

The Historical Records Program: The States and the Nation

(Questions and Answers from the NHPRC)

LARRY J. HACKMAN

THIS ARTICLE IS PARTIALLY A RESULT of several conversations with the editor of the *American Archivist*, during which we noted mutual disappointment in the lack of published evaluation of the NHPRC's historical records program. We shared particular concern about the absence of critical discussion by archivists of the NHPRC's views of national needs for historical records, its preferred methods for meeting these needs, the role of the states in the records program, and the review and decision process on grant applications.

Following unsuccessful individual attempts to solicit articles from the profession, I prepared this question-and-answer article to share basic information and to spur analysis by others. This format was chosen because the article deals with matters about which NHPRC staff members are frequently questioned and because the question-and-answer approach is often applied in the grant review process.

Reader reactions are invited in the form of letters (with additional questions) to the editor of the *American Archivist* and to the NHPRC.

1. *What are the national priorities of NHPRC?*

There seems to be quite a bit of confusion regarding NHPRC priorities. To date, the commission has not issued or established internally a statement of priorities. The commission's "Statement of National Needs and Preferred Approaches"¹ for historical records in the United States, adopted in 1978, is its estimate of major problem areas; the "preferred approaches" can be taken as a records program philosophy. Careful examination of records

program funding decisions would show a close parallel between the techniques outlined in successful proposals and the "approaches" suggested in the "Statement of National Needs." In addition, the commission issued for 1978 and again for 1979 a list of *invited* types of proposals, those particularly encouraged because of neglect of these areas in recent funding cycles. Projects implied in these lists are clearly considered to be of high priority by the commission. But the primary purpose of the invited list is to spur archivists

¹ The "Statement" was printed in the *American Archivist* 41 (January 1978): 125-26; and, in a condensed version, it follows this article.

and others to develop proposals in complicated or difficult problem areas. Typically these are projects which have benefits beyond a single repository and for which a single repository is not likely to feel responsible.

2. How was the "Statement of National Needs and Preferred Approaches" drafted and promulgated?

During discussions in late 1977 and early 1978, the commission decided to use this means of conveying its concerns and advice. The commission announced that the statement was not confined to the records grant program *per se*, but represented the commission's advice to the interested professions, other granting sources, and indeed to all individuals and groups involved in the preservation and use of historical records. To our knowledge, this is the first such statement in the United States.

The statement, which was circulated in draft form to national and regional archival associations, to national historical organizations, and to all state historical records coordinators, was intended to spur discussion and debate. We have, however, received very few comments about it. Perhaps we failed to convey the importance which the commission attaches to the statement. Archivists and others may not realize that the commission views itself not just as a funding agency but as *the* national coordinating agency in the historical records area. Also, there is no tradition among archivists to look to national programs for leadership in matters other than federal records. Whatever the reason, the commission has been disappointed in the lack of

reaction to this statement, especially from archivists.

3. Why did the commission itself set no formal priorities of its own?

First, the initial regulations adopted by the commission (before the arrival of a records program staff) emphasized the importance of having a State Historical Records Advisory Board to develop the records program in each of the states. Commission members were aware, from the start, that there is considerable variation in problems and capabilities among the states. Experience has confirmed this. Establishing a ranked list of national priorities seemed, and still seems, likely to discourage the boards and others in the states from looking carefully at their own needs. Second, in regard to individual applicants rather than state boards, a detailed list of national priorities might encourage proposals that fit neatly into the first or second priority even though they did not address the applicant's most pressing needs.

Both of these points reinforce the commission's view that it is more important to support developmental projects, encouraging progress in a variety of areas, than to emphasize only a few priorities. Here the commission had in mind also the limited funds likely to be available for several years, and the broad range of records problems needing attention. Finally, the 1977 SAA-NEH "priorities" conference,² for which a commission member and I drafted the initial outline, helped convince us that national priorities were likely to be either vague and ill-defined or, if detailed, might stifle rather than promote fresh thinking and increased involvement below the national level.

