

Case Study

State Government and Statewide Archival Affairs: New York as a Case Study

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Abstract: This article seeks to provoke discussion and analysis of the role of state governments in archival activities beyond the records of state government. Should the state regularly assess archival conditions, report on them, and recommend action to address key needs? Should states provide financial and technical assistance to archives in local governments and in programs in the not-for-profit sector? Should the state coordinate public awareness campaigns and educational programs statewide? What should be the scope and the methods of state programs, who should decide, and how? The article draws on New York as an example of how such state programs might be developed and as a basis for discussion of their appropriateness. A final section considers potential roles for all state governments.

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THIS ARTICLE IS FIRST OF ALL a case study of a state government that, during recent years, has actively promoted the improvement of archival conditions statewide. This effort has included the creation of programs and policies whereby state government will play a broad, continuing role in archival affairs beyond its core responsibility for the records of state government. The article describes both the programs that have been developed and the strategies used to bring them about, e.g., assessment and planning, public awareness, coalition building, legislative and funding advocacy, regionalization, and others. A final section of the article presents suggestions for the statewide archival activities of state governments in the United States. The chief goal overall is to provoke discussion of the appropriate archival roles of state government, an issue that has not been considered carefully by the archival community or by state government.

New York is offered as a case study for several reasons: It has experienced considerable change in archival affairs, especially in the role of the state government; this change has been characterized by an activist stance by the state archival agency; this activist role appears to have had the support of most members of the archival community; and there was considerable discussion of the role of the state as part of the preparation of reports and recommendations regarding archival and records issues. Most of all, however, the Empire State is a useful test case because by 1990, statutes, executive orders, agency reorganizations, formally adopted plans, and several major programs reflected these developments and made a broad, activist state role in archival affairs highly likely for the foreseeable future.

New York in 1980

In 1980, the New York State Archives was still in its infancy. A statute calling for

the creation of a separate state archives in the State Education Department was adopted only in 1971. It was not until 1975 that a first state archivist, Edward Weldon, was appointed by the associate commissioner for cultural education, an office that then included the New York State Library, State Museum, and Office of State History. There was no other professional staff, except for several records analysts in a local records unit transferred to the state archives from the Office of State History when the latter was abolished in 1976.¹ Indeed, in 1977 a National Historical Publications and Records Commission (NHPRC) grant of \$13,967 was obtained, "to sustain on an emergency basis for four months temporary personnel" to enable the archives to cooperate with the Office of General Services in a survey of records in state agencies.² It was only in 1978, chiefly due to interest from the office of the majority leader of the state senate, that the State Education Department was assigned funds for several permanent archivist and support positions.³

¹Since 1911, state law had assigned certain regulatory responsibilities for local government records to the State Education Department, especially review and approval of local government requests to dispose of records. During certain periods the department had accessioned small bodies of local government records judged to have high historical value. In the mid-seventies, the local records unit was promulgating standard disposition schedules for records relating to most types of records managed by the major kinds of local governments. The unit also advised local governments on the design of fireproof vaults, microfilm systems, and indexing of official minutes. Given the emphasis on records disposition, it seemed appropriate to transfer the unit to the new state archives.

²The Office of General Services had statutory responsibility for the state records management program. It coordinated the records disposition review process and operated the State Records Center. As with local government records, approval of the State Education Department was required for the disposition of state government records. This responsibility had been carried out in the department by the Office of State History but was transferred to the new state archives.

³This political interest, in addition to a resolution to remove the state archives from the State Education

Despite a lack of resources and considerable turnover among initial staff, some of whom lacked archival training or experience, Weldon and his colleagues took several farsighted steps during the late 1970s.⁴ Participation in the survey of agency records, for example, provided a key tool for identifying and subsequently accessioning archival records, and it gave the new program visibility in many offices. It also exposed the fledgling staff to the workings of many agencies and helped them establish initial relationships with key records custodians. As a result, the state archives accessioned nearly 16,000 cubic feet of archival records by the end of 1981; these were in addition to the roughly 10,000 cubic feet transferred from the state library which had previously served as the custodian for state archival records. In June 1978, the New York State Archives officially opened for research in the new Cultural Education Center in the Empire State Plaza.

While struggling to develop core archival functions for state government records, the state archives also seized on the new NHPRC records grant program to encourage action statewide. Governor Hugh Carey was persuaded by the state archives to appoint a strong State Historical Records Ad-

visory Board and to issue an executive order calling on it to set statewide priorities and promote action to address them.⁵ The state archivist cum state historical records coordinator assigned one of the local records analysts, Bruce Dearstyne, to help the board establish statewide grant priorities—presumably the first-ever statewide archival priority document.⁶

The coordinator and special assistant actively encouraged proposals that addressed the priorities adopted by the board. One major grant to Cornell University, although not prompted by the state archives, initiated a statewide collection-level survey and guide project, the Historical Documents Inventory. To foster local government archives work, the board applied successfully for NHPRC's first-ever "regrant project" award; this enabled the board to give small grants to up to ten local governments to develop archival programs.

By 1980, then, New York had a still new and small state archives.⁷ The actions of its leadership and the views of the State Historical Records Advisory Board indicated, however, that the new program was unlikely to confine its activities to state government records. In 1980, the state archivist accepted appointment as deputy archivist of the United States and was succeeded, in

Department that was nearly adopted by the 1979 Governors Conference on Libraries, helped to raise awareness in the State Education Department of the need to strengthen support for the archives.

⁴Among the early staff assembled by Weldon were Bruce Dearstyne, who came to the archives when the local records unit was transferred from the Office of State History, and Tom Mills, who was one of the temporary staff hired to work on the survey of agency records. Dearstyne and Mills contributed greatly in subsequent years to the overall development of the state archives. In 1987, Dearstyne was appointed assistant director for external programs, and Mills was named assistant director for state records in the newly organized State Archives and Records Administration. Although the state archives has been blessed with an extremely strong staff, many well known in the archival profession, the contributions of individuals will not be highlighted in this article. Success has nearly always been the result of group rather than individual effort.

⁵Initial appointees to the advisory board included, for example, nationally recognized leaders such as Herbert Finch of Cornell, Shonnie Finnegan of the State University of New York—Buffalo, and William Rofes of IBM. Subsequent members included William Joyce, Anne Van Camp, and Joan Warnow-Blewett.

⁶The board revised its "State Historical Records Plan" several times during the late 1970s. The purposes of the plan, as described in the 1979 update, were "first, to serve as a broad statement of advisable historical records priorities, and, second, to indicate the Board's own criteria used in evaluating applications under the NHPRC program." This process continues in the early 1990s.

⁷The archives' staff consisted of about a dozen positions, excluding the local records unit transferred from the Office of State History. Approximately 20,000 cubic feet of records had been accessioned by 1980, more than half of which were transferred from the collections of the state library.

October 1981, by the author, who had served for five years in Washington as the first director of the NHPRC's Historical Records Program.

A Decade of Development

The 1980s was a time of rapid change for the New York State Archives—in size, scope of mission, and even in name. By 1990, most of the foundation blocks were in place for a strong state archival agency. Expansion of the archives' statewide role accompanied equally important developments regarding state government records.

