provide an explanation for doing so and a description of how they intend to revisit the text with new programming.)
* Describe the community you plan to reach with NEA Big Read programming. For example, a community may be a geographic area, a demographic, or both.
* Describe your programming plans in detail. Be sure that your plans meet the programming requirements explained above, and address the themes, writing, and content of the NEA Big Read book.
* Provide details on the types of activities, target audiences for those activities, locations, and intended dates.
* Explain how your activities will be inclusive and engage diverse audiences.
* Describe how you will promote your programming to a wide range of audiences.
* Explain how your program will distribute copies of your chosen NEA Big Read book and optional companion title(s).

# Project partnerships description narrative (one upload – no more than two pages)

* Describe your partnerships with libraries (as applicable) and community organizations.
* Explain the role each partner will play in your program, the activities each partner will undertake with your organization, and whether these partnerships are confirmed or pending.
* Explain how your partnerships will allow you to reach your intended audience(s) and engage individuals of diverse backgrounds and ability levels. Discuss any proposed or existing partnerships with specific media outlets.

# Project partnership letters (two to five uploads – no more than two pages each)

* Each letter should address the roles and responsibilities of the partner organization in relation to the project. These letters may be addressed to “NEA Big Read review panel.”
* For library applicants: one letter must be from a key partner.
* For all other applicants: one letter must be from your library partner.
* Submit letters on organization letterhead and in PDF format.

# Project personnel description (one upload – one page)

* Outline the key personnel from the applicant organization and partner organizations and what role(s) they will have in implementing your proposed activities. Include volunteers as applicable. Briefly describe their qualifications for the project.
* Explain how these individuals will help engage diverse audiences with your selected book and promote inclusive experiences.

# Project budget (one upload on provided template – one page)

* Include all anticipated expenses necessary to fully implement the program plans proposed, including planning, programming, and reporting.
* Be sure to represent your 1-to-1 cost share/match for the program. Matching funds can consist of staff salaries, volunteer hours, in-kind contributions, additional grants, cash, ticket sales, etc.
* Compare your budget against the details provided in the narrative responses to ensure there are no inconsistencies.

# Selection process and review criteria

Applications are reviewed by an advisory panel composed of a diverse group of arts and literature experts and other individuals with broad knowledge of programs like the NEA Big Read. Panel composition changes annually.

Application review will be based on the artistic excellence and artistic merit of the program. If selected for a grant, an organization will be expected to carry out a program consistent with its proposal. If changes are necessary, they must be discussed and approved by NEA Big Read staff at Arts Midwest.

Specifically, panelists will evaluate each application based on the following review criteria:

1. **Quality programming.** The panel will review the relevance and rationale of the chosen NEA Big Read book and companion title(s) and the quality of diverse and imaginative literary programs held at a variety of spaces that: address the themes, writing, and content of the chosen NEA Big Read book and meet the programming requirements.
2. **Community support and outreach.** The panel will consider the relevance and depth of involvement with individuals and organizations that will assist with program deployment and broaden audience participation beyond the applicant’s primary constituent base. The panel will also consider efforts to engage audiences of various abilities, ages, cultural backgrounds, educational levels, races, ethnicities, and occupations as partners and participants.
3. **Ability.** The panel will consider the applicant’s abilityto manage and implement an NEA Big Read program. The panel will consider organizational capacity, the planning timeline, the participation of appropriate personnel, and a reasonable budget plan with the required 1-to-1 match.
4. **Promotion**. The panel will review plans for promoting NEA Big Read events and activities through digital and print channels as well as other public relations/marketing efforts; distribution of digital resources and promotional materials; and publicity through partnership with local radio, print, TV, social media, and media outlets as applicable.

Application deadline

All applications must be submitted electronically on or before **Wednesday, January 27, 2021.**

After submission of your application, Arts Midwest staff will review it for eligibility, project requirement fulfillment, and the inclusion of all application components. If there are no questions concerning your application, the contacts named in your application will receive an email acknowledging your application is complete along with a PDF of the complete application as it will be forwarded to the review panel.

# Program contact

Arts Midwest manages all grant applications for the NEA Big Read from eligible applicants nationwide and serves as the program manager on behalf of the National Endowment for the Arts. If you have questions about the NEA Big Read, application components, or the application guidelines, please call Arts Midwest at 612.238.8010 or email [neabigread@artsmidwest.org](mailto:neabigread@artsmidwest.org).