



Voices from the Prairie

A publication of Humanities Iowa • Winter 2025



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HUMANITIES IOWA MISSION STATEMENT

The mission of Humanities Iowa is to promote understanding and appreciation of the people, communities, cultures, and stories of importance to Iowa and the nation.

Join other Iowans and support Humanities Iowa. Donations are tax-deductible to the extent permitted by law. Humanities Iowa also accepts gifts of stock or securities. To make a donation or receive more information please contact our office at (319) 335-4149 or info@humanitiesiowa.org, or visit our website at www.humanitiesiowa.org.

ABOUT VOICES FROM THE PRAIRIE

Voices from the Prairie is published annually by Humanities Iowa and distributed to its friends and interested Iowans.

CONNECT WITH US

Keep up with Humanities Iowa's work year-round by following us on Facebook, Instagram, X, and LinkedIn at [@humanitiesiowa](https://www.humanitiesiowa.org).

Find news and information on speakers, grants, and ways to get involved with Humanities Iowa on our website at www.humanitiesiowa.org.

SUBMISSIONS

Would you like to contribute to the next issue of *Voices from the Prairie*? Contact grace-altenhofen@uiowa.edu to learn more.

COVER

Pictured: Artwork in the dome of the Greene County Courthouse in Jefferson, Iowa, which photographer David Plowden captured in 2009 and included in his collection *David Plowden's Iowa*.

Learn more on Page 8. *Photo by Grace Altenhofen*

Voices from the Prairie

WINTER 2025

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Letter from the President

Dear friends of Humanities Iowa,

As we come to the close of another year, I find myself reflecting on all we've achieved this year and looking ahead to the work that is ahead of us. Thanks to the hard work of our staff, Board, volunteers, partners, and supporters, Humanities Iowa has continued to bring the humanities to life across our state: from art exhibits at local libraries to our Speakers Bureau to our mini-grants and more. Each year, our programs and grants reach thousands of Iowans, helping to strengthen cultural understanding, civic dialogue, and the shared stories that connect us.

At the same time, our work has taken on renewed urgency. You may be aware that the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) and other federal agencies are facing legal and funding challenges—developments that have affected humanities programs nationwide and here in Iowa. We were fortunate to receive additional funding from the Mellon Foundation this year, which allowed us to continue operations when our funding had been cut completely. Thankfully, our NEH funding was partially restored and we are cautiously optimistic that it will be fully restored in the coming years.

Our work is grounded in the belief that the humanities truly flourish where community, culture, and connection meet. I invite you to join us: attend a Speakers Bureau event, begin the conversation in your town, consider applying for a mini-grant, and share the stories that matter most in your corner of Iowa. Your voice helps us ensure that every story has a place, and every person has a chance to engage.

Thank you for being part of this journey, for your ongoing support, and for believing that history, culture, and community matter now more than ever.

Warmly,

Dave Bright

President, Humanities Iowa Board of Directors

Rooted in Community

How the Humanities Iowa Board of Directors Gives Back



At Humanities Iowa, our mission is rooted in community, and that spirit of service extends well beyond our work as an organization. Here's a glimpse at how the people behind Humanities Iowa give back to their communities.

Dave Bright, President

Dave is active in the local community through volunteering and board service. In addition to serving as the President of the Humanities Iowa Board of Directors, he serves on the boards of the Cedar Rapids Museum of Art (Treasurer), Iowa Museum Association, Iowa Volunteer Lawyers for the Arts (President), Surface Design Association, and YMCA Camp Wapsie (Chair). He previously served on the boards of the Bur Oak Land Trust, Friends of the Animal Center Foundation (President), the Iowa City Public Library Friends Foundation (President), Legion Arts, the University of Iowa Stanley Museum of Art, and the YMCA of the Cedar Rapids Metropolitan Area.

Jan Warren, Treasurer

Jan works in the University of Iowa's Office

of Community Engagement, where she helps connect students, faculty, and community partners through collaborative projects. She teaches a First-Year Seminar that visits eight local nonprofits, introducing students to community issues and guiding them in developing community-engaged projects that address causes they are passionate about.

Cyndi Sweet, Secretary

Cyndi is involved in her local community as a volunteer at the Cedar Falls Historical Society (currently working in the archives), and in the museum community as a volunteer for the Iowa Museum Association (currently focused on the Teaching Iowa History program).

Monica Challenger

Monica Challenger is an electrical engineer and long-standing advocate for science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) education. She earned her Bachelor of Science in Electrical Engineering from the University of Massachusetts Lowell and has spent years working in the aerospace industry. As a STEM advocate, she has developed and presented workshops, mentored students, and supported pathways that help broaden

access to technical fields. She twice stepped away from her engineering career to raise her children, while continuing her community service without interruption, and later returned to engineering and project leadership with the same steady commitment to service.

