

118TH CONGRESS  
1ST SESSION

# H. R. 5192

To establish a grant program in the Department of Labor to assist unemployed and under-employed workers to document the American experience.

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## IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

AUGUST 11, 2023

Mr. LIEU (for himself, Ms. LEGER FERNANDEZ, Ms. NORTON, Mr. TONKO, Mr. POCAN, Ms. GARCIA of Texas, Ms. WILLIAMS of Georgia, Mr. SCHIFF, and Mr. KILMER) introduced the following bill; which was referred to the Committee on Education and the Workforce, and in addition to the Committee on House Administration, for a period to be subsequently determined by the Speaker, in each case for consideration of such provisions as fall within the jurisdiction of the committee concerned

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## A BILL

To establish a grant program in the Department of Labor to assist unemployed and under-employed workers to document the American experience.

1 *Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representa-*  
2 *tives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

3 **SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.**

4 This Act may be cited as the “21st Century Federal  
5 Writers’ Project Act”.

6 **SEC. 2. FINDINGS.**

7 Congress finds the following:

1           (1) In 1935, during the Great Depression,  
2           President Franklin Delano Roosevelt established  
3           The Federal Writers' Project of the New Deal Era.  
4           This program was organized to employ writers, edi-  
5           tors, historians, researchers, journalists, librarians,  
6           broadcasters, photographers, and others to document  
7           American society.

8           (2) The Federal Writers Project employed up to  
9           10,000 people between its founding in 1935 during  
10          the Great Depression and the publication of its first  
11          guides in 1943.

12          (3) The original Federal Writers' Project had  
13          many successes, such as—

14                 (A) the American Guide Series, which cov-  
15                 ered 48 States, 40 cities, 18 regions and terri-  
16                 tories, and countless counties, with John  
17                 Steinbeck calling the Series, “the most com-  
18                 prehensive account of the United States ever  
19                 got together, and nothing since has even ap-  
20                 proached it. It was compiled during the depres-  
21                 sion by the best writers in America”;

22                 (B) creating opportunities for writers who  
23                 went on to become some of the United States  
24                 greatest authors, including Ralph Ellison, Rich-

1           ard Wright, Saul Bellow, and Zora Neale  
2           Hurston;

3           (C) developing the Slave Narrative Project,  
4           the largest project to document the experience  
5           of formerly enslaved people, as part of the oral  
6           history and photography project telling the  
7           story of 10,000 people of the United States;  
8           and

9           (D) creating over 1,000 books and pam-  
10          phlets covering local and regional histories, folk-  
11          lore collections, humor, ethnic studies, and na-  
12          ture studies.

13          (4) Between late 2019 and May 2022, more  
14          than 360 newspapers closed and the country is on  
15          track to lose more than one-third of its total news-  
16          papers by 2025.

17          (5) Around 7 percent of America's counties are  
18          without a local news outlet.

19          (6) The original Federal Writers' Project pro-  
20          vided the opportunity to observe and document the  
21          Great Depression as part of a larger portrait of  
22          American society. The 21st Century Federal Writ-  
23          ers' Project will serve to update this portrait of  
24          American society in the 21st Century.

1 **SEC. 3. DOL GRANT PROGRAM.**

2 (a) IN GENERAL.—Not later than 180 days after the  
3 date of enactment of this Act, the Secretary of Labor,  
4 working through the Employment and Training Adminis-  
5 tration, shall establish a grant program to provide eligible  
6 entities described in subsection (d) with funds to assist  
7 individuals who are unemployed or underemployed in  
8 order to document in writing and images the current state  
9 of the American experience.

10 (b) INTERAGENCY WORKING GROUP.—

11 (1) ESTABLISHMENT.—There is established an  
12 interagency working group for the purpose of devel-  
13 oping the program’s guidelines.

14 (2) MEMBERS.—The interagency working group  
15 shall be composed of the following members:

16 (A) The Secretary.

17 (B) The Chair of the National Endowment  
18 for the Humanities.

19 (C) The Librarian of Congress.

20 (D) Experts in the field of journalism.

21 (E) Any other experts the Secretary deter-  
22 mines to be appropriate.

23 (3) REPORTS.—The working group shall issue a  
24 report on the composition of the working group and  
25 how the program will be structured, how grant re-

1 recipients are determined, and another report fol-  
2 lowing disbursement on efficacy and lessons learned.

