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Recommendations; Response; Participants

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National Historical Publications and Records Commission

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RECOMMENDATIONS

This report, prepared by Harry E. Whipkey (Pennsylvania) and Albert H. Whitaker (Massachusetts) and approved by a steering committee of state historical records coordinators, was presented to the National Historical Publications and Records Commission at its meeting on October 23 and 24, 1980.1

Section I

OBJECTIVES OF THE NATIONAL HISTORICAL PUBLICATIONS AND RECORDS COMMISSION'S RECORDS PROGRAM

The objectives of the National Historical Publications and Records Commission's (NHPRC) records program are familiar. They have been spelled out most concisely in the "Statement of National Needs and Preferred Approaches for Historic Records."2 They have been amplified in circular letters and in published interviews with staff and commission members.

From the very beginning, the commission chose strategies that emphasized program development on a broad front, rather than the application of some monolithic prescription. Thus, it rejected formula distribution of grants to the states; it also rejected a first-come-first-served approach and it opted for programs to change rather than reinforce the existing state of archival affairs.

It is not surprising that a national records program largely emanating from Washington with an avowed aim of rearranging the archival landscape in the
states and territories has produced some tensions—tensions that can be either creative or destructive, or both.

Many of these tensions have to do with the way in which NHPRC dispenses its largess. Some have argued for splitting the pie "even Stephen" or by some specified formula. Others have argued that given the limited funding, it should be used in a way to maximize the development of comprehensive programs within the states—a pump-priming incentive. Some agree with the commission's broad front approach and argue the scope of the program should be expanded even further to include such things as records management, oral history, exhibits, and even equipment purchase. Given the current level of funding, others believe that the program needs a narrower, not wider, focus. To many state archivists, this means concentrating on strengthening the public records programs in the states, one of the purposes for which the program was conceived originally. Certain of the critics oppose grants for special area collecting, for processing, or other activities designed to make collections available to scholars in the humanities—activities they see as a basic funding responsibility of the individual archival agency. Some feel more emphasis must go toward research and development. Finally, several critics argue that the highest priority should go to creating a strong state level planning and coordinating mechanism—a real records board, not an advisory one.

These are only some of the issues that have been raised about the national role of the records program. In reference to these and to other issues, it is concluded that the objectives of the national records program need to be redefined.
Recommendation

A basic goal of the NHPRC should be a national historical records program to promote an effective effort by governments and private organizations to identify, preserve, and make available for use those records that further an understanding and appreciation of American life, history, and culture. To achieve this goal there should be a comprehensive survey and assessment of national, regional, state, and local resources and deficiencies, leading to the following:

1. Cooperation among archival and records repositories at all levels

One objective of a national program is to promote cooperative approaches to common problems, including the creation of cooperative structures such as networks, consortia, and regional conservation centers. Inter-institutional cooperation is especially urgent in high technology areas such as the preservation of newer recording media and the application of electronic data processing to archival administration. Cooperation of another sort is crucial to the creation of a national bibliographic data base and to any coordinated institutional acquisition activities. Formal networks of regional centers coordinated by statewide or territorial archival agencies can provide a cooperative structure to spur archival development and maximize limited resources for archival work. In areas such as training and education and institutional standards for the profession, regional and national professional organizations may be the appropriate vehicles to carry out activities beyond the scope or capability of individual institutions. In
each case, the commission and advisory boards must continue to remove barriers and to increase incentives for cooperation.

2. Development of improved system-wide records program for public and private records

The development of sound archives and records programs for state, territorial, and local governments, for institutions of higher learning, and larger private organizations is an essential element in any national records program. The commission should encourage combined archives and records programs to insure the proper identification and retention of archival materials and the efficient disposition of other records. The development of model programs within such an organization can demonstrate their value, lead to their extension, and provide for testing and modification prior to adoption on a wider scale. Archival and records management professions should cooperate on programs of mutual interest.