Monica plays a significant role in her community through her extensive leadership and service commitments across multiple institutions. She is serving in her second term as President of the Cedar Rapids Public Library Board of Trustees and is the first African American to hold this position in the library's 128-year history. She serves on the Cedar Rapids Public Library Foundation Board, provides steady guidance on the advisory committee for the Sixth District Department of Corrections, and serves as a Regional Representative for the Morehouse College Parents Council. She is also a member of the Tau Psi Omega chapter of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority Incorporated.

Sherry Gupta

Sherry works to strengthen collaboration among teams and communities across the state of Iowa. She does this by volunteering at CultureALL, the organization she founded 20 years ago. With a dynamic network of

cultural teaching artists and presenters, she guides Iowans to appreciate their neighbors and create a community where flourishing can be mutual – elevating the quality of life for ALL.

Kelly Baum

Kelly Baum is the John and Mary Pappajohn Director and CEO of the Des Moines Art Center. She is a member of Mainframe's Board of Directors and is a participant in the Nexus Women's Executive Alliance, the Rotary Club of Des Moines, and the Greater Des Moines Committee.

Gaye Shannon Burnett

Gaye Shannon Burnett, a US Army Veteran, artist of the Black Diaspora, and community leader from the Quad Cities, co-founded the Azubuike African American Council for the Arts. With over thirty years of experience, Gaye has been instrumental in drama, art, cultural programs, and Black History education for youth in the Quad Cities. Her military service provided her with discipline, leadership, and organizational skills, which is evident in her strategic planning and project management. She is dedicated to amplifying underrepresented voices and creating inclusive opportunities for all Iowans to engage with the arts and humanities.

Janet Flanagan

Janet Flanagan is not retired, but redirected after a long career in communications and fundraising. She is a board member of the Siouxland Medical Education Foundation, The Tolerance Alliance and Rotary Club of Sioux City. In addition she is a Court Appointed Special Advocate for Children who are abused or neglected and has recently been appointed by the governor to the Iowa Child Advocacy Board.

Janet also serves as a docent at the Holocaust Rails exhibit in Sioux City, volunteers at the Sioux City Public Museum's Research Center, and contributes articles to the American Red Cross Northwest Iowa-Northeast Nebraska chapter.

William Friedrichs

Bill Friedrichs is on the board of State Historical Society, Inc., a private nonprofit, where he has served for fifteen years. The organization dates to 1857 and works to preserve, protect, and further Iowa history by supporting historical collections, exhibitions, lectures, and research.

Kevin Mason

Kevin Mason is committed to strengthening the communities he calls home. Since moving to the Cedar Valley, he's jumped into local service with enthusiasm, volunteering with organizations including Fortepan Iowa, the African American Boxcar Museum of Waterloo, and the Grout Museum. Previously, he made a deep investment in community heritage work through the Forest City Historic Preservation Commission, the Winnebago Historical Society, Heritage Park of North Iowa, Wright on the Park in Mason City, and the Forest City Rotary Club. His service extends well beyond the local level. At the state level, Mason serves on the Board of Trustees for the State Historical Society of Iowa and has contributed to projects ranging from the Iowa DNR's Inkpaduta Canoe Trail initiative to leadership roles with Preservation Iowa and the Iowa Cultural Leadership Cohort. Regionally and nationally, he continues to support public history and scholarship as Treasurer of the Society of Historians of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era and as co-host of the Middle West Review's Heartland History podcast. Across all these roles, Mason strives to build stronger, more connected communities through history, stewardship, and public engagement.

Christine Shea

Christine Shea serves on the board for Iowa City Foreign Relations Council and also collaborates closely with Spanish teachers at Iowa City high schools who work with Spanish Heritage Speaker students. Christine has also worked as an interpreter for Iowa City Compassion.

Fredo Rivera

Fredo is passionate about the intersection of pedagogy and community engagement. They work closely with Grinnell College's Office of Civic Education and Innovation to incorporate community engagement into their courses, connecting students to community leaders, organizations and spaces both within Grinnell and throughout Iowa. Fredo's courses on art and architecture have connected them with museums and cultural institutions throughout the state, and they have participated in public programming and engagement with several art institutions across the state. They hope to continue to work collaboratively across institutions, to support public forms arts and humanities.

Esther Mackintosh

Esther's community activities in Washington, DC, are primarily focused on the League of Women Voters (LWVDC), with which she has been actively involved since 2020. This year, she has served on both the LWVDC Nominating Committee and the Full Rights Committee, which focuses on pursuit of statehood for DC and representation in Congress for the citizens of DC. Esther has also taken part in voter registration and engagement activities, including registering new voters at monthly Naturalization Ceremonies. She is also a member of her neighborhood Indivisible chapter, serving as co-coordinator of a Calls with Friends project for contacting members of Congress on issues of interest and concern.

In Iowa, Esther recently completed her fourth and final term on the board of directors of Morningside University, which included three years as board chair.

