

# State Archives in 1997: Diverse Conditions, Common Directions

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**Abstract:** In the nearly one hundred years since the first state archives was established, all states have designated a repository for their archival records and most have instituted records management. Organizational structures, resources, and programs vary greatly, but state archivists and records administrators have developed common principles and share innovations through organizations that enhance their ability to cooperate and communicate, particularly the National Association of Government Archives and Records Administrators and the National Historical Publications and Records Commission. Priorities and challenges facing these programs include asserting archival concerns as information-related policies and regulations evolve, developing programs for managing and preserving electronic records, and using information technologies to improve access to records.

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ONE HUNDRED YEARS AGO, there were no state archives in the United States. The states had records, sometimes great volumes, but no single agency formally designated to care for them. As a result, there was great disparity from state to state in the physical condition of the records, their accessibility, and the prospects for their continued survival. At the close of the twentieth century, all fifty states now have a state archives. While wide variations in financial and physical resources remain among state archives, substantial agreement now exists on the principles and policies essential to a sound program for state government records.

### Evolution of State Archives and Records Management Programs

The first state archives were created early in the twentieth century, largely in response to an alarming report by the American Historical Association on primary source documentation in the United States. It detailed the sometimes "total neglect" of government records in the then forty-six states. This report led twenty-three states to create central repositories for their archives by 1910.<sup>1</sup> Another wave of development was spurred during the middle third of the century by two factors: the creation of the National Archives in the 1930s, and the paper explosion that all governments experienced during World War II. Seven states created official archival repositories between 1935 and 1950, and fourteen more archives were established in the next two decades. This period also saw the rise of records management at both the state and federal level. At least thirty-five states made some move toward instituting records management between 1945 and 1965.

The organizational structures each state chose as they implemented these programs were as different as the states themselves. Like all state agencies, state archivists also had to deal with the realities of operating in a political system. Every state archivist has to wear, "in addition to an archivist's garb, the cloak of a diplomat, a politician, and, most of all, a missionary; for only through building personal and official relationships with members of the executive and legislative branches could he or she win the respect and funds necessary for the development of an adequate program."<sup>2</sup>

Legislation establishing a state archives or records management program, however, never guaranteed that it would actually become a functioning part of state government. In some states, many years elapsed between the creation of a state archives in law and the provision of adequate appropriations, staff, and facilities. In other states, the archives flourished for a while, sometimes for decades, then almost inexplicably disappeared, absorbed into some other department, its staff dispersed and mandates gutted.

The last of the state archives were created during the 1970s and 1980s, many the result of persistent efforts by archives and records professionals who used funds provided by the National Historical Publications and Records Commission to assess conditions and provide strategic plans for implementation of effective programs.

**Three Functional Areas of Responsibility.** Although history was a primary concern in the early years, state archivists began to refocus their programs toward administrative utility during the 1930s and 1940s. Margaret Cross Norton, state archivist of Illinois, asserted that "archival materials are primarily the government's legal and administrative documentation and only secondarily research material for the historian."<sup>3</sup> As computers

<sup>1</sup>Ernst Posner, *American State Archives* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964), 19.

<sup>2</sup>H.G. Jones, "The Pink Elephant Revisited," *American Archivist* 43 (Fall 1980): 481.

<sup>3</sup>Posner, *American State Archives*, 30.

have become common in the workplace during the last few decades, state archivists and records managers have turned their attention to a third arena, that concerned with the management and accessibility of information. Today they must participate and have some measure of influence in all three areas—historical/cultural, management/administration, and information/communications—to have a fully developed and effective records program (see Figure 1). The constituents of each of these three functional areas are quite different, with widely varying degrees of expectations and needs. State archivists and their staffs face significant challenges in maintaining a responsible and responsive balance among them.

**Significant Change Begins in the Mid-1970s.** It is possible to see real progress in state archives and records programs by comparing the conditions reported by Ernst Posner in his landmark study, *American State Archives*, with those of today. In 1962–63, Posner's book "told an uncomplimentary story of archival lethargy or neglect in about three quarters of the states of the Union."<sup>4</sup> Change happened slowly at first, but some movement in the right direction began to occur in the decade immediately after Posner's report was published. Eight states created archives for the first time and thirteen created records management programs within the next ten years.

By the mid-1970s, major changes began to occur. A significant number of long-term state archivists retired within a few years of each other and those hired to replace them between 1975 and 1985 created a corps of energetic, forward-thinking colleagues who saw themselves as a new generation of leadership. Many of these individuals still hold their positions and, as they have matured, so have their programs.