State records. The chief focus of this article is on the statewide archival role of state government. Reviewing activities relating to state government records helps to demonstrate that statewide archival initiatives do not preclude vigorous efforts to address the first responsibility of any state archives—the records of state government of enduring value to the state and its citizens. New York is considerably closer than it was a decade ago to the identification, retention, sound administration, and appropriate accessibility of state archival records, although a large gap remains between capacity and need. Perhaps more relevant here, the advances described below suggest that New York is as close to sufficiency as many other states that have chosen a less active role in statewide archival affairs.

During the 1980s, the New York State Archives accessioned approximately 25,000 cubic feet of archival records from all parts of state government. Among the records accessioned, all following formal appraisal, are some of the most important extant state records. These records range from nearly 2,500 cubic feet of the pre-1847 colonial and state records of New York's higher civil courts, to many records of the construction and operation of the Erie Canal and other state canals, to valuable records of major social welfare and correctional programs from their founding through recent years.

Despite this voluminous influx, by 1990 the state archives had established basic physical and intellectual control of all the 4,100 archival series in its custody. The archives had entered series titles for all of these into the RLIN database and into the state library's on-line public access catalog, including full USMARC AMC series-level records for more than half of them; was near publication of a second summary guide to holdings, listing all series, providing a history and the current scope of responsibility for each agency, and offering other information useful to potential users; and had issued a broad range of traditional finding aids, including indexes, inventories, and topical guides.

In 1982, the state archives created a preservation administrator position responsible for careful assessment of the preservation needs of its holdings and for coordination of all preservation activities. This included environmental controls, records processing and handling procedures, operation of a well-equipped conservation laboratory, and oversight of a micrographics program addressing both preservation and access goals. By 1990, over 8,000 items had been treated in the laboratory and approximately 2,000 cubic feet of records had been microfilmed to archival standards. Despite this systematic approach to preservation, New York's situation is typical of state archives in that it faces a huge backlog of preservation work. Given the long years of New York's archival delinquency and the size and complexity of its state government, the backlog is formidable indeed.⁸

⁸During the 1980s, several glaring deficiencies were addressed: Severe roof leaks were stopped, and fire walls, fire doors, and an electronic card access security system were installed. Temperature and humidity fluctuation was reduced and brought closer to levels appropriate for preservation of archival materials. Overall, however, environmental conditions and systems for prevention of fire-related loss remain unsatisfactory. Resources to support preservation treatments,

As a result of work in appraisal and accessioning, arrangement and description, and preservation, research use climbed steadily from approximately 1,200 users in 1979 to more than 17,500 in 1991. This is far fewer than in some state archives that hold many more state and local government records of high interest to genealogists. In New York, genealogists are approximately one third of users. Another third are users within state government. Scholars comprise about 20 percent, and researchers from the legal and business communities account for another 15 percent.

The state archives also took several major initiatives to build understanding, cooperation, and support. Each of these sought a high impact on a certain segment of the state's archival records. For example, the state archives proposed to the Office of Court Administration (OCA), which coordinates New York's Unified Court System, that OCA apply to the NHPRC for a grant for the Court Records Disposition and Archival Planning Project. The archives itself prepared a rough draft of the proposal, which led to a \$198,000 NHPRC grant in 1983 for a "Statewide Judicial Records Disposition and Archives Development Project." Drawing on advice from a Judicial Records Committee, and day-to-day assistance from state archives appraisal staff, the project produced disposition schedules for the first time for nearly all types of records in all

types of courts statewide. A new records disposition rule was issued by the chief administrative judge, who also created a new cabinet-level office and staff in OCA to coordinate court records management, archives, micrographics, and law library policies and programs statewide. Under the new schedules, the archival records of the higher level appellate courts, including those of the New York State Court of Appeals itself, are regularly transferred to the state archives.⁹

As in most states, records of the legislature have been a major challenge in New York. In 1987, a member of the State Historical Records Advisory Board became a key aide to the new speaker of the New York State Assembly. Drawing on this relationship, the archives proposed creation of a Legislative Records Project, and the speaker sponsored a \$50,000 appropriation to support a project archivist. The project assessed a number of important legislative records systems and proposed records disposition schedules or direct archival transfers to a variety of offices and committees. In 1989, the archives produced the first *Guide to Legislative Records in the State Archives* as an aid to research and as a way to increase awareness in the state legislature. Despite these efforts, firm agreements were not reached on disposition for many key leadership and committee records in the assembly, and there has been virtually no cooperation from the New York State Senate. Records vital to understanding legislative history continue to be destroyed or alienated from state custody without archival review. As in most states, arrangements for the archival records of legislative leadership, administrative offices, and key

including laboratory treatments, holdings maintenance, and microfilming, were insufficient to support substantial progress against the huge backlog. Several large preservation grants from the National Endowment for the Humanities permitted preservation action on some documents of high national research interest. Despite these deficiencies in facilities and resources, Howard Lowell, the author of a major national study of preservation in state archives, observed that "Of the states I visited, only New York seemed to have a clear, comprehensive notion of the directions its preservation efforts must take." See *Preservation Needs in State Archives* (Albany, N.Y.: National Association of Government Archives and Records Administrators, 1986), p. 22.

⁹See the April 1988 final report by the Office of Court Administration, *Records Management in the New York State Unified Court System: Final Report of the New York State Judicial Records Disposition Committee* (New York: Office of Court Administration).

committees remain incomplete or unreliable.

Progress was also modest regarding the records of the governor and executive chamber staff. Appraisal work by state archives staff led to the transfer of about 850 cubic feet and 200 reels of microfilm of executive chamber files, chiefly the voluminous central files, at the end of the Carey administration (1974–1982). An important agreement was reached early in the Cuomo administration to improve filing practices and provide for regular microfilming of the executive chamber central files—approximately 250 cubic feet were created per year in the 1980s. With a modest increase in resources secured through support from executive chamber staff, the archives has been systematically microfilming most of these records so that a high-quality microfilm set will be available at the end of the Cuomo administration.

On the negative side, at the end of the Carey administration, highly important records, including those of the governor's counsel and secretary (his two most important advisors), were destroyed or removed from state custody without archival review, actions that appear to conform to past practice in New York. To prevent similar action in the future, the state archives and the commissioner of education have advanced recommendations and position papers and have met several times with key executive chamber staff. The governor has taken no action, however, to ensure that similar destruction or alienation will not take place again. Executive law language on gubernatorial records, dating from the nineteenth century, gives the governor *carte blanche* regarding executive chamber records. This remains in effect in New York nearly two decades after Watergate and the Presidential Records Act and runs contrary to the published recommendations of the National Governors Association. A resolution adopted by delegates at the 1990 Governor's Conference on Libraries and

Information Services recommended specific provisions to replace New York's outdated statutory language for executive chamber records with a modern law requiring appropriate disposition review and preventing alienation of archival records from legal custody of state government.¹⁰

Cuomo administration records legislation, promoted by the state archives, brought major change in other areas of executive branch records administration. In 1987, the State Budget Bill transferred records management responsibilities from the Office of General Services to the State Education Department. This legislation assigned the state archives responsibility to guide, review, and ultimately approve records analysis and disposition in all agencies, to provide storage and retrieval for appropriately scheduled inactive agency records, and to develop training and technical assistance to agencies on records administration. The transfer resulted from a study carried out by the governor's Office of Management and Productivity (MAP); that office had been encouraged by the archives to review the state's records management services, which had deteriorated in the 1970s and early 1980s. The MAP study, approved by the Division of the Budget, recommended the integration of archives and records management functions and creation of an "internal service account" whereby agencies pay a fee for records management advisory and educational services and are charged also for records center storage and retrieval.¹¹

¹⁰The inadequacies of the present statute were described in testimony given by Stanley Katz, president of the American Council of Learned Societies, at the October 1990 hearing on "Archives, Unique Research Resources, and the Future of New York," co-sponsored by the Governor's Commission on Libraries and the Archivists Roundtable of Metropolitan New York.