Dawn Terpstra

Dawn's community involvement centers on expanding access to the literary arts and nurturing creative expression. As President of the Iowa Poetry Association, she has helped guide an organization that brings people together through poetry publications, workshops, poetry slams, and statewide poetry events. Her work as a poet and editor of a poetry journal allows her to champion diverse voices and cultivate space for meaningful dialogue. Drawing on experience in education and communications, she's committed to fostering connection, and encouraging lifelong learning.

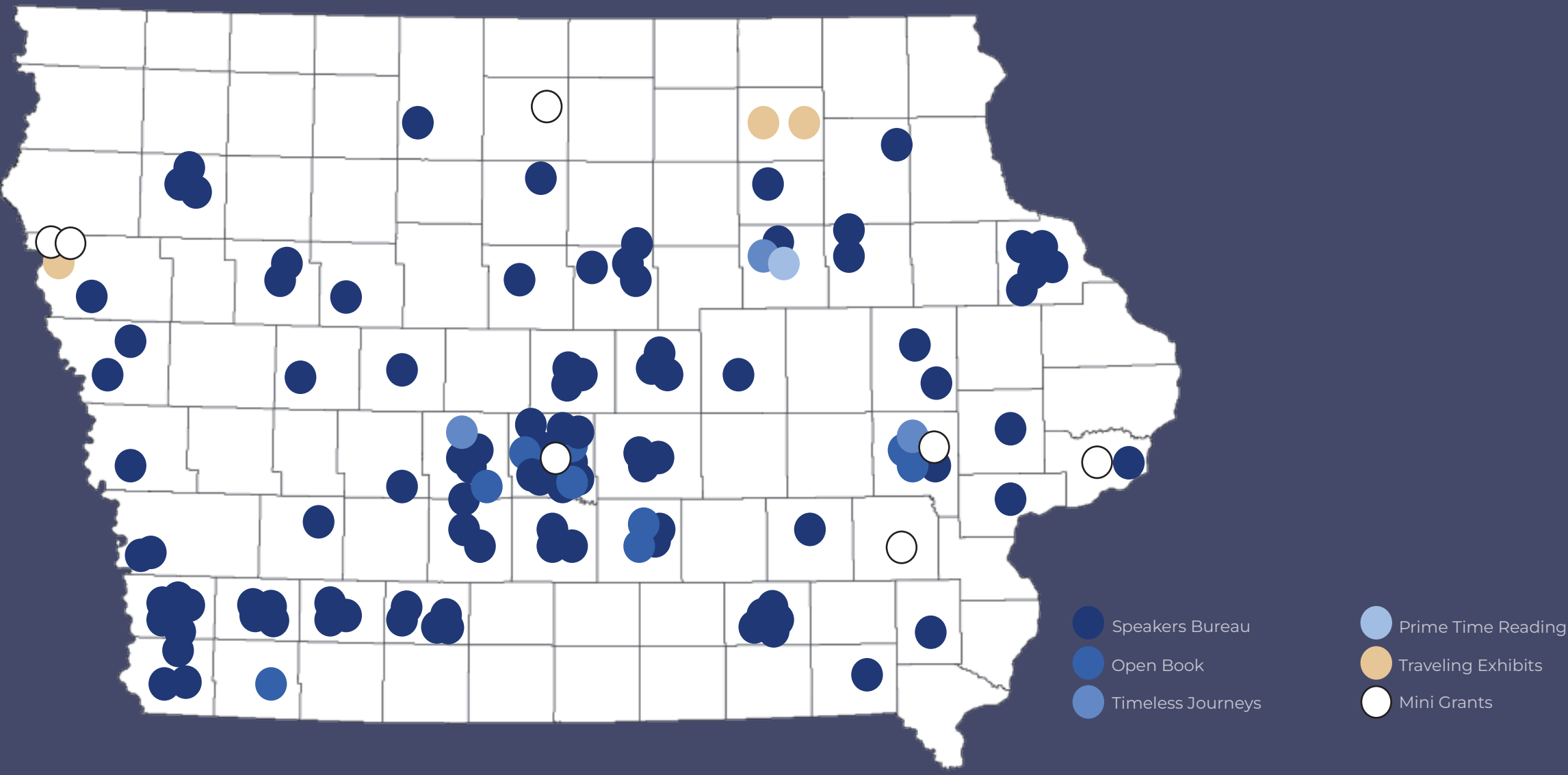
Linda Shenk

Linda dedicates much of her time to working with farmers and landowners on adopting practices that improve water quality, soil health, and pollinator habitat. She also volunteers at Food at First, her church, and in her neighborhood as well as provides space for a local Community Supported Agriculture group.

Learn more about HI's Board of Directors at humanitiesiowa.org/board-of-directors.

