



MASSACHUSETTS250.ORG

Mass Humanities 250th overview

MA250 Lunch & Learn
August 12, 2025
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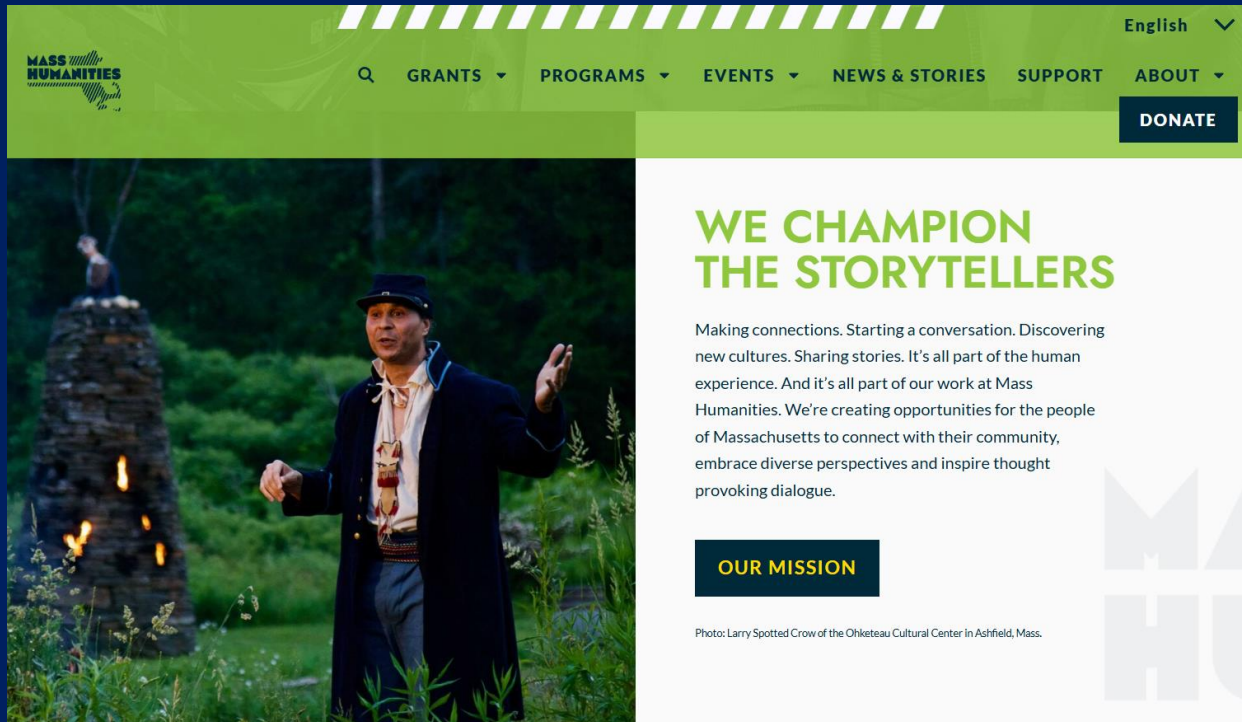
The 250th + **Mass Humanities**

- About Us
- Public history in Mass.
- Smithsonian traveling exhibit
- Frederick Douglass
- Expand Mass. Stories funding initiative
- Our plans for 2025 and 2026



Mass Humanities

The foundation for storytelling



Masshumanities.org

- Founded in 1974
- Private, non-profit foundation
- 1 of 56 state humanities councils, affiliate of **National Endowment for the Humanities** (NEH), a federal agency
- Based in **Holyoke**
- Grant-maker (**\$1.6M, 159 orgs in 2024**)
- Key initiatives
- 8 FTE, statewide board (3 Governor's appointees)
- Supported by MCC, Barr Foundation, private donors
- Federal funding cut in April

What are **the humanities**?

The humanities are the tools humans create to make sense of our lives and make our way through the collective life we share.

Include: history, philosophy, literature, language, ethics, law, archaeology, political theory, comparative religion, anthropology, sociology, and media and cultural studies.



History in the commonwealth

- Global institutions
- Hyperlocal grassroots
- Progressive traditions
- Preserved narratives
- Migration
- Bellwether for change



INPUT: +568 history organizations in Mass.

- nonprofit and public sector history museums;
- nonprofit historical societies, historic preservation organizations, and other history-related organizations;
- historical societies that are a part of state, county, or local government;
- historic sites that are administered in the public sector by a state park system or a state government historical society.