¹¹The state archives had initiated contact with MAP when the latter undertook a Forms Reduction Project early in the Cuomo administration; the archives sought

To reflect these expanded mandates, the state archives was reorganized in September 1987 as the State Archives and Records Administration (SARA). Drawing on the fees from services to agencies, SARA increased professional records management staff positions from two to more than 25. This staff extensively upgraded the records analysis and disposition process and instituted educational and technical assistance programs; issued general records schedules for personnel, fiscal, and administrative records; and began a series of technical booklets for managers in all state agencies. Records disposition requests increased sevenfold during the initial three years of SARA's records management program and agency activity—and satisfaction—improved in other records management areas as well. Nevertheless, a huge task remains, given the estimated 2.4 million cubic feet of agency records, only roughly one third of which have ever been analyzed and scheduled. Resources must be focused increasingly on “mission-critical” agency records.¹²

By the end of the 1980s, the archival community perceived the New York State Archives and Records Administration as a leader in addressing machine-readable records, the major challenge now faced by all

government archives. Until 1990, this reputation was based heavily on the writing and leadership by SARA staff and on awareness of SARA's 1988 published report, *A Strategic Plan for Managing and Preserving Electronic Records in New York State Government*.¹³ This report was the formal product of a two-year “special media” project co-sponsored by the Office of Management and Productivity and supported by the Division of the Budget. The project identified many important electronic records systems in state agencies, examined several major systems in detail, and concluded that approximately 35 percent of the estimated 1,000-plus large, centralized electronic records systems needed careful appraisal because of the potential archival value of some of the information in them. After delays due to recruitment and to organizational and support issues, SARA in 1990 created a Center for Electronic Records (CER) to give more prominence to, and to concentrate resources on, this crucial activity. Center staff members are accessioning electronic archival records, working directly with agencies on electronic records issues, and drawing on advice and support from a strong CER Advisory Committee of knowledgeable and interested members from key state offices. SARA expects to give high priority throughout the 1990s to developing effective strategies for electronic records administration, especially retention and access tools.

SARA's most important state records achievement in the 1980s may have been increasing the visibility and awareness of archives and records management in all branches of state government. Beyond workshops and technical publications, this

to increase MAP's awareness of the broader aspects of records management and its relationship to archival administration. MAP subsequently undertook “The Governor's Records Management Improvement Project” with considerable advice and assistance from the state archives. MAP also initiated a formal study of whether the records management program should be combined with the archival function and, if so, how this should be accomplished. This included discussions with archivists and records managers in other states.

¹²For example, the quality and quantity of records retrievals increased greatly, and agencies made increasing use of SARA's storage facilities for microforms and computer tapes. A summary of the first four years of SARA's records management activities is reported in a special Fall 1991 issue of SARA's newsletter, *For The Record*.

¹³Albany, N.Y.: State Education Department, State Archives and Records Administration, 1988; reprinted in 1989.

process included an active newsletter and presentation program, sponsorship of regular meetings of state agency records officers, an awards program, frequent meetings with staff in individual agencies, and direct participation in several organizations of state agency managers. By the end of the decade SARA staff members were highly active in, for example, the new New York State Forum for Information Resources Management (NYSFIRM). This organization was created in 1987 by state government managers concerned about information technology and policy issues. The forum, with annual funding from the State Division of the Budget through the Rockefeller Institute for Government, has developed a wide range of working groups, task forces, seminars, and executive institutes, as well as several standing committees. Although SARA was not involved in founding the forum, SARA's director was elected to the forum's executive committee in 1988 and, in 1989, a constitutional amendment gave SARA *ex officio* status. The only other such members are the assembly, senate, Office of the State Comptroller, Division of Budget, and Office of General Services.

SARA's involvement has contributed to the forum's sponsorship of seminars on information stewardship, electronic records, and other issues important to archives. SARA helped shape the forum's 1989 Information Policy Briefing Paper and its 1990 proposal to the executive chamber to create a State Information Resources Management Office. The forum gave its first annual award for excellence to the director of SARA's Bureau of Records Analysis and Disposition for leading a forum project, funded by NHPRC, to develop a pilot clearinghouse describing databases in selected state agencies and to explore agency views on sharing such information within government and beyond. As the forum seeks to influence policies and improve practices in New York's highly decentralized state

information arena, SARA participation increases the chances that archival needs will receive due consideration.¹⁴

Local government records. No state can effectively address its documentation needs overall without actively influencing the records practices of its local governments. Indeed, no state archives can conduct sound appraisal and disposition analysis for state government records without substantial understanding and consideration of the records in its local governments.

Between 1911, when the New York State Education Department was first given certain responsibilities for local government records, and 1980, the state pursued a variety of approaches to influence the retention and treatment of local government records. In the late 1970s this consisted of approximately two dozen state-issued retention schedules covering many types of records administered by New York's local governments; of state standards for micro-filming and for fire-proof storage vaults; and of publications on indexing and filing systems for certain types of records. A handful of Albany-based analysts sought to provide direct advice on request to the nearly four thousand units of local government. It was not surprising that, despite valiant staff efforts, many local governments either had no contact with or concern about the state's program or were entirely unaware of it. A small number of local governments maintained frequent contact with Albany, and a

¹⁴One additional attempt to increase visibility and support for state archival concerns was the creation in early 1991 of a Regents Visiting Committee for the state archives. Initial members include the assembly majority leader, another member of the assembly and one from the senate, the governor's counsel, an associate justice of the court of appeals, three members of the board of regents, the president of the New York Information Forum, and a historian, archivist, and librarian. During its first year, the Visiting Committee became highly interested in preservation and access conditions, resource needs, and the archival implications of state information policy.

larger number sought advice or assistance in time of crisis; but almost none were developing a systematic records management program or understood the place of the archival function within it. The state's strategy did not seem to address the expanding records and information management needs of the 1980s, whether viewed from a local government administrative or a statewide archival documentation perspective. A fundamental shift in state strategies led some to claim that by 1990 a "quiet revolution" had taken place in local government records affairs in New York.¹⁵ The new approach, as it emerged, consisted of several parts.¹⁶

The most important strategy was to concentrate for several years on increasing the awareness of records administration issues among local officials and their influential statewide associations so that they would actively promote both improved state policies and services and increased local effort. A closely related strategy was to focus the attention of the emerging constituency on the inadequacies of extant state statutes;

the goal here was to secure adoption of a new law to consolidate and modernize statutes and to expand and make explicit the obligations of both the state and local governments in records administration. A comprehensive new law would also signal to all a "new day" in local government records affairs.