Engaging Communities Across Iowa

A small snapshot of Humanities Iowa's work across the state



For over 50 years, Humanities Iowa has been bringing Iowans together through programs that inspire curiosity, spark dialogue, and deepen understanding of our shared history as Iowans. From free public lectures and performances to immersive learning experiences, we connect communities with the humanities in ways that are meaningful, accessible, and help foster connections.

Statewide Reach

Our programs touch every corner of Iowa:

Thousands of Iowans attend HI-sponsored events each year, from small communities to larger cities.

Audiences span generations and backgrounds, with programs designed to be welcoming and accessible to all.

Educational initiatives reach students in classrooms and libraries, sparking curiosity and lifelong learning.

Supporting Local Projects Through Grants

In addition to statewide programs, Humanities Iowa helps organizations bring humanities-based initiatives to their own communities through Mini Grants, including these FY2025-26 Mini Grant projects:

The Lewis and Clark Interpretive Center's **2026 Humanities Series** will offer free, public Sunday programs in Sioux City featuring historians, artists, musicians, and cultural presenters.

The Garner Chamber of Commerce's **A Legacy of Service & Strength** project will host community conversations to create recorded oral histories for preservation at the local library.

UI Arts Share's **Barberman: The Alexander Clark Story** will develop a theater production about Muscatine civil rights leader Alexander Clark, with performances and post-performance discussions.

The Iowa Department of Natural Resources' **The Wild Horizon: Art, Careers, and Conservation** program will combine art, storytelling, and conservation education, connecting students with Iowa's ecological heritage.

Speakers Bureau

Humanities Iowa's Speakers Bureau brings speakers covering a wide range of subjects into communities across the state. In 2025 alone, our speakers:

- Presented over **130** events in more than 80 communities across the state.
- Reached audiences of **15-150+**, with topics ranging from Iowa history to art and music.
- Provided engaging experiences like Civil War presentations, film discussions, and public history programs that encourage conversation and reflection.



A student looks at historical images with Western Home Communities residents as part of the Timeless Journeys program.

Timeless Journeys

A partnership between Humanities Iowa and the University of Northern Iowa, Timeless Journeys connects UNI students with older adults — including those living with dementia — to explore historic images and memories. Each semester, participants collaborate to create original intergenerational performances inspired by the stories these photos spark.

Through this program, students gain hands-on experience in storytelling and empathy-building, while older adults have a meaningful space to share their voices and lived experiences.

Each semester's performances reach **2,000+** Iowans through a combination of in-person audiences and widely shared virtual recordings, extending the impact far beyond the stage.

Speaker O.J. Fargo presents at a Speakers Bureau event at the Missouri Valley Public Library in November 2025.

Get Involved with Humanities Iowa



Humanities Iowa's work is possible because Iowans believe in the power of stories, history, and connection. Whether you're a community leader, educator, or someone who simply loves Iowa, there are many ways to be part of our work.

Host a Speaker: Bring engaging humanities programs to your town through our Speakers Bureau and Open Book programs.

Apply for a Grant: Support local history projects, cultural events, or community storytelling initiatives.

Attend an Event: Join us for readings, performances, and community conversations happening across the state.

Together, we can keep inspiring curiosity and strengthening Iowa's community connections.

See Humanities Iowa's Traveling Photo Exhibits



"Sherman Township Near Knierim, Calhoun County"
Photo by David Plowden, 2004

For more than half a century, photographers David Plowden and Michael Harker have documented the spirit of rural America through black-and-white photography. Each turned to Iowa for inspiration in his own way—capturing not only its landscapes and architecture, but the enduring character of the people and communities shaped by the land.

Plowden, celebrated for his stark and timeless images of the American landscape, found in Iowa a reflection of the nation's broader story. His photographs of small

towns, silos, and grain elevators reveal a place both resilient and changing—a landscape where progress and memory coexist.

Harker's work, by contrast, focuses on the structures that have long defined Iowa's horizon. In the Barns of Iowa collection, his minimalist approach—one photograph per barn—preserves the individuality of each building and honors the craftsmanship of those who built them. Paired with written narratives by historian Loren Horton, his images spotlight the pride and heritage of Iowa's farming traditions.

Through Humanities Iowa's traveling exhibits, David Plowden's Iowa and Barns of Iowa offer a portrait of the state's rural history and traditions seen through two distinct yet deeply complementary lenses.

Next year, the exhibits will continue their journey across the state—David Plowden's Iowa at the Sioux City Art Center and Barns of Iowa at libraries across Iowa—inviting Iowans to rediscover the familiar landscapes that define home.

David Plowden's Iowa

This classic David Plowden collection will be housed at the Sioux City Art Center.



David Plowden's Iowa captures the essence of the state through quiet yet powerful black-and-white photographs. From weathered grain elevators and farmhouses to patchwork fields and dusty roads, Plowden's images reveal both the endurance and fragility of the Midwestern landscape.

Each photograph invites viewers to pause and reflect on the subtle beauty of ordinary places—small towns, silos, and open fields that form the backbone of Iowa's identity. The collection offers a contemplative portrait of a region shaped by time, change, and its own history.