3 (4) TERMINATION.—The working group shall  
4 terminate not later than 180 days after the date on  
5 which the final grant under this program is dis-  
6 bursed.

7 (c) GRANT FEATURES.—In administering the grant  
8 program under subsection (a), the Secretary shall deter-  
9 mine—

10 (1) the parameters of the grant program; and

11 (2) the amount and duration of grant awards  
12 under the program, except that in no case may an  
13 individual grant awarded under the program for a  
14 fiscal year exceed an amount equal to 7.5 percent of  
15 the amounts appropriated under subsection (j) for  
16 such fiscal year.

17 (d) ELIGIBLE ENTITIES.—To be eligible to receive a  
18 grant under this section, an entity shall submit an applica-  
19 tion to the Secretary of Labor at such time and in such  
20 manner as the Secretary may require and be—

21 (1) a nonprofit organization that has experience  
22 in writing, researching, collecting, curating, or dis-  
23 seminating educational information;

24 (2) a newsroom, which may be a nonprofit or  
25 for-profit entity;

1 (3) a public or nonprofit library; or

2 (4) a communications labor organization or  
3 guild.

4 (e) PREFERENCE FOR CERTAIN INDIVIDUALS.—In  
5 selecting individuals to receive funds, a grant recipient  
6 shall give preference to individuals who have experience  
7 or education in an occupation described in the Standard  
8 Occupational Classification for categories 25–000 and 27–  
9 000.

10 (f) GEOGRAPHIC DIVERSITY.—In selecting the recipi-  
11 ents for a grant under this section, the Secretary of Labor  
12 shall, to the extent practicable, ensure equitable geo-  
13 graphic distribution, including urban and rural areas and  
14 Tribal lands.

15 (g) REPOSITORY.—

16 (1) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary of Labor shall  
17 establish a repository of works developed through  
18 the grant program, in which grant recipients submit  
19 completed works from subgrant recipients, give cred-  
20 it to each writer or artist of the completed work, and  
21 make such works available to the public.

22 (2) TIMING.—Not later than 90 days after re-  
23 ceipt of a completed work under paragraph (1), the  
24 Secretary of Labor shall forward such work to the

1 Librarian of Congress to archive such material in  
2 accordance with subsection (g).

3 (h) ARCHIVE.—The Librarian of Congress shall es-  
4 tablish an archive program in the American Folklife Cen-  
5 ter at the Library of Congress to collect the written and  
6 visual works collected by the Secretary under subsection  
7 (f) and make such works publicly available in a digital and  
8 print format, which format includes giving credit to each  
9 work’s writer or artist.

10 (i) REPORTING REQUIREMENTS.—

11 (1) GRANT RECIPIENT REPORTING.—The Sec-  
12 retary of Labor shall develop reporting guidelines for  
13 grant recipients under this section to include, at a  
14 minimum, information regarding—

15 (A) the amount of funds received by each  
16 grant recipient, the amount provided to  
17 subgrant recipients, and the number of projects  
18 completed;

19 (B) the race, ethnicity, age, location in  
20 terms of urban or rural, and regional diversity  
21 of subgrant recipients;

22 (C) the number of requests made to review  
23 the completed projects or works distributed  
24 (when available); and

1 (D) such other data as the Secretary con-  
2 siders important.

3 (2) REPORTING TO CONGRESS.—Not less than  
4 once each year while the program under this section  
5 is in operation, the Secretary of Labor shall submit  
6 a report summarizing the data collected under para-  
7 graph (1) to the Committees on Appropriations and  
8 Education and Labor of the House of Representa-  
9 tives and the Committees on Appropriations and  
10 Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions of the Sen-  
11 ate.

12 (j) ADMINISTRATIVE COSTS.—

13 (1) SECRETARY.—The Secretary of Labor may  
14 reserve 5 percent of the funds made available to  
15 carry out the program under this section for admin-  
16 istrative costs.

17 (2) ELIGIBLE ENTITIES.—An eligible entity  
18 that receives a grant under this section for a fiscal  
19 year may reserve not more than 10 percent of funds  
20 received for such year to administer its program  
21 under the grant.

22 (k) AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.—There is  
23 authorized to be appropriated to carry out this section  
24 \$60,000,000 for fiscal year 2024.

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