



## Minnesota Humanities Center Launches Two Youth Poetry Programs

### For Immediate Release

**February 27, 2026—ST. PAUL, MN**— The Minnesota Humanities Center (MHC) announces the launch of two programs that highlight and uplift the work of youth poets in Minnesota: *Voices Forward* and the Minnesota Youth Poet Laureate.

Applications for both programs are open until March 16 and can be found on MHC's website ([Voices Forward](#), [Minnesota Youth Poet Laureate](#)).

CEO Kevin Lindsey stated that “MHC is committed to propelling the next generation of civic thinkers and writers,” and that the organization is “honored to bring programs with national entities, the Smithsonian Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage, the Federation of State Humanities Councils, and Urban Word, to Minnesota youth and community groups.”

### **Minnesota Humanities Center Launches Voices Forward to Reflect on 250 Years— and Imagine the Future**

Minnesota Humanities Center (MHC) is excited to announce our participation in *By the People: Conversations Beyond 250*, a series of community-driven programs created by humanities councils across the United States, its territories, and the District of Columbia in collaboration with local partners. Together, these programs explore 250 years of the nation's cultural life and imagine its shared future. The initiative was developed by the Federation of State Humanities Councils and the Smithsonian Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage (the Center). All humanities councils were invited to take part, and fifty-one councils—including those from the District of Columbia and four U.S. territories—will participate in local programs designed to foster intergenerational dialogue and highlight culture bearers. These include musicians, artists, performers, poets, craftspeople, workers, cooks, storytellers, and more.

Our first program celebrating America's 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary, *Voices Forward*, is a poetry and public humanities initiative that invites emerging youth poets (ages 13-19) from across Minnesota to explore the Smithsonian Folklife Festival's themes: remembering together, harmonizing together, moving together, and building together. With this program, we have the opportunity to build and support more mentorship and workshops with acclaimed Minnesota poets and community groups and invite youth poets to use their art to reflect and remember our past, mark our present, and imagine a shared future. The poets will showcase their original works in performances throughout the summer of 2026, and these gatherings will be a key part of MHC's commemoration of the Semiquincentennial, as we engage communities to explore how remembrance, democracy, and identity intersect locally and nationally.

“This partnership amplifies the voices from communities nationwide and the cultural practices that define them,” says Phoebe Stein, the Federation's president. “It's a celebration of the

humanities as a living, breathing force in our country—one that has brought people together to listen, learn, and create since the nation’s earliest days.”

Each program will be locally produced by a humanities council with community partners and featured on a multimedia story map produced by the Smithsonian Folklife Festival. Content related to or generated by this work will be released throughout 2026 on Smithsonian’s media platforms through a series of articles, short documentaries, and podcasts.

Apply for Voices Forward [here](#), and learn more about *By the People* on the [Center’s website](#) or on the [Federation’s website](#). The selected poets will be announced in late April.

### **Minnesota Youth Poet Laureate**

The Minnesota Humanities Center (MHC) is pleased to announce the launch of the **Minnesota Youth Poet Laureate (MYPL)** program, a new statewide initiative funded in the 2025 legislative cycle to recognize and uplift exceptional young poets ages 13–19.

The program has been designated by legislative statute to create a statewide opportunity for youth poets — and to open a pathway to the national Youth Poet Laureate program. The Minnesota Youth Poet Laureate program will work with Minnesota-based groups and poets to celebrate and mentor youth who demonstrate artistic excellence, leadership, and a commitment to civic engagement through poetry. This program will also connect youth to the national Youth Poet Laureate program and network through **Urban Word**. The selected laureate will represent Minnesota at public events, engage with communities across the state, and participate in national youth poetry convenings. MHC was chosen to lead this program because of our statewide reach and excellent track record of cultivating and supporting programs aimed at connecting Minnesotans.

Applications are open through March 16 2026, to Minnesota residents ages 13-19. Applicants will submit original poetry and a creative resume through the [Minnesota Humanities Center website](#). The Minnesota Youth Poet Laureate will be announced in late April 2026.

### **About the Minnesota Humanities Center (MHC)**

MHC, an affiliate to the National Endowment for the Humanities, was founded as an independent non-profit organization in 1971. MHC strengthens our society by promoting humanities and increasing shared understanding of our collective pasts. MHC creates a wide variety of humanities programming in collaboration with individuals, creators, scholars, and organizations to build a more curious, inclusive, and connected society. MHC has a long history as a grantmaking organization and operates a full-service event center in a historic building in St. Paul. More information is available at [www.mnhum.org](http://www.mnhum.org).

### **About Clean Water Land & Legacy Amendment**

The Minnesota Legislature passed the Clean Water, Land and Legacy Amendment (Legacy Amendment) in 2008 to ensure clean water, preserve opportunities for Minnesotans to enjoy nature, parks, and trails, and to appreciate arts and culture that exists within the State. The Legacy Amendment increases the state sales tax by three-eighths of one percent to create the Legacy Fund – 19.75% of the Legacy Fund is dedicated to the arts and cultural heritage fund.



Media Contact: Ali Syverson, Director of Strategic Communications, email [ali@mnhum.org](mailto:ali@mnhum.org) & 651-772-4295