David Plowden's Iowa will be on view at the Sioux City Art Center in 2026.

"Greene County Courthouse, Jefferson, IA" Photo by David Plowden, 2009

Barns of Iowa

The Barns of Iowa exhibit by Michael Harker will be displayed at local libraries across Iowa.

In Barns of Iowa, photographer Michael Harker turns his lens toward one of the most recognizable—and rapidly disappearing—symbols of the rural Midwest. Each photograph in this collection of twenty 11 x 18-inch black-and-white prints captures a single, defining view of a barn: a sunlit facade, a weathered beam, or the curve of a roof against the sky.

Harker's minimalist approach gives every structure its own voice, while historian Loren Horton's accompanying text deepens the connection between image and place. Together, they celebrate the craftsmanship, perseverance, and pride rooted in Iowa's farming traditions.

Barns of Iowa traveled to the Nashua Public Library in November 2025 and Upham Memorial Public Library in December 2025. Stay tuned on Humanities Iowa's social media and events calendar to see where the Barns of Iowa exhibit will travel next.



"Roof and Cupola" Photo by Michael Harker, 2001

Elevating Youth Voices in Poetry

Cedar Falls High School senior Daniel Somotochukwu Umemezie plans statewide impact during his tenure as the 2025-26 Iowa Student Poet Ambassador.

When Cedar Falls High School senior Daniel Somotochukwu Umemezie first picked up a poetry book as a child, he didn't imagine it would lead him to a statewide platform for amplifying young voices.

Now serving as the 2025–26 Iowa Student Poet Ambassador, Daniel is using his passion for words to inspire connection and creativity among young Iowans. From public readings to long-term goals around founding a youth poetry council in the state, he's determined to foster a community for young poets in Iowa.

Humanities Iowa's Grace Altenhofen sat down with Daniel to discuss his journey with poetry, what the ambassadorship means to him, and how he hopes to strengthen the future of Iowa's youth literary community.

Q: Could you share a bit about your background and how you first became interested in poetry?
A: I got into poetry when I was about six or seven...I read a book about poetry and thought, "That seems fun." Children's Day came around that year and I decided to write a poem for my friends, and since then, I've written poetry. I kind of fell out of it when I moved from Nigeria to the United States—I took a bit of a hiatus from writing, about two years. The four years I've spent in America have been coming back to writing poetry. I was pushed towards it by my English teacher...so I got back into it, and it's been great, it's been an awesome journey.

Q: What was your reaction finding out you had been named Iowa Student Poet Ambassador?
A: On finding out that I became the ambassador, I was elated, I was overjoyed. Really, can't put into words how much it felt for me to be able to be the one that amplifies the voice of Iowa youth poetry. It's an honor I carry every day with me.

Q: What have been some of your favorite moments in this role so far?
A: I would say probably the two biggest ones that have really stood out to me would be All Iowa Reads—I got to interview the authors of award-winning books, one being Rez Ball and the other being Jawbreaker. And those were amazing. Christina Wyman, the author of Jawbreaker, was absolutely amazing, and so was Byron Graves, the author of Rez Ball. I mean, it was just really eye opening to talk to artists like myself and just kind of listen to their world views and their views on the work that they brought into this world. It was an amazing experience. And then I was in a workshop held by the IPA for young poets as well. And that was really amazing to kind of shape the minds of young poets across Iowa—it was a great event.

"You have a voice that's very, very much unique from everyone else, and you should learn to be confident in that voice."

Q: You're also working to develop an Iowa Youth Poetry Council. What kind of feedback are you hearing?
A: Everyone kind of came to the consensus that this is really something that would be needed in Iowa, as a lot of times, Iowa youth are kind of scattered around, in the sense that there's not a lot of ways to connect to those youth out in the more rural regions of Iowa. There's always going to be youth poets in Iowa City who are informed, there's always going to be youth poets in the bigger cities like Cedar Falls and Waterloo who are going to be informed, but how do we get to people in Sioux City? How do we get to people in Decorah? How do we get to people across other parts of the state? And that's something that I believe everyone said

was really needed as we kind of elevate youth poetry in Iowa.

Q: What's your long-term vision for a youth poetry council?
A: I would love to see the youth poetry council become a beacon to all young writers across Iowa that they have a community that is able to support their growth in whatever capacity possible, that they have a community that's able to stand with them on certain issues and certain matters. And that's something I think everyone needs, not just the youth poets, but just people knowing that there's a group of people that stand together for this, and I think that's something that is really needed in our community.

