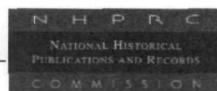


SPECIAL SECTION



The NHPRC in the New Records Age

Ann Clifford Newhall

Abstract

This article examines the NHPRC's records programs, particularly its electronic records program, its efforts to strengthen the national archival infrastructure through collaboration with the states, and its support for archival continuing education and the documentation of ethnic, racial, gender-based and other groups representative of diversity within the United States. It discusses ways in which the NHPRC, created during the 1930s, is rising to the challenges of a new records age, an age defined not only by the new records formats which began emerging in the latter decades of the twentieth century, but also by the political realities confronting archivists at the dawn of the twenty-first century.

For the past quarter of a century, many archivists have known the National Historical Publications and Records Commission (NHPRC) as a major, logical source for the funding of archival and records projects and for research into the problems posed by electronic records; as the sponsor of fellowships in archival administration; and as a backer of major developments in the archival world, ranging from the development of the Society of American Archivists' series of *Basic Manuals* all the way to the National Forum on Archival Continuing Education (NFACE), held in Georgia in April 2000.

More specifically, the NHPRC is the grant-making affiliate of the National Archives and Records Administration, created by Congress at the same time as

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the National Archives. The NHPRC's statutory mission is to ensure understanding of our nation's past by promoting, nationwide, the identification, preservation, and dissemination of essential historical documentation. The Commission is chaired by the Archivist of the United States, and its offices are located in the National Archives in Washington, D.C., but its mandate is to look outward, to provide assistance to non-federal agencies, institutions and individuals committed to the preservation and use of America's documentary resources.

The Commission itself has fifteen members, chaired by the Archivist of the United States, and consisting of representatives of the President of the United States, the Senate, the House of Representatives, the Supreme Court, the Departments of State and Defense—and representatives of the leading professional associations of archivists and historians: the Society of American Archivists, the National Association of Government Archivists and Records Administrators, the American Association for State and Local History, the Association for Documentary Editing, the Organization of American Historians, and the American Historical Association.

The list of former members of the Commission reads like a *Who's Who* of American History—of those who *made* the history recorded in the documentation that we labor to preserve and make accessible;¹ of the historians who *interpret* that record through their writings and historical editions;² and, since 1974, of the *keepers* of the record.³ Following in their wake, today's Commission is, arguably, one of the most interested and involved.⁴ Twice a year, in May and in November, the Commission meets to consider the proposals submitted for pro-

¹ Former Commission members include Supreme Court Justices Felix Frankfurter, William J. Brennan, Jr., Harry Blackmun, and Chief Justice William H. Rehnquist; Senators such as Leverett Saltonstall, Mark Hatfield, and Paul Sarbanes; and members of the House of Representatives such as John Brademas and Lindy Boggs.

² Historians who have sat on the Commission include J. Franklin Jameson, Janet Wilson James, Arthur M. Schlesinger, Julian P. Boyd, and Arthur Link.

³ Examples include Elizabeth Hamer Kegan, Charles Lee, Mary Lynn McCree Bryant, H. G. Jones, Ed Weldon, Helen Samuels, David Gracy, John Fleckner, and Brenda Banks.

⁴ The current members of the National Historical Publications and Records Commission are: Archivist of the United States John W. Carlin (Chairman), Associate Justice David H. Souter (representing the United States Supreme Court), Sen. James Jeffords of Vermont (United States Senate), Congressman Roy Blunt of Missouri (U.S. House of Representatives), Nicholas C. Burckel, Director of Libraries, Marquette University (Presidential Appointee), Marvin "Bud" Moss, Chief of Staff (ret.) Office of Senator Paul Sarbanes (Presidential Appointee), Margaret P. Grafeld, Director, Office of IRM Programs and Services (U.S. Department of State), Alfred Goldberg, Historian, Office of the Secretary (U.S. Department of Defense), Winston Tabb, Associate Librarian for Collections Services (Library of Congress), Charles T. Cullen, President and Librarian, Newberry Library (Association for Documentary Editing), Howard P. Lowell, State Archivist and Records Administrator, Delaware Public Archives (National Association of Government Archives and Records Administrators), Brent Glass, Executive Director, Pennsylvania Historical and Museums Commission (American Association for State and Local History), William H. Chafe, Dean of Arts and Humanities, Duke University (Organization of American Historians), Mary Maples Dunn, Director, Arthur and Elizabeth Schlesinger Library on the History of Women in America, Radcliffe College (American Historical Association), and Anne R. Kenney, Associate Director, Department of Preservation and Conservation, Cornell University (Society of American Archivists).

jects. At these meetings it is determined which of these proposals will be recommended to the Archivist for funding. When this unique and fascinating combination of viewpoints, agendas, and backgrounds sits down together, the result is a remarkable synergy. This diversity of membership on the Commission and, consequently, the diversity of its constituencies, is one source of the NHPRC's effectiveness and strength.

The NHPRC receives its administrative support from the National Archives and Records Administration. NARA provides office and meeting space, supplies, travel funds, meeting expenses, and salary and benefits for the Commission's staff.⁵ For a great number of applicants and grantees, the NHPRC component with which they have the most contact is the Commission's staff. From the beginning, the NHPRC has been blessed with an actively engaged, highly professional staff. In fact, many former grantees claim that the help and guidance they received from NHPRC staff was as valuable, in other ways, as the money they received from the Commission. The staff continually expands and augments its expertise, in order to be educated assessors of the needs of the professions the NHPRC supports, fair and knowledgeable evaluators of proposals, and effective communicators and disseminators of the projects' results.

The Commission was established by Congress in 1934 as the NHPC: the National Historical Publications Commission. In 1974, Congress passed the legislation that added the "R"—for Records—and the NHPRC was born. That legislation also expanded the membership of the Commission to include representatives from the American Association for State and Local History and the Society of American Archivists. SAA's first representatives on the Commission were Charles Lee and Mary Lynn McCree Bryant; and the first Director of the NHPRC Records Program was Larry Hackman. Among the fifteen members of the Commission today are two former SAA Presidents: Anne Kenney, SAA's current representative to the Commission, and Nick Burckel, who is one of the two Presidential appointments to the Commission. Delaware State Archivist Howard Lowell represents the National Association of Government Archives and Records Administrators (NAGARA.)