A third strategy was to emphasize the development by local governments of bona fide records management *programs* (emphasis mine) rather than particular records activities (such as inventory, reprography, storage, or archives) or treatment of particular types of records. Finally, the new strategy proposed expanded state services rather than greater regulation, and it sought regionalization of services rather than concentration in Albany. Underlying the strategy was a belief that the ultimate responsibility for local government records, including archival records, is with the local government itself, not with the state or with historical societies, libraries, museums, and other collecting programs.¹⁷

From a 1992 perspective, the new strategies have achieved key intermediate objectives that appear in turn to have an excellent chance of bringing about more fundamental change. For example, several initiatives in the mid-1980s greatly increased interest in records issues in the local government community. This included broad distribution and discussion of the 1984 statewide assessment report *Toward a Usable Past*, which reported major deficiencies and provided recommendations for

¹⁵The term *quiet revolution* is generally attributed to Andrew Spano, the Westchester county clerk who was appointed in 1987 as the first chair of the Local Government Records Advisory Council created under the new records law. The council's major report and recommendations, required by December 1987 under that new law, was entitled *The Quiet Revolution: Managing New York's Local Government Records in the Information Age (A Report to the Governor, Legislature and Commissioner of Education)* (Albany, N.Y.: State Education Department, 1987).

¹⁶The need for new strategy was indicated by two experiences in the late 1970s and early 1980s. The first was the NHPRC regrant project, which demonstrated that few local governments had developed (or even understood the nature of) a records management program, but that modest initial external financial aid, coupled with technical assistance, could foster programs that might well be continued with local support. The second was the statewide assessment project, which confirmed that most local officials so underappreciated records management that, when asked, they had few complaints and few recommendations for change. Reflecting on these experiences led the state archives leadership to formulate and pursue the strategies described below.

¹⁷Underlying principles regarding the responsibilities of local governments, those shared with the state, and those chiefly belonging to the state, were later spelled out in a section on "Principles and Assumptions for Local Government Records" in *The Quiet Revolution*, 5-6. The goal of that section was to reduce continuing argument about state versus local responsibilities and prerogatives and to provide "a firm foundation on which diverse parties interested in local government records can stand together to build improved local records programs and services."

change. Regular coverage of local government records affairs, including plaudits to local governments that were developing strong programs, was provided in *For the Record*, the state archives and State Historical Records Advisory Board newsletter sent to all local governments. SARA staff appeared frequently before local government associations and prepared articles for their newsletters. In 1985, the state archives issued the state's first overall local government records manual,¹⁸ a publication that emphasized the importance of comprehensive records management programs in local governments. The small local government records staff, which was upgraded to bureau status in 1987, concentrated its efforts first on updating and streamlining state disposition schedules. By 1989, five general schedules covering all the major types of local governments replaced the previous schedules—and reduced their number by a factor of five. To supplement the basic manual, staff issued more than forty technical leaflets on matters ranging from drafting a local records ordinance and creating a local records advisory committee to optical disc technology and automated geographic information systems. In 1988, the bureau initiated introductory records management workshops statewide and supplemented them with workshop series on micrographics, inactive records storage, and inventory, needs assessment, and program planning.

Drawing on the several years of increased awareness efforts and then on extensive discussions of bill language drafted by the state archives, the State Education Department advanced a comprehensive local records statute in 1986. The formal proposal provoked further discussion and required modest revision to gain support from the statewide associations of local

government officials sufficient for passage in August 1987. The new law was consistent with the strategies outlined above. One key provision required creation of a New York State Local Government Records Advisory Council (LGRAC) and gave it a strong role in advising and monitoring the state archives and State Education Department. The LGRAC was to be appointed immediately and, by 1 December 1987, was to issue a report to the governor, legislature, and commissioner of education on state and local policies and procedures affecting local government records and on the potential need for state financial assistance and other services. The council was to report annually to these same parties on the condition of local government records and of state services. The law also charged each local government to appoint a records management officer to coordinate its records management activities and to be its liaison with SARA.

These provisions of the Local Records Law of 1987 had a dramatic early impact. SARA advised the commissioner of education, who quickly appointed a talented twenty-five member Advisory Council, and the archives worked closely with it on the report due in only a few weeks. That report, *The Quiet Revolution: Managing New York's Local Government Records in the Information Age*, became a highly visible and widely accepted agenda and statement of philosophy for addressing local government records needs. The report recommended actions in ten areas, including information technology, state regulations and standards, public awareness and advocacy, and state and local finances. Priority recommendations, fundamental to progress on many other proposals, became the focus for the major records initiative of the council and of local governments and their associations during 1988 and 1989: the passage in July 1989 of the New York Local Government Records Improvement Fund Law. Under this new statute, county

¹⁸*Managing Local Government Records* (Albany, N.Y.: State Education Department, 1985).

clerks collect a slightly increased fee for recording certain documents; proceeds to the Improvement Fund are administered by SARA on behalf of the commissioner of education. The fund, which has generated approximately \$10 million per year during its first three years, is to be used for two purposes. Most of the income supports grants to local governments in response to individual or cooperative proposals to improve their records administration. Grants are awarded through a competitive process in a variety of authorized project categories, including archives. Up to \$2 million each year may be used by SARA to administer nine regional offices throughout the state to provide training and technical assistance to local governments in records and archives administration as well as to operate the grant program. The fund operates with the advice and close oversight of the Local Government Records Advisory Council; a separate advisory committee in each region helps to assess regional needs and to shape regional office services.¹⁹

The ultimate impact of the new laws, new resources, and increased interest in local government records and records programs remains to be seen. It seems clear, however, that the strategies developed and refined by the state archives in the 1980s, in cooperation with the local government community, have substantially changed perceptions, expectations, and the state-

wide "infrastructure" for local government records. This enriched infrastructure includes simultaneously a stronger role for both state government—especially the state archival agency—and for local governments and their representatives. One important indicator of progress is the development, from the grass roots, of a highly active New York Association of Local Government Records Officers. In the long run, as suggested in SARA's first strategy described above, informed and self-interested local officials are the best guarantee of effective performance at both the local and state levels.

Beyond government archives. New York's state government took several initiatives in the 1980s to foster improved archival affairs statewide. These include the steps described above for the records of New York's more than 3,800 local governments. They also include efforts regarding historical records beyond government and certain cross-cutting activities affecting all types of records and repositories. Some initiatives sought first to explore ways to effectively address a particular need. Where possible, successful methods were then incorporated into an ongoing program. In several areas the program itself needed to be created. An underlying goal was to reach at least a start-up stage in each area in which it seemed logical for state government to play a continuing role.

The Statewide Assessment and Reporting Project of 1982–83 was fundamental to the development of a statewide archival agenda, and it suggested strategies for many particular issues. Given the relative newness of New York's state archives, the assessment project grant category announced by NHPRC in 1981 seemed to the state archives administration a great opportunity from the very first.²⁰ Here was a chance to

¹⁹Income to the fund was \$9 million in the first year, with \$4.3 million being granted for nearly 300 projects. All nine offices were staffed, most by mid-1990, and each was actively providing consultation and offering workshops in coordination with Albany staff. More than 600 proposals were received in both the second and third years, and more than \$9 million was granted each year for nearly 450 projects throughout the state. During the first several years, basic inventory and program planning projects predominated, although grants also supported a variety of projects for inactive records storage, micrographics, archives, outreach, new technology, disaster recovery, and research and development.

