

**Society of American Archivists  
Council Meeting  
May 16–17, 2017  
Chicago, Illinois**

**Issue Brief: Federal Grant Funding for Archives  
(Prepared by SAA Committee on Public Policy)**

**BACKGROUND / DISCUSSION**

Federal grant support of archival institutions has been a perennial appropriations issue with each presidential administration and session of Congress. On March 16, 2017, the Trump Administration forwarded its FY 2018 budget blueprint to Congress, to be followed by a more detailed proposal later in the year. The outline proposes a \$54 billion increase in defense and public safety spending that is offset by equivalent cuts in discretionary non-defense programs. Included in those cuts are reductions in—or total elimination of—funding for federal agencies with a history of supporting cultural heritage organizations and projects. The proposed budget eliminates funding for the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) and the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS), both of which support archival and other cultural heritage projects. The proposed budgets for other agencies with archives-related programs, including the National Historical Publications and Records Commission (NHPRC), have not yet been released.

SAA routinely has voiced its opposition to budget cuts affecting the NHPRC, NEH, and IMLS while advocating vigorously for robust funding for programs administered by these entities. Federal grant funding programs are vital to the archival mission, especially in preserving historical documentation for the next generation and making accessible evidence of the diverse and complex elements of the human experience. Making the case for federal grant support to archival programs is often an uphill battle when faced with competing demands and finite resources. However, archives have a demonstrably positive impact on the communities they serve, ensuring that taxpayer funds benefit society as a whole.

The Committee on Public Policy recommends adopting the following issue brief as a general statement expressing SAA’s position on the positive impact of federal grant funding on the cultural and economic well-being of the country.

**RECOMMENDATION**

**THAT the following issue brief on “Federal Grant Funding for Archives” be adopted.**

## **Issue Brief: Federal Grant Funding for Archives**

### **SAA Position**

The Society of American Archivists encourages and supports robust federal funding for grants to archival programs to ensure that the historical record of our collective human experience is preserved and accessible for use by the American public, including teachers and students, scholars, scientists, family historians, the business community, and governments themselves.

SAA recognizes that public funding for archives has a critical impact on local communities and represents an excellent return on investment. Furthermore, federal funding is an indication to the private sector of the important role that archives serve in preserving essential aspects of our country's social, political, scientific, and cultural heritage.

SAA supports the continued work of the National Historical Publications and Records Commission (NHPRC), the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH), and the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) as the three leading federal entities that provide grants to archives and have a proven track record for cost-effective and meaningful use of taxpayer funds. Federal grants spur innovation and creativity in advancing best practices in archives, developing new technology, publishing historical documents, and connecting citizens to their records. Current funding is modest, yet it is vital to the cultural and economic health of the nation and cannot be substituted from private foundations or other sources.

In accordance with this position, SAA will:

- Advocate with Congress and the Administration for robust funding of federal programs that support archives.
- Advocate for the continued existence of the NHPRC, NEH, and IMLS as the three primary federal entities that provide funding to archives programs.
- Collaborate with allied organizations to support federal agencies that provide critical funding to archives programs.

### **The Issues**

Archives are essential to ensuring that a complete and accurate record exists of America's people, events, and history. They are the foundational information resource to which teachers, lawyers, scholars, scientists, government officials, business people, community groups, individual citizens, and countless others turn to assess the past, think critically about the present, and consider directions for the future. Just as this country is a union of states, our history is not one story but a blended series of narratives that together form the

American experience. As federal funding comes from all 50 states, it is appropriate that it be used to ensure that those narratives survive for use by all citizens in all states.

Grants to archives and archival projects are a productive and positive investment of very modest federal funds. They ensure that documentation, especially in electronic form, is preserved and made accessible to a wide array of users. These grants create jobs in archives, libraries, museums, historical societies, and other cultural heritage institutions, and they enable the purchase of goods and services in local communities. Visitors to archives spend tourism dollars on housing, food, and entertainment during their stay and further contribute to the local economy. The Council of State Archivists estimates that visitors to state archives alone contribute between \$2.5 million and \$5 million annually to local economies. Similarly, the U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis estimates that the arts and cultural sector, in which archives serve a vital function, is a \$704 billion industry that represents 4.2% of the nation's GDP (as of 2013, the latest figures available).

Grant recipients typically are required to match federal funds up to 50 percent of the overall project budget. In this way, federal funding stimulates private support for archival projects and offers potential donors the incentive of doubling the impact of their contributions. Federal matching funds may not be released before third-party gifts have been raised. In this way, federal funding acts as a catalyst that cannot be substituted from private sources. Grants from the NHPRC, NEH, and IMLS catalyze private investment and enable archives to leverage these grants to attract additional private, local support.

The NHPRC, NEH, and IMLS have supported work in every state in the U.S., funding archival repositories within academic institutions, local and state governments, museums, and public libraries. Federal grants demonstrate a commitment on the part of the government—on behalf of the American people—to ensure that the nation's social, cultural, economic, scientific, and political experience is available to future generations. Without the leadership of these programs, Americans' understanding of our cultural heritage would be greatly diminished.

