



*Teaching American History Article*  
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Office of Innovation and Improvement

The Teaching American History (TAH) program is the largest Federal history education program in the country. Created in 2001, the TAH program is a professional development program for teachers of all levels (Grades K-12) of American history. The goal of the program is to raise student achievement by improving teachers' knowledge of and appreciation for traditional U.S. history. Grants are awarded on a competitive basis to Local Educational Agencies (LEAs or school districts) to develop and disseminate innovative and cohesive models of professional development in consultation with organizations with content expertise. Grants are made for a period of three to five years. Funding amounts vary according to school district size but normally average around \$974,061 for a three-year period for school districts with 20,000 to 300,000 students.

The TAH program is authorized under Title II, Part C, Subpart 4 of the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act* of 1965, as amended by the *No Child Left Behind Act* of 2001. Senator Robert Byrd (D-West Virginia), an ardent advocate of historical literacy, proposed the program as a result of his concerns regarding the preparation of history teachers across the nation. The program is one of five teacher quality grant programs administered in the Office of Innovation and Improvement at the U.S. Department of Education (Department). Funding for the program began in 2001 with \$50,000,000. Since then, funding has more than doubled and has remained steady with \$117,903,600 in Fiscal Year (FY) 2008 and \$119,790,000 in FY 2007. Grants have been awarded to LEAs in all 50 states, as well as the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands. Currently, there are almost 500 active grants.

The TAH program distinguishes itself in a number of ways from many Federally funded professional development programs. First, the program strongly emphasizes teacher mastery of subject matter knowledge. In fact, there is a statutory requirement for applicants to partner with an organization with content expertise: an institution of higher education, a library or museum, or a non-profit history or humanities organization. Second, the program emphasizes “traditional American history” as a concept to be clearly taught as part of the funded professional development activities. The definition of “traditional American history” was first published in the Federal Register Notice of Final Selection Criteria and Other Application Requirements of April 15, 2005, and it is incorporated in the Project Quality selection criterion in the annual competitions. Third, the program focuses on upgrading the content knowledge of elementary and secondary classroom teachers in targeted school districts, rather than on serving teachers from many school districts.

The format of most TAH projects includes an intensive summer institute, academic year workshops or colloquia, some form of mentoring or collaboration with Master Teachers, lesson plan development, and technology integration. The offerings may vary widely depending on the needs of the particular district or teachers. Variations include offering a master’s degree as part of the program, engaging in field studies to sites of historic significance, and conducting research at local or national archive or museum facilities. In addition, in recognition of the unique challenges faced by teachers of different grade levels, many projects have recently begun to offer “a menu of options” or levels of participation in order to serve the greatest number of elementary, middle, and high school teachers within their districts.

The majority of TAH projects cover the entire scope of American history beginning with pre-colonial America to the present day. A typical TAH project may cover the beginnings of American history to the antebellum period in Year 1; the Civil War, Reconstruction, and Westward Expansion in Year 2; and 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> Century histories in Year 3. However, some projects focus on specific periods of American history based on the results of a needs assessment or to coincide with historical topics tied to State or district standards and assessments. Whatever may be the historical content, it is normally delivered by an expert in the academic field, i.e., a historian, history professor, or noted author. Furthermore, the grants also assist teachers in developing their skills as historians by providing opportunities to work with primary sources, conduct original research, and interact with archivists, historical interpreters, and pedagogical experts. The many features of a TAH project, therefore, offer teachers opportunities to master historical subject matter, as well as enhance their historical thinking skills.

TAH projects partner with a great variety of government and non-government organizations, including for-profit and non-profit entities. The Smithsonian, the Library of Congress, the National Archives, the National Park Service, and the Presidential Libraries and Museums are quite active across a great number of TAH grants. Additionally, well-known historical and civic education organizations such as the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, Mount Vernon, the Bill of Rights Institute, and National History Day, to name only a few, are well-represented among TAH projects. More importantly for the TAH projects, however, is the opportunity to form lasting partnerships with local organizations that can provide sustainability of the grant's effects after Federal funding ends. Indeed, one of the most cited benefits of TAH projects is the relationship established between school districts and local colleges, universities, museums, and historical societies that had no formal contact prior to the grant.

As a condition of receiving grant funds, TAH projects are required to submit Annual Performance Reports on a yearly basis and a Final Performance Report 90 days after the conclusion of the grant. They are also required to respond to the TAH program's Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA) measures. Currently, the program uses measures of success related to increases in student achievement and teacher content knowledge in American history and participation rates in professional development activities.

In addition to ensuring high-quality history professional development through the awarding and monitoring of grants, the TAH program is also involved in a number of initiatives to improve history education and historical knowledge at a national level. The most important of these initiatives is the creation of the National History Education Clearinghouse in 2007 (<http://teachinghistory.org/>). The Clearinghouse was created under contract to the Department by the Center for History and New Media (CHNM) at George Mason University. The CHNM's partners in this endeavor are the American Historical Association and the Stanford University History Education Group. The Clearinghouse is designed to provide K-12 U.S. history teachers with access to resources and materials that enhance American history education in the classroom. The site builds on and disseminates valuable lessons learned by more than 800 funded TAH projects. The site contains a wealth of information on history content, teaching materials and practices, professional development, and research.

Additionally, the TAH program also serves as the lead office for the Congressionally mandated commemoration of Constitution Day and Citizenship Day annually on September 17. In 2008, the program sponsored a special event that included opening remarks by Deputy Secretary Ray Simon and an educational presentation by Lauren Cristella, Education Manager for the National Constitution Center. In addition to Constitution Day celebrations, the program is an active partner in the Advisory Council for Historic Preservation and has recently engaged in talks with the staff of the Abraham Lincoln Bicentennial Commission to explore possibilities for collaboration. Further, the program staff has an active presence in professional history organizations by attending and presenting at conferences such as those sponsored by the American Historical Association, the Organization of American Historians, the National Council on History Education, and others. Finally, through numerous site visits to projects each year, as well as the annual TAH Project Directors Meeting, the TAH staff remain on the cutting edge of issues of vital importance to the history education community.

It is the goal of the TAH program to transform history education in the United States by improving the quality of its history teachers. Indeed, in many districts, the TAH projects represent the only professional development program available to history teachers. By assisting teachers in acquiring deep content knowledge and training them in the skills of professional historians, TAH grant participants are able to deliver high quality history instruction that is engaging and meaningful to their students, resulting in higher student achievement and better prepared citizens for our democratic Republic.

For more information, visit the TAH program webpage at <http://www.ed.gov/programs/teachinghistory/index.html>.