

**Society of American Archivists  
Council Meeting  
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**DRAFT Issue Brief: Adequate Funding of Government  
Archives and Archival Programs  
(Prepared by the Committee on Advocacy and Public Policy)**

This issue brief addresses the following priority within SAA's Advocacy Agenda, as adopted by the SAA Council in June 2012:

**The Public's Interest in Adequate Funding of Archives and Archival Programs**

The records found in our archives ensure administrative continuity, help hold government officials accountable for their actions, and create documentary sources through which we come to understand our society. Because of the importance of these functions, archival institutions at all levels of government and throughout society must be adequately funded. Funding should include sufficient resources both to renew and invigorate undervalued operations and to support innovative and transformative projects that enable archives to preserve extraordinary documentary resources for the public.

**SUMMARY**

Government archives in the United States are underfunded. By any reasonable comparison the legally required records of government, as well as valuable historical documents found in government archives, receive too little funding. Even when compared with other "cultural agencies" that receive federal funding, such as the Smithsonian Institution and the Library of Congress, federal archives receive less support. Additionally state and local government archives function with minimal funding.

Equally disturbing is the fact that neither the federal government nor any state or local governmental agency has systematically studied the cost of maintaining the archival record that is required by a democratic nation to preserve the legally required and culturally valuable records created by public institutions. In an era in which the public increasingly realizes the need to allocate vital resources rationally, government has failed to ascertain the true cost of maintaining an adequate documentary record of our democracy.

To resolve this problem:

In the short term, the Society of American Archivists believes that:

- Federal spending for archives should be maintained at its current level,

- Grant support from the federal government for state and local archival work should be expanded significantly to equal the level of support already given to the library and museum communities nationwide, and
- State governments should appropriate, on a per capita basis, at least as much for the care of archival records as is spent by the federal government.

In the longer term, systematic federal and state studies should be undertaken to determine the true cost of maintaining in archives the public records that are legally required to assure individual rights, document government actions, provide government transparency and accountability, and document historical actions taken by government.

## **THE ISSUE**

In the United States the funding made available to public archives is not adequate to serve the public's legitimate right for access to and preservation of documents that must, by law, be maintained and through which public accountability and historical interpretation are made possible.

Using federal spending as a bellwether for public spending on archives:

- In Fiscal Year 2012 the National Archives and Records Administration's budget was \$391.5 million, 0.00008 % of the \$4.537 trillion federal budget, representing an expenditure of about \$1.24 U.S. per resident (based on the current United States population).

Some programs within the federal government's FY12 budget with similar costs include:

- \$581.7 million in NASA's budget for the exploration of Mars, about \$1.84 per resident.
- [\$450] million in economic assistance to [country], about [\$1.42] per resident.

SAA believes that the citizens of the United States have a greater need to ensure the preservation of archival records that are fundamental to their government than they have in exploring Mars or aiding economic development in a small [TK] nation. Yet the federal budget does not reflect this prioritization.

The National Archives is significantly underfunded when compared to other cultural or historical organizations supported by the federal government. In FY12:

- Congress appropriated \$635,511,552 in operating funds for the Smithsonian Institution, about \$2.00 per U.S. resident.
- The Library of Congress appropriation was \$587 million, about \$1.85 per resident.

The federal government has not invested grant funds in state and local records at the rate at which it has supported similar state and local cultural activities:

- The National Historical Publications and Records Commission (NHPRC) received funding of \$5 million in FY12 to support archival activity at the state and local levels, far less than a penny per U.S. resident.
- The Institute for Museum and Library Services (IMLS) in FY12 gave \$189,035,000 in funding to libraries nationwide, about 60 cents per resident, and \$30,140,000 to support museums nationwide, about 9 cents per resident.

Thus, when compared with similar organizations, the federal government underfunds archives, both in terms of budgets allocated to somewhat comparable organizations and in grant support for archival activity throughout the nation.