Twenty-Five Years

Over the twenty-five years since the Records Program began, the NHPRC has awarded approximately \$40 million for archives- and records-related projects. With the assistance of the Commission, an astonishing range of American

⁵ The current NHPRC staff are: Ann Clifford Newhall (Executive Director), Roger A. Bruns (Deputy Executive Director), Timothy D. W. Connelly (Director for Publications), L. Mark Conrad (Director for Technology Initiatives), Richard A. Cameron (Director for State Programs), Mary Giunta (Director for Communications & Outreach), Daniel A. Stokes (Program Officer), Nancy T. Copp (Management and Program Analyst), J. Dane Hartgrove (Historian & Editor, *Annotation*), Laurette O'Connor (Grant Program Assistant), Cassandra Scott (Staff Assistant).

historical documentation has been identified, preserved, and made physically and intellectually accessible. For nearly ten years, electronic records have been an increasing focus, and under the aegis of the Commission, a research agenda on electronic records issues was developed and continues to shape and inform the efforts of archivists attempting to come to grips with the seminal records problem of our time.

With the assistance, persistence, and (sometimes) the insistence of the Commission, State Historical Records Coordinators have been appointed in forty-eight states and one territory, their Council of State Historical Records Coordinators (COSHRC) has become a force for archival progress in its own right, and State Historical Records Advisory Boards are active in forty states and in one territory.

The NHPRC has become an important part of the professional archival environment in the United States. It has influenced the development of the profession on many levels: individual professionals, individual institutions, multi-institutional collaborations, professional organizations, all levels of government archives (short of federal), and many types of non-profit organizations. It has also funded professional educational initiatives, including many undertaken by the Society of American Archivists. A key part of what the Commission has done has been to support the development of archival and editing professional organizations, and through them to assist measurably in the establishment and promulgation of canons of good professional practice.

The NHPRC has helped to further a better understanding of the archival landscape through such mechanisms as the *Directory of Archives and Manuscripts in the United States*,⁶ and the sponsorship of national studies and planning agendas. We have better information about the diversity of archival programs, their strengths, and their problems—and the extent of them—than we had in the past.

The NHPRC has done all it has with what is, particularly in federal budgetary terms, a very small amount of money. In fiscal year 1999, the NHPRC received the largest appropriation for competitive grants in its history: \$6 million. (However, applicants requested approximately \$9,700,000 that year, and there were indications that some potential applicants, knowing the level of our funding, did not even approach us.) In fiscal year 2000, the NHPRC's appropriations for competitive grants remain at the same level.

There is no question that, over the twenty-five years since the "R" was added to its name, the NHPRC's funding has lost ground in terms of its buying power and its relationship to the overall federal budget. In 1974, the NHPRC was appropriated \$2 million for competitive grants. A quarter of a century later, its budget has increased three times, but the federal budget has grown by a con-

⁶ Largely the work of Nancy Sahli and Richard Noble, *Directory of Archives and Manuscripts in the United States* was originally published by the NHPRC in 1978. NHPRC staff subsequently revised it, and this revised version was published by Oryx Press in 1988.

siderably greater magnitude. The good news is that NHPRC is doing far better now than it did in the early 1980s, when its appropriation plunged from \$4 million in 1981 to \$2.5 million the following year. Commission Chairman and Archivist of the United States John W. Carlin deserves enormous credit for persuading Congress to reach the \$6 million level for competitive grants for 1999 and 2000.

The fact that our financial resources are so limited is one reason why the Commission stresses the value of leveraging dollars as much as possible, preaches the necessity for strategic planning, and urges collaboration among many as a useful approach. The NHPRC has managed, and continues to manage, to use a very small portion of the federal budget to sustain a viable and vibrant national program, to address problems of great significance to this nation, and to produce results that will long endure.

The NHPRC in a New Records Age

The NHPRC is moving ahead confidently in this new records age, guided by its strategic plan, the revised version of which went into effect on October 1, 1998 (the beginning of the 1999 fiscal year).⁷ This plan identifies three equal strategic goals to which the Commission will concentrate its efforts and its resources within its broader mission. These three equal strategic goals are:

1. The NHPRC will provide the American public with widespread access to the papers of the founders of our democratic republic and its institutions by ensuring the timely completion of eight projects now in progress to publish the papers of George Washington, John Adams, Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, and papers that document the Ratification of the Constitution, the First Federal Congress, and the early Supreme Court.
2. The NHPRC will promote broad public participation in historical documentation by collaborating with State Historical Records Advisory Boards to plan and carry out jointly funded programs to strengthen the nation's archival infrastructure and expand the range of records that are protected and accessible.
3. The NHPRC will enable the nation's archivists, records managers, and documentary editors to overcome the obstacles and take advantage of the opportunities posed by electronic technologies by continuing to provide leadership in funding research-and-development on appraising, preserving, disseminating, and providing access to important documentary sources in electronic form.

⁷ The complete Strategic Plan, as approved and adopted by the NHPRC on June 19, 1997, may be found at <<http://www.nara.gov/nhprc/strategy.html>>.

The Strategic Plan goes on to provide that, "The Commission will commit up to 60% of its appropriated funds each year to grants for soundly conceived projects of value in reaching these three goals. The Commission will reserve at least 40% of its appropriated funds each year for grants for other projects eligible for support within the Commission's statutory mission, including projects to protect and otherwise make accessible historically significant records, to publish documentary editions other than the eight founding-era projects judged to be of critical importance, and to improve the methods, tools, and training of professionals engaged in documentary work."

One immediate result of the new Strategic Plan is that now there are only two tiers of proposals to be considered: projects which fall under the three equal strategic goals, and all other projects. As a consequence, in fiscal year 2000 the Commission began meeting twice, instead of three times, each year. The first meeting of that fiscal year, held in November 1999, extended over two days, in order to give the members more time to consider policy. Commission members have voted to have the May 2000 meeting extend for two days, as well.