² For a report on the conference, see the *American Archivist* 40 (July 1977): 291-347.

In summary, we hoped that the early years of the records program would be a time of creative thinking, grass roots involvement, diversity, and learning.

4. Why did the commission encourage the state boards in the first place?

Several factors account for the origins of the board system. A number of individuals who promoted a national historical records program were active in the historic preservation program; some even served as state historic preservation officers and were very familiar with the preservation program's state-level mechanism. Many advocates initially had in mind a much larger, independent program, not merely the "R" added to NHPC and the modest level of funding authorized in the amendment which finally passed. Second, many of those most interested in a national records program were state archivists, directors of state historical societies, or others with a state orientation. It was not surprising, therefore, that the members of the NHPRC, particularly the new members representing the SAA and the American Association for State and Local History, approved the recommendations of their consultant, Herbert Angel, that the records program include state historical records coordinators and advisory boards as an integral part of the decision making apparatus. Commission members appear to have viewed the state coordinator and board as a device to secure grass roots advice, to increase the leadership exercised by state archivists and state historical agencies, to provide better oversight of projects, and to build a strong base upon which to de-

velop an expanded program for the future.

5. Have the State Advisory Boards been successful in establishing their priorities and, where they have done so, have these been useful?

By July 1979 nearly forty states had submitted some form of priorities statement. The record to date on their use is mixed, for several reasons.³ The commission has made several slight changes in emphasis and procedure in this matter. At first, the commission had in mind a formal state plan from each of the advisory boards. This approach was modified, however, by late 1976, as we became more conscious of the limited resources available for preparing detailed plans and of restrictive or complicated regulations in some states regarding approval and issuance of formal plans. The commission then moved to encourage each board to draw up a less formal "statement of priorities" to serve several purposes, including assistance to the board and the commission in evaluating future proposals, better information for applicants and others about the views of the board, a focus for the efforts of the board itself toward specific ends, and the measurement of progress in priority areas. Establishing priority lists has not been made a formal requirement in the commission's regulations; however, in November 1978 the commission announced that it might defer consideration of proposals from states that had not submitted a list of priorities or needs. The commission began to implement this policy in June 1979.

The absence of clear and consistent guidance from the commission has

³ See the accompanying article by F. Gerald Ham, "NHPRC's Records Program and the Development of Statewide Archival Planning," pp. 33-42.

created confusion and resentment among some state boards. Others have declared that they do not have time to draw up a priorities statement, or have seen this requirement as a restrictive bureaucratic exercise of no value. A board's attitude toward the priorities statement often seems indicative of the overall role of that state board. Where the board has approached the establishment of priorities as a positive exercise to enable it to establish better communication with the commission and with applicants, and especially as a device to help direct its own work, the statement has proved useful. It appears to work especially well when a priorities statement outlines specific problems with suggested solutions (sometimes in the form of a particular project) and also broader problem categories and approaches. The commission has encouraged the states to indicate their own preferred approaches where these seem appropriate, and to rank the areas of need at least into rough groupings.

A priorities list seems to have been least effective when a board adopted it merely to meet the commission's request, but does not consider the list to be an analysis of state problems to be solved with the board's active involvement. Priorities seem also to have been of negligible value when they are so all-inclusive as to provide little guidance to applicants, the commission, or to the advisory board itself.

The commission continues to believe that lists of priorities and needs can be

useful to the boards, the commission, and to archivists and others concerned with our nation's records.⁴ The development, refinement, and maximum use of such devices is likely to be a continuing process, even though it may not bear fruit in some areas in the immediate future.