## **THE SOLUTION**

The Society of American Archivists believes that three steps should be taken to ensure the protection of America's public records:

- Archival programs at the federal level of government should, at a minimum, remain at their current levels, lest unanticipated and irreparable damage occur to the nation's documentary heritage.
- Grant funding by the federal government for archival programs made available through the NHPRC should be immediately increased to a minimum of \$30,000,000, approximately the level of grant support offered to museums nationwide. Over a longer period, new legislation should be introduced to create equity of federal grant opportunities among state and local archives, museums, and libraries. Such equity could be established by adoption of the Preserving the American Historical Record Act (PAHR), which proposes a minimum funding level of \$50,000,000, or 16 cents per U.S. resident.
- The Society of American Archivists encourages state governments to fund state archives and records programs at the current level established by the federal government, \$1.24 per resident.
  - In 2012, 11 states and the District of Columbia met or exceeded this federal commitment, while 38 states fell below this threshold (data unavailable for one state). On average, state governments devoted 43 cents per resident to the care of archival records. (See Table.)

In the longer term, governments at the federal, state, and local levels should initiate studies to determine the amount of funding needed to ensure the necessary and required preservation of America's public records

## **ADDITIONAL REFERENCE SOURCE**

For more information on the Preserving the American Historical Record Act, see <http://www2.archivists.org/initiatives/preserving-the-american-historical-record>.

**Funding for Archives/Records Programs by State  
Data for 2012 except as noted**

<b>State</b>	<b>Archival Funding Per Person</b>	<b>Funding 2012</b>	<b>Functions</b>	<b>Note</b>
Wyoming	\$4.69	\$2,700,000	ARM	
Vermont	\$2.50	\$1,567,810	ARM	
North Dakota	\$1.83	\$1,278,236	ARM	
Maryland	\$1.63	\$9,606,099	ARM	
Idaho	\$1.48	\$2,365,847	ARM	
West Virginia	\$1.45	\$2,686,151	A	
District of Columbia	\$1.41	\$888,126	ARM	
Connecticut	\$1.39	\$5,000,000	ARM	
Mississippi	\$1.37	\$4,099,988	ARM	
Rhode Island	\$1.37	\$1,442,203	ARM	
Hawaii	\$1.30	\$1,804,593	ARM	
Washington	\$1.29	\$8,870,500	ARM	
Nebraska	\$1.20	\$2,228,393	ARM	
New Mexico	\$1.18	\$2,455,300	ARM	
Kentucky	\$1.08	\$4,738,902	ARM	
Montana	\$1.08	\$1,085,068	ARM	
Louisiana	\$0.95	\$4,381,942	ARM	2010
Oklahoma	\$0.87	\$3,323,523	ARM	
Delaware	\$0.85	\$780,000	ARM	
Utah	\$0.83	\$2,363,921	ARM	
Oregon	\$0.75	\$2,905,745	ARM	One-half 2007-09 biennial budget
Maine	\$0.70	\$933,813	ARM	
Kansas	\$0.68	\$1,963,498	ARM	
South Dakota	\$0.62	\$515,147	A	
Arkansas	\$0.59	\$1,731,111	A	
New Jersey	\$0.57	\$5,088,709	ARM	
Alaska	\$0.55	\$400,000	ARM	
Alabama	\$0.54	\$2,609,000	ARM	
North Carolina	\$0.53	\$5,138,864	ARM	
Virginia	\$0.51	\$4,184,000	ARM	
Michigan	\$0.48	\$4,715,500	ARM	
Tennessee	\$0.47	\$3,057,905	A	
Nevada	\$0.45	\$1,127,847	ARM	
Missouri	\$0.42	\$2,535,227	ARM	
Colorado	\$0.41	\$2,102,657	ARM	

South Carolina	\$0.40	\$1,634,330	ARM	
New York	\$0.38	\$7,346,754	ARM	
Illinois	\$0.37	\$4,738,902	ARM	
New Hampshire**	\$0.33	\$438,120	ARM	
Indiana	\$0.28	\$1,804,593	ARM	
Pennsylvania	\$0.19	\$2,465,710	ARM	
Texas	\$0.17	\$4,364,823	ARM	
Iowa	\$0.13	\$402,349	ARM	
Massachusetts	\$0.12	\$800,000	ARM	
Arizona	\$0.09	\$614,947	ARM	
California	\$0.09	\$3,348,413	A	
Wisconsin	\$0.07	\$390,000	A	
Ohio	\$0.05	\$550,468	A	
Georgia	\$0.03	\$333,500	ARM	
Florida	\$0.01	\$237,000	ARM	
Minnesota	\$0.00	\$0		No data available

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