

Survey of National History Day State Coordinators

Committee members conducted phone interviews with 36 state coordinators between May and July 2010, gathering information on how state coordinators communicate with teachers, students, and archivists; what resources were available and/or needed to promote and enhance the use of local archival resources; and what additional resources they considered most needed. NHD Committee members entered answers from the interviews into a survey tool and that data is attached to this report. A summary of comments follows:

Communication and Outreach

The survey found a significant difference in funding and resources for NHD between various states. Some states have multiple paid educators who coordinate NHD. Massachusetts and Rhode Island are staffed by seasoned volunteers. In all cases, the state coordinators are the primary conduit of information about NHD to teachers, and teachers are the primary conduit of information to students. Working with state coordinators to reach teachers is the most effective way to make a difference for students. Coordinators routinely publicize NHD via listservs, emails, and mailings to teachers. A few publish online newsletters, while others use social network sites and Twitter. Also of significance, coordinators make presentations and personal contacts at state teacher workshops and meetings of the state Social Studies councils. Educators at NARA regional offices were a significant source of training for teachers.

Outreach to archivists was less focused and ranged from “the state archivist is the NHD coordinator” to “not much.” Archivists/librarians were most likely to be contacted to serve as judge, and an annual flyer about the NHD topics was often sent to all state heritage organizations with very little response from the archivists. Several state coordinators did publicize NHD at archivist conferences. Some state coordinators noted the difficulty in encouraging students and their families and teachers to approach a new or unfamiliar repository, and in general confirmed the need for RAO NHD to promote NHD to archivists and offer guidance about how archivists can engage with NHD teachers and students.

Resources for Teachers/Students

Workshops Over 90 percent of the states offered workshops for teachers about NHD and about half provided for class visits to the repository. 27% of states had a paid position for at least one educator to work with teachers and students using primary sources; in most cases, these educators were also the state coordinators for NHD. Only 4 states offered any workshops introducing NHD to archivists.

Handouts Coordinators ranked a basic, straight forward handout for students, preferably online with on-demand printing, as the most useful, new resource to help students learn how to do research in an archive. At the same time, 77% of states indicated that they already had handouts, and 47% said they already offered this information online. This probably reflects a need for a simple, direct handout designed by educators specifically to help students orient and organize themselves for primary source research. A high quality informative handout would lead to its extensive use.

NHD Website Many state NHD Websites resembled the national NHD site, and offered special pages for teachers, students, and topics. The sites promoted the value of participating in NHD, offered information about the annual schedule and the topic, plus the rubric used by judges, and a link to the national website. Few offered information about guiding students in their research, such as how to work with archivists, how to use finding aids, how to plan your time, etc. Several states listed repositories in the state or well-known repositories such as NARA or the Library of Congress. None had feedback from local repositories about their willingness or suitability to work with NHD. This latter presents an opportunity for RAO NHD committee to bring archivists into a more collaborative relationship with NHD in their states.

Conclusion In conclusion, it seems clear that while state NHD coordinators have an active relationship with the teachers in their respective states, there exists an opportunity (and a need) for NHD coordinators to improve the amount of communication they are having with state and local archives. What is even clearer is that state and local archives need to do more to work with state NHD coordinators to publicize their archives to the parents of potential NHD participants so that there is not the degree of unfamiliarity which state NHD coordinators considered a factor that lead parents to avoid archival institutions. It seems that based on information presented above, there is an opportunity on state NHD websites for state and local archives to have themselves listed as NHD "friendly." Continued positive interaction between parents participating in NHD and archival institutions can only have the desired outcome of increasing the exposure of archives and the archival community to the public at large.