



## The National Endowment for the Humanities: Supporting a Historical Site and Cultural Festival in Dyess, Arkansas

At the height of the Great Depression, nearly 500 families lived in the Dyess Colony, which was created in 1934 to help destitute farmers get back on their feet. It is now famous as the childhood home of Johnny Cash, who moved to Dyess with his family in 1935 and whose music was influenced by his experience growing up in the colony.

Since 2014, Historic Dyess Colony has attracted visitors from every state and 55 foreign countries to the 415-person town.

In partnership with the City of Dyess, Arkansas State University's A-State Heritage Sites program leveraged a National Endowment for the Humanities challenge grant to raise more than \$1.5 million to save the colony's historic buildings. One of them, the Federal Administration Building, now houses a museum that connects visitors with the history of the New Deal and the Depression. In addition, A-State Heritage Sites has meticulously restored the Cash homestead.

And in partnership with Rosanne Cash and John Carter Cash, A-State Heritage Sites has established the Johnny Cash Heritage Festival, a celebration of the region's cultural and musical heritage that doubles as the organization's largest fundraiser and outreach event. Held at the Historic Dyess Colony, the festival features performances by major artists alongside humanities programming, including documentary screenings, lectures, and panel discussions that illuminate the colony's history and culture.





“Arkansas is rich in culture and history. It is important to me that it not be minimized.”

- SURVEY RESPONDENT

“To actually be on the same soil that developed and enriched Johnny Cash provides a much deeper appreciation of the music.”

- SURVEY RESPONDENT

“Without our support we lose our heritage.”

- SURVEY RESPONDENT

A 2018 survey of 55 festival attendees, conducted by the National Humanities Alliance and A-State Heritage Sites, demonstrated that the Johnny Cash Heritage Festival encourages participants to learn more about the New Deal and music history, enriches their understanding of history and appreciation for the historic site, and increases their sense of connection to place and other people. Respondents ranged from teenagers to octogenarians. While some held high school diplomas, others held PhDs.

The Johnny Cash Heritage Festival provides a powerful educational opportunity for people from diverse educational backgrounds, inspiring them to learn more:

- 100% of respondents said the cultural and historical context enriched their appreciation of the music.
- 100% reported that the festival motivated them to learn more. Several indicated particular interest in the Dyess Colony and the New Deal.
- 95% of respondents reported they are “more likely to visit the Dyess Colony or other similar historic sites” after attending the festival.

100%  
said it was important to support festivals that combine music and humanities programming;

54%  
said “extremely important.”

The Johnny Cash Heritage Festival cultivates a sense of connection to Arkansas, the Dyess Colony, and other people.

- 100% of respondents reported that their “experience at the festival enhanced their sense of connection to this place.”
- 100% perceived significant value in holding the festival at the Dyess Colony.
- 98% indicated that they “experienced a sense of connection to fellow participants.”

### About A-State Heritage Sites

Arkansas State University (A-State) Heritage Sites manages six historic sites of regional and national significance in the Arkansas Delta. These sites facilitate educational experiences for the public, foster tourism in rural communities, and offer professional development opportunities for students in the university’s Heritage Studies program.

### About the National Humanities Alliance Foundation

The National Humanities Alliance Foundation advances the humanities by conducting research on the humanities and communicating the value of the humanities to a range of audiences including elected officials and the general public.