3. Development of programs of archival awareness and assistance, especially for the records of organizations and institutions formerly outside the traditional archival framework

An increasingly large segment of the archival record will continue to be in the custody of those who are not professional archivists, especially as more and more organizations maintain their own records. A greater attempt must be made to arouse their concern about and awareness of proper archival procedures as well as to provide them with an increasing number of direct technical and other assistance programs. Through workshops, instructional material, on-site consultation, and
cooperative use of archival facilities, state boards and other archival organizations should develop comprehensive programs to assist such institutions in establishing effective in-house archival programs.

4. The wider use of archives

As more and more of the archival record is on media such as film and magnetic tape, the archivist has the capacity to make ever-increasing segments of his records as easily available as the printed book. Programs for the preservation of such media that stress wider availability as well as security and preservation should have a high priority. In addition to programs to disseminate the information in the records, a greater attempt should also be made through the packaging of archival materials in exhibitions, audio-visual and mass media programming, and inexpensive publications to broaden the current archival constituency and develop new ones.

5. Programs in research and development

Such programs are integral to the above objectives. If such programs as cooperative collection strategies, conservation and information networks, and sampling and bulk reduction techniques are some of the real needs, archivists must improve the tools and techniques to make these programs operational. The commission recognizes not only the necessity to develop and test specific models and methods to improve practice but also the importance of developing much needed theoretical studies in the collection, control, and use of information. In reviewing applications for research grants, the commission should favor those applicants that provide
assurances for the maximum sharing and dissemination of project results.

6. The development of archival planning as a strategy and the development of an institutional structure for such planning both within the states and between the states and the commission

Thorough and skillful planning is a fundamental precondition for progress toward the above-mentioned objectives. It is essential to the process of identifying and analyzing records needs, delineating objectives, devising and testing strategic approaches, and evaluating achievement. The state board is an "indispensable vehicle" for such planning, for it can reflect the diverse, sometimes competing, archival interests that must develop a colloquy about mutual problems and their solutions. At the same time, a structure must be created to maintain a dialogue between the boards and the commission so that national planning and priorities mesh with, and truly reflect, state needs. The commission must give greater emphasis to assistance in planning, for it is apparent that many states can greatly benefit from outside help in identifying planning goals and developing step-by-step planning procedures.

In achieving the foregoing goal, the NHPRC should move immediately to revise its relationship with the states and territories to provide in a logical sequence for the following objectives:

1. A consistent program to provide funding for the preparation of statewide records plans addressing the foregoing goal and objectives
2. The establishment within the states of a framework for carrying out such statewide records programs consisting of a state records coordinator, a records committee or board, and such companion administrative mechanism as may be required not inconsistent with existing state records programs.

3. The establishment of a mechanism for providing ongoing funding to carry out NHRPC approved statewide plans.

Section II

THE ROLE OF THE STATE BOARDS AND COORDINATORS:
FUNCTIONS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

The discussion group which studied this subject area reported recommendations which would have the effect of significantly modifying the configuration of the NHRPC's records program. If adopted, these recommendations would have the NHRPC restructure itself on the basis of the State Historic Preservation Program (SHPP) model, with the locus of power for funding decisions passing to the state boards and coordinators. The original study group reported recommendations as follows:

1. Converting the existing NHRPC program into a federal-state program with block grants to the states and territories on a matching basis according to a formula to be devised by the coordinators and the NHRPC.

2. The establishment of specific criteria for the NHRPC program and definition of the responsibilities of the commission, the coordinators, and the boards.
3. Flexibility in composition of the advisory boards, for instance, allowing existing and duly constituted state boards to serve as advisory boards

After heated discussion, the conference chose to substantially revise these initial recommendations. In so doing, the coordinators were rejecting an overt reshaping of NHPRC along the lines of a SHPP model. Nonetheless, it is important that the national commission understand that a considerable minority of the coordinators did express interest in such a plan. To a certain extent, this may be taken as a reflection of the frustration of those coordinators who perceive (correctly or not) inequities in funding distribution and inattention to recommendations and observations of their particular state boards. Following extended discussion, the conference, working from the preliminary study group recommendations, settled on the following two recommendations.