Electronic Records Program⁸

The third of NHPRC's strategic goals has special relevance for archivists. Without question, the greatest challenges facing the archival world today are to identify, preserve and provide long-term access to electronic records and to effectively utilize new technologies in accomplishing our archival mission. As the Society of American Archivists' Position Paper *Archival Roles for the New Millennium* points out, global telecommunication and computing technologies are changing the way individuals and organizations communicate and do business. Increasingly larger amounts of historically valuable documentation are being created and stored in electronic form, without ever existing in hard copy. The good news is that the information once conveyed by telephone (and, unless recorded on audio tape, thus lost to historians) is now often transmitted by e-mail. The bad news is that these messages are sent in absolutely staggering numbers. And too often they are sent and saved (if they are saved) among a sea of chitchat, jokes, error messages, and other trivia.

The technology needed to provide access to electronically created documentation becomes obsolete in a matter of a few years. Archivists face the threat that the source material necessary to write the history of our time will have huge gaps; that much of the evidence of the achievements and the wrongdoing, the aspirations and the near-misses of our time—and why they happened and the conse-

⁸ This section draws heavily upon the NHPRC Guidelines, Suggestions for Electronic Records Projects, and other materials on the NHPRC website. See <<http://www.nara.gov/nhprc/eragenda.html>>. Special thanks to Mark Conrad.

quences that followed—may not survive to instruct, warn, and inspire the generations who come after us.

On January 24–25, 1991, forty-six individuals from a variety of disciplines gathered in Washington, D.C. for the Working Meeting on Research Issues in Electronic Records. The purpose of the meeting, sponsored by the Minnesota Historical Society and funded by a grant from the NHPRC, was to examine issues related to the identification, preservation, and long-term use of electronic records, and to produce a national agenda for research in the archival management of such records, which would guide the NHPRC and other funding agencies interested in supporting archival electronic records projects.

Participants met in task groups and developed ten questions, constituting a foundation for a research agenda. These questions are:

1. What functions and data are required to manage electronic records in accord with archival requirements? Do data requirements and functions vary for different types of automated applications?
2. What are the technological, conceptual, and economic implications of capturing and retaining data, descriptive information, and contextual information in electronic form from a variety of applications?
3. How can software-dependent data objects be retained for future use?
4. How can data dictionaries, information resource directory systems, and other metadata systems be used to support electronic records management and archival requirements?
5. What archival requirements have been addressed in major systems development projects and why?
6. What policies best address archival concerns for the identification, retention, preservation, and research use of electronic records?
7. What functions and activities should be present in electronic records programs and how should they be evaluated?
8. What incentives can contribute to creator and user support for electronic records management concerns?
9. What barriers have prevented archivists from developing and implementing archival electronic records programs?
10. What do archivists need to know about electronic records?

Since the publication of these questions, in a report entitled *Research Issues in Electronic Records*,⁹ the NHPRC has awarded approximately \$4.2 million for electronic records projects.¹⁰ A 1993 grant to the University of Pittsburgh to address the first three questions in the research agenda¹¹ and a grant to the University of Michigan in 1996, for a conference to assess the progress made in

⁹ For the full report, see <<http://www.nara.gov/nhprc/eragenda.html>>.

¹⁰ "NHPRC: Electronic Records Projects," <<http://www.nara.gov/nhprc/ergrants.html>>.

¹¹ See <<http://www.lis.pitt.edu/~nhprc/>>.

electronic records research and program development since the 1991 meeting which produced the research agenda,¹² helped to further delineate the map of areas to be investigated.

A number of NHPRC electronic records grants have sought to attempt to develop and implement models for the management and preservation of electronic records. Over the past three years, several of these projects were completed or published final reports:

- The report, *Models for Action: Developing Practical Approaches to Electronic Records Management and Preservation*, was produced under a two-year applied research project conducted by the Center for Technology in Government at the University at Albany (SUNY), in partnership with the New York State Archives and Records Administration. The project was designed to combine best practices from the domains of business process analysis, system design and development, and electronic recordkeeping and archiving to create practical tools to help public agencies to create, manage, and retain records that support their business objectives.¹³
- The Indiana University Electronic Records Project was designed to analyze existing electronic records systems and policies, compare them to models or policies at comparable institutions, and create and disseminate a repository information system model and information policy standards.¹⁴
- The Syracuse University Model Guidelines for Websites Project aimed to develop better records management and preservation strategies for electronic information available on state and federal agency websites.¹⁵

Today, the Commission's overall priorities for electronic records research have not changed, and it continues to invite proposals designed to solve research problems as defined by the electronic records research agenda. For its purposes, the NHPRC uses the phrase "electronic records" to mean records *originally created* in electronic form.¹⁶ The Commission supports electronic records projects in four basic areas: research, program development, analysis,

¹² See <<http://www.si.umich.edu/e-recs/>>.

¹³ See <<http://www.ctg.albany.edu/projects/er/ermn.html>>.

¹⁴ A Methodology for Evaluating Recordkeeping Systems: The Indiana University Electronic Records Project, April 1998, available at <<http://www.indiana.edu/~libarche/97method.html>>. See also Philip C. Bantin, "Developing a Strategy for Managing Electronic Records: The Findings of the Indiana University Electronic Records Project," *American Archivist* 61 (Fall 1998): 328-64 and Philip C. Bantin, "The Indiana University Electronic Records Project Revisited," *American Archivist* 62 (Spring 1999): 153-63.

¹⁵ Charles R. McClure and J. Timothy Sprehe, Analysis and Development of Model Quality Guidelines for Electronic Records Management on State and Federal Websites: Final Report, January 1998, available at <http://istweb.syr.edu/~mcclure/nhprc/nhprc_title.html>.