²⁰This was not surprising, given that the new state archivist/coordinator had played a major role in draft-

understand current conditions and attitudes better, to discuss a variety of approaches to problems with the archival community and others, to set in place a statewide archival agenda, to consider whether the state archives and State Historical Records Advisory Board could coordinate an attack on that broad agenda, and then to draw the attention of key communities, resource allocators, and the general public to the findings and recommendations of the project. Consistent with this expansive approach, "Non-government Historical Records" and "Common Problems, Coordinated Solutions" received substantial attention during the project and in the final report. Both because of the project's potential to establish a statewide agenda and as an educational device, the state archives invested a very high level of its own resources; this included extensive involvement over many months by its director, an associate archivist/deputy state coordinator, and several other staff. NHPRC funds were used almost exclusively to publish more than 20,000 copies of an attractive final report. This investment in the assessment project paid high dividends.²¹

Drawing on the published state assessment report, *Toward a Usable Past: Historical Records in the Empire State* (1984), the state archives worked with the State Historical Records Advisory Board to begin to address recommendations for non-government archives as well as those related to state and local government records. To

help accomplish this (and to signal an intention to pursue a continuing statewide agenda), the state archives drafted a new executive order to expand the statewide responsibilities of the State Advisory Board. Governor Mario Cuomo issued the order in 1985.

Even before the assessment project was completed, the state archives began a statewide newsletter, *For the Record*. Each issue of the newsletter, distributed several times each year since 1983, is sent to more than 13,000 associations, repositories, libraries, local governments, state officials, and other appropriate organizations and individuals. In the absence of a statewide archival organization, the newsletter established itself as the main source of information on the activities of the state archives and on state policies, projects, and proposals of interest to the archival community and to state and local government.

An increasing statewide archival role for state government was demonstrated further in 1985, when the state began to support annual contracts averaging \$150,000 through the state archives and State Education Department to Cornell University to continue the statewide Historical Documents Inventory (HDI). The survival of this project to describe the collections in all repositories in New York was threatened by lack of funds, with less than half of New York repositories surveyed. A legislative advocacy effort, supported strongly by the state archives, brought state contractual funding to the rescue. This has provided the primary resources for completion of the initial statewide collection survey, editing and entry of USMARC AMC data into RLIN, and publication of county-by-county guides.²²

ing the NHPRC guidelines for the state assessment projects while still at NHPRC. A threat to NHPRC funding in 1980 had provided the impetus for the assessment project approach; it was felt that state assessments and plans might serve as a vital tool for action within the states, even if NHPRC project grants would no longer be available. Fortunately, NHPRC grants, albeit modest, have continued to be available for historical records projects.

²¹For an overview of the New York assessment project, see Larry J. Hackman, "From Assessment to Action: Toward a Usable Past in the Empire State," *The Public Historian* 7 (Summer 1985): 23-34.

²²The HDI surveyed well over 1,500 repositories, described more than 30,000 collections in them, and entered nearly all of the descriptions into the RLIN national database. The descriptions had also been published in one or more guides for nearly all counties. Although an initial survey had been completed state-

As the 1990s began, SARA was considering how to ensure regular updating of the statewide repository and collection survey and how to move beyond it. This would include additional types of information, such as information on selected active records and databases in state and local government, on general schedules for government records, and on local government archival records even where these are not in a formal archival program.²³ Discussions were also under way on how to provide much broader and more "user-friendly" access (including via statewide and regional library networks), better promote use of archives and records information in these networks, and make more effective use of the data as a tool to guide regional and statewide archival program development.

The New York Document Conservation Training and Planning Project also responded to a recommendation in *Toward a Usable Past*. This project, initiated by the state archives, was conducted jointly by the state archives and state library with advice from a statewide New York Document Conservation Advisory Council. It sought to raise both public and archives-library community awareness of problems in preserving New York's "unique research resources." Funded in part by the National

Endowment for the Humanities (NEH), the project provided a series of preservation administration workshops for key archives and library leaders, sponsored regional discussions and a statewide planning conference, and issued a report on conditions and an ambitious set of recommendations for action. The agenda in this report, *Our Memory at Risk: Preserving New York's Unique Research Resources* (1988), sought to focus increased attention on preservation issues but to avoid isolating preservation from related archival functions. The report repeated, but in most cases updated and refined, a variety of recommendations from *Toward a Usable Past*. Not surprisingly, these included a strong statewide role for state government, including the state archival agency and the state library, in funding, technical assistance, and coordination. During the project, passage of previously pending legislation created a major statewide preservation grant program coordinated by the state library; the state archives sits as an observer member of the advisory board for the program. Historical records repositories (including archives, historical societies, museums, and local governments as well as libraries) have been regular recipients of grants and the technical assistance and materials supported by the state library program, which now provides approximately \$500,000 per year for such preservation projects all over the state.

A number of the recommendations in *Our Memory at Risk* have been subsequently addressed either through the statewide preservation program administered by the state library or through initiatives of the state archives or others. The report—and the Document Conservation Project overall—demonstrate again the value of a state government effort to understand better an important statewide archival issue, to draw on professional expertise and leadership beyond government, to draft an agenda and hold it up for broad critique, and then to bring the results to the public, key decision

wide, collection descriptions for Long Island and some repositories in New York City had not been fully processed and entered into RLIN because of state budget freezes and cutbacks in 1990 and 1991.

²³In fact, many local government records are being described through inventory and planning grants under the Local Government Records Improvement Fund described above. The forms, instructions, and workshops developed by SARA for these projects guide local governments in producing survey data that is fully compatible with the USMARC AMC format. Survey work has been conducted on a pilot basis for state agency records under the "Sourcebook" project supported through an NHPRC grant to the New York State Forum for Information Resources Management. SARA seeks to make certain that information developed about state and local government records is compatible between and among these governments and with descriptions of nongovernment records.

makers, and the affected professional communities. Among the recommendations in *Our Memory at Risk*, as in *Toward a Usable Past*, is a call for periodic statewide reassessment of conditions and refinement of the action agenda.²⁴

For archival records beyond government, the major statewide initiative of the 1980s, and the one with the greatest promise for the future, is embodied in the Documentary Heritage Program (DHP) law of 1988. The DHP brings together several of the initiatives and strategies suggested in *Toward a Usable Past* and adds several others.

The DHP law authorizes state grant support for the full range of basic archival functions (except preservation), for the analysis of archival problems affecting the archival community, and for the development of programs or tools to address them. DHP projects may be undertaken by individual repositories, groups of cooperating institutions, and organizations that provide services to repositories. Grants may also support the promotion of public awareness and increased use of historical records. The aid provision of the DHP law authorizes annual state support for nine regional service providers, ordinarily one of the nine regional library reference and research resource systems, called "3Rs"; each sponsor employs a professional archivist, creates a regional historical records committee, and provides coordination, leadership, and direct advisory services in the region. The regional entities do not themselves collect or administer historical records but seek to play an educational and advisory role and to encourage cooperation and systematic assessment, planning, and action to im-

prove conditions within the region.²⁵ Modest aid also goes to the central administrations of the huge State University of New York and City University of New York to foster sound system-wide archival policies and practices.²⁶

In accord with the DHP law, the state—through the state archival agency—coordinates the regional system and administers the grant program. Through technical and promotional materials, workshops and meetings, and day-to-day communications, SARA's External Programs Division operates the DHP as a statewide program, even while much of its activity is conducted through regional service programs attuned closely to regional conditions and attitudes. Each region assesses needs, establishes five-year objectives and priorities, and sets an annual work plan, following general guidelines from the state archives. These regional assessments and objectives are a major source for statewide plans, priorities, and approaches.