Recommendation 1

The existing NHPRC program should be converted into a stronger federal-state partnership with specific criteria for the NHPRC program and definition of the responsibilities of the commission, the coordinators, and the boards to be developed by NHPRC in consultation with the state coordinators.

Recommendation 2

State boards should actively assume responsibilities for planning, developing, and coordinating state-federal programs for public and private records in a joint participatory arrangement with the NHPRC.

As reflected in these final recommendations, the coordinators do not wish to make, at this time, the
transition to a SHPP model with block grants and matching funds as the exclusive medium of the NHPRC programs. Instead, the development of a "stronger federal-state partnership" should go a long way toward setting the stage for stronger and more vigorous state boards.

Section III

THE ROLE OF STATE BOARDS AND COORDINATORS: APPOINTMENTS AND COMPOSITION

A. Eligibility for the position of State Historical Records Coordinator

Existing procedure of the NHPRC dictates that the records coordinator "must be the full-time professional official in charge of either the State archival agency or the State-funded historical agency." While this procedure may work well in most states, it creates a problem in those areas where mature state-related archival programs remain to be established and where individuals with the necessary experience, expertise, and/or staff support to be effective coordinators are lacking. In certain other states, archival programs might be firmly established, but the state archivists or state history administrators may be unsympathetic to the federal program or may be too involved in other projects to assume the responsibilities associated with the position of records coordinator. It is concluded that alternatives to the present system are needed.
Recommendation 1

The State Historical Records Coordinator should be the head of the state archival agency or the head of the state-funded historical agency. If, however, in the determination of the NHPRC, upon the recommendation of the State Records Advisory Board (if one exists), neither of the above arrangements is possible or workable, the head of a private, active, statewide historical organization having large collections of original papers will be eligible to become coordinator. If this third alternative is impossible or unworkable, a professionally qualified archivist or historian will be eligible to serve as coordinator. (The third and fourth alternatives, given the difficulties involved, are obviously viewed as last resorts.)

B. Appointment of the Records Coordinator

The NHPRC policy requiring that the coordinator be appointed by the governor to a four-year term with the possibility of renewal is considered in most states to be workable and appropriate policy. A gubernatorial appointment is viewed as a positive factor, one giving increased prestige and publicity to the records program. Not recognized in current regulations is the possibility of achieving these same goals by way of state statute. In fact, in several states, statutes have been enacted, or may be established, which specify, or may determine, how the position of records coordinator is to be filled.

Recommendation 2

The appointment of the records coordinator to a four-year term with the possibility of
reappointment to be made by the governor or
to be determined by state statute.

C. Appointment to the State Historical Records
Advisory Board

Appointments to the records board by the gov­
ernor, as called for under existing NHPRC regula­
tions, give the records program increased visibil­
ity and probably give individual board members
more incentive to meet assigned responsibilities.
While this procedure should be continued, problems
exist when a governor's office gives little or no
priority to the filling of board vacancies or when
political factors become involved in the appoint­
ment process. A procedure is needed to insure
that the board will be at necessary strength at
all times.

Recommendation 3

Appointments to the advisory board will be
made by the governor. In the event that a
governor does not make an appointment to a
board within three months of notification of
a vacancy, the coordinator will be requested
by the NHPRC to fill the position on an in­
terim basis.

D. Flexibility in establishing an advisory board

In meeting the need to establish an advisory
board, there is obviously no reason for a governor
to duplicate activities within the state. If cir­
cumstances permit, the governor should be allowed
the flexibility of utilizing an existing state
board for advisory board purposes.
Recommendation 4

In any state where the possibility may exist, the governor will have the option, with the approval of the NHPRC, of using an existing and duly constituted state board, commission, etc., as the State Historical Records Advisory Board. Such a state entity must meet the requirements established by the NHPRC.