Q: What do you hope people take away from your time as Poet Ambassador?
A: I would say the biggest thing I want to leave with people is that even the smallest iota of an action can bring about change. I mean coming from where I was, that hiatus, that period of self inquiry, to come from that point to who I am now, it's been a journey that I would really want everyone to kind of take a piece with them and just see that even through the dark times, even in the good times, there's definitely people out there that could use your voice. Because there's a lot of people that don't know how to use their voice. There's a lot of people that don't know they can use their voice. And I think getting to the point where poetry is an avenue for people to be able to use their voice in the most powerful ways, I think that's something I would want everyone to take away from my time in this role.

Q: What advice would you give to other young poets just starting out?
A: You have a voice that's very, very much unique from everyone else, and you should learn to be confident in that voice. That's something that I would say to every poet I would ever meet, is getting confident in your own voice. There's a difference, I would

say, between emulation and copying. If you hope to emulate something, you hope to carry parts of that with you, and emulating people's voices in certain aspects definitely helps the development and expression of your own voice. But I think at a certain point we need to be able to come into our own voice and be confident in what we're saying and our values and what we stand for. And I think that's something that I would tell every youth poet I ever come in contact with.

Q: Anything else you'd like to share?
A: I am an 18 year old. I definitely know what it feels like to be stressed out by the college experience, by high school life, by everything that wants to wear you down. And I just think that sometimes taking a break, even as hard as it might feel...I often have to remind myself that I can take a break. That's something I have to constantly remind myself to do. And I would say that is the message I should be preaching to every youth—take the time to rest, take the time to treat yourself, take the time to be yourself.

For more information about the Iowa Student Poet Ambassador Program, visit engagement.uiowa.edu/ispa.

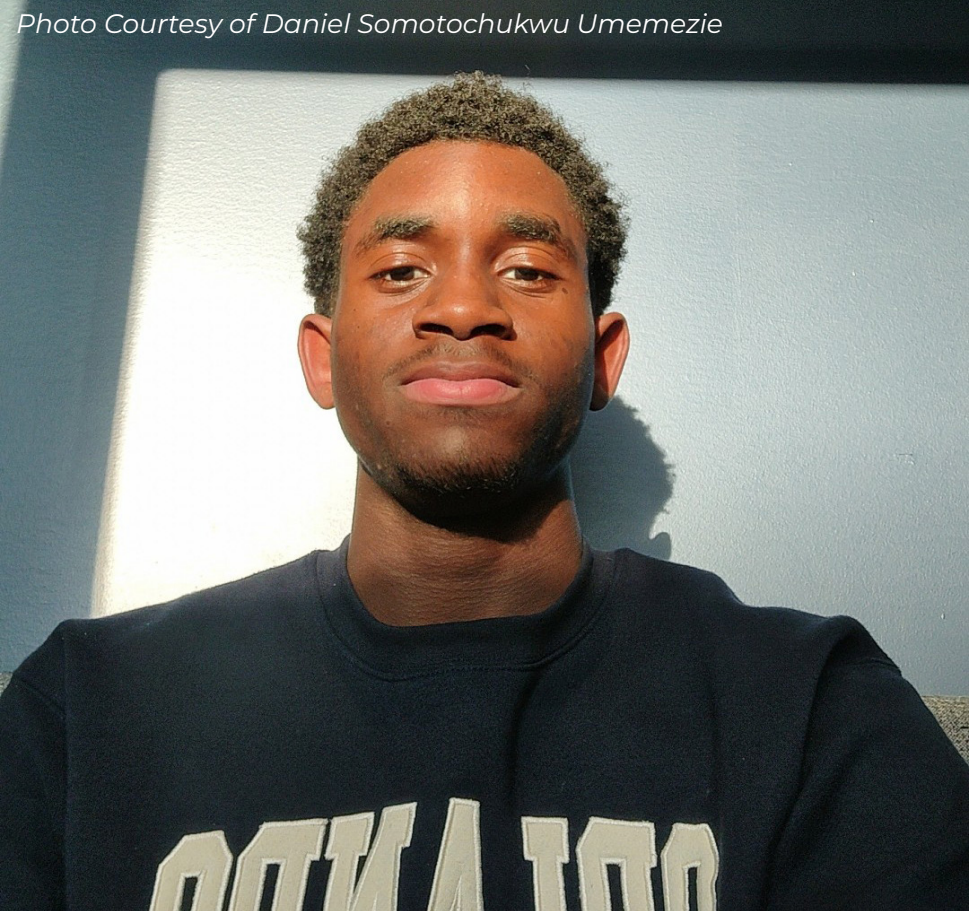


Photo Courtesy of Daniel Somotochukwu Umemezie

When Mud Softens

by Daniel Somotochukwu Umemezie

*She kneels where he knelt.
Trowel-teeth bite the earth, its handle still cool
in her coat-pocket hands.*

*Without his shoulders
the furrows wander, crooked;
frost freckles the steel.*

*A robin listens, head aslant,
for the hidden worms
cold blade wakes.*

*She settles each bulb
papery and feathered into black crumbs.
Smelling of leaf-smoke,*