²⁵An earlier version of this legislation passed the legislature in 1986 but was vetoed by Governor Cuomo. This bill would have supported a regional network to provide technical assistance to promote archival program development as well as coordination among both local governments and nongovernment repositories in the region. The state archives believed that a grants program should then be proposed several years later, after a stronger base had been built through an integrated regional system. In retrospect, it appears that inclusion of grants was essential to securing legislation to assist both local governments (the Improvement Fund) and nongovernment programs (the Documentary Heritage Program).

²⁶The DHP authorizing legislation provides that ordinarily at least 35 percent of appropriated funds should go for individual projects, up to 20 percent for cooperative projects, at least 40 percent for the regional programs, and 2.5 percent each to SUNY and CUNY central administrations. The annual target is \$2.2 million. As of 1991, the state appropriation was \$400,000, enough to support regional services in only three of the nine regions, as well as a modest program for competitive project grants. The development of the DHP is described in the annual reports to the governor and the legislature required by the DHP law. For a good overview of the origins and purposes of the DHP from the perspective of the lead legislative sponsor, see William B. Hoyt, "Archives, Politics and the Public," *Bookmark* 47 (Summer 1989): 227–31.

²⁴For lessons learned from the project, see comments by Larry J. Hackman in the "case studies" section of the report of the 1990 *National Conference on the Development of Statewide Preservation Programs*, pp. 35–38. The 1991 report is distributed by the National Commission on Preservation and Access.

The Documentary Heritage Program can help provide many of the ingredients required for strong archival performance statewide. Among these are ongoing statewide and regional assessment and planning; communication and coordination among programs within regions and between regions and the state; and training and technical assistance to address priority needs. The DHP will continually emphasize increasing public awareness of and support for archival needs; archival program development and the skills needed to achieve it; coordination with library systems and networks; and promotion of a more cohesive, active community of individuals and organizations committed to improved archival services. Drawing on oversight and advice by the State Historical Records Advisory Board (specified in the DHP law), continuous dialogue with regional entities, and a growing base of data and experience in grants and services, New York's state government should be able regularly to refine and improve the methods and materials offered through the DHP.

In anticipation of the DHP, the state archives undertook a Statewide Historical Records Program Development Project with oversight by the State Historical Records Advisory Board and partial support from the NHPRC. A key aspect of this project was publication and widespread distribution of a detailed manual, *Strengthening New York's Historical Records Programs: A Self Study Guide* (1988). This serves as a basic guide for individual repositories, an educational and technical assistance tool for regional archivists and other advisers and teachers, and an indicator of expectations for viable archival programs in New York. The manual covers all of the core elements of an archival program but gives more than usual emphasis to administration and planning, development of resources, and outreach that will contribute to program development as well as service. An accompanying pamphlet, "The Core Elements of

Historical Records Programs," highlights the main points in the manual. The pamphlet is intended for trustees and others unlikely to be familiar with archival administration and unlikely to review the lengthy manual. The development project also encouraged preliminary regional documentation assessment and planning through formation of a regional documentation working group.²⁷

Another effort to influence the views of resource allocators and the general public is a fifteen-minute audiovisual show, "Let the Record Show: The Practical Uses of Historical Records." Released in 1989, the show develops four case studies to illustrate the value of archival records for education, public policy, citizen advocacy, and day-to-day operation of cultural institutions. Like the self-study manual, "Let the Record Show" is being used in a variety of educational programs and by individual repositories and other organizations and associations interested in historical records. A short pamphlet was developed to promote broad use of the audiovisual program, which has also been shown on community cable networks across the state. Another booklet, "Archives and You," draws in part on the same four vignettes to explain the importance of historical records to a general audience.²⁸

The state archives intends to develop and distribute similar public awareness products statewide and via regional programs and to encourage others to do so, with funding, where appropriate, from the Doc-

²⁷The documentation effort is discussed in Richard J. Cox "A Documentation Strategy Case Study: Western New York," *American Archivist* 52 (Spring 1989): 192-200. My own view is that this preliminary effort, barely begun when the grant project ended, was far too brief, modest, and informal to support a formal evaluation or a published article.

²⁸The video, "Let the Record Show," received the SAA's 1990 Hamer Kegan Award. The "Archives and You" booklet received the 1991 Custer Award from the Mid-Atlantic Regional Archives Conference.

umentary Heritage Program and the Local Government Records Improvement Fund. Increased public awareness and support is a fundamental part of a statewide archival agenda, one in which a statewide perspective and products are valuable, especially to supplement work by regional and other groups and by individual repositories. An excellent example of this combined state-regional-local approach is the emergence since 1989 of New York Archives Week as an important annual archival event. Here, the Archivists Roundtable of Metropolitan New York played a pioneering role and provided an example that has been emulated across the state. The state archives shared information statewide in 1989 about the roundtable's ambitious plans, obtained a resolution from the legislature and a proclamation from the governor, and began to sponsor directly New York Archives Week events in the capital district. In 1990, the state archives and the state board of regents of the New York State Education Department initiated annual archives week awards to recognize excellence in state and local government and in other repositories, in archival research by scholars and students, and in archival advocacy. The Archivists Roundtable, other regional archival associations, and the New York Association of Local Government Records Officers also give archives week awards. The DHP regional archivists and SARA's regional local records offices also participate actively in regional archives week plans and activities. The state archives plays only a very modest clearinghouse role in what has become an important, largely decentralized statewide effort in archival advocacy and outreach.²⁹

Systematic assessment of documentation of topics, functions, and geographical areas

is another issue fundamental to future archival work in New York. Effective action here awaits the enhanced documentation analysis capacity, which could be supported by an ongoing statewide archives and records database, and experience by regional archivists and advisory committees. The Documentary Heritage Program Committee of the METRO regional library system in New York City has recently created a special committee for documentation analysis and coordination.

Finally, developing and maintaining relationships with organizations that ought to have a continuing interest in historical records affairs is an important part of the state archives' efforts to create a strong statewide infrastructure. Examples include the New York Library Association, the Alliance of New York State Arts Councils, the New York Association of Museums, the New York Council of Genealogical Associations, the Associations of County and Municipal Historians, the New York Social Studies Council, and the New York Folklore Society. To date, this work has chiefly involved keeping these organizations informed about archival activities, particularly on legislative issues and funding programs of interest to them. Much additional work is needed.

The initiatives described above demonstrate the statewide intentions of the State Archives and Records Administration. These have been reinforced by generally positive reactions from New York's archival community, counsel from the State Historical Records Advisory Board, support by the State Education Department, and, as appropriate, by formal ratification by the board of regents, legislature, and governor. The clear message is that state government will play a broad role in improving the identification, administration, accessibility, and use of historical records across the state.³⁰

²⁹For an overview of the first two years of New York Archives Week, see Larry J. Hackman "Resolved: A United States Archives Week," *SAA Newsletter*, March 1991.