6. *Exactly how does the commission process an application? What weight is given to compatibility with a state's announced priorities?*

Before it will consider a proposal, the commission requires individual evaluation sheets from five members of the board or two-thirds of its members, whichever is greater. Each evaluation (Exhibit A) provides for both numerical ratings and narrative comments on the basic elements of the proposal. One of the narrative sections covers the relation of the proposal to the priorities established by the state board and seeks special justification if the proposal does not fall in a priority category. The coordinator also completes a summary recommendation form reflecting the views of the state board. This also includes a numerical section (an average of the ratings of board members) and asks for a summary of the views of the state board and the relation of the proposal to the board's priorities. Finally, the coordinator indicates (Exhibit B) which of several options the commission is advised to take with regard to the proposal, and, if funding is recommended, the board's view of the project's importance.⁵

⁴ The evolution of the commission's thinking on national and state priorities is summarized briefly by a commission member in John A. Fleckner, interviewer, "The Records Program of the NHPRC: An Interview with Commission Member Richard A. Erney," *The Midwestern Archivist* (Vol. 3, No. 2, 1978); see especially pp. 65-66.

⁵ This system applies to review of "state" applications, i.e., proposals for projects to be conducted within the confines of a single state. Each regional and national proposal, approximately 11 percent of applications received to date, is sent to approximately ten expert reviewers for individual evaluation using a form very similar to Exhibit A.

The commission reviews the opinions and recommendations of the advisory board for each proposal, paying particular attention to the narrative comments of the individual members and to the summary and recommendation from the coordinator. It is clear, therefore, that attention to priorities is encouraged at several stages and the coordinator is required to relate each recommendation for funding directly to the board's priorities and to indicate to the commission just how important the proposal is regarded by the board in comparison to other proposals it is considering or is likely to consider. When the board has not established priorities and preferred approaches, the commission's decisions must be more arbitrary than it likes them to be.

7. Are state boards worth continuing, judging by their performance to date?

As with many other questions, the answer depends on one's expectations and perspective. On one hand, it is apparent that in some instances the appointment and operation of a state historical records coordinator and board have had a substantial positive impact on the development of records programs within the state, showing that the state boards have the potential for positive action in other areas. On the other hand, some advisory boards are ineffective, and in some states the coordinator-board mechanism as presently constructed may even have become a hindrance to the development of programs.

My personal opinion is that refinement rather than abolition of the state

board system is required and that this improvement needs to move in several directions. Changes might include, for example: small allocations of NHPRC funds to the state boards for meeting and administrative expenses; a much larger number of *pass through* grants, whereby state boards re-grant funds for specific purposes outlined in a proposal from the board; some relaxation of the requirement that the coordinator be the state archivist or director of the state-funded historical society; and an outright veto power for the boards on proposals for which they do not recommend support. An alternative is to allow individual state boards to choose to place heavy emphasis on statewide planning and on directly operating highly important statewide projects, but to play little if any role in the evaluation of other proposals from the state.

8. What are the characteristics of those boards that already appear to be functioning effectively?

Several elements seem especially important, the chief being a coordinator who believes in the value of the program and is willing to commit a portion of his or her time or that of a qualified assistant to facilitate the work of the board. Also important is inclusion on the board of at least a few members who are technically competent to evaluate the plan of work and the techniques outlined in proposals, who are interested in a broad range of problems relating to historical records, and who are anxious to see the board active in problem-solving within their state.⁶ The most successful boards are not al-

⁶ In February 1979, the commission revised its regulations to require that a majority of advisory board members in each state consist of members who have recognized experience in the administration of historical records or archives. Experience "in a field of research making extensive use of such records" is no longer sufficient for a majority of the board, although welcomed in "other" members.

ways those that commit the greatest amounts of time to board meetings and to other records program activity; more successful are those that approach their work systematically and positively. Reaching agreement on procedures and goals seems to be very helpful, as does a willingness to communicate frankly and in detail with the commission, and to assume good-faith efforts in return.

Less successful boards include those that have adopted a "booster" attitude (recommending proposals from their state without careful evaluation)⁷; have consistently ignored the commission's procedures and policies; and who feel "entitled" to the commission's acceptance of their recommendations without evidence of careful planning, review, or the board's acceptance of responsibility.