Perhaps not coincidentally, 1974 was a key year because it saw both the creation of a new professional association, the National Association of State Archives and Records Administrators (NASARA), and the establishment of the Records Program within the National Historical Publications Commission. Both of these have been critical to the advancement of sound practices and innovative programs for government records.

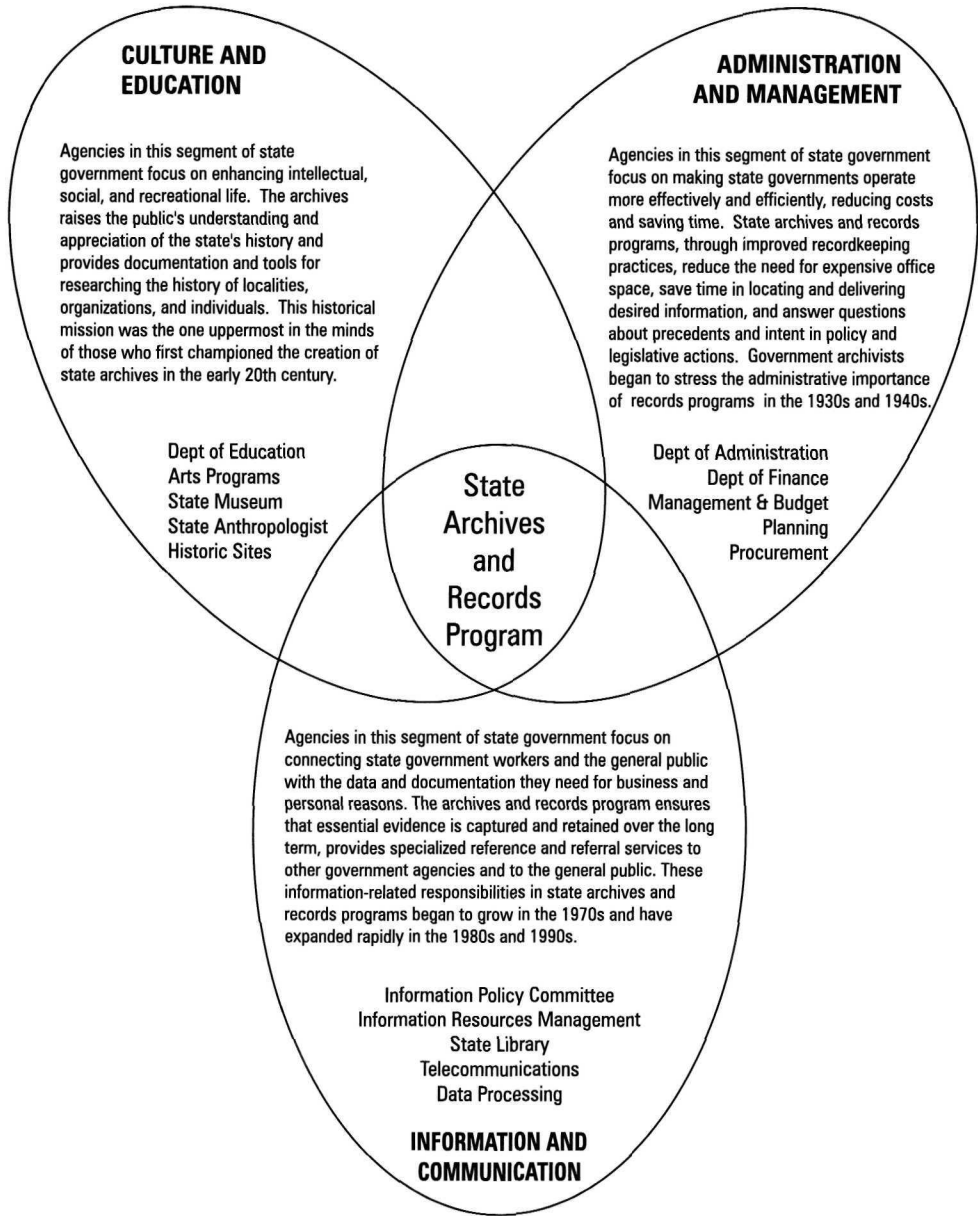
NASARA was founded by state archivists, but became NAGARA in 1984 when the organization expanded its membership and mission to include local and federal interests and "Government" replaced "State" in the organization's name. NAGARA has provided a focal point for collaborative activity, promulgation of best practices, and continuing education among administrators and staff members in government archives and records programs. It has established a common philosophical base (see Figure 2), as well as providing practical tools. NAGARA's leadership has emphasized communication, both among its members and with allied organizations sharing its interests. These have included important ties to ARMA International, the National Association of State Information Resources Executives, and a number of organizations of local government officials like the International Institute of Municipal Clerks. NAGARA has also worked hard to open cooperative channels between the National Archives and its counterparts at the state and local levels of government.