### **National Historical Publications and Records Commission**

As the grant-making arm of the National Archives and Records Administration, the NHPRC is the only federal program that focuses solely on records programs and archival projects, and thus the only federal program that supports Americans' right and need to know both their heritage and the workings of their public offices. NHPRC has a distinguished record of supporting innovation at state and local levels that has a major impact on federal records. NHPRC provides opportunities for the American people to discover and use records that increase understanding of our democracy, history, and culture. During the past 40 years, NHPRC has awarded \$175 million in grants to more than 4,500 state and local government archives, colleges and universities, and other institutions and non-profit groups. Funds are used for various purposes—preserving historical records, digitizing collections, producing oral histories, publishing documentary editions, establishing new archives programs—to preserve and provide access to records of national impact and importance. These grants create jobs that make

accessible records and documentary editions for use by classroom teachers, students, biographers, local historians, lawyers, genealogists, surveyors, documentary filmmakers, and many others.

### **National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH)**

The National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) is an independent federal agency that was created by Congress in 1965. As one of the largest funders of humanities programs in the United States, NEH provides critical support for research, education, preservation, and public programs, including vital support to archives nationwide. NEH funding supports research that leads to new digital tools, technologies, national standards, best practices, and other methodologies for the preservation of archival collections and cultural resources. NEH grants also support the training of archives staff in the appropriate procedures for preserving and enhancing access to archival collections. Such funding helps sustain basic preservation activities at small and mid-sized archives, libraries, and other historical organizations. Through its cost-sharing requirements, NEH leverages private sector contributions of the nation's businesses, foundations, and philanthropic-minded individuals on behalf of archives and humanities projects and programs.

### **Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS)**

The IMLS is the primary source of federal support for the nation's 123,000 libraries and 17,500 museums, many of which maintain archives and special collections that enrich scholarly learning and civic engagement. IMLS believes in a democratic society in which communities and individuals thrive with broad public access to knowledge, heritage, and lifelong learning. As such, IMLS investments in research and development yield long-term benefits to the public. IMLS funding enables institutions to develop the latest technology and embrace innovations and opportunities to digitize and share their collections, as well as to develop new standards and protocols to preserve and provide access to born-digital data and records. In its role as a federal agency, IMLS provides critical leadership through its support for research and policy development, as well as helping to develop best practices to enable archives, museums, and libraries to improve their services and processes.

### **Additional Resources**

Council of State Archivists, The Importance of State Archives, 2013.

[https://www.statearchivists.org/files/7114/4071/0454/Importance\\_of\\_State\\_Archives.pdf](https://www.statearchivists.org/files/7114/4071/0454/Importance_of_State_Archives.pdf)

National Endowment for the Arts, "Arts and Cultural Production Contributed \$704.2 Billion to the U.S. Economy in 2013," February 16, 2016. <https://www.arts.gov/news/2016/arts-and-cultural-production-contributed-7042-billion-us-economy-2013>

National Endowment for the Arts, "Taking Note: Trending Now – An Arts Imperative in Economic Policy," February 2, 2016. <https://www.arts.gov/art-works/2017/taking-note-trending-now%E2%80%9494-arts-imperative-economic-policy>

National Endowment for the Humanities, Impact Reports. <https://www.neh.gov/news/impact-reports>

U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of Economic Analysis, “Arts and Culture Grows at Faster Pace in 2013,” February 16, 2016.

<https://www.bea.gov/newsreleases/general/acpsa/acpsa0216.pdf>

Yakel, Elizabeth, Wendy Duff, Helen Tibbo, Adam Kriesberg, and Amber Cushing. “The Economic Impact of Archives: Surveys of Users of Government Archives in Canada and the United States”. *The American Archivist*: Fall/Winter, Vol. 75, No. 2, pp. 297-325.

<http://americanarchivist.org/doi/pdf/10.17723/aarc.75.2.002033qg27366gvt>

All sites were accessed on April 1, 2017.

**Support Statement:** This issue brief supports SAA’s Public Policy Agenda by providing members and other prospective audiences with SAA’s considered opinion on the topic of the importance of federal grant support to archives, and in support of the public’s need for strong and adequately funded institutional stewardship of the American historical record.

**Impact on Strategic Priorities:** Addresses Goal 1: Advocating for Archives and Archivists, Strategy 1.1. Provide leadership in promoting the value of archives and archivists to institutions, communities, and society, 1.2. Educate and influence decision makers about the importance of archives and archivists, 1.3. Provide leadership in ensuring the completeness, diversity, and accessibility of the historical record, and 1.4. Strengthen the ability of those who manage and use archival material to articulate the value of archives.

**Fiscal Impact:** Approval of the issue brief does not commit SAA to expend funds on any particular advocacy effort at this time.