9. If the commission wants more active and conscientious state coordinators and boards, why are grant funds not allocated to the states with the responsibility for spending decisions and oversight? Are they not more likely to be responsible if they are accountable for decisions instead of being asked merely to advise the commission, especially if their advice is not always taken?

There is much to be said for this argument, and some commission members have been more inclined than others to move in that direction. This remains an option likely to receive continuing discussion in the future and one on which the commission seeks advice from all who are interested.

Caution here stems from a combination of factors. One is the basic problem of establishing an appropriate formula for distribution of funds among the states. Population or area of the state, its date of entry into the Union, its number of repositories, or provision of an equal amount to each state all appear to be unsatisfactory criteria for distribution. Any of these is likely to be greatly resented by many states. Second, regardless of the formula, the amount of money available has been so limited that a distribution to all states is unlikely to prove sufficient to tackle major problems in any state. Third, if all of the state boards receive funds directly, review proposals, or formulate their own proposals and provide oversight to projects or administer them directly, a high portion of the federal funds would probably be diverted to administrative rather than project costs. The Congress and the public are unlikely to look with favor upon such use of the very limited funds available for the early development of programs. Also, the commission is willing to provide support for a portion of the staff time necessary to facilitate the work of a board, to fund projects directly administered by a board and/or coordinator, and to support *pass through* grants to be reallocated for carefully defined purposes. These options provide sufficient opportunities for interested boards to participate in problem solving with the support of records program funds. The commission believes that public monies will be used more

⁷ A September 1979 study of 157 proposals reviewed by state boards from June 1978 to June 1979 indicated that boards recommended support for 78 percent of the proposals and rejection or revision of only 22 percent. Using the categories in the Summary and Recommendation Sheet (Exhibit B, attached), state boards ranked recommended proposals as follows: 23 percent were considered to be "among the most important likely to be recommended by the Board in the foreseeable future"; 57 percent were classed as "high priority"; 15 percent were of "average priority"; and 5 percent were "low priority."

effectively for the time being through the present competitive "incentive" system than if distributed in some other fashion. Although some, particularly state coordinators, have suggested that more funding authority pass to the state coordinator and board, many archivists with whom we have discussed this matter express concern about the likely performance of some boards in terms of technical capacity, equal treatment, and breadth of perspective.

It is well to keep in mind, also, two other points. First, the records program has been developed during the cost-conscious mid- and late 70s, not the boom period of the mid-60s. Finally, and perhaps most important of all, while a state framework is useful in many ways, it can also be restrictive and inefficient when unleavened by a national perspective. Placement of final funding decisions at the state level can lead to duplication of effort, poor coordination and sharing of information, and narrowness of view, particularly in problem areas that are not unique to a single state. Most of the areas of need identified by the commission do appear to be national in

scope. There is also a long tradition, implied in the authorizing legislation of the commission and confirmed many times since, that the commission is first of all a body to provide coordination, planning, evaluation, and recommendations, and is only secondarily a mechanism for the dispersal of funds. Here, the past does seem to have been prologue for the records program.⁸

10. *What is the single factor most likely to improve the performance of the advisory board in the future?*

Institutions ordinarily respond most effectively when they are supported by a constituency that is active, closely attentive, and constructively critical of their performance. Many of the boards would function better if archivists and others interested in history and historical records would inquire more often about the activities and procedures of the board in their state, request and attend open board meetings, suggest directions for the development or revision of priorities statements, indicate a willingness to serve on the board or suggest others to serve, and otherwise seek to influence the work of the board

⁸ Some examples of NHPRC non-grant activities include, for example, the commission's production or sponsorship of Walter Rundell, Jr., *In Pursuit of American History: Research and Training in the United States* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1970); Leslie W. Dunlap and Fred Shelley, eds., *The Publication of American Historical Manuscripts* (Iowa City: The University of Iowa Libraries, 1976); and Philip M. Hamer, ed., *A Guide to Archives and Manuscripts in the United States* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1961). For 1950-60 volumes, the commission's staff compiled and the Government Printing Office published *Writings on American History*.

