

Preserving our Future: NHPRC's Role

The National Historical Publications and Records Commission (NHPRC) promotes the preservation and use of America's documentary heritage, which is essential in establishing the rights of citizens, ensuring the accountability of our government, and preserving the voice of national events as evidenced through the lives of our country's people, communities, and organizations. NHPRC, which is the granting agency within the National Archives and Records Administration, provides modest grants to states and organizations that support their ability to contribute to a comprehensive national record in the following ways:

NHPRC investments ensure the preservation of and access to a comprehensive national record.

- The American national story is told through many voices. The National Archives captures the official records of the Army, for example, including General Douglas MacArthur's World War II orders. But the stories of those "dogfaces" who carried out the orders (such as Captain Joseph McAffrey from Tallahassee, Florida, and his company of soldiers from Ohio and Michigan), stories that are captured in their letters home, their diaries, and oral histories, complete the larger story of that great conflict. Through NHPRC grants to individual institutions around the country, we preserve those pieces of our national story that don't "live" in Washington.
- The attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon marked a sea-change in the political, economic, and daily life of the United States. Although the National Archives preserves documentation about federal actions during that crisis, the full story is told at the state and local levels. Through NHPRC grants to governments, citizens, and private organizations, the story of rescue, response, and recovery in New York, Washington D.C., and Shanksville, Pennsylvania, is preserved and available for use.
- Documentary editing projects bring together papers and documents in annotated, online editions, and have provided the backbone of research for well-known works such as: David McCullough's biography of John Adams, Joseph Ellis's biography of George Washington, and Ron Chernow's Pulitzer Prize-winning biography of Alexander Hamilton.
- Teachers and students around the country are able to have direct encounters with the words of the Founding Fathers, and with iconic individuals such as President Abraham Lincoln through online documentary editions that provide annotations and information to explain the documents and provide needed context for student understanding.

NHPRC investments provide leadership and best practices to ensure the preservation of and access to a comprehensive national record.

- The technology revolution has changed the nature of information and communication in this country. It now poses massive challenges to long-term preservation of a wide range of information that is created only in an electronic format, from geographic information systems, infrastructure data, and websites to individuals' medical, student, or prison records. By funding projects to develop and share best practices for managing digital records, NHPRC grants help ensure the survival of essential information from the 21st century – so that there will be a historical record of our time.

NHPRC investments leverage funding from additional sources to support the preservation of and access to a comprehensive national record.

- Recipients of NHPRC grants are required to provide cost-sharing of 50%. This requirement provides the critical incentive for a state or institution to allocate funds to an archives project – and in many cases, it serves as a stimulus for funding to sustain the program after the grant is completed.
- NHPRC grants serve as “seed money” to initiate archives programs that establish sufficient capacity to later seek further funding from other sources. A small NHPRC grant – just \$25,000 – to the Council of State Archivists was used to assess the disaster and recovery needs of states affected by hurricanes Katrina and Rita. The findings provided the foundation for a successful application to the Federal Emergency Management Agency for a \$2.6 million grant to provide training on emergency preparedness and recovery for state and local governments in all 50 states.
- A modest NHPRC grant to the New York State Historical Records Advisory Board resulted in the identification and preservation of more than one million items documenting the Latino communities in that state. The records that were preserved and made accessible were then made available as a bi-lingual online resource for teachers and students through a \$100,000 grant from the Time-Warner Foundation.
- In Kentucky, a grant of \$200,000 in 1983 helped secure sustained funding for the Kentucky Local Records Program, which has awarded more than \$16 million in grants for the preservation of important local records. That’s an 8000% return on investment from the initial NHPRC grant!

NHPRC investments provide funding for jobs.

- Most NHPRC grants lead directly to the creation of jobs because of the labor-intensive nature of archival work. Documents may have to be physically cleaned and preserved, re-housed in proper storage conditions, indexed or otherwise described, and possibly reformatted for preservation or access. An analysis of existing NHPRC grant projects done by the Council of State Archivists shows that at least 75% of all records grant funds are used for staff, demonstrating that money in this program generally equates to money for jobs.

NHPRC supports State Historical Records Advisory Boards

- In each state and territory, the State Historical Records Advisory Board provides statewide coordination for historical documentation and preservation. NHPRC supports the state boards with grants for planning, for developing statewide services and training in archives, and for effective re-grant programs. State boards partner actively with NHPRC in these vital efforts. In Missouri, for example, the state board recently supported a re-grant program for 14 projects across that state, including the archives of historic Booneville, the Jewish Federation of St. Louis, and the architectural archives at the St. Joseph Museums. These statewide efforts continue to strengthen the documentation of our nation’s story.