*whispering his given name into every furrow.
Snow powders the ridges.
Her breath unwinds, drifting like smoke above the beds.*

*Below, the bulbs bask in the wake of dusk.
When the mud softens and boots sink,
green will nick the air.*

*She rises, brushing grit from her knees.
Folds the trowel homeward,
then walks.*

Read Like a Poet

A selection of poets and works recommended by Iowa Student Poet Ambassador Daniel

James Baldwin
Sonny's Blues
Notes of a Native Son

Tyehimba Jess
Olio

Langston Hughes
The Weary Blues

Ocean Vuong
Time Is a Mother

Danez Smith
Don't Call Us Dead: Poems

Claudia Rankine
Citizen: An American Lyric

Ann Carson
Men in the Off Hours

Finding Hope in Changing Nonprofit Funding Streams

Build Resilience Through Local Support

As federal funding streams face uncertainty, many nonprofits are discovering that strong local partnerships can help sustain their work — and even open new opportunities for growth. Here are a few strategies organizations across Iowa can use to strengthen their community impact:

- **Engage your neighbors:** Host community events, open houses, or volunteer days to share your mission and connect with supporters.
- **Partner creatively:** Collaborate with local businesses and nonprofits on programs, exhibits, or joint fundraising efforts.
- **Leverage volunteers:** From administrative support to program delivery, volunteers not only expand capacity — they can also become champions for your work.
- **Tell your story:** Regularly share success stories and updates through social media, newsletters, and local press to build awareness and goodwill.

Partner Spotlight: CultureALL

CultureALL, a Des Moines-based nonprofit, fosters inclusivity and cultural appreciation across Iowa through programs that engage communities in meaningful experiences.

Their Open Book program, a partnership with Humanities Iowa, invites individual “Books” to share personal stories with small groups of “Readers,” exploring themes like identity, faith, immigration, disability, and resilience. By creating spaces for dialogue and connection, CultureALL demonstrates how local partnerships and storytelling can strengthen local communities and build understanding.

Learn more at cultureall.org.

by Heather Plucar and Grace Altenhofen

For many nonprofit organizations, 2025 has been a lesson in adaptability. Shifting priorities among funders, increased competition for grants, and the current economic and political climate have forced organizations of all sizes to rethink what sustainability really means. Across Iowa and beyond, many have found themselves asking the same question: How do we continue to serve our communities when the funding landscape keeps changing?

In late January 2025, nonprofits across the U.S. began receiving federal notices of government funding freezes and, in some instances, full funding cancellations. Litigation followed — some successful, some not — as nonprofit organizations worked to regain their federal funding. Several months later, a federal government shutdown once again threatened the stability of nonprofit funding nationwide.

While the uncertainty can be daunting, it can also be an opportunity for growth and collaboration. Nonprofits that once relied primarily on federal or state funding are now discovering the power of building local partnerships and diversifying their support networks. By engaging directly with their communities — through local businesses, donors, volunteers, and civic groups — organizations are creating stronger, more resilient foundations for their work.

Humanities Iowa has seen firsthand how local partnerships and grassroots support can sustain and even strengthen vital cultural and educational programs in uncertain times. From the Iowa Poet Laureate program in partnership with the Iowa Arts Council, to the Open Book partnership with CultureALL, Humanities Iowa continues to see the greatest success in programs founded in partnership. These programs remind us that funding streams may change, but the human desire to learn, connect, and help each other remains constant.

In uncertain times, it’s critical to focus on relationships rather than solely focusing on revenue. Nonprofits that invest time

in listening to their communities and developing relationships find new allies in unexpected places. A partnership with a local arts organization might lead to a joint exhibit. A collaboration with a business could create an internship program or shared event. Even a single volunteer with a new idea can make a lasting impact on a nonprofit organization.

Of course, federal and state funding remains an important part of the picture for many nonprofits. But as many organizations have learned, those funding sources can fluctuate with economic trends and policy priorities. Building a broad base of local support helps ensure that when one stream narrows, others can fill the gap. It’s about creating a mosaic of support — small gifts, community collaborations, and meaningful partnerships that, together, sustain the work that matters most.

For organizations across Iowa, the humanities offer a special kind of lesson in resilience. They remind us of the shared values, histories, and stories that connect us — stories that have survived decades of varying economic and political landscapes, and will continue to survive for years to come.

If your organization is seeking to build partnerships and you think Humanities Iowa would be a good partner for you, please reach out and Humanities Iowa staff would be happy to talk. From grant funding and speaker programs to collaborative storytelling and public engagement initiatives, we’re here to support Iowans who believe in the power of ideas to bring people together.

As the nonprofit funding ecosystem evolves, one thing remains constant: hope. Hope in the creativity of our communities, the generosity of our neighbors, and the enduring strength of the partnerships to light the way forward. Together, organizations and community members can continue supporting the important work of nonprofits across the state and country.

To learn more about Humanities Iowa’s current partners, visit humanitiesiowa.org.