The commission has sponsored numerous conferences on editing and on the documentation of particular aspects of American history, and it directly administers editorial workshops, an editorial fellowship program, and a job register for editorial positions. The commission has also issued standards for historical records in microform and for quality book production, which have been accepted or endorsed by organizations and institutions beyond recipients of NHPRC grants. The commission's most recent operational initiative is the planning and coordination of a national data base of information about historical records repositories and their holdings. See Larry J. Hackman, Nancy Sahli, and Dennis A. Burton, "The NHPRC and a Guide to Manuscript and Archival Materials in the United States," the *American Archivist* 40 (April 1977): 201-5; *Report on the Conference on Automated Guide Projects* (Atlanta: National Association of State Archives and Records Administrators, 1977); H. Thomas Hickerson, ed., *SPINDEX Users Conference: Proceedings* (Ithaca: Cornell University Libraries, 1979); and the introduction to NHPRC, *Directory of Archives and Manuscript Repositories in the United States* (Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Service, 1978).

and hold it accountable.⁹ The board is, after all, appointed by the governor; it is a state, not a federal, entity; and it is ordinarily just as subject to citizen concern as other state bodies.

Some boards, including those in Minnesota and New York, have begun to issue annual reports to the governor. Quite a few of the boards prepare and publish formal minutes of their meetings. Some states, such as Massachusetts, Tennessee, and Pennsylvania, invite potential grant applicants to meet with the board before submitting a proposal, to discuss a possible application and the interests and procedures of the board and the commission. Some, such as Delaware and Wisconsin, have held open meetings to seek comment on the drafting of a priorities statement. Despite these efforts, archivists and others who might be expected to be interested in the work of the boards appear to have made little effort to influence their work to date. But I still believe such efforts are the most likely, and appropriate, way to improve advisory board performances.

11. *Which is the most important role of the boards, establishing priorities or evaluating individual proposals?*

In my opinion, the most important task of the board is problem solving, which certainly relates both to priorities and evaluation but does not stop there. It implies more eagerness to take whatever combination of actions is needed to move toward solutions to pressing problems. This often involves grant projects; but it can also include publicity, reports, appearances before

the legislature, various educational and consciousness raising activities in the state, information gathering and sharing, coordination of lobbying efforts, and other activities of the sort usually involved in the improvement of programs for agreed upon ends.

12. *Shifting now from the advisory boards to proposals, what characteristics contribute to the success or failure of a proposal to the NHPRC's records grant program?*

The NHPRC has issued a detailed booklet, *Suggestions for Applicants*, which provides sufficient guidance in most cases. The *Suggestions* include the list of "invited proposals" for the current year, the "Statement of National Needs and Preferred Approaches," advice on what the commission looks for in each section of a proposal, and other helpful suggestions and cautions.

Here are a few of the kinds of proposals that fail to receive support: (1) proposals that call for overly elaborate procedures, particularly in description of records; here the commission may conclude either that the records simply do not warrant such detailed description or that the need for it is not so pressing as to require use of commission funds; (2) proposals that appear to decrease rather than increase the applicant's own support for its historical records program; the commission is attracted to proposals that increase financial commitments of the applicant, or those that demonstrate a willingness to address key policy questions, to clarify priorities, or to improve procedures for the future; (3) proposals that do not show careful planning or confrontation of impor-

⁹ These same points were made in talks to regional archival associations during the early months of the records program. Perhaps it was too soon for them to have received careful attention. See Larry J. Hackman, "A Progress Report on the Records Grant Program: The Future Belongs to You," *The Midwestern Archivist* (Vol. 1, No. 2, 1976), pp. 21-27.

tant problems before the beginning of the project; the commission is seldom persuaded by assurances that vaguely described and untested techniques will work.