E. Composition of the advisory board

Although experience has proven that it is unrealistic to require that gubernatorial appointments to advisory boards be confirmed by or cleared through the federal commission, it is nevertheless expected—in line with existing regulations—that (1) the head of the state archival agency and the head of the state-funded historical agency will, in each state where such agencies are in operation, be recognized as ex officio members of the state board; (2) a majority of the individuals named to a board will "have recognized professional experience in administration of historical records or archives"; and (3) the board will "be as broadly representative as possible of the public and private archival and research institutions and organizations in the State."

A source of some difficulty is the related NHPRC requirement that an advisory board consist "of at least seven members, including the State Historical Records Coordinator, who chairs the Board." A problem is recognized in those states where the number of available historical records administrators and archivists are in short supply. While there is no need to establish the maximum size of an advisory board, regulations should be altered to allow a somewhat smaller board.
Moreover, a procedure should be adopted which will allow for the possibility of persons other than state coordinators to serve as chairpersons of advisory boards. Since a coordinator may be the head of a state-funded historical agency but have no real understanding of records problems or archival techniques, the work of the board could be facilitated if an individual with recognized expertise in archival administration could function as chairperson. Perhaps that person could be elected by the board members from among their number. Perhaps, if the head of the state-funded historical agency is the designated coordinator, the head of the state archival agency (if both agencies exist in the state) could serve as chairperson.

Recommendation 5

The State Historical Records Advisory Board will consist of at least six members, including the records coordinator. The coordinator will serve as chairperson, unless the board develops a procedure, approved by the NHPRC, making it possible for another person to serve in that capacity.

F. Terms of office of advisory board members

In accordance with NHPRC guidelines, board members, with the exception of the coordinator, are to be appointed for three years with the possibility of reappointment. To insure a measure of continuity and at the same time allow the infusion of "new blood," terms of office should be staggered.
Recommendation 6

Board members are to be appointed for three years with the possibility of reappointment. Terms are to be staggered.

Section IV

FUNDING: ISSUES AND OPTIONS

As an issue, funding was a major stimulus leading to the Atlanta conference. Throughout, the focus of attention was on:

1. The total amounts available for the records program

2. The policies/procedures governing the distribution of funding by the NHPRC

While there was uniform agreement on the need for larger congressional allocations for this program, discussion was more spirited on the means by which distribution decisions should be made by the NHPRC.

Among the conference attendees, sentiment ranged broadly from those who supported the maintenance of the present system of competitive grants review at the commission level to those who would revise NHPRC procedures in favor of greater reliance on block grants (or pass-through funding) similar to that of the State Historic Preservation Program (SHPP). As noted above in Section II, this latter viewpoint appeared to relate to perceptions of funding inequities, or aberrations, in the present system. The coordinators, in ratifying the recommendations which follow, opted for a more moderate and diverse response to this problem.
Nonetheless, the coordinators noted that greater consideration might be given to block grant procedures once mature state plans (within the meaning of Section I) are in place.

In sum, a consensus was developed to the effect that the federal commission should expand its funding repertoire to include the procedures recommended below. This should be considered as an elaboration on, or expansion of, the present system of grants administration. In that respect, the coordinators anticipate the maintenance of the regular competitive grant application schema, with those modifications recommended below given consideration in that context.

Recommendation 1

The NHPRC should provide funding for the preparation of statewide records plans addressing the goals and objectives in Section I and for the administrative support of state advisory boards. The NHPRC should prepare and issue a simple grant application form for administrative costs that do not exceed $10,000.

Recommendation 2

In the interest of equity, the NHPRC should annually set aside a certain percentage of its available grant funds for distribution to the states on an equal basis. The NHPRC should also set aside a certain percentage of its available grant funds for distribution to the states on the basis of population. However, states must file a statement of priorities and preferred approaches before being eligible for these base grants.

