**Program Description**

In 2016, Humanities Guåhan initiated an important pilot project, *Speaking to Water*, in partnership with the Smithsonian Institution Traveling Exhibition Service (SITES) through a grant from the Smithsonian Asian Pacific American Center to preserve and share Pacific Islander voices on the significance of water in their lives and communities, as well as in maintaining their cultural and environmental heritage. This digital programmatic initiative was an important outreach opportunity for SITES and the Council through the *Water/Ways* exhibition and the locally focused companion exhibition, *We Are Water, Hita I Hanom*. The exhibits were presented from August 31 through October 29, 2017 at the Guam Museum. *We Are Water, Hita I Hanom* drew together our island’s historians, scientists, artists, engineers, master cultural practitioners, community organizers, and diverse community members to examine the significance of hānom in our lives.

Working with a network of scholarly, artistic and community leaders, the Council facilitated dialogue with indigenous Chamorro and Micronesian, those who trace their heritage to the Federated States of Micronesia, and the Republics of the Marshall Islands and Palau, community groups and cultural experts about their history, art and culture to gather chants, stories, songs, poetry and personal narratives about the meaning of and experiences relating to water in their island societies. These digital resources were presented in a kiosk interactive as part of the *Water/Ways* and *We Are Water, Hita I Hanom* exhibitions to privilege native voices and creative expressions, as well as create greater understanding of their shared value through compelling public programming.

Guam is a U.S. island territory located in the Western Pacific that is deeply connected to water—the vast ocean that surrounds it and the fresh rivers, lake and groundwater that sustain it. Guam is arguably the most urbanized island within Micronesia, experiencing the recognizable challenges of rapid change that come with globalization and continued colonization, while also existing as “home” to indigenous Chamorros and burgeoning Asian and Pacific Islander communities, specifically those from island nations in other parts of Micronesia.

The migration of Micronesians to Guam over the past thirty years has come with a great deal of resentment, tension and misunderstanding from the larger community that has only been exacerbated in recent years by Guam’s overburdened education, health and housing infrastructure, along with the legally questionable removal or “deportation” of some Micronesians who have criminal records. Unfortunately, with the exception of the Council’s multifaceted project carried out from 2009-2011 that explored how Micronesians create a sense of identity and belonging in their new island “home” in Guam, Chamorro and Micronesian communities rarely have the opportunity to engage in activities that encourage learning from each other, celebrate their diversity and shared
histories, and build positive relationships based on an understanding and appreciation of
their unique cultures and the natural environment of their shared home in Guam.

From the aftermath of World War II, to massive militarization and corporate tourism,
Guam also faces unique environmental challenges, such as fresh water accessibility,
wastewater impacts, and the degradation of fishing and coral reef resources that are
connected to traditional knowledge, skills, and practices. These challenges also impact
community identity and collaboration, as well as language and cultural preservation.
Importantly, Guam is also in a position to become a transitional stop or place of
permanent sanctuary for environmental migrants and climate change refugees from
within the Micronesian region, while also confronting its own related ecological
emergencies. Residents can benefit from programs that support respectful and peaceful
dialogue and interaction, highlight their marginalized narratives, promote awareness and
understanding of their shared Pacific Islander American experiences, and provide the
space to participate in conversation about water stewardship and citizenry, as well as
about more contentious issues.

Within the context of NEH’s Humanities and the Legacy of Race and Ethnicity in the U.S.
initiative, Humanities Guåhan is expanding this story collecting project with SITES in
order to continue facilitated discussions with Chamorros and other Micronesians using
the collected chants, stories, songs, poetry and personal narratives about the deeper
cultural meaning of water to explore shared cultural pasts, differing colonial histories that
have shaped current misperceptions and divisiveness, and the need to reimagine
relationships in more positive ways for the betterment of our island. Larger themes of
community, sustainability, identity, ethnicity and power are also addressed.

Civic reflection is a means to build greater understanding and awareness of the
persistent and fraught social, economic, cultural and ethnic issues that oftentimes divide
the Guam community and affect the lives of all island residents. This program seeks to
empower participates to think more critically and empathetically about Micronesians and
their migration to Guam in terms of the challenges and opportunities they have
presented. One of the main objectives of these humanities-based discussions is to
create a safe and comfortable “space” to reflect on important civic matters and hear
diverse voices in a constructive, non-confrontational way to build a more inclusive sense
of community.

Program Partners
Humanities Guåhan is working will work with several of the fifteen community members
who have been trained to facilitate civic reflection conversations through the Project on
Civic Reflection, as well as newly trained facilitators. Formal roundtable/planning
meetings have been held to review the collected and recorded oral traditions, literary
pieces and other creative expressions; to develop questions around them that speak to
the larger program themes in preparation for the facilitated conversations; to assess the
status of various conversations; and to offer any logistical or content support. The
program coordinator is meeting with individual facilitators on a more regular basis and
attending the first and last conversations in each series to introduce the expanded
program component and the civic reflection model, and to close with reflection and
evaluation. The conversations are structured as a six part series.

The network of scholarly, artistic and community leaders that assisted the Council in
outreach to the various Chamorro and Micronesian community groups and cultural
experts as part of the SITES pilot project are important liaison in our efforts to recruit participants for the conversations. The target audiences for the civic reflection conversations are a diverse range of island residents, mainly Chamorros and other Micronesians, from high school and college students, community/political activists and law enforcement officers to social workers, public health officials and members of the larger community on May 31, 2018. The Council will also host a larger community conversation event focusing on joint presentations by Chamorro and Micronesian scholars and artists that will include breakout sessions for facilitated civic reflection, and reconvening of groups for a closing conversation with the scholars and artists.