

**Society of American Archivists
Council Meeting
May 12-13, 2020
Virtual Meeting**

**Consent Agenda: Ratify Council Interim Actions
(Prepared by Governance Manager Felicia Owens)**

BACKGROUND

Current parliamentary policy agrees on validating board decisions made remotely, and ratifying the Council's online and conference-call decisions via the Consent Agenda does not conflict with any existing SAA policy.

DISCUSSION

Given the Council's use of an e-mail discussion list to function as a group and make decisions remotely, approving interim Council actions via the Consent Agenda contributes to streamlining the group's work and improves access to the interim decisions of SAA's elected decision makers.

RECOMMENDATION

THAT the following interim actions taken by the Council between December 9, 2019, and March 23, 2020, be ratified:

- Reviewed the annual report from the SAA representative to the National Historical Publications and Records Commission. (Appendix) (December 9, 2019)
- Approved the [December 3-5, 2019, Council meeting](#) minutes. (January 3, 2020)
- Appointed [Stacie Williams as the next SAA Publications Editor](#) for a three-year term, beginning April 1, 2020. (February 4, 2020)
- Prepared a "[Council Statement on SAA 2020 Election](#)," in response to a petition received to add a candidate to the ballot. (February 4, 2020)
- Prepared a "[SAA Council Statement on Impact of COVID-19 Health Crisis on Archives Workers](#)." (March 18, 2020).
- Approved the [March 6 Council conference call](#) minutes. (March 20, 2020)
- Agreed to [sign on to a statement](#), at the recommendation of the Intellectual Property Working Group, calling on the World Intellectual Property Organization and its Member States to respond to the need for international copyright laws that will empower cultural institutions to prevent further loss of worldwide cultural heritage due to global warming. (March 23, 2020)

**Society of American Archivists
Council Interim Report
November 21, 2019**

**Representative Report: National Historical Publications and
Records Commission (NHPRC)**

(Prepared by Dennis Meissner)

Approved Grant Requests. At its semiannual meeting on November 21 the Commission approved funding for 29 proposals totaling \$2,585,796. These awards represent a variety of projects undertaken in 22 states and the District of Columbia, including grants in 7 states (AK, CO, KS, MS, MT, UT, and WY) that have had lower levels of successful grant applications in the past. They break down as follows:

State Board Programming (RC) grants: Funding was approved for 15 projects aggregating \$479,574. This grant category comprises direct grants made to state SHRAB boards to support their work to stimulate and reinforce archival activity in governmental and tribal entities and other small repositories within the states. This work typically involves developing and presenting archival skills workshops, supporting board meetings, conducting needs surveys, providing supplies and other resources, and similar activities to elevate the performance of archival repositories within the states and territories.

Access to Historical Records – Major Initiatives (RM) grants: Funding was approved for 4 projects in the amount of \$1,029,391. This category funds projects in excess of \$100,000. This category was recently split out of the normal Access to Historical Records channel so that more modest proposals (sometimes from less experienced requesters) did not have to compete against big-dollar proposals from larger institutions. This bifurcation has proved to be helpful in leveraging dollars fairly and effectively.

Access to Historical Records – Archival Projects (RH) grants: Funding was approved for 1 project for \$44,185. This large category is normally dealt with at the spring meeting. This out-of-cycle award funds a project originally reviewed last May, for which questions from staff and commission members required further information and some budget adjustments.

Publishing Historical Records in Documentary Editions (PD) grants: Funding was awarded for 9 projects in the amount of \$1,032,646. These large projects, some of which are generational in their lifespans, continue as the backbone of NHPRC's enduring documentary commitments. The great majority are still focused on papers and records of the nation's Founders, of later statespersons, and of organizations and movements essential to understanding the nation's shared public history.

250th Anniversary projects. The committee planning the Commission’s role in this congressionally-funded initiative for 2026 has met several times virtually and has developed two proposals, which were considered at the meeting. The first is a statement to be inserted as an amendment into the grant program descriptions for the Access to Historical Records, Publishing Historical Records, Public Engagement with Historical Records, and State Board Programming grants “that seeks to encourage applications for projects tied to commemorating the 250th anniversary of the nation’s founding through the continual interpretation and debate over the ideals that led to the founding of the nation.”

The second recommendation is to “convene the leadership of the organizations represented on the Commission, and those other organizations that have been interested stakeholders in the work of the Commission, to discuss the state of historical records preservation and access for non- federal institutions, consider ways to collaborate, and build stronger relationships amongst them and with the NHPRC.” This second proposal was discussed at length. Commission members are agreed that it is absolutely necessary to bring all of these represented organizations into closer cooperation in furtherance of the NHPRC and NARA missions, and in the larger cause of historical documentation and citizen education. However, members agreed that a single large convening would be an expensive proposition, the enduring results of which are questionable.