Recommendation 3

All regional and national projects should be subject to review and approval by a committee of the
state coordinators' organization. Regional projects should be subject to review and approval of the boards and/or coordinators of the affected states. Regional projects which involve public records should be subject to the review of the archivists of the affected states. It should be required of applicants of such projects that they coordinate directly with the archivists of the affected states.

Recommendation 4

The state coordinators or their representatives assembled at the Atlanta conference should communicate to the Congress and the president of the United States their abiding concern for the need of a substantial increase in NHPRC funding. A minimal annual appropriation of $12,000,000 is considered necessary, and should be requested, for a national program that will begin to address the acute historical records problems. (A committee of coordinators was formed to draft and transmit such a statement. This directive has been fulfilled with the posting of a communication under date of June 19, 1980, to congressional leaders and the president of the United States.)

Recommendation 5

The NHPRC should fund an annual meeting of state coordinators or their designees.
Section V

FORMATION OF A CONTINUING ORGANIZATION TO REPRESENT THE INTERESTS OF COORDINATORS AND BOARDS

Charles Lee, invited to address the conference on the subject of whether there should be a continuing organization of coordinators and boards, outlined the options for the composition, organization, and implementation of such an association. While substantial interest was demonstrated in the establishment of such an organization, the following was unanimously decided:

that the steering committee elected by this meeting have as one of its tasks the development of recommendations for a continuing organization for this body to be presented to it at its next meeting.

In addition to this mandate, the steering committee* was made responsible for the following:

the drafting and submission of a suitable distribution (funding) formula as a surrogate to Resolution 2, Section IV, in the event that Resolution 2 proves unacceptable to federal budget procedures and congressional authorizations.

NOTES

1 The introduction to the report is included in the foreword, p. v.

RESPONSE

The following statement by the National Historical Publications and Records Commission regarding the recommendations of the Atlanta conference was received by the steering committee from Larry Hackman, Director of the NHPRC Records Program, on November 3, 1980, and is circulated with his permission.

INTRODUCTION

The National Historical Publications and Records Commission (NHPRC) wishes to express its appreciation to State Historical Records Coordinators and other official representatives of State Historical Records Advisory Boards who participated in the June 6-7 Atlanta conference. The commission has reviewed the written report from the Atlanta meeting and discussed it on October 23, 1980, with representatives* chosen by the state delegates in Atlanta.

The commission agrees with the overall direction for future program development implied in the Atlanta report and with many of its specific recommendations. The commission expects the report to be an important reference document in a general review of the mission, goals, objectives, and procedures of the records grant program. To carry out this detailed review in an expeditious manner, the commission’s chairman has appointed a committee of NHPRC members who will begin their work shortly and will report to the commission

during its next several meetings. Commission members appointed to the committee are Norbert Brockman, H. G. Jones, John Lorenz, Mary Lynn McCree, and David Trask. The commission expects that the committee will work closely at times with the steering committee chosen by attendees at the Atlanta meeting last June and chaired by Peter Harstad, Historical Records Coordinator for Iowa.

For the present, the commission wishes to make its views known in several specific areas indicated below. It should be noted that this statement does not represent in itself an overall review of the records program, but is rather a partial reaction to some of the recommendations in the Atlanta report regarding the role of the states in the records program. The overriding goal of the NHPRC's records program remains the same, that is, to have the maximum positive impact on improving the preservation and use of historical records in the United States.

