Re-Authorizing NHPRC at $15 Million

From 1991 thru 2009, Congress authorized the National Historical Publications and Records Commission (NHPRC) at $10 million. Although authorization lapsed after 2009, Congress continued to support and fund the program. A new authorization level is required because much has changed in the publication and archival/records fields in the past few decades. Accounting for inflation alone, $10 million in 1991 is equivalent to $18.7 million today. Below is information about the growing needs and changes that necessitate an increased NHPRC Authorization.

Electronic Records

The preservation and access of electronic records is a significant expense and complicated endeavor for archival institutions. Expanded NHPRC authorization and funding will tackle these complexities and support development of tools and methods to make electronic records preservation more efficient, automated, and accessible when appropriate. Joint projects among the states and the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) with multiple research and development efforts will foster speedier results, eliminate duplicate efforts in research, and limit the losses of materials occurring today.

Data from the Council of State Archivists’ [2017 State Archives and Records Management Survey](https://www.statearchivists.org/resource-center/cosa-reports-projects-and-surveys/state-arm-surveys/) reports that the electronic records holdings of state archives are dramatically expanding. From 2012 to 2016, electronic records holdings more than tripled, increasing from 425.8 Terabytes to 1,371.1 Terabytes. The volume continues to increase across the nation.

Due to lack of funding, NHPRC eliminated its State Electronic Records Program in 2017. Grants supported under this program focused on developing State Archives digital preservation capability, which could also be repurposed by other archives, including NARA. Currently, this important area for future development is incorporated with other archival grant funding. Dedicated funding in this area is needed.

Digitization and Access

The public expects content to be available on-line. Many institutions have vast paper and electronic holdings that require tremendous preparation work and indexing as part of the scanning process. NHPRC cannot adequately provide the resources demanded to help support this matching grant program. In 2017, NHPRC received more than 100 grant applications for Archival Records Grants and was able to award only 20. In 2018, about 95 grant applications were submitted and fewer than 20 were awarded. NHPRC data from 2018 indicate that professional development grant requests totaled about $1.85 million but only $316,865 was awarded. Archival Records grants requests amounted to $1.4 million, yet just $225,000 was awarded. NHPRC staff note that the quality of grant proposals being denied is largely equal to the grants being funded.

250th Anniversary of the United States

Archival institutions hold significant founding-era documents that tell the story of America and the states. With an increased authorization, and appropriation for NHPRC, the archives community at the state and local levels could provide improved access to collections, long hidden from the public due to lack of funding, to help commemorate the nation’s 250th Anniversary. An effort to make accessible records related to the nation’s founding, territorial records, Native-American records, slavery records, and founding state documents would enrich America’s 250th anniversary commemorations through enhanced public engagement both now and for generations to come.

Publications

The oldest portion of grant funding for NHPRC is for publications projects. These grants have funded such projects as “The Papers of George Washington,” “The Papers of Thomas Jefferson,” and “The Papers of Alexander Hamilton.” Half of NHPRC’s funding has traditionally been provided to publications projects. These projects are now being created online and older projects are being converted to digital form meeting the growing needs and expectations of users. Many of those are available in Founders Online at [www.founders.archives.gov](http://www.founders.archives.gov).

Grant Recipient Distributions

The majority of NHPRC grants are awarded to colleges and universities. State and governmental archives rank second in NHPRC support, followed by museums, historical societies and eligible non-profits, and then Native-American tribes and recognized Native groups. NHPRC grants reach communities across the country, many of them underserved and unable to otherwise preserve their histories. Information about grants awarded, sorted by state or territory, is available online at [www.archives.gov/nhprc/projects/states-territories](http://www.archives.gov/nhprc/projects/states-territories).

There is tremendous need and demand for NHPRC funding. The archives profession is facing significant challenges in preserving and providing access to our nation’s records – and those challenges are growing daily. We encourage Congress to re-establish NHPRC authorization at $15 million to help address these issues.