³⁰The most recent occasion for broad discussion was

Attitudes and Approaches

Several basic approaches have informed many of the particular initiatives described above and have been viewed as paths to success. Although none are individually innovative, together they represent a set of proactive approaches that seemed appropriate for New York in the 1980s. Promoted most strongly by the leadership of the state archives, these were generally shared and supported by the State Advisory Board and by the deputy commissioner for cultural education, the resource allocator directly above the director of the state archives.³¹

at an October 1990 day-long hearing in New York City on "Archives, Unique Research Resources, and the Future of New York." This hearing was co-sponsored by the Governor's Commission on Libraries and the Archivists Roundtable of Metropolitan New York. Two discussion panels were followed by nearly thirty witnesses representing a wide range of archival and related organizations. The hearing confirmed very strong support for the Documentary Heritage Program and highlighted the need for increased analysis and action on, for example, archival education, incentives for the development of business archives, the archives of the government of New York City and of state government, and for use of historical records in elementary and secondary education. See *Archives, Unique Research Resources, and the Future of New York: A Report of the Governor's Commission on Libraries* (Albany N.Y.: New York State Archives and Records Administration, October 1990). Unpublished report.

³¹Many of these views were based on my experiences at NHPRC as I considered methods tried in other states and other programs and, especially, as I noted issues that appeared not to be addressed at all. I was also particularly impressed at the time with the ideas in the "Wilson Report" for development of a Canadian archival system. See *Canadian Archives: Report by the Consultative Group on Canadian Archives* (Ottawa: Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, 1980). It appeared to me that on many issues what was needed was a more formal agenda, a stronger focus on strategy, better bases for sustained and coordinated attention to difficult archival issues, and more and stronger allies beyond the archives and historical communities. These views led me to propose and advocate creation of the initial SAA task force on goals and priorities, not an easy sell in the early 1980s. A decade later, "planning" is much more widely accepted in the society and the profession.

For the development, testing, and refining of strat-

These approaches include a strong reliance on broad assessment projects and reports, beginning with the statewide assessment project of 1982-1983. These projects have provided a basis for setting an agenda and for acting on it. As needed, selected issues (local government records, court records, preservation, electronic records) have been examined through a participatory process modeled in part on the first statewide assessment project. Each study is viewed as an opportunity to define and examine an issue, identify interested constituencies and seek their advice, establish or refine an agenda or methods to address it, and communicate the findings broadly to the appropriate constituencies and decision makers. Clearer direction, increased legitimacy, and expanded support for action have ordinarily resulted from this process.

A second approach, obvious in a number of areas described in the case study, has been to emphasize initiatives that will help prepare the way for continuing programs. Consistent with this has been devaluation of actions that, no matter how worthy otherwise, will likely have a more limited, short-term impact. In short, projects have been considered important when they can lead to programs.

New York's state archival leaders have also stressed the need for visibility, understanding, and support among nonarchivists (individuals and organizations) who could have a continuing positive impact on archival affairs. A closely related approach has been to emphasize the practical benefits and the diverse beneficiaries of the use of records rather than to focus on personal and academic research or on the number of users and uses per se.

Another perspective has been to empha-

gies in New York, major credit is due to the talented staff of the state archives. Deputy Commissioner of Education Carole Huxley has been both a valued colleague and our constant supporter.

size the interrelationship between good archives and good records and information management. The assumption has been that most individuals and institutions will identify more readily with the need to manage records effectively than with the value of good archival administration. Furthermore, support for good records management is especially important from executives whose organizations handle important records; these organizations are unlikely to retain and make sound decisions on archival records unless they effectively manage their records overall.

To the extent possible, the state archives has sought to take the initiative in each major problem area and then to seize opportunities when they arise, rather than adhering to a rigid plan of action. Where some momentum has been achieved in a given area, conveying a sense of it to others, especially potential support groups, has been viewed as a high priority.

Aggressive national recruitment and maximum support for staff involvement in professional organizations have been considered vital ingredients in program development at the state level. Great value has also been attached to quality in published products and presentations. This has been viewed as a way to convey competence, legitimacy, and leadership.

Creation of external advisory bodies, committees, and task forces has also been viewed as basic to success. These are valued as sources of ideas and as sounding boards, for endorsement and support, and as vehicles for building broader alliances with key organizations and constituencies.³² Closely related has been the practice

of sharing ideas and reports and other products extremely broadly, in order to educate and build support but also to reduce suspicion of government as insular and defensive. Often such products have been endorsed or sponsored directly by external bodies.

Finally, when possible, external funds, especially NHPRC funds, have been sought to develop effective techniques and to provide high leverage in advancing the statewide agenda—not to support core state records work. The exception to this has been the several major grants from the expanded NEH Preservation Program for preservation microfilming of records of national research interest.

Unfinished Business

The sections above report action on a broad archival front and the attainment of important thresholds in several areas. Despite these advances, New York is far from achieving adequacy for any major archival function or for any of the major categories of records, repositories, or users. In part, this is due to New York's late start and to the magnitude of its challenge, i.e., the variety of records, the number of governments and other institutions, the range of repositories, and the plethora of interests to be served. Moreover, some of the programs in place are based on methods that still have not been fully tested or demonstrated as successful.

A number of basic questions remain to be answered to the degree that should be expected by both the archival community and the public. One set of questions relates chiefly to the status of archival programs, including new ones. For example, can the statewide approaches being used for train-

³²As of 1991, the groups included the State Historical Records Advisory Board appointed by the governor, the Local Government Records Advisory Council appointed by the commissioner of education, the Advisory Committee for the Center for Electronic Records appointed by the chief of the Bureau of Records Analysis and Disposition, the Research and Reference

Services Advisory Committee appointed by the chief of the Bureau of Archival Services, and the important new Visiting Committee for the State Archives appointed by the board of regents.

ing, technical assistance, and financial support for local governments and for repositories have a major impact on quality of archival performance and on the development of programs where they are needed? What are the appropriate criteria for assessing the degree of success? What should be the ultimate archival role of the several thousand small local governments and the hundreds of tiny repositories that seek to retain or collect and administer archives? What kinds of cooperation and consolidation are appropriate and might be effective? What can be done, and what role should the state play, to promote the development of archival programs in those institutions, including in the private sector, which will not, or are too large to, transfer their archival records to a collecting program? Where, if at all, should the state adopt standards for archival programs and how, if at all, should standards relate to eligibility for state services? What standards should apply to the treatment of the state government's own archival records, and how is the state to be held accountable for meeting these standards?

A second set of questions relates chiefly to archival documentation and its use. Can the status and adequacy of documentation be assessed statewide? If so, how and by whom, and how can the results be used to improve documentation overall? What is the value, for documentation analysis and for access and use, of a continuing statewide database describing archives and their holdings? What are realistic expectations for the use of archives, and how can educational and promotional programs help achieve this potential? Who, after all, are the potential users whose needs should be given priority when viewed statewide?

A third set of questions relates to leadership and cooperation. For example, can large repositories work together on a sustained, even formal, basis? Should they do so? What special roles should they seek to play statewide? Can SUNY and CUNY de-

velop policies and programs systemwide and, if so, what impact will these have in their regions and statewide? Can the national and international aspects of many archival resources in New York City repositories be integrated into statewide frameworks? Should they be? How can the archives community work effectively with other information services, especially with libraries and library systems, to improve access and use? Can the archival community develop a continuing, coordinated statewide vehicle for advocacy in its own interest, or will this depend mostly on other communities that have greater political influence or that are more willing to act? In the long run, can the state archival agency effectively attend to its state government responsibilities, including records and information management, and sustain a credible performance in statewide archives and records affairs? Given the current fiscal climate, can the state role be sustained under severe resource constraints?