In general, proposals have the best chance of success where there is evidence that the applicant has thought carefully about how to use the commission's funds for maximum leverage to improve the overall condition of his program, instead of treating outside funding as a special project without relationship to broader and continuing program needs. Finally, state category projects must almost always receive the recommendation of the appropriate State Historical Records Advisory Board; there have been only two or three exceptions among the nearly 300 grants recommended to date.

13. *How does the commission judge the success of a completed project?*

The most obvious measure is completion of the work outlined in the proposal or expected by the commission at the time the grant was recommended. The commission attempts to assess quality from the narrative reports required from projects; from products such as finding aids, published reports, manuals, and schedules issued by grantees as a result of grant support; and from site visit reports by commission staff, the coordinator, or a board member. We have a long way to go in assuring adequate oversight, especially during the grant period.

The commission also looks especially for residual or spillover effects from records grant projects. For example, some grantees convince their institutions to continue to employ the new grant-funded staff member after the grant period ends, because of his or her performance or the usefulness of the activities begun during the grant

project. Many NHPRC grants are made to projects that identify records not yet in repositories, carry out pilot projects demonstrating the value of and procedures and requirements for a continuing program, prepare schedules for recurring types of records, or prepare manuals to improve future program performance. In such cases, the commission looks not just at the survey guide, the manual, or the schedules but also at the applicant's effort to promote program implementation by the end of the grant period and after it is over. When a project makes a critical intervention in a positive direction, the project is judged to be more successful than one which merely meets the targets outlined in the proposal—although we are certainly well pleased with the latter.

14. *What is the essential difference between the records grant program of NHPRC and the collections program of the National Endowment for the Humanities, and what is your working relationship with that program?*

As early as 1976 the two programs issued a rather detailed joint statement on their respective areas of responsibility. The statement is available upon request from either program. The essential difference is in purpose. The NEH program exists chiefly to support projects that contribute to advanced humanistic research. It is logical, therefore, that most of their grants are directly to make available collections of interest to scholars in the humanities. They also support some library book and serial collection projects; we do not. And NEH is not confined to American history, as we are. NHPRC, on the other hand, has a much broader mandate to help ensure the preservation and use of historical records, broadly defined, for the future. We in-

clude under historical records all records that have permanent value to society for any of the reasons archivists ordinarily apply in appraisal, not just the promotion of scholarly research and certainly not just humanistic research. As indicated above, the commission, by legislative history and tradition, is a coordinating, planning, and guiding body, as the NEH is not—though some critics have taken both the National Endowment for the Humanities and the National Endowment for the Arts to task for failure to develop a “national plan” for the humanities and the arts. Neither endowment at this time appears to aspire to this broader role.

The NHPRC records staff maintains a close and cordial relationship with the NEH collections program staff, just as our publications program staff does with others at NEH. We frequently consult with NEH staff regarding advice to applicants; we share lists of applicants and news of decisions on proposals; and we generally inform each other of changes in policies, procedures, and areas of emphasis. During recent grant cycles, very few proposals have been submitted to both programs at the same time. Applicants appear to determine rather well which of the two programs is the appropriate one from which to seek support for a given project; the willingness of staffs of both programs to consult frankly with applicants and with each other seems to be helpful.

15. *How do you view the commission's relationship to the SAA?*

The amendment that established the historical records program in December 1974 gave the Society authority to appoint two members of the commission, so there is a formal statutory tie as well as many informal ones.¹⁰ The records program looks to the SAA more than to any other professional organization for guidance and leadership on methodological issues affecting historical records problems. We work closely with SAA officers, staff, committees, and, most of all, individual members. Cooperation includes requests for SAA reactions to proposed changes in our regulations and procedures, SAA efforts on congressional appropriations and authorizations for NHPRC programs, and special efforts to keep the Society closely informed on grants, studies, reports, and policies. Many SAA members serve as reviewers of regional and national records grant proposals and as members of state advisory boards. For the past several years the records program has held a caucus and office hours at the annual meeting of the Society.

