New York
Public History Trust

The New York Public History Trust's ***State History Model Cities Program*** aims to expand the use of New York State History Day contest in public schools statewide, strengthening history and civics education curriculums in middle and high school statewide. As New York marks its 250th anniversary along with the nation, this is an opportune moment to invest in a proven program that equips diverse students with essential research and presentation skills specifically demanded by historical research.

Every year across the United States and its territories, more than one million middle and high school students take part in National History Day (NHD) competitions. These students develop in-depth projects based on an annual theme, engaging in rigorous research using primary and secondary sources. Working individually or in teams, they create papers, exhibits, documentaries, performances, or websites, which are judged at local, regional, and state levels before advancing to the national stage. This hands-on approach encourages critical thinking, creativity, and a deeper understanding of history's relevance.

National History Day is more than a contest—it's a powerful educational tool that public school systems can use strategically to enhance their social studies curriculum. Teachers can offer it as an extension of classroom learning or as an enrichment opportunity for students to pursue independently or collaboratively. For students who may not thrive in traditional academic settings, NHD provides a structured but flexible framework to explore their interests, develop valuable skills, and achieve recognition. Participation also provides students a competitive edge in all areas of their education and as an excellent addition to their college applications, demonstrating initiative, intellectual curiosity, and the ability to conduct and communicate original research.

How the Program Is Implemented in Schools

The New York Public History Trust introduces the *State History Model Cities Program* to school districts through the offices of district superintendents, working in partnership with school leadership to identify the best implementation strategy. Once a school district agrees to participate, educators are linked with National History Day's professional development resources—including teacher workshops, online training modules, and instructional materials aligned with state standards.

Through these training programs, teachers learn how to integrate NHD into their curriculum, coach student researchers, and manage the competition cycle. Some schools incorporate NHD projects into social studies classes, while others offer it as an extracurricular activity or after-school club. Throughout the school year, students are supported by their teachers, librarians, and local historians as they research, refine, and present their projects.

By embedding National History Day into the academic calendar, public school systems can create a year-round enrichment pathway that combines academic rigor with creative expression. This model not only strengthens civic literacy but also cultivates the habits of mind that prepare young people for college, careers, and engaged citizenship.

What Makes It a "Model Program?

Great question. What makes the **State History Model Cities Program** a *model* program is how it strategically leverages an existing, proven national platform (National History Day) to create scalable, equitable, and high-impact outcomes across public education systems. Here's a breakdown of what gives it that "model" status:

✅ 1. Proven Pedagogical Framework

- **NHD is nationally recognized** and research-backed for improving student performance in history, writing, reading comprehension, and civic understanding.
- It supports **project-based learning**, aligning with best practices in 21st-century education.

✅ 2. Equity Through Access

- The program brings NHD to **diverse, often under-resourced urban school systems**, reaching students who may not otherwise have access to enrichment or honors-level academic opportunities.
- Offers **multiple points of entry**: in-class, after-school, or independent participation.

✅ 3. Teacher Empowerment

- Teachers receive **professional development**, curriculum support, and access to national resources.
- Builds capacity within districts for long-term sustainability.

✅ 4. Flexible and Scalable

- It can be scaled up or down depending on district size and interest.
- Schools can integrate it **across subjects** (history, ELA, civics) and **grade levels**, or offer it as enrichment.

✅ 5. Aligns with Public Goals

- Ties into state and national priorities for civics education, college readiness, and student achievement.
- Supports broader initiatives like **America 250**, giving it added visibility and momentum.

✅ 6. Community and Cultural Engagement

- Encourages partnerships with local museums, libraries, archives, and community organizations.
- Builds **civic pride and historical literacy** in the very communities being served.

✅ 7. Tangible Outcomes

- Students gain **presentation, research, and communication skills**.
- Many go on to earn awards, scholarships, and college acceptances.
- The program produces **measurable academic and social-emotional growth**.

It's "model" not just because it works, but because it can be replicated across districts and states, using an existing infrastructure (NHD), and tailored to local needs while maintaining consistent excellence.