These questions do not have simple answers, and the criteria for addressing them are not well established in the archival world at any level. Listing them indicates the complex issues that remain for New York's state government and for all New Yorkers.

ARCHIVAL ROLES FOR STATE GOVERNMENTS

The case study above described the efforts of one state government to support and influence archival affairs statewide. The aim in this final section is to provoke analysis and discussion of the appropriate archival roles of all state governments. Considering the experience in New York, the nationwide archival agenda, and what might be termed the "archival infrastructure" in the United States, here is one person's list of ten activities in which every state government might play a useful continuing role. To assess this list, the archival community should consider both archival

needs and alternative ways and means for addressing them.

The list does not presume or propose a particular scope of activity or method of action in any area, merely some continuing state role designed for effectiveness. Depending on the activity area, the state's role could be carried out, for example, by adopting a statewide policy, standard, or regulation; through evaluation and planning; by offering direct services; through a granting or technical assistance program; by supporting networks or systems; through tax policy; and by other means. One would expect a variety of methods best suited to the traditions, conditions, and style of each state and reflecting discussion among its concerned professional and institutional communities.

Here is a working list of state government roles offered for the consideration of the archival community, those who need effective archival services, and state government policy makers.

1. Assessment. The goal here would be a systematic approach to measuring archival conditions by examining, for example, the status of records and the programs that administer them, the use of archives, the degree of success of any existing state programs, and the level of support for archival activities. This process would include periodic data gathering and statistical analysis, as well as hearings and discussions with experts and interested members of the public. Ideally, a base line of conditions and standard survey approaches could be established so that change could be measured effectively.

2. Agenda Setting. This involves a regular, open, well-understood formal process to establish and refine a statewide archival agenda, including recommendations to address it. It is not enough to assess conditions. Interested parties need to be drawn into a process to understand the identified needs and to debate, advise on, and seek a consensus on the actions needed. Ideally,

this agenda will receive some formal state-level ratification as a result of this open process; it should then be communicated to all in the state who have a role to play in addressing the agenda or who otherwise have a need to know.

3. Public Awareness. Information about archival conditions and the archival action agenda should be shared with the "interested" public. At present, the portion of the public that is "interested," i.e., that understands the benefits of archives and supports sound archival policies and programs, is far too small in every state. State government and the state's archival and cultural community need materials and programs to inform the general public about the importance of archival records and of sound archival programs in the state. Although national public awareness efforts are needed as well, a statewide effort is perhaps ideal; at this level, planning and products can be attuned to the character of the state and sensitive to regional and local differences within the state.

4. Advocacy. This is actively advancing and advocating within state government proposals to achieve those parts of the state's archival agenda that can effectively be addressed through state government action. This includes encouraging and assisting the efforts of nonarchivists to advocate such action. Just as an assessment process does not in itself produce a sound archival agenda, so an agenda does not in itself lead to effective action. An organized archival advocacy effort is essential, especially when state government legislation or increased support is needed. Effective advocacy might best be based in a coalition of organizations involved in archives, records, research, education, and informational and cultural affairs.

5. Reporting. This requires providing an ongoing newsletter or other regular communication to inform the archival community and other interested organizations and individuals of developments of statewide importance. Public awareness is not

the primary purpose here, but rather providing a reliable source of important information to key parties within and beyond state government.

6. Database Services. Coordinating, supporting, or otherwise ensuring continuing statewide information services describing the historical records repositories and collections in the state is what is meant here. This activity contributes to meeting several ongoing needs: improving access to archival materials and promoting their use, fostering cooperation and building a sense of community among the state's diverse repository community, promoting the use of appropriate standards for description and institutional reporting, and conveying a sense of the documentary heritage of the state. Some of this information is appropriate for reporting to, and may be "downloaded" from, national databases; maintaining it at the state level is useful for needs assessment, program development, and resource advocacy. A statewide program permits relevant information to be linked most effectively to the broader information network in the state and tailored to the needs of the state's citizens and institutions.

7. Access to Archival Expertise. Providing for ongoing technical assistance to the organizations and institutions collecting or administering historical records is important to the citizens of the state. Given the value of every state's historical records as a resource for research, education, and the operation of public and private institutions, it is logical for the state to see that those who administer these resources have regular access to advice that will improve their performance. This expertise could be provided in a wide variety of ways: through educational programs, consultation, and technical materials—including the programs of statewide, regional, and national professional associations. However, it is unlikely to be reliably available to those who need it without some continuing action by state government.

8. Financial Assistance. Providing financial support for important historical records and historical records programs and to meet priority historical records needs statewide is essential. The arguments for such programs are similar to those for access to expertise: The citizens of the state have an interest in effective archival performance. As in other areas in which state government is involved, financial assistance for historical records should be seen within the context of federal, local, and private sources of support, and state tax policy as well as direct assistance should be considered. Financial assistance programs might also be linked to state guidelines, e.g., for reporting to a statewide or other database.

9. Setting an Example. Conducting its own work, especially regarding state government records, at the highest level of quality and energy is a requirement for state archives. Ideally, this state government archives and records work will be carried out within a comprehensive state information policy that promotes an accessible and accountable government overall. One can argue that the state's own archives is the place to start and that nothing else should be done until this is fully achieved. In an imperfect world, however, this could excuse a lack of state action in the other important areas indicated above.

10. A Presence in Federal Affairs. Care must be taken to represent the state's interest in federal policy and programs by monitoring, reporting on, advocating, and otherwise influencing federal government action as it impacts on archival affairs in the state. State archives and records agencies, with the state's archival agenda as the primary reference point and in collaboration with a broader statewide archival advocacy network, should lead these efforts, working in concert with nationwide archival and other appropriate associations. The state's archival interests can thereby be protected and advanced, and the nation's archival policies and programs made better

and more responsive. In an increasingly complex society in which information is a vital resource at all levels, these policies and programs are of ever greater importance to archives and records work below the federal level.

Coda

It would benefit the archival community and others interested in our documentary heritage to engage in a spirited, carefully framed discussion of the role of government in archival affairs in the United States.³³

As the archival community has begun to better assess archival conditions nation-

wide and to formalize an archival agenda, it should by now recognize how few strong vehicles exist to address archival needs. Although professional associations and individual archival programs are crucial, they are not presently sufficient. State government generally, and state archival agencies in particular, can contribute more to the archival infrastructure we need. States can provide leadership, communication, and resources relatively close to home and at a distance convenient for regular oversight by those who conduct and use most archival programs. Every state has the capacity to carry out the activities described above if it chooses to do so, and each can be doing so in many of these areas by the year 2000.

As we consider whether our state, or all states, should play such active roles, we must ask, "What are the alternatives? Are they likely to be more or less effective? Are they likely to be more or less achievable?" Objective analysis will indicate the wisdom of a continuing, active role for state government.

³³This should include the role of the federal government as well as of state and local governments. At the federal level, for example, the existing mix of the National Archives, federal collecting programs, federal granting agencies, and federal retention requirements do not fully meet the thoughtful, coordinated set of policies and services needed beyond the Beltway. See Larry J. Hackman, "The United States Needs a National Historical Records Policy," *History News* 43 (March–April 1988): 32–37.