What emerged from the discussion was a commitment by staff to restructure the agenda of all future Commission meetings to include, as a central feature, a generous amount of time for the various representatives to present the goals and strategic concerns of their organizations, to voice immediate concerns, and to engage each other in promoting greater cooperation, stronger alliances, and more focused interactions. I think this is a very good step, which has the potential for profound results. My only regret is that I will be off the Commission before this fully ramps up.

Digital Edition Publishing Cooperative program. This is the cooperative project funded by Mellon with a goal of dramatically innovating digital publishing of historical documents.

Working with Mellon Foundation staff, the program initially funded eight planning teams and, in August 2019, three (University of Virginia, Massachusetts Historical Society, and Bucknell University) implementation teams were invited to prepare revised proposals for further consideration and possible funding up to \$1 million per project. Final funding decisions by the Mellon Foundation will be made at its Trustees meeting in December and work will start in January 2020, if funded.

Budget. At the time of the meeting, the 2020 budget had not yet been appropriated. As in the prior year, the President’s budget for FY2020 contained no funds for the NHPRC. On June 27, a bill, H.R. 3351, was sent to and received by the Senate and referred to the Senate’s Committee on Appropriations. H.R. 3351 proposes \$7 million for the NHPRC grants program. On September 19, Senate bill S.2524 was introduced proposing FY2020 funding for the National Archives of \$363 million, without mention of funding for the NHPRC. No further action has been taken and NHPRC continues to operate under a continuing resolution.

Congressperson vacancy. As of the meeting date, the Democratic House majority had still not appointed a member of Congress to represent that body on the Commission.

NHPRC Strategic Plan Implementation

The NHPRC staff members are three years into implementing the Strategic Plan approved May 2016. The following is a summary of highlights for the six-month period, May 2019-November 2019.

Strategic Goal One: Connect the National Archives with the nation's archives.

- *Initiative on new publishing methods:* reported above.
- *Initiative on Early Legal Records.* The nine projects funded at the May meeting, as part of the Access to Historical Records grant channel, are all moving forward.

Strategic Goal Two: Expand access to the nation's historical records.

- *Complete current documentary editions and fund new projects.* American University is submitting for Commission consideration the first proposal for a publishing project on the *Correspondence of Zachary Taylor and Millard Fillmore*, covering the period 1844- 1853, a critical time of national expansion ahead of the Civil War.
- *Online promotion efforts.* Following the May meeting, Darrell Meadows developed a four-part video series to promote the Publishing program on NARA's YouTube channel.
- *Support, where appropriate, the use of Creative Commons licenses, the buildings of application program interfaces (APIs) and other Open Access principles that promote use and reuse of collections and associated data.* Staff continues this work.

Strategic Goal Three: Public engagement in preserving and discovering the American Record.

- *Implement a Public Engagement grants program.* At the close of the October 2019 deadline, there were ten Public Engagement with Historical Records applications that will be reviewed and presented for consideration at the May 2020 meeting, a 25% increase from the prior grant cycle.
- *Help the public find fulfilling and useful ways to benefit from the increasing amount of digital resources.* Following the NHPRC staff's engagement with the Wikipedia Foundation's Wiki Scholars program in the spring, to assist the NARA Office of Innovation in its promotion of the centennial of the women's suffrage movement and the 19th Amendment, and to add content to new and existing Wikipedia articles drawn from NHPRC-supported publications, there have been about twenty-five (25) other Wikipedia articles that have been found that have relied on information from

NHPRC-related grants projects and Founders Online.

Strategic Goal Four: Enhance the capacity of small and diverse organizations with records collections.

- *Develop a grants program to encourage collaboration for small and diverse organizations.* Two collaborative agreements were signed following May meeting. The first, the needs assessment for small and diverse organizations, was signed with LYRASIS (\$25,000) and the second was signed with Shift (\$24,975). Both organizations will conduct their assessments over the course of the fiscal year and are intended to be completed by the close of FY2020 in September. The results should be available to report by the time of the November 2020 Commission meeting.

Archives Leadership Institute. Following a conversation with Rachel Vagts regarding concerns about the performance of the 2019 ALI, which resulted in the mass resignation of the Advisory Board of experienced archivists, I requested written assessments from all those erstwhile board members. I assembled the salient criticism from those statements and presented them to the executive director and assistant director of NHPRC in September. At the November Commission meeting, I also briefed Executive Committee chair Naomi Nelson about the issue and shared my aforementioned memo to Eck and Barber. Before leaving the meeting, I had a substantive conversation with Chris Eck about the situation, and was assured that Lucy Barber is taking action to ensure that the problems do not repeat themselves in 2020. All are agreed that this important program, and its reputation, cannot be allowed to suffer.

As always, I will be happy to provide more information about any of these matters at any time.