¹⁶ *NHPRC Statement on Digitization*, approved at the November 1999 NHPRC meeting. At this time the NHPRC prefers not to spend its limited funds on projects whose primary purpose is digitization, i.e., the conversion of materials and existing finding aids to electronic form, or on projects whose main purpose is to make digitized materials available via the Internet.

and advocacy;¹⁷ and it recently announced a new initiative focusing upon broadening the base of archival expertise in the area of electronic records.

At its February 1999 meeting, the Commission approved funding for the non-NARA elements of the U.S. research team participating in the InterPARES Project, an international research initiative to develop the theoretical and methodological knowledge required for the permanent preservation of authentic records created in electronic systems.¹⁸ In November 1999 the Commission voted to support a project at the San Diego Supercomputer Center to build upon SDSC's previous research on the long-term preservation of and access to software-dependent data objects, which it has conducted for the National Archives and Records Administration, the National Science Foundation, and the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency, and other sponsors. The NHPRC-funded project will specifically look at the scalability and usefulness of the technology in archives other than NARA.

Many challenges remain in the electronic records research area. Many archival institutions and programs need to change their structures, practices, and skill bases to build programs capable of addressing electronic records issues. Although there has been substantial progress in some areas, considerable work is still needed to resolve the questions raised within the research agenda, and several questions from the research agenda have yet to be addressed. In addition, electronic records research can be very costly. The NHPRC hopes to support more electronic records projects that involve other funding partners and it is working to strengthen its ties with other funding agencies to better leverage mutual resources for electronic records research.

It is necessary to achieve critical mass in a number of areas if we are to preserve an adequate record of society during our watch. One of these areas is better-educated archivists and records managers. The number of archivists and records managers in this country that are actively participating (or equipped to participate) in electronic records initiatives in their institutions is still too small, and many of these individuals hold fairly junior positions. It has been very encouraging to see the development of doctoral programs and the incorporation of electronic records training into the curricula of many graduate programs at colleges and universities around the country. Many of the faculty at these institutions have participated in and/or benefited from NHPRC electronic records projects.

However, graduate education alone is not sufficient to create this critical mass. Many archivists and records managers already in the workplace are not

¹⁷ By "advocacy," the NHPRC means stating the archival case to those whose cooperation, compliance, and support are essential to the longterm retention and accessibility of electronic records. Of course, as a federal agency, the NHPRC cannot support *political* advocacy activities. But, the clarification and resolution of archival electronic records issues is a large and complex undertaking which requires efforts by a variety of constituents including archivists, records managers, program managers, administrators, information technologists, computer scientists, and social scientists.

¹⁸ See <<http://www.interpares.org/>> and <<http://is.gseis.ucla.edu/us-interpares>>.

in a position to go back to school full-time. There is an urgent need for more continuing education opportunities for these working professionals.

We also need to find ways to involve other stakeholders in meeting the challenges posed by electronic records. It is quite obvious that archivists and records managers cannot do it alone. The participation of records creators, chief information officers, financial, audit, information technology, and legal staff, among others, is critical to meet the challenges of modern recordkeeping. Archivists and records managers must be capable of explaining to these stakeholders what the challenges are and why they are important to the other groups.

Two groups of stakeholders that urgently need to be reached are computer scientists and computer science educators. One of the most important questions that needs to be addressed is largely a computer science question that needs archival input, i.e., how do we access software-dependent objects over time? If we don't find an answer to this question, there is not much point in pursuing answers to much of the rest of NHPRC's electronic records research agenda. Of course, before archivists and records managers can do this they must have a thorough understanding of the issues and what impact those issues have on other stakeholders. Which brings us back to the need for better-educated archivists and records managers.

Therefore, at its November 1999 meeting, the Commission voted unanimously to launch a significant new NHPRC initiative: to issue a call for proposals to broaden the base and raise the level of archival expertise across the nation with regard to electronic records, and to devote \$1.8 million over three years to this important initiative. The Commission believes that archival expertise needs to be enhanced at a number of different levels and in a number of different venues and has set no arbitrary limits on dollar amounts for this initiative.¹⁹

In summary, the NHPRC continues to welcome projects which address issues raised in the electronic records research agenda and related issues. It is especially interested in proposals which address Questions 3, 8, 9, and 10 on the research agenda. Furthermore, there is a need to address all the research questions in a wider range of organizational and technological settings. Projects that aim to implement findings of previous electronic records research (especially to verify that the results are generalizable and scalable); and which disseminate these results in ways that are understandable to the entire archival and records management professions are particularly welcome. Also sought are innovative projects that help us move from the theoretical to the practical; that test out and help to implement practical solutions; that identify and publicize best practices; that will work for smaller, non-federal institutions; and that foster and facilitate a dialogue with other stakeholders in order to acquaint them with the concerns and needs of the archival community.

¹⁹ For further information, contact Mark Conrad, NHPRC Director for Technology Initiatives.

NHPRC's State Board Program²⁰

Another NHPRC strategic goal of special relevance to archivists refers to the Commission's State Board Program. Within this program can be seen a clear articulation of such basic NHPRC tenets as the encouragement of collaboration on many levels, the reliance upon jointly funded programs, the importance of planning, and the necessity of broad participation for the success of a sustainable national program.

Because of the scope of the records program and the principles of federalism inherent in our system of government, the NHPRC has chosen to work through the state board mechanism, as follows:

The governor of each state desiring to participate fully in the NHPRC grant program appoints a State Historical Records Coordinator, who serves as the central coordinating officer for the historical records grant program in the state. He or she is usually, but not always, the professional official in charge of the state archival program or agency. The Coordinator is not an official or employee of the federal government and receives no federal compensation for this service.

The next step is the appointment of the State Historical Records Advisory Board (often abbreviated as "SHRAB".) This is a citizen board comprised of keepers and users of records and consisting of at least seven members, including the coordinator, who are representative of public and private archives, records offices, and research institutions and organizations in the state. The members of the State Board, too, serve without federal compensation or employment status.