-["2022 National Census of History Organizations,"](#) American Association for State and Local History (AASLH)



Smithsonian Museum on Main Street: **Strengthening rural Massachusetts**

Smithsonian

- 6 host sites, 6 weeks each, 6 free public events
- 2022-23: 130 public events, 23,000 visitors, 57% 1st time, 2,000 students, 23 field trips
- Partnerships with MOTT, Rural Policy Advisory Commission, select boards
- **Exhibit created by Smithsonian, coordinated + funded by Mass Humanities for 2025-26**



Smithsonian Museum on Main Street: **2025-26** **“Voices & Votes: Democracy in America”**

Host sites

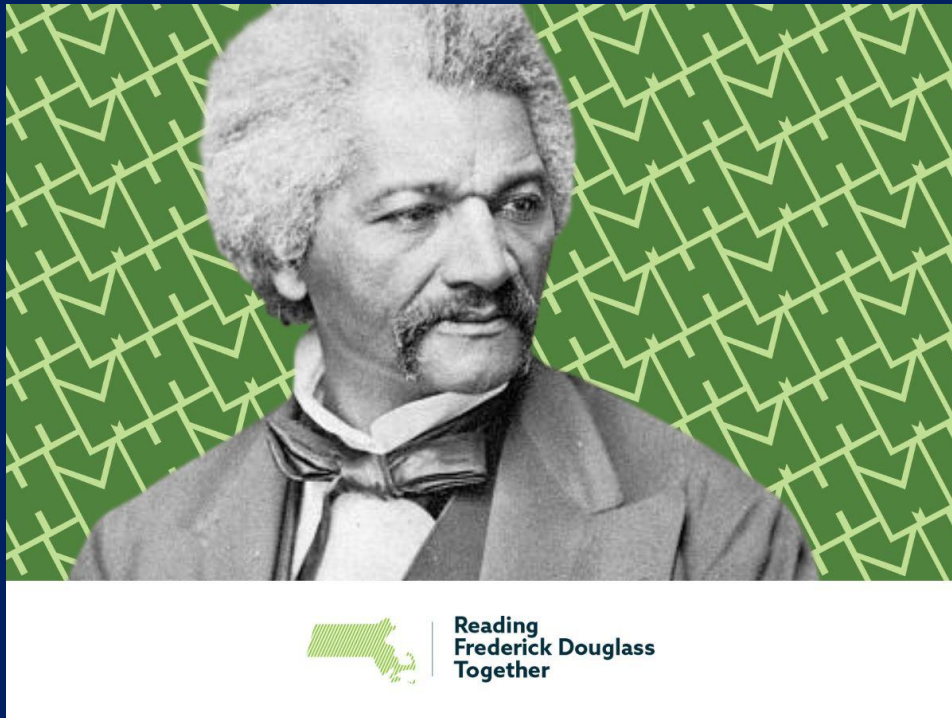
- 4.19.25 Mohawk Trail Regional HS, Buckland
- 6.7.25 Town of Lee
- **7.26.25 Ashby Free Public Library**
- **9.13.25 Douglas Historical Society**
- **11.1.25 Holbrook Public Library**
- **12.20.25 Nye Museum, Sandwich**



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Reading Frederick Douglass Together: **Words of a Massachusetts revolutionary**



- Found freedom in New Bedford, lived in Lynn, spoke in +130 Mass cities & towns
- Interactive and participatory
- Statewide movement:
 - 2019: 15 events
 - **2025: 70 events**
- Community readings of 4th of July speech
 - Juneteenth, Black History Month
 - Town halls, historic sites, campuses, festivals, cultural centers
- **Fall 2025: #DouglassWeek in Boston, New Bedford**

Reading Frederick Douglass Together: 250th opportunity



Input: not everyone sees themselves

“Many Massachusetts residents – a greater percentage than Americans overall – believe systemic racism is present in each genre of arts and culture organizations. For example, **47% of respondents think systemic racism is present in history museums, and 42% think it exists in art museums.** These percentages increase significantly, to **83% and 78%, respectively, for Massachusetts residents who identify as Black or African American.**”

“Culture and Community in a Time of Transformation,” 2022 report by Slover Linnett



EXPAND MASS STORIES GRANT-MAKING INITIATIVE

Launched 2021

Projects must be based in **the experiences of Massachusetts residents.**

Eligible: Non-profits, tribal nations, government entities. **Up to \$20K per project.**

Initiative supported by **Mass Cultural Council, Barr Foundation.**

“Nothing about us without us”: Prioritize leadership from communities where stories live

Reimagining expertise: In review and projects, encourage lived experience, tradition bearers



The public history field is wide, diverse, and growing.

