

**Society of American Archivists
Council Meeting
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Chicago, Illinois**

**Issue Brief: Adequate Funding of Government
Archives and Archival Programs**

**(Prepared by a Working Group Composed of Representatives of the
Council of State Archivists, the National Association of Government Archives and
Records Administrators, and the Society of American Archivists
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 2012:¹

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.

Given the subject matter and SAA's interest in collaborating with other organizations, and particularly the Council of State Archivists and the National Association of Government Archives and Records Administrators on public policy issues,² members of the Committee on Advocacy and Public Policy contacted CoSA's and NAGARA's leaders about preparing a joint statement on funding of government archives and archival programs. The following statement reflects our collaboration.

RECOMMENDATION

THAT the following issue brief on Adequate Funding of Government Archives and Archival Programs be approved:

¹<http://www2.archivists.org/initiatives/saa-advocacy-agenda>

² See the SAA Strategic Plan 2014-2018, Strategy 1.2.1.: "In collaboration with CoSA, NAGARA, and other influential advocates for archives, develop a broad-based archival advocacy program directed at resource allocators, policymakers, and other 'influencers.'"

Adequate Funding of Government Archives and Archival Programs

SUMMARY

Government archives are responsible to both preserve and make accessible the permanent records of government. By any reasonable comparison the legally required records of government, as well as valuable historical documents found in government archives, receive too little funding.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. State and local government archives also function with minimal funding as many local governments across the nation have no archives funding.

Neither the federal government nor any state or local governmental agency has systematically studied the cost of maintaining the archival record 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 run, the Council of State Archivists, the National Association of Government Archives and Records Administrators, and the Society of American Archivists believe that:

- Increased federal spending for archives is necessary to manage, preserve and make accessible the federal government’s records. Total funding for the National Archives and Records Administration should be increased to approximately \$600 million.
- 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.
- 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.

Systematic federal and state studies should be undertaken to determine the true cost of maintaining – in archives – 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. Additionally, state archives should recruit local city and county governments to participate in conducting studies. Ensuring that all levels of government records are included, beginning with local government, is important in estimating the true cost of archival preservation.

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, of a total federal budget of \$3.7 trillion. This represented an expenditure of about \$1.24 per resident at that time.

The National Archives is significantly underfunded when compared to similar organizations supported by the federal government. In FY12, for example:

- Congress appropriated \$635,511,552 in operating funds for the Smithsonian Institution, about \$2.00 per 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, half of which was expended to support archival activity at the state and local level, or about .015cents per resident.
- The Institute for Museum and Library Services (IMLS) in FY12 granted \$189,035,000 in funding to libraries nationwide (about 60 cents per person) and \$30,140,000 to support museums nationwide (about 9 cents per resident).

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

THE SOLUTION

The Council of State Archivists, the National Association of Government Archives and Records Administrators, and the Society of American Archivists believe 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 level of approximately \$1.24 per resident (adjusted annually for population and inflation), lest unanticipated and irreparable damage occur to the nation's documentary heritage. More appropriately, funding should be increased to \$600 million – approximately equivalent to the amounts received by the Library of Congress and the Smithsonian.
- Federal grant funding for archival programs made available through the NHPRC should increase immediately to a minimum of \$30 million, 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 million for this critical area, or 16 cents per resident.

- State governments must fund state archives and records programs at no less than the current level established by the federal government of \$1.24 per resident. In 2012, on average, state governments devoted just 43 cents per resident to the care of archival records.

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 SOURCES

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

For more information on the work of state archives in documenting government, promoting history, and securing rights, see:
<http://www.statearchivists.org/reports/Importance%20of%20State%20Archives.pdf>