GENERAL

The NHPRC seeks increased responsibility and improved performance at the state level in the development of the historical records program. The pace and phasing of this movement are dependent upon several interrelated factors including the availability of sufficient appropriated funds for grants and support services, the careful investigation of revised policies and procedures, the relative success or failure of these policies and procedures as they are put into practice, and the continuing need to address some problems from national and regional perspectives as well as at the state level. In supporting increased responsibility and improved performance at the state level, the commission continues to believe strongly that nonfederal contributions should meet or exceed federal funds for the records program as a whole.
STATE PLANNING

The commission recognizes the need for much more attention to, and support for, state planning for historical records program development. Strong state performance in this area is likely to be one of two key ingredients (the other being availability of increased funds to NHPRC) in a stronger role for state advisory boards in the administration of the records program. The commission intends to examine this area in detail and to develop a policy on NHPRC funding for state planning, the nature of the state planning which will be supported, and the relationship of state planning to the granting and administration of NHPRC funds.

STATE BOARD ADMINISTRATIVE EXPENSES

The commission sympathizes with the need for, and accepts the desirability of, sharing, on a trial basis, a portion of basic advisory board expenses for purposes such as board meetings, project oversight, and the initiation of state planning. The commission anticipates that an application process for grants for such expenses will be in place by the beginning of the next fiscal year, October, 1981.

ALLOCATION OF FUNDS TO STATES

The commission will study the concept that a portion of its records program funds be reserved or allocated to individual states. In any case, the amount of funding to be reserved or allocated in such a manner would relate substantially to the appropriated funds available to the NHPRC's records grant program. Regardless of new policies and procedures which might
be developed, the commission will continue to be re-
ceptive to the use of block or pass-through grants
for projects of statewide importance and of high pri-
ority to state boards, provided adequate procedures
are assured at the state level. Any state allocations
are likely to be tied closely to the development of
state historical records plans and to the presentation
of proposals for implementing such plans.

APPOINTMENT AND COMPOSITION OF BOARDS

The commission is sympathetic to the concerns of
the Atlanta meeting regarding the appointment and com-
position of the State Historical Records Advisory
Boards. The commission intends to prepare draft regu-
lations on these matters to be published for comment
in the Federal Register as soon as possible. The com-
mission hopes that revised regulations on these mat-
ters can go into effect by October 1, 1981. The com-
misson continues to have reservations, however, about
the designation of an existing state body to function
also as the State Historical Records Advisory Board.

CONFERENCE OF STATE REPRESENTATIVES

The NHPRC favors periodic meetings of State Rec-
ords Coordinators or other representatives of state
boards and will continue to explore ways whereby such
meetings may be arranged and supported. Because of
problems with federal funding of such conferences, it
is hoped that alternatives other than the grant appli-
cation process can be developed to provide support for
conferences and meetings of state board delegates.
The commission believes that review of grant proposals for regional and national projects should include evaluation by appropriate state coordinators and/or board members. The commission does not believe, however, that such applications require approval of a committee of state coordinators.
PARTICIPANTS

Alabama  Milo B. Howard
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Arizona   Sharon Womack
Arkansas  John L. Ferguson
California Lynn Bonfield
Colorado  George E. Warren
Connecticut Robert Claus
Delaware  Edward F. Heite
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Idaho     Merle Wells
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Indiana   John J. Newman
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Kansas    Eugene Decker
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Mississippi Elbert R. Hilliard
Missouri  Gary Behan
Montana   Dale Johnson
Nebraska  James E. Potter
Nevada    Guy Louis Rocha
New Hampshire Frank C. Mevers
New Jersey Karl Neiderer
New Mexico Joseph F. Halpin
New York  Edward Weldon
North Carolina Larry E. Tise
North Dakota Frank E. Vyzralek
Ohio      Dennis East

Maine and Maryland were not represented.
Oklahoma
Oregon
Pennsylvania
Puerto Rico
Rhode Island
South Carolina
South Dakota
Tennessee
Texas
Utah
Vermont
Virgin Islands
Virginia
Washington
West Virginia
Wisconsin
Wyoming

Thomas Kremm
Louise Flannery
Harry E. Whipkey
Miguel Angel Nives
Phyllis Silva
Charles Lee
Stan Heffner
Cleo Hughes
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Melvin T. Smith
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