The State Board serves in a number of capacities:

- as the central *advisory* body for historical records planning and for Commission-funded projects developed and carried out within the state,
- as a *coordinating* body to facilitate cooperation among historical records repositories and other information agencies within the state, and
- as a state-level *review* body for NHPRC records grant proposals which originated in their state.

Central to the SHRAB's mission are: developing and submitting to the Commission state priorities for historical records as part of a state board plan, and developing jointly funded programs to address key priorities. Boards accomplish this by promoting an understanding of the role and value of historical records, fostering and supporting cooperative networks and programs dealing with historical records, and soliciting or developing proposals for NHPRC grant projects, as well as a variety of other activities.

There are four specific types of grant projects that State Boards may propose to the Commission:

²⁰ This section draws heavily upon the NHPRC Guidelines and other NHPRC materials on the NHPRC website, available at <<http://www.nara.gov/nhprc/stbds.html>>. Special thanks to Dick Cameron.

1. Projects which would create a statewide strategic plan to address archival and records issues throughout the state.
2. Projects which would create a statewide program or project to implement the plan.
3. Projects which request funds for basic board administration.²¹
4. Projects which request funds to be regranted within the state to implement the plan.

Regrants

“Regrant” projects involve NHPRC funds which, along with matching non-federal dollars, may be subgranted or subcontracted by the state board to communities or organizations within the state to address key priorities in the state plan. Participants in these programs may include any state and local institutions and agencies that serve as records repositories, as well as non-profit and volunteer organizations that hold important historical records. These grants do more than help to preserve and make accessible individual collections of historical material. They also support the establishment and development of local and statewide archival programs, to leverage non-federal matching dollars, and provide archival training to volunteers and allied professionals to make sure that their work reflects good, accepted practice.

Early successes in regranting funds at the state level helped to establish ongoing state grant programs for local governments in New York and Kentucky, and later to expand the benefits in New York to other local institutions and organizations. Subsequent to the inclusion of regrants in NHPRC’s 1993 long range plan, a regrant to Virginia helped to establish a state grant program dealing with court records. Georgia and North Carolina also have had successes in repeatedly leveraging non-federal matching dollars. In Florida, Texas, South Carolina, and Maine regrants have been used as part of successful efforts to sustain statewide programs aimed at implementing state board plans, without creating a continuing grant program. Promising new regrant efforts are underway in Massachusetts, New Mexico, and Nevada. Even with limited funding, it would appear that regrant projects can expand resources devoted to records preservation and access, and help to build an ongoing statewide mechanism for sustaining these efforts.

In other states, board plans have been implemented by using already existing state grant programs. A notable example is Iowa, where the state board serves as the review body for the documentary projects submitted to the Iowa Historical Resource Development Program (HRDP). While no NHPRC money

²¹ This type of grant, designed to encourage more boards to actively participate and to help sustain existing board activity, was first awarded in November 1999.

is involved here at all, this arrangement allows the board to implement aspects of its plan and complement its own work.

To date, several states have been unable to maintain support for state grants programs. Alabama and Hawaii both received early regrants, but these have not led to sustained efforts by the boards. In other states such as Wisconsin, Kansas, and Michigan, efforts to convert a regrant project into ongoing additional resources at the state level to continue the program have been unsuccessful. Nevertheless, some of these states have found other ways to achieve progress in implementing their state plans. Wisconsin, for instance, joined forces with three statewide professional associations involving public librarians, local officials, and local history professionals to develop and introduce best practices guides and curricula in focused areas of archival and record-keeping concerns which affected their constituencies.²² Supported with NHPRC grant funds, this project fostered partnerships that appear to have long-term potential. Moreover, the allied professionals involved in this project ended up with products they consider useful to their needs and a better understanding of archival work. As a consequence, they have made a commitment to continue to use the products and to continue working with the board.

The NHPRC must find more ways to help those states that would benefit from this program but which have not yet been able to launch viable and effective State Boards. Commission staff have been reviewing project files and seeking out records professionals from these states in an attempt to identify reasons and solutions. One thing is obvious: the reasons for the problems in implementation vary as much as the states themselves do. In some cases, the problems are primarily geographic, i.e., the sheer size of some states has inhibited the establishment or success of a state board program; in others, the problems are demographic, i.e., there are too few archivists or archival repositories to sustain a state board program. In still others, the problems are primarily political, the state legislature has failed to be persuaded to provide matching funds. And in others, state archival leaders have indicated that the effort to obtain NHPRC matching funds is not worth the payoff, because the funding that the NHPRC can make available to them is too small in relation to the political capital which they must expend to obtain the cooperation of the administration and the legislature. Finally, in some states, the problem is leadership: some programs hinged upon a single individual and those programs withered when that person moved to another position or to another state. In some states, the state archives may not be the most active and logical candidate for state archival leadership. In others, the state archives *is* the logical leader, but has failed to sustain followers in a state program because other institutions feel that it fails to take a large enough view and utilizes its role *vis a vis* the NHPRC for its own benefit at the expense of other records operations within the state.

²² See <<http://www.shsw.wisc.edu/archives/whrab/bpdsc.html>>.

The Commission is considering a number of more flexible, imaginative approaches to overcome these and other problems that some states have encountered in making the state board program work well for them. One key may be the encouragement of more interstate and interprofessional collaborations. The NHPRC particularly values the advice it receives from COSHRC and from NAGARA, and welcomes suggestions from others groups and individuals.

The Council of State Historical Records Coordinators (COSHRC)

Another key part of this national archival infrastructure is the Council of State Historical Records Coordinators (COSHRC).²³ COSHRC is an organization representing the State Historical Records Advisory Boards, and is made up of the State Historical Records Coordinators (SHRCs) who provide leadership to the SHRAB in each state and territory. "Working collectively through their membership in COSHRC, the Council encourages cooperation among the states and state boards on matters of mutual concern, defines and communicates archival and records concerns at a national level, and works with the NHPRC and other national organizations to ensure that the nation's documentary heritage is preserved and accessible."²⁴ The Council meets twice yearly: first, usually in January in the Washington, D.C. area, and again immediately after the NAGARA meeting. The Council leadership includes, by design, representatives from every region of the country.

