

The Mellon Just Futures Initiative – Call for Proposals

August 2020

The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation invites proposals from multi-disciplinary teams that include scholars from the humanities, arts, and humanities-inflected social sciences for the Mellon Just Futures Initiative competition. The program will provide funding to support visionary, unconventional, experimental, and groundbreaking projects in order to address the long-existing fault lines of racism, inequality, and injustice that tear at the fabric of democracy and civil society. This call for proposals seeks to support teams whose work focuses specifically on and addresses racial inequality and its many manifestations. This competition is overseen by the Foundation's Higher Learning program.

Grants of up to \$5 million with a 2-3 year duration will be awarded to multi-disciplinary collaboratories with the intention of generating innovative research, projects, pedagogies, and curricula. We also encourage the formation of multi-institutional teams that may include partners from across the sectors of higher education and from outside the academy.

About the Grant Program

As the COVID-19 pandemic spreads across the globe, it continues to lay bare deep inequities and vulnerabilities that have disproportionately impacted communities of color. It is simultaneously generating significant shifts across established institutions and known structures and systems. The humanities, arts, and qualitative social sciences have an essential role to play in re-envisioning and communicating what the future will look like by helping us understand the past, make meaning of the present, and analyze the conditions required for socially just futures. We encourage teams that think historically to understand the present as being in constant conversation with the past.

The Mellon Foundation's Higher Learning program is particularly focused on:

- Improving equitable and broad access to higher education;
- Supporting humanities education that builds and centers more complete and accurate narratives to construct a fuller account of the human experience;
- Accelerating demographic transformation in the academy;
- Elevating bold ideas and new knowledge that support the generation of just societies.

This open call thus seeks visionary proposals that begin with expertise based in the humanities and utilize a multi-disciplinary approach to addressing racial justice in ways that are in keeping with the Higher Learning program's above-listed foci, asking questions such as (but not limited to):

- What might we learn from the study of past periods of crisis and disruption, and how might those lessons lead us to cultural and social transformation in the present?
- What are the future possibilities for structures that elevate, make visible, liberate, and help individuals and communities to thrive?

- How might the humanities and higher education more generally be productively transformed to achieve greater and more equitable access, demographic transformation, and to support new ways of knowing and new modes of knowledge production? And how might those transformations be linked to the generation of a more just and equitable society?

This call for proposals is predicated on the Foundation's belief that the voices of historians of all subjects, writers, linguists, philosophers, scholars of literature, of languages and cultures, of religion and of communication, of race and ethnic studies, of gender and sexuality, as well as artists, anthropologists, cultural and human geographers, political theorists and sociologists (to name just a few) are absolutely essential to the societal and cultural transformation we so clearly require.

Simultaneously, the call is rooted in a belief that the full depth and complexity of humanities-based inquiry can be put towards the search for solutions to current societal problems, even if the research discoveries themselves are not immediately transactional. This program thus aims to support fundamental and applied humanities exploration, in a manner that requires new forms of intellectual partnerships that are based in deeply reciprocal modes of collaboration, with the goal of shaping the future through the generation of bold new perspectives and imaginatively developed new knowledge.

Multi-disciplinary teams are encouraged to think capacious and inclusively about their structure, using—but not limited to—the following guidelines. Teams:

- ***must include a coordinator to ensure strong collaboration.*** The coordinator's time should accordingly be accounted for in the budget. The coordinator may also be (but is not necessarily) the PI;
- are encouraged to include partners from a range of colleges and universities across sectors;
- may include artists and scholars who are without an institutional affiliation;
- may include artists-in-residence, community scholars-in-residence, activists-in-residence, or Elders-in-residence;
- may include partners from non-profits and community-based organizations;
- must include undergraduate and/or graduate students;
- may include no more than two post-doctoral fellows.

Proposals will be prioritized that have a clearly defined workplan for collaboration, and that describe the ways they plan to enact that work.

They must also include a description of proposed products from the work. These may (as in the case of some artworks) be ephemeral but they must in all cases be durably documented, discoverable, and accessible.

The Foundation expects the multi-disciplinary aspect of each proposal to be prioritized, and will not award support to teams that intend to develop individual projects under a single conceptual framework. Additional credit will be given to proposals that describe a single effort towards which collaborators work in a deeply integrated fashion, and that prioritize the creation of innovatively

assembled, diverse, and inclusive teams. Funded teams will produce work that benefits society and contributes to the ways the public understands the humanities and the role they play in the creation of socially just futures.

For this competition, grants will be awarded to up to 10 teams. In order to facilitate administrative clarity, awards will be made to single institutions. For cross-institutional collaborations, PIs will be responsible for working with their institution's Office of Sponsored Projects to facilitate any sub-awards that may be necessary.

Grant awards may be used for purposes such as (but not limited to):

- Course releases for participating faculty;
- Stipends/honoraria for community partners;
- Salaries for visiting artists, scholars, and “in-residence” fellows;
- Pre-doctoral fellowships;
- Post-doctoral fellowships;
- Funds to support programming related to the project;
- Undergraduate research fellowships/stipends;
- Supplies and library resources that may be required for the research project (subject to Foundation approval);
- Salary supplement or course buyout for the collaboration coordinator who must be a faculty member at the institution receiving the award;
- Equipment necessary to the project with the exception of computers;
- Up to 10 percent of funds to administrative and occupancy costs.

Given the present constraints of the COVID-19 pandemic, we expect travel and in-person convening expenses to be minimal for the initial year of the planned work period.

All teams will be required to include a rigorously developed communication plan for the distribution of white papers and/or other research results.

About the 2020 Just Futures Initiative Call for Proposals

Through this program, grants will be made to institutions of higher education representing the selected teams.

Applications will be due by Wednesday, September 23 at 12:00 pm ET. They will then be evaluated by a panel that includes Foundation staff and external reviewers. All applicants will be notified of the status of their submission by Monday, October 12. If selected, additional information and materials will be requested in a final proposal to be reviewed by the Foundation's Board of Trustees.

Key Dates

- Application deadline: Sept. 23, 2020 at 12:00 pm ET
- Finalists notified: Oct. 12, 2020
- Final proposal deadline: Nov. 4, 2020 (for finalists only)
- Final notification: December 11, 2020 (public announcement to follow)