169 mass. stories funded 2021-24

Human services, community based orgs including...

- Agencia ALPHA
- Chinese Economic Development Council
- Latinx Center for Community Empowerment in Lowell
- United Lynn Pride
- Hampshire County Food Policy Council
- Mashpee Wampanoag Tribe
- Migrant Communities Project
- MLK Action Team of Nauset Interfaith
- Transhealth
- Wellspring

Cultural sector including...

- The Performance Project in Springfield
- New Bedford Fishing Heritage Center
- Boston Dance Alliance
- Jewish Women's Archive
- National Black Doll Museum
- Cape Cod Cape Verdean Museum
- Holyoke Public Library
- Common Wealth Murals
- Cape Ann Museum
- Royall House and Slave Quarters

2024 projects 62 STORIES

“An exhibit supporting the creation of a **Chinatown heritage center** that is dedicated in preserving the history of the community.”

“A documentary film that highlights the stories of **legally blind people throughout Massachusetts** who grew up in different eras, exploring people’s success and on public perceptions of blindness and disability.

“A major exhibit, publication, and series of community programs to celebrate the **South Coast’s Cape Verdean community**.”

“A new exhibit that explores the lives of four real children of diverse backgrounds in **Boston’s North End** in the 18th and 19th centuries through archaeological artifacts.

NEW: CLIMATE STORIES

“Tide Talks is an oral history project interviewing **East Boston** residents across demographic groups and generations about living next to Boston Harbor.”

“Rising River’s Edge is a 20-minute video documentary looking at the impacts of the climate crisis on the food systems of **Franklin County**, one of the poorest and most rural counties in Massachusetts.”

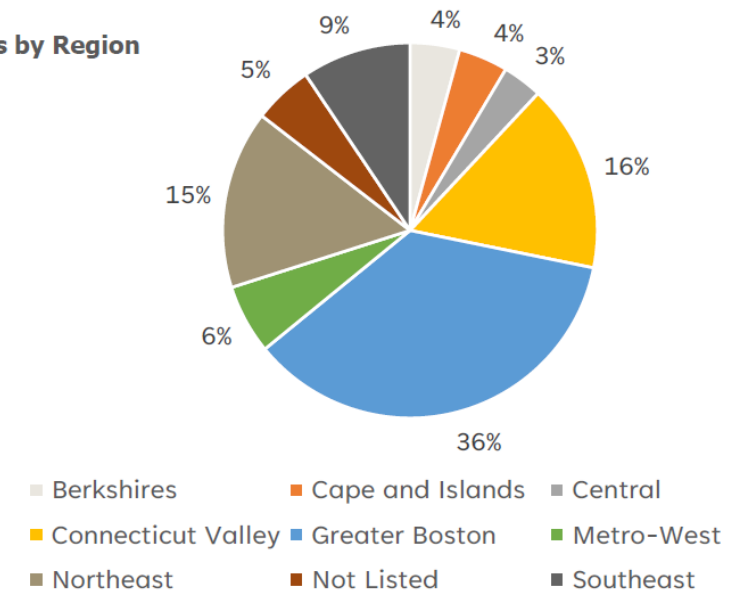
“Youth Climate Ambassadors will create a comprehensive program to elevate the often overlooked voices of **youth in the climate conversation**.”

Expand Mass Stories

“Promises of the Revolution”

- Who made the Revolution possible? **Untold stories.**
- Who carried forward the Revolution’s promises to new eras? **Freedom struggles, civil rights.**
- Who are the revolutionary heroes born long after the end of Revolutionary War? **Massachusetts leaders.**
- **Doc films, exhibitions, podcasts, events**
- **Announcing: November 2025**
- **Stay tuned!**

Applicants by Region



117 applications June 9 - \$2 million in requests

Mass humanities

Funding cuts

- **April 3 – NEH terminates annual major funding to MH**
- 20% cut in revenue – layoffs, cancelled programs and vents
- April 19 - **Smithsonian tour opens at Mohawk Trail Regional School**
- June - July – 70 Douglass events this year
- June 11 – Honored Mashpee Wampanoag Tribe in New Bedford “climate summit”
- **Sept 25 – Honoring Ken Casey of Dropkick Murphys – “Who’ll Stand with Us?”**



9.25 “In the Archives with Ken Casey”

Thanks!

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