Humanities Iowa Welcomes New Staff and Board Members

Esther Mackintosh

Director, Board of Directors



“When I was asked if I would be interested in joining the Humanities Iowa board, my immediate response was joy at the prospect of being involved in something that combined two strong forces in my life: my love of Iowa and my commitment to the humanities.

I had followed the activities of Humanities Iowa for many years and was impressed with all that this organization was able to do, working with limited resources but endless commitment, to enrich the lives of Iowans. I consider it an honor to be able to be part of that effort.”

Alfredo Rivera

Director, Board of Directors



“I joined Humanities Iowa because I think art and culture play a critical role in creating a better society.

I admire how Humanities Iowa aims to expand the humanities to audiences far and wide, rural and urban.”

Dawn Sly-Terpstra

Director, Board of Directors



“As a poet, I value serving on the Humanities Iowa Board because it lets me support and amplify the voices that shape our shared story.

Poetry teaches us to listen. This board gives me the opportunity to champion the cultural work and artistic expressions that keep important conversations alive across our state.”

Grace Altenhofen

Communications & Grants Director



“Being on the staff of Humanities Iowa feels like a dream come true.

Now more than ever, the humanities are so important as a means of connection and preserving the stories and history that make us who we are. It’s an honor to help further this work in our state.”

Monica Challenger

Vice President, Board of Directors



“I joined Humanities Iowa because I believe the humanities help communities understand their own stories and build stronger connections with one another.

My years of board service supporting science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) learning as an engineer, literacy, and community engagement have shown me how access to these experiences can uplift Iowans of every age and background. I am honored to support work that brings these opportunities to communities across our state.”

Learn more about HI's Board of Directors:



Scan to meet the Iowans who guide our mission.

Learn more about Humanities Iowa’s Board of Directors and their commitment to strengthening communities across the state.

Mini Grants Awarded 2025-26

Lewis & Clark Interpretive Center - \$3,000

The Lewis and Clark Interpretive Center in Sioux City is launching a new Humanities Series in 2026, featuring speakers, artists, and performers celebrating culture, history, and the arts.

Garner Chamber of Commerce - \$2,300

The Garner Chamber of Commerce will launch “A Legacy of Service & Strength: Community Reflections in Garner,” a series of public conversations exploring how veterans, first responders, caregivers, educators, and volunteers shape their community. These recorded reflections will be preserved at the local library for future generations.

UI Arts Share - \$3,000

UI Arts Share will bring “Barberman: The Alexander Clark Story” to life as a full theatrical production in Muscatine. The play highlights the legacy of civil rights leader Alexander Clark and will be filmed so students across Iowa can engage with this important history.

Lewis & Clark Trail Heritage Foundation - \$2,967

The Lewis and Clark Trail Heritage Foundation’s “Undaunted Reality” project uses virtual reality to bring history to life along the Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail, helping thousands of students gain access to an immersive history experience.

Sioux City NAACP - \$3,000

The Sioux City NAACP will host “Celebrating Coretta Scott King: Her Story and Songs,” a narrated concert sharing Coretta’s life as an artist and activist. Opera singers and two choirs will bring her story to life, followed by a post-performance conversation around accompanying readings.

Iowa Department of Natural Resources - \$3,000

“The Wild Horizon: Art, Careers, and the Future of Conservation,” a humanities-based conservation program using art, storytelling, and student-created work to explore Iowa’s ecological heritage.

Council Conducted Partnerships 2025-26

CEDAR FALLS

Iowa Museum Association

DAVENPORT

Azubuike African American Council for the Arts

SIOUX CITY

The Tolerance Alliance

DES MOINES

Poetry Palooza
Sankofa Literary & Empowerment Group

IOWA CITY

Iowa Student Poet Ambassador
Iowa City Foreign Relations Council (ICFRC)

Statement of Activity

for the year ending October 31, 2025

ASSETS

Total for Bank Accounts	623,683.78
Total for Accounts Receivable	1,266.41
Total for Other Current Assets	4,172.39
Total for Current Assets	629,122.58

Total for Fixed Assets	249,910.61
Total for Investment Fund	-659.37
Prepaid Insurance	-96.42
Total for Other Assets	755.79

Total for Assets	878,277.40
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LIABILITIES & EQUITY

Total for Accounts Payable	63,730.45
Total for Credit Cards	-4,483.44
Total for Payroll Liabilities	18,349.93
Total for Other Current Liabilities	-53,956.60
Total for Current Liabilities	5,290.41

Total for Liabilities	5,290.41
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3000 Unrestricted Net Assets	179,474.52
3100 Unrestricted Bd. Desig. Net Assets	716,527.99
Permanently Restricted Net Assets	128,000.00
Retained Earnings	-607,770.24
Net Income	456,754.72

Total for Equity	872,986.99
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Total for Liabilities & Equity	878,277.40
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