COSHRC has been encouraged by NHPRC to serve as a mechanism for launching multi-state, regional, and national initiatives. This is a logical complement to the Commission's program and one way to encourage further collaboration among archival associations at a number of levels. The Council has conducted a number of NHPRC-funded studies and issued a number of reports on records issues in the states. These include its 1996 report, *Maintaining State Records in an Era of Change: A National Challenge. A Report on State Archives and Records Management Programs*, which is an analysis of data collected in a comprehensive survey of archives and records management programs in state government.²⁵ The survey was conducted in cooperation with NAGARA. Building on COSHRC's 1993 report (which was the first in-depth analysis of state archives in over thirty years), the 1996 report extends its focus to include the challenges presented by electronic recordkeeping technologies.

²³ See <<http://www.coshrc.org>>.

²⁴ "About the Council of State Historical Records Coordinators," <<http://www.coshrc.org/about.htm>>.

²⁵ *Maintaining State Records in an Era of Change: A National Challenge*, compiled by Victoria Irons Walch, Project Consultant, April 1996. Available at <<http://www.coshrc.org/surveys/1996rpt/1996survey.htm>>.

Having completed two surveys of state archives and records programs, COSHRC next undertook to learn more about repositories that collect and hold historical materials produced by private organizations and individuals. The Historical Records Repositories Survey collected a total of 3,508 usable responses from repositories in twenty-one states. In June 1998, the Council issued an analysis of this data in a report entitled *Where History Begins: A Report on Historical Records Repositories in the United States*.²⁶

In 1999 the Council examined the NHPRC's planning initiative. In its study, the Council concurred with the Commission's identification of the need for an additional type of NHPRC support: for some basic State Board administrative costs.²⁷ The Commission voted to establish this fourth type of state board grant, which complements other aspects of our program and provides for outside evaluation of those affected.

All of the Council's reports have identified continuing archival education as both a high priority and an area of need in all the states which responded to its surveys. As a consequence, COSHRC spearheaded the preparations for the National Forum on Archival Continuing Education (NFACE). This work was sponsored by COSHRC, but funded by NHPRC grants administered by the American Association for State and Local History. COSHRC was a logical candidate for this task not only because of its long interest in this area, but also because it was a national organization, yet one without a direct stake in administering any of the national or regional continuing education efforts. The AASLH agreed to be a partner, providing key administrative support for this project.

In this "New Records Age," one existing advantage is the fact that in the last twenty-five years the United States has made much progress toward developing a national archival infrastructure. Key components of this infrastructure are the national professional associations (SAA, AASLH, NAGARA, and the Academy of Certified Archivists) and the regional and state archival groups. To this mix, NHPRC has added its efforts with its State Board Programs.

Today, forty states have active state boards; of these,

- thirty-seven have developed statewide plans for historical documentary work;
- roughly half have created statewide programs or projects to implement these plans; and
- twenty-one have conducted regrant programs, with Georgia, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Maine among the most vibrant; with encouraging new programs in Massachusetts, New Mexico and Nevada; and solid participation in Vermont, Florida, and Texas.

²⁶ Report compiled by Victoria Irons Walch, Project Coordinator, May 1998. Available at <<http://www.coshrc.org/surveys/HRRS/hrrsdocs.html>>.

²⁷ *The NHPRC Planning Initiative: An Evaluation*, January 1999. Report prepared by Sandra Clark, Michigan State Coordinator. See <<http://www.coshrc.org/surveys/planning/sclark.htm>>.

The NHPRC intends to begin an aggressive new phase in its State Board Program. The Commission is actively reviewing and reappraising its successes and failures and engaging in an energetic nationwide dialogue with state coordinators, boards, and NAGARA, SAA, AASLH, and COSHRC leadership and members.

Other Records Projects

However, even in a “New Records Age,” not all of our problems involve electronic records. In fact, for some archivists, electronic records may still be but a blip on the radar screen. An ominous blip, but not one with which they must grapple today.

Recent reports and state planning studies supported through NHPRC funds indicate that many archival programs continue to face significant problems with the basics: processing backlogs, funding, staffing, training, and space. The COSHRC report, *Where History Begins: A Report on Historical Records Repositories in the United States*, was based on data gathered in surveys from twenty-six states. While the surveys do not provide a scientific representative sample nor comprehensive coverage, they reported on over 3,500 repositories including most types of non-governmental repositories of all sizes. The report indicated that only 38 percent of the responding major repositories (defined as those having 5,000 linear feet of collections or more) reported having finding aids for 75 percent or more of their collection. This report also concluded that storage space is a major concern across the board, both in lack of capacity and poor environmental controls. Preservation remains a key concern, with access to training for existing staff in basic preservation procedures and access to centralized preservation services frequently mentioned as problems. The same survey reported that many archival repositories have not broadly embraced accepted professional practices such as acquisition policies or disaster plans. For instance, only 39 percent of all repositories in the survey on which the report is based have written acquisition policies identifying the kinds of materials they accept and conditions or terms that affect these acquisitions. Although larger collections are more likely to have such policies, it is of concern that only two-thirds of “major” repositories have them. Only 62 percent of these “major” repositories reported having disaster plans. Of special concern to the Commission is the need (identified in this and other reports and plans) for better education and training for those who staff these repositories.

Thus, the NHPRC’s Strategic Plan provides for “other projects . . . eligible for support within the Commission’s statutory mission, including projects to protect and otherwise make accessible historically significant records.” At its February 1999 meeting, the Commission voted to award \$922,436 for such projects. These included a grant to the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

for a project to arrange and describe the University's African-American archival and manuscript holdings and those of North Carolina Central University; and a grant to The Catholic University of America, in Washington, D.C. for a project to arrange, describe, undertake conservation work on, and prepare guides for five collections which document the labor movement and religious activism in the New Deal era.

The NHPRC also continues to support projects to preserve and make accessible visual materials, such as a project at the University of California, Berkeley, to prepare collection-level cataloging records for the 3.25 million photographs which make up the Bancroft Library Pictorial Collections.

