



Preserving the American Historical Record Act

History matters . . .

History connects people to community – whether the community is a family, a neighborhood, a city, a state, or a nation. Connections to the past are essential to sustaining our democracy, educating our youth, enriching our sense of place in family and community, supporting information needs in our business and legal affairs, and making reasoned decisions about our nation’s future direction.

It deserves support . . .

Much of the American record – evidence of births, education, marriage (and divorce), property owned, obligations satisfied and criminal conduct – is held at the state and local level. Our state and local history organizations preserve the records that protect our rights. Our nation has recognized the importance of history by its support of national institutions – the National Archives, the Library of Congress, the Smithsonian Institution. Yet this support is not adequate to reach the rest of our nation’s archives being held in government agencies, state and local historical societies, archives, and library history collections. Very simply, more resources need to be directed to states and regions to ensure essential care so that documents and archival records in many forms can be readily used for a host of purposes by the people of this nation.

So we propose this solution . . .

The *Preserving the American Historical Record Act* proposes to increase federal support for state and local archival records held by government agencies, historical societies, libraries, and related organizations. This initiative would preserve and provide access to historical records by supporting:

- the creation of a wide variety of access tools, including archival finding aids, documentary editions, indexes, and images of key records online;
- preservation actions to protect historical records from harm, prolong their life, and preserve them for public use, including digitization projects, electronic records initiatives, and disaster preparedness and recovery;
- initiatives to use historical records in new and creative ways to convey the importance of state, territorial, and community history, including the development of teaching materials for K-12 and college students, active participation in National History Day, and support for life-long learning opportunities; and
- programs to provide education and training to archivists and others who care for historical records, ensuring that they have the necessary knowledge and skills to fulfill their important responsibilities.

Financial resources are needed . . .

The *Preserving the American Historical Record Act* would establish a program of formula-based grants to states for re-grants and statewide services to support preservation and use of historical records. The program, to be administered by the National Archives, will provide a total of \$50 million per year nationwide. Each state would receive a portion of these funds for redistribution to organizations within its borders.

Federal funding to related fields:

Libraries (LSTA):	\$214 million
Museums (IMLS):	\$40 million
Historic Preservation:	\$43 million

This program would be *in addition* to the existing national grants program within the National Historical Publications and Records Commission, which should be funded at its full authorization level of \$10 million. The program proposed in the *Preserving the American Historical Record Act* cannot be useful if it negatively affects the existing national grant program. The state-based program should alleviate some of the demand on NHPRC's national-level project money by providing re-grants administered regionally. It will also open wider opportunities for new and expanded varieties of nationally significant projects.

To carry out the program in each state . . .

The state archives or the organization with the comparable functions for statewide archival services would administer the program. With guidance from the State Historical Records Advisory Boards, each state would develop a five-year strategic plan establishing funding priorities. Annual applications thereafter would provide parameters for re-grants, reports on project outcomes, and core statistical measures for monitoring of conditions and progress.

Base funding would be provided to each state or territory, with the remainder of funding distributed using a population/area-based formula, comparable to that for library aid. A cost-sharing requirement of 50% of funding available should be required to stimulate funding from state and local resources.

Examples of approximate funding amount to selected states based on proposed formula:

Alabama	\$ 733,216
California	\$3,939,637
Connecticut	\$ 579,268
Illinois	\$1,614,773
Kansas	\$ 564,841
Nevada	\$ 492,965
New Hampshire	\$ 343,790
Texas	\$2,719,324
Washington	\$ 648,353

Many are interested in the idea of expanding federal support . . .

The Council of State Archivists, the Society of American Archivists, and the National Association of Government Archives and Records Administrators are taking leadership in this initiative. Collaboration has also been pursued with the American Association of State and Local History, which is leading a parallel effort for history organizations and museums. Information has also been shared with related national professional records and historical organizations and with several national genealogical organizations, many of whom have signed on as endorsers.

For more details, and up-to-date information on the status of this effort, see the PAHR page on the Society of American Archivists website: <http://www.archivists.org/pahr/>.