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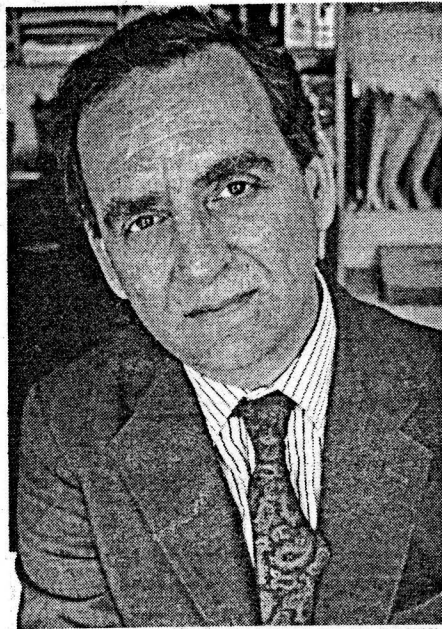
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Humanities Endowment Weighs Closer Supervision of Organizations That 'Re-Grant' Its Funds



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Humanities fund's Lynne V. Cheney: "Oversight is crucial. The standards have to be the same, there has to be openness, and there have to be objective criteria."



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Humanities Alliance's John Hammer: Re-grant agencies "can help develop a field in a way it would be difficult for the N.E.H. to do directly."

By **CHRISTOPHER MYERS**

WASHINGTON

The National Endowment for the Humanities is reviewing its relationship with "re-grant" agencies—organizations that take federal funds from the endowment and pass them on to scholars in the form of fellowships, grants, and stipends.

Endowment officials say they do not plan any radical changes in their ties to re-grant organizations. But they add that they worry that the N.E.H. may not exercise enough oversight over the groups, that some of the groups may have become too dependent on N.E.H. support, and that some of them may not make fellowship decisions based on objective criteria.

This year, about half of the roughly 900 fellowships awarded with endowment funds were distributed by re-grant agencies.

Lynne V. Cheney, chairwoman of the endowment, said of the review: "We just want to take a big look at it. There's no particular goal."

Mrs. Cheney said it was important for

the members of the National Council on the Humanities, "who see themselves very much as stewards of the humanities, to know where the money is going." She added that the council wanted to be sure that the re-granting agencies were not conducting work that the N.E.H. could or should be doing.

Said Leon R. Kass, vice-chairman of the National Council on the Humanities: "I think the general presumption is in favor of the N.E.H.'s exercising its own review and judgment on the awards it makes."

But he added that cases did exist where other organizations had knowledge of specific academic fields that made them better suited to manage the fellowships.

Controversy at Arts Endowment

Although the N.E.H. review of its grant policies was not spurred by any particular event, it coincided by chance with a recent controversy about similar practices of the National Endowment for the Arts. The arts endowment came under fire from members

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of Congress last month when an art work, partially financed by the N.E.A. through a re-granting organization, was widely assailed as offensive. The work is a photograph of an image of the crucified Jesus submerged in urine.

Because of that controversy and because both endowments are coming up together for Congressional reauthorization this year, N.E.H.'s re-granting review appears particularly timely. "In retrospect, we look brilliant," Mrs. Cheney said.

Mutually Beneficial Relations

Officials of both the N.E.H. and the re-grant organizations said that their groups had a mutually beneficial relationship: The endowment provides important support to the various fellowship foundations and the re-grant organizations distribute funds to a broad range of scholars.

Many N.E.H. observers say that the re-grant agencies help extend endowment money to fields and scholars that the agency on its own might not otherwise reach.

Said John Hammer, director of the National Humanities Alliance, a coalition of humanities organizations: "Some of the re-grant agencies are able to do very specialized work. They can pay sustained attention to an area of scholarship and help develop the field in a way it would be difficult for the N.E.H. to do directly."

This is particularly true of foundations that deal with international scholarship, he said. One such agency is the International Research and Exchanges Board, known as IREX, which promotes and supports American humanities and social-science research in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union as well as exchanges between scholars from the United

States and Eastern-bloc countries.

IREX, Mrs. Cheney said, does work that the endowment "just isn't in a position to do."

Both IREX and another re-grant agency that supports international scholarship, the Committee on Scholarly Communication with the People's Republic of China, have extensive experience in working with scholarly institutions in their respective countries, and would be difficult to replace, said Douglas Greenberg, vice-president of the American Council of Learned Societies, which also receives re-grant money from the endowment.

"It would be like reinventing the wheel," Mr. Greenberg said. "If you didn't have IREX and C.S.C.P.R.C., you'd need something just like them."

'Absolutely Critical Margin'

But if the endowment counts on the re-grant agencies to extend its money into hard-to-reach areas of scholarship, some of the re-grant agencies are even more dependent on the endowment.

IREX receives about \$1-million of its annual \$6-million budget from the N.E.H., and that is "an absolutely critical margin" said Allen Kassof, IREX executive director.

"We would go under without that money," he said.

And the endowment's support of re-grant organizations goes beyond money, he said, adding: "Their understanding and their appreciation of the work we do is very keen."

The largest of the re-granting agencies is the American Council of Learned Societies. That group, which has been receiving N.E.H. re-

grant money since 1966, will be independent of endowment support by 1991. The endowment has helped the council move toward independence by giving it a large matching grant to build its own endowment.

But that independence comes at a price: The council will probably have to cut its fellowship programs by 35 to 40 per cent after it is weaned from endowment support, Mr. Greenberg said.

He said, however, that the council had initiated the move to independence from the endowment, and that "there was absolutely no expectation" that the N.E.H. would pick up support of council programs that may have to be cut after 1991.

Thomas S. Kingston, assistant chairman for programs at the N.E.H.,

said that after 1991 the endowment money that ordinarily would have gone to the council would be used to sponsor additional fellowships.

Mr. Greenberg said it would be very difficult for most of the smaller re-grant organizations to cut loose from N.E.H. backing. "Not every re-grant organization is as favorably endowed as we are. I don't think it's realistic to think that the other organizations would survive if they were utterly cut off from the endowment's support," he said.

'They Might Strike Out'

Mrs. Cheney said no such sweeping cuts were being considered.

Still, endowment officials said they wanted to be sure that the organizations that receive re-grant funds

do not become too wedded to the N.E.H. or begin to view N.E.H. money as an entitlement.

Said Dr. Kass of the humanities council: "No organization has reason to believe that it can simply expect permanent support from the N.E.H. The thing is competitive, and people have to expect that at some point they might strike out."

The endowment's officials are also concerned about making sure that the re-grant foundations are reviewing fellowship candidates with the same kind of care and scrutiny that they say the endowment exercises in awarding its own fellowships.

"There's a very clear indication from the council that oversight is crucial," Mrs. Cheney said. "The standards have to be the same, there has

to be openness, and there have to be objective criteria."

She said most of the re-grant organizations have been "wonderful" in the past, but that she wanted to dispel a perception that re-grant fellowships are a "closed network, in which you have to belong to the club to get a fellowship."

Officials of re-grant agencies said their selection processes were at least as stringent as those of the N.E.H.

Mr. Kassof of IREX said that his organization, far from feeding into a restricted pool of scholars, had broadened the distribution of funds.

"IREX reaches all over the country and serves people at very small institutions as well as the larger ones," he said. "It's not a national organization serving an elite group. It's a mechanism to bring everybody into the picture."