Documenting Diversity

In too many cases the primary documentation of many of our nation's diverse populations remains missing, hidden, or threatened. Several current NHPRC projects grapple with this concern.

- An article in the September 1999 issue of the NHPRC's newsletter, *Annotation*, describes an NHPRC project at Northeastern University, *Preserving the History of Boston's Under-Documented Communities*, which supports a series of partnerships between Northeastern's archives and the African-American, Chinese, Latino, and gay and lesbian communities of Boston, to ensure that important documentation on those communities is preserved. This project complements a jointly funded NHPRC/Massachusetts State Archives project being conducted by the Massachusetts Board through a newly created *Documentary Heritage Grant Program*. One of the main focuses of that grassroots regrant program is to plan and implement community documentation projects.
- The New York State Archives and Records Administration (SARA), through the New York Historical Records Advisory Board, is undertaking a complementary statewide project to test a practical approach to create topical documentation plans, engage records creators and users in the documentation process, take action to preserve the most important records, and raise public awareness of the value of an even and equitable historical record. A trial phase of this project supported by SARA has already demonstrated exciting results in the area of mental health records.
- For well over a decade, the NHPRC, through its Native American Initiative, has invited proposals to develop archives and records management programs within tribal organizations, to survey and copy historical documents relating to tribes that are held by records repositories, and to conduct oral history projects. In recent years, a number of successful projects in these areas have served to improve the preservation of and access

to the nation's Native American heritage. Tribal archives and records management programs have been initiated by tribes in Minnesota, Montana, New Mexico, Oklahoma, and South Dakota. The Cherokee Nation in Oklahoma, for example, has been able to arrange, describe, and make available for research records documenting its history since the 1700s. The Pawnee Tribe of Oklahoma is conducting a repository survey project to identify photographs relating to the Pawnee Nation. Copies of these photographs, along with detailed descriptive information, will be made available to researchers at the tribe's archival facility. In fact, the only Commission-funded oral history projects are those of Native American groups, because such projects help to preserve native languages as well as tribal history, which is based upon oral tradition. Native American oral history projects have been undertaken in Alaska, Minnesota, and Montana. At Little Big Horn College in Montana, an oral history class was integrated into the college curriculum to help ensure that trained interviewers will be available in the future.

The NHPRC has made a start, but it is seeking more ways to encourage projects that identify, preserve, and improve access to documentation of ethnic, racial, gender-based and other diversities in the United States. At its November 1999 meeting, the Commission endorsed these ongoing efforts and directed the staff to report on the information they have solicited and the progress made in this effort at the May 2000 meeting, in particular with regard to Native American Records.

Archival Education

Besides the three equal strategic goals and projects to protect and otherwise make accessible historically significant records, the NHPRC's Strategic Plan provides for "other projects . . . eligible for support within the Commission's statutory mission, including projects . . . to improve the methods, tools, and training of professionals engaged in documentary work." From the beginning, a major component of the NHPRC's funding of archives and records projects has been in the area of archival education. Many archives and records grants involve educational components: workshops, training programs, institutes, manuals, etc. And, for some grants, the primary focus is archival education and training.

One of the NHPRC's earliest archives grants was awarded to the Society of American Archivists to develop the *Basic Manuals* series, and it also funded the *Archival Fundamentals* series, which updated and replaced the *Basic Manuals* a decade later. During the mid- and late 1980s, a series of NHPRC grants to SAA played an important role in supporting SAA's development of its Education Office and its post-appointment educational offerings. In recent years the SAA/NHPRC partnership has continued with the development and comple-

tion of SAA's Descriptive Standards Curriculum, and a series of case studies with teaching notes to assist archival educators in addressing issues relating to archival electronic records and the use of information technologies. The NHPRC envisions a continuing and evolving partnership in many areas of archival education as SAA evaluates its education program in the context of its current strategic planning efforts.

Since 1985 the NHPRC has offered fellowships in archival administration, which are intended to expand administrative training opportunities for professional archivists with two to five years of professional archival experience. The object of the archival fellowship program is the development of a pool of future archival administrators and the invigoration of older archival institutions with fresh ideas derived from recent, academically trained staff. NHPRC fellows participate in a variety of daily administrative and managerial activities, from budget planning and implementation to long-range planning and the development of administrative procedures and policies. Potential host institutions as well as potential fellows compete to be chosen.

Another significant Commission project in archival education was the institute which was affectionately known as "Camp Pitt." Held from 1989 to 1997 at the University of Pittsburgh, this institute was designed to provide senior government archivists and information resource managers with the knowledge and tools to improve their organizations' effectiveness in dealing with information policy issues. While the overall reviews of this institute have been mixed, it is clear that the offerings were of value in assisting many state archival and records programs in moving from a passive approach to active efforts in developing electronic policies and programs.²⁸

NHPRC projects in archival education extend well beyond the organizations that are represented on the Commission. A recent grant to the Association of Research Libraries and the Coalition for Networked Information enabled them to develop and test workshops which brought together teams of archivists and information technologists to explore electronic records issues. We have received extremely enthusiastic reports from participants, indicating that it was very useful in opening the lines of communications with other stakeholders in their institutions and in developing projects to begin to address electronic records issues.

National Forum on Archival Continuing Education (NFACE)

With the assistance of grants from the NHPRC, the Council of State Historical Records Coordinators, the American Association for State and Local

²⁸ For additional information on the "Camp Pitt" institute, see David J. Olson, "'Camp Pitt' and the Continuing Education of Government Archivists: 1989-1996," *American Archivist* 60 (Spring 1997): 202-14.

History, and other professional organizations worked together to plan a National Forum on Archival Continuing Education (NFACE). The focus upon archival continuing education is a direct outgrowth of concerns voiced at recent Commission and COSHRC meetings and was identified in the 1998 COSHRC report *Where History Begins* as one of the top priorities of all who responded to the study.