The active role of records program staff in the affairs of the Society also indicates a close relationship between the two organizations. The NHPRC's executive director is a member of SAA Council, a Fellow of the Society, and he has chaired Society committees. Other staff members serve on Society committees, participate in SAA confer-

¹⁰ With passage of this amendment, a majority of the commission became non-federal for the first time. Of the seventeen members of the NHPRC, two each are appointed by the SAA, the American Association for State and Local History, the Organization of American Historians, and the American Historical Association. Two other public members are appointed by the President. Other members include an appointee of the Library of Congress, the Supreme Court, the House of Representatives, the Senate, the Department of State, and the Department of Defense. The Archivist of the United States is chairman of the commission.

ences and workshops, write manuals for the Society and publish in its journal, and appear frequently on its annual meeting program. These activities, for the most part, reflect professional interests and experiences predating the staffs' NHPRC work.

Although these comments indicate close ties, it was expected that the records program would have received and supported more proposals from the Society than has been the case.¹¹ We are aware that the SAA can become overburdened with special projects, and that its committees have traditionally relied on modest support from the Society's own income; but we continue to feel that the records program could provide assistance for more rapid and ambitious work in some areas. Here, we are acutely aware of the lack of alternative bases for broadly directed research and development projects.

16. Beyond the items discussed above, are there other points that records program watchers should keep in mind?

Several brief reminders might be helpful. First, lists of grants supported do not, in themselves, provide a sufficient basis for analysis of records program policies, priorities, or decisions. Brief descriptions of grants cannot possibly indicate why the commission supported one project of a certain type

but did not fund another which, on the surface, seemed very similar. The factors considered are often numerous and complex.

Second, observers sometimes seem to overlook the fact that the commission can only fund specific written proposals for specific projects. It cannot make grants in response to lists of priorities, or suggestions, or hopes and dreams. It cannot even make grants to carry out its own views of the most important projects unless an applicant presents an appropriate proposal.

Third, the decisions of the records program on individual grant proposals are bound to disappoint applicants and state boards most of the time. Other factors aside, funds have not been sufficient to support more than a small percentage of proposals, and even this is possible only by granting less in many cases than was requested. This trend is likely to continue, especially given the combination of inflation, a continued appropriation ceiling identical to that for the 1974-79 period, and an increase in funding requests. Rejection of proposals is a normal part of the records grant program, not a personal failure of the proposal writer. A growing number of disappointed applicants and boards seems inevitable, not necessarily a sign of poor choices among competing requests.

In closing I wish to reaffirm that the NHPRC invites all who are interested in the preservation and use of historical records to broaden their concerns beyond the view from the door of their own repository. We need archivists and others who are willing to work individually and cooperatively to address problems which are not unique to a single repository. Our professional organizations, as helpful

¹¹ The records program has made two grants to date to the Society. The very first records program grant in late 1975 provided support for the writing and publication of the first five manuals in the Society's "Basic Manual" series. A grant in June 1978 is supporting six additional manuals in this series. The commission chose not to fund a 1976 application from the Society to survey and evaluate unpublished inventories of the Historical Records Survey of the Work Projects Administration.

as they are in membership services, are not presently undertaking many special problem solving projects. Archivists and their repositories in particular geographic areas or with similar programs and problems need to join together to meet shared needs such as appraisal studies, survey and accessioning programs for particular kinds of records, and framing of educational programs for specialized needs. We hope that more can be done during the coming years to establish agenda for action and agreement on approaches, and then to begin systematically the work that needs to be done. We believe the records program can be useful to those who are willing to accept this challenge.

EXHIBIT A, PAGE ONE

EVALUATION SHEET FOR ADVISORY BOARD MEMBERS

Date evaluation due in Coordinators office _____

Applicant: _____

Project Title: _____

Please comment on as many questions in Section I as you can and complete Sections II and III. Return your evaluation to the Coordinator as soon as possible. Unless the required number of evaluation sheets and the "Recommendation" to be prepared by the Coordinator are received by the Commission by the established deadline, the proposal will not be reviewed by the Commission at the meeting for which the proposal was submitted.

