The media covers U.S. government funding for the humanities as a generalized mix of arts, humanities, and heritage funding.

News media covers U.S. government funding for the humanities in ways more confusing and complex than might be anticipated. This is partially because the media portrays both the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) and National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) as humanities organizations. Articles about the NEA place the agency within a broad spectrum of arts programming, occasionally meaning also the humanities. Reporting on the NEH also blurs the margins. The media focuses above all on NEH support for history or heritage-based programming, but the NEH also funds arts programming. Thus, humanities funding is not strictly discussed as “arts” and “humanities” in public media, nor is it treated solely in terms of traditional humanities subjects. These conclusions are drawn from a topic model of our Collection1 of 82,324 unique articles mentioning “humanities.”

For example, Topic #141 is representative of coverage of the spectrum of NEA funding in arts programs. Keywords include funding, grants and support for the arts, humanities, theater, and dance. Groups, children, and artists come together in museums, cultural organizations and nonprofits for education and performances. (See for example articles: a, b).

Topics #230 and #86 reflect funded public events related to history as heritage in museums and historical societies; through oral history and chautauqua performances and cultural exhibits, museums and displays. The media here sees that the NEH funds humanities, heritage and cultural preservation while providing public access to humanities education, research and entertainment (e.g., articles: c, d).

Should U.S. government funding agencies for the humanities and arts such as the NEH and NEA be concerned that a clearer understanding and narrative of how they support their areas has not emerged in the media? How can the story be clarified in journalism? (See also KF-7-2 for what areas of NEH support are visible in the media).

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Topic model of this collection: 250 topics.
Interesting sample topics in the model: 86, 141, 230.
Representative articles: a, b, c, d.
Evidentiary documentation for this key finding: Topic Model Interpretation Report

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