In particular, those responding to the COSHRC survey identified the most pressing training needs among staff and volunteers as, in order:

- Preservation/conservation methods
- Basic and intermediate archival methods
- The use of computers
- Disaster preparedness
- Appraisal and collection development
- Records management
- Electronic records

It has become clear, as well, that more and better programs focusing upon continuing archival education must be developed not only for professional archivists, but also for allied professionals with records responsibilities; e.g., local government officials, librarians, historic site administrators, museum curators, and records caretakers who have limited or no training, many of whom work as volunteers.

Therefore, the NHPRC supported the efforts of COSHRC, AASLH, and other professional organizations for NFACE. The forum was held April 28–30, 2000, in Decatur, Georgia, and invited approximately 100 representatives from more than forty-five organizations that currently provide continuing education to those caring for historical records or whose constituents are potential consumers of such services. Many of the state coordinators themselves also attended, thus broadening the participation of those delivering education and information services to grassroots organizations nationwide.

The forum served three purposes:

1. to inform these organizations about what educational services and information resources are already available and identify gaps (especially with regard to electronic records) and redundancies;
2. to encourage collaboration and coordination among providers in developing additional offerings that address gaps in existing educational opportunities; and
3. to improve accessibility to information resources about best practices in the care of historical records that support these educational efforts.

The forum focused upon continuing archival education for all of the groups mentioned earlier: professional archivists, allied professionals with recordkeeping responsibilities, and records caretakers who have limited or no training.

Another very specific, focused NHPRC initiative in archival education, discussed earlier in this article, is its recent call for proposals designed to broaden

the base and raise the level of archival expertise with regard to electronic records.

For the future, the NHPRC anticipates a growing need for both general and specialized archival continuing education. The archival world is top-heavy with “baby boomers,” who will begin retiring in great numbers. The result will be a plethora of vacancies at the top levels of archival repositories, programs, and associations across the nation. It is likely that a special demand for continuing education opportunities will come from those currently at mid-level positions who wish to increase their eligibility for consideration for the posts which will open, and from those who gain these positions and realize that there are particular areas in which they need additional training in order to succeed. Moreover, these individuals may not prove to be great enough in number to fill all the vacancies which will occur; individuals from other professions may be selected for some posts and require specialized archival continuing education, as well. The NHPRC intends to monitor the situation and to try to anticipate these needs, relying heavily on recommendations emerging from NFACE.

Application Assistance

All of this talk of NHPRC strategic goals and interests is all well and good, perhaps, but the reality is that the Commission can only fund—or decide not to fund—the proposals which come before it. Prospective applicants are encouraged to contact NHPRC staff as early as possible in the planning process for assistance in planning successful projects, and preparing more competitive proposals. Staff will indicate if a project requires more preparation and the applicant should wait for a later funding cycle; or applicants may be advised that their projects would be a better “fit” with another funding agency. Draft proposals which are submitted at least six weeks ahead of deadline are reviewed and concrete suggestions made for improving them. In addition, unlike many other granting agencies, NHPRC gives applicants the opportunity to reply to issues raised by peer reviewers or by the staff—one last chance to make their case.

To further assist applicants, Commission staff recently revised the Commission’s *Guidelines for Applying for and Administering NHPRC Grants*. By the time this article appears, the revisions will have completed the federal review process and will have been released. The NHPRC will publicize and distribute them as widely as possible, including on the NHPRC website.²⁹

²⁹ NHPRC’s website is located at <<http://www.nara.gov/nhprc/>>. The *Guidelines* also may be obtained by writing to: National Historical Publications and Records Commission, National Archives and Records Administration, 700 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW, Room 111, Washington, D.C. 20408-0001.

Performance Measures

These days, the NHPRC is taking a closer look at how well grantees do what they say they're going to do with the grant money they are awarded. The NHPRC has begun applying "performance measures" to all grants that it awards. Those who received funding from the NHPRC this fiscal year received a document, which took from their proposals the objectives they had stated they intended to achieve with the grant. This document informed grantees that at the end of the project the NHPRC will assess how well—or whether—they have achieved these goals. It will also look for unanticipated benefits resulting from the project, whether the work proceeded in a timely manner and whether reporting was on time. It is understood that projects run into problems—and some more than others—and that will be taken into account, particularly if Commission staff are kept apprised at the time of the problems and the efforts made to deal with them. In fact, NHPRC staff often draw upon their experience with similar problems encountered by other projects to suggest solutions.

This evaluation process will help the NHPRC make even better use of scarce dollars, advise projects in the future, develop early warning systems for identifying projects headed for trouble, and perhaps determine what makes some projects especially successful, and share that information with everyone else.

The Commission staff feels it particularly needs to do a better job of evaluating electronic records projects. In this area especially it must learn lessons from the projects it funds in order to ensure that it invests funds wisely in future projects. Asking the peer reviewers who evaluated electronic grant applications prior to funding to help evaluate the products of the funded grants is under consideration, as well as the possibility of establishing a listserv for post-project evaluation.

What is the NHPRC?

The NHPRC remains today the only grantmaking organization in the nation whose *only* focus is the preservation of and increased access to American historical documentation, in its myriad forms and formats. It is a source of venture capital for the archival and documentary editing communities and, in the opinion of many archivists, the definite funder-of-choice for first-time grant applicants.

The NHPRC fills another, particularly important, role: it serves as the one national consultative mechanism that regularly tries to identify principal historical and records needs and priorities, to publicize them widely, and to suggest and facilitate ways to address them most effectively. As an archivist who returned to the United States after living abroad for five years, I have been conscious of the increased splintering of the archival community. It is no small thing that, in an increasingly decentralized archival world, the NHPRC endures

as one of the few national unifying forces for the profession, one place where all the threads of the archival tapestry intertwine.

The NHPRC is a unique and fascinating mix of representatives of the three branches of government and of leading professional societies of historians, documentary editors, and archivists, supported by an experienced, hard-working staff. It is a small agency, and its grant dollars may have less buying power today than they did in 1974, but it stretches and leverages those dollars as best it can in its ongoing effort to protect the nation's documentary heritage in this New Records Age.