



itvs.org

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Independent Television Service, Inc.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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ITVS Launches NEH-supported \$1.7 Million Fellowship for Independent Filmmakers and Advisors Working in the Humanities

How can supporting a diverse cohort of 20 filmmakers for one year bring new perspectives to documentary filmmaking and the humanities?

(San Francisco, CA) October 4, 2021—Launching this month, the ITVS Humanities Documentary Development Fellowship, supported by the National Endowment for the Humanities’ Sustaining the Humanities through the American Rescue Plan (#SHARP) funding, will help pandemic-affected independent documentary filmmakers develop high-potential projects that increase the diversity, urgency, and relevance of the nation’s humanities-centered documentary pipeline. Support will be awarded in the form of 12-month stipends to a diverse cohort of independent documentary filmmakers at all stages of their careers, as well as advisors working in the humanities who will provide input and counsel to strengthen filmmaking humanities practices.

The one-time program recognizes the humanities sector as an essential component of economic and civic life, identifying documentary filmmakers who develop projects for public television as vital contributors affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. NEH and ITVS have been longtime supporters of documentarians, helping bring to life and to audiences stories like [Asian Americans](#), [Latino Americans](#), [Tell Them We Are Rising: The Story of Historically Black Colleges and Universities](#), and many more. The ITVS Humanities Documentary Development Fellowship will fuel this work at a challenging time when the country needs a greater diversity of perspectives, deeper cultural understanding, and strong humanities storytelling.

Over a 12-month period spanning 2022 and 2023, this fellowship and the dedicated coaching that comes with it will allow funded documentary makers more time and energy to develop early concepts into high-quality humanities projects. Each fellow will be supported by advisors drawn from relevant fields in the humanities, along with the support of ITVS staff. Advisors will include thought leaders, as well as experts in archival research and third-party rights clearance, with the goal of strengthening the humanities scholarship and quality of the content. Filmmakers will develop a concept and nurture it through the early phases of research and development with the input and expertise from humanities scholars, positioning a project to compete for development and production funding with a full treatment, advisors, and a plan for production, distribution, and engagement.

Ultimately, this support seeks to expand the diversity of voices telling compelling stories to national audiences in ways that can broaden perspectives on questions of racial justice, gender equality, and equity for people living with disabilities. The stories that emerge from the fellows will align with the values of the NEH’s “A More Perfect Union” initiative and its goal of “encouraging projects that explore, reflect on, and tell the stories of our efforts towards a more just, inclusive, and sustainable society.”



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"Our hope is that this fellowship will provide needed support to documentary filmmakers greatly affected by the pandemic while also amplifying and strengthening humanities stories, particularly stories by makers who are traditionally underrepresented in the humanities documentary pipeline for public television," said Keri Archer Brown, ITVS Director of Content and Initiatives. "Not only can we support filmmakers, but NEH funding allows us to strengthen a critical link between filmmakers and expert humanities advisors that is needed to succeed in deepening the power of their stories."

The ITVS Humanities Documentary Development Fellowship follows the release by ITVS in collaboration with the Center for Media & Social Impact (CMSI) of [*Stories for a Stronger Nation*](#), a report that captures the findings of dozens of interviews ignited in 2020 by the intertwined crises of the COVID-19 pandemic and the racial reckoning following the police murder of George Floyd. Findings outlined in the report include:

- Independent documentary filmmakers, as uniquely trusted storytellers about the complexities of American life, are critical to the future of the public sphere and a healthy democracy.
- At a moment of intertwined crises in America, public television and independent filmmakers are crucial partners in reaching the American public; both need more investment in that relationship: to stabilize it, support it, and ensure their mutual contribution to America's communities.
- Public television urgently needs to strengthen its relationship with BIPOC independent filmmakers, a vibrant resource to address the racial reckoning.
- Increased funding is needed now, and on an ongoing basis, for independent filmmakers and the organizations that directly support their work.

Filmmakers may apply to become one of the 20 fellows via an open call for applications at ITVS.org beginning October 15th. Details about the selection process will be shared by ITVS at that time.

In addition to ITVS, NEH will provide SHARP grantmaking awards to Firelight Media and the Sundance Institute. [Firelight Media](#) will offer a grant program to deliver relief from the coronavirus pandemic to mid-career Black, Indigenous, and people of color filmmakers whose work on historical or humanities-focused documentary film projects was disrupted by the coronavirus pandemic. The [Sundance Institute](#) fellowship will support the sustainability of 20 humanities-focused nonfiction mediamekers who have been adversely impacted by the coronavirus with unrestricted stipends and humanities mentorship.

Together, ITVS, Firelight Media, and Sundance Institute will create opportunities for more than 75 humanities documentary filmmakers.



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About ITVS

ITVS is a San Francisco-based nonprofit organization that has, for over 25 years, funded and partnered with a diverse range of documentary filmmakers to produce and distribute untold stories. ITVS incubates and co-produces these award-winning films and then airs them for free on PBS via our weekly series, INDEPENDENT LENS, as well as on other PBS series and through our digital platform, OVEE. ITVS is funded by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, The National Endowment for the Humanities: American Rescue Plan, Acton Family Giving, John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, Ford Foundation, Wyncote Foundation. For more information, visit itvs.org.

About National Endowment for the Humanities

Created in 1965 as an independent federal agency, the National Endowment for the Humanities supports research and learning in history, literature, philosophy, and other areas of the humanities by funding selected, peer-reviewed proposals from around the nation. Additional information about the National Endowment for the Humanities and its grant programs is available at neh.gov.