Non-identifying excerpts from rating sheets may be made available upon request of applicants where these excerpts are relevant to the action taken by the NHPRC.

I. Board Member's Comments: (Please submit on an attached sheet.)

1. How does this proposal relate to any priority categories of need indicated by the Advisory Board?
 - a. If the proposal falls within a priority category, how pressing is the need for support of this project in comparison to other proposals or potential proposals in this category?
 - b. If the proposal does not fall within a priority category, is there a special justification for its recommendation by the Advisory Board and its support by the NHPRC?
2. Please comment on the soundness of the plan of work, and especially the appropriateness of the techniques to be applied, presented in the proposal.
3. Please comment on the qualifications of the personnel specified to carry out the particular activities indicated in the proposal.
4. Please provide your view, if appropriate to this proposal, of the importance of the records to be dealt with.
5. Please provide your view, if appropriate to this proposal, of the importance of project activities to improved historical records programs.
6. Please comment on the soundness of the budget.
7. Please note any area in which you believe additional information is needed to fully understand and evaluate the proposal.
8. Please note any area in which you believe the proposal should be revised.
9. Other comments.

EXHIBIT A, PAGE TWO

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II. Numerical Rating Section:

Although the Commission finds most useful the narrative comments of Board Members and written Recommendation prepared by the State Coordinator, it would be helpful if you would numerically rate this proposal in the following areas:

Please circle the appropriate number using the following scale:

Exceptional (5), Very High (4), Average (3), Poor (2, 1)

- A. The applicant's need for grant support for this proposal:
5, 4, 3, 2, 1
- B. The soundness of the plan of work: 5, 4, 3, 2, 1
- C. The qualification of the personnel to carry out this project:
5, 4, 3, 2, 1
- D. The soundness of the budget: 5, 4, 3, 2, 1
- E. The importance of the records to be dealt with in terms of their
research value: 5, 4, 3, 2, 1
- F. (Check category which most applies.) The importance of the project:
() as a model; () to provide leverage to the applicant in seeking
additional resources, or; () because of the report or other publication
to be produced. 5, 4, 3, 2, 1
- G. Overall rating of the proposal: 5, 4, 3, 2, 1

III. Recommendation:

In my opinion this project should be:

- A. Funded: _____
- B. Partially funded: _____ (If so, how much? _____)
- C. Revised: _____
- D. Rejected: _____

Signature _____

Date _____

EXHIBIT B

Which of the following best reflects the recommendation of the State Board to the Commission?

- ____ (a) *The State Board will communicate directly with the applicant regarding the need for additional information or to suggest revision of the proposal. The NHPRC should take no official action for the time being.
- ____ (b) The NHPRC should consider the application as soon as possible and should reject it for reasons specified under #1 above. The applicant should be informed of these reasons by the Commission and urged to work with the Coordinator and Commission staff toward a revised proposal.
- ____ (c) The Commission should reject the proposal and should inform the applicant that a revised proposal is not desired by the Commission or the State Board.
- ____ (d) The Commission should support the proposal if funds permit. The Advisory Board considers this proposal:
- ____ 1. Among the most important likely to be recommended by the Board in the foreseeable future. (Suggest no more than 10% of proposals recommended be in this category.)
- ____ 2. Of high priority (the Commission believes that no more than 33% of proposals recommended by an Advisory Board should, by definition, be placed in this category) because: (Check one or more)
- ____ of the importance of the records to dealt with
- ____ of the likely impact of the project on improved records programs
- ____ of the pressing nature of the project (if support is not given now it may be too late)
- ____ other (explain)
- ____ 3. Of average priority
- ____ 4. Of relatively low priority
- ____ (e) Other: (Please comment and advise the Commission on the action you wish the Commission to take.)

*This is the preferred procedure when the Board believes additional information or a revision is advisable.