NAGARA has issued a large number of key documents designed to help government records professionals explain the significance of good archives and records management to key officials and decision makers. NAGARA-sponsored projects have focused on clarifying issues and training professional staff to meet the challenges facing records programs in general and government archives in particular (see Figure 3). Its quarterly newsletter,

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<sup>4</sup>Jones, "Pink Elephant Revisited," 476.

**Figure 1. Multiple Responsibilities: State Archives and Records Management.** A state archives operates in three arenas within state government. These are shown as three overlapping ovals below, with the archives and records management program in the center. Other state agencies that typically operate in each of the three arenas are also identified. The archives has to build alliances within each of these distinct groups and work out a suitable division of responsibilities among the players in order to carry out its mission effectively.





the *Clearinghouse*, relays important news about state initiatives while the relatively new *Crossroads* circular provides timely updates on key developments in electronic records management and information technology. NAGARA is now placing increasing emphasis on the Internet in general, and its own website in particular, for information dissemination and access to models and best practices for government archives and records programs. The NAGARA homepage also provides links to all active Internet sites maintained by state archives and records programs nationwide.<sup>5</sup>

If NAGARA provided the vehicle for collaboration and cooperation, the NHPRC's Records Program furnished the resources and incentives to make real change possible. As the Records Program developed, it came to focus ever greater attention on, and vest significant responsibility with, the fifty state archivists. In order to fully participate in the grant program, NHPRC required each state to establish a State Historical Records Advisory Board (SHRAB), appointed by the governor and headed by the state archivist acting as state coordinator. All of the states had accomplished this feat before the end of the 1980s. All grant proposals from both public and private repositories are reviewed by their respective State Boards and, in turn, the SHRABs are expected to foster archival activity within their respective states. The state coordinators, collectively, form the Council of State Historical Records Coordinators (COSHRC).<sup>6</sup> Thus, state archivists have two umbrellas to gather under: NAGARA serves their interests as government archivists, while COSHRC focuses on their roles as

**Figure 2. State Archives and Records Management Imperatives**

The National Association of Government Archives and Records Administrators (NAGARA) approved the following statement in March 1994 as part of its "Missions, Principles, and Goals."



Through strong archives and records management programs, governments must ensure that:

- ☞ records adequately document the conduct of public business for the purposes of government and the benefit of the people
- ☞ all possible care is taken to guarantee the integrity of information
- ☞ information is organized to facilitate use
- ☞ information collecting and maintenance burdens are kept to the lowest possible level
- ☞ legal restrictions on access are respected in order to guarantee privacy, proprietary, and other rights
- ☞ resources are used effectively and efficiently in creating and maintaining government records
- ☞ ownership and dissemination of government information fosters the greatest possible public benefit
- ☞ electronic information is made available equitably
- ☞ records are retained and available for as long as needed by government and the public
- ☞ records with long-term research value are identified, preserved and accessible.

<sup>5</sup>The Summer 1997 issue of *NAGARA Clearinghouse* focused on the use of websites. See also the 1997-98 NAGARA workplan in *NAGARA Clearinghouse* 13 (Fall 1997): 6-7. The URL for the NAGARA homepage is <http://www.nagara.org/>.

<sup>6</sup>The first decade of the council is described in Richard E. Lynch, *Preserving Yesterday While Planning for Tomorrow: A View from the States*, Biennial Report of the Council of State Historical Records Coordinators (Phoenix, Ariz., 1991).

**Figure 3. Selected NAGARA Publications and Programs**

NAGARA has sponsored several projects and issued a number of documents that reflect the needs and interests of the government records community. The following is a select list of programs and publications that pertain to the work of state archivists and records managers in particular. Within each category, they are listed in chronological order starting with the most recent.

#### **Programmatic and Philosophical Documents**

State Government Records Programs: A Proposed National Agenda. November 1989.

State Government Records and the Public Interest: A Guide for Citizens and State Officials. 1988.

Program Reporting Guidelines for Government Records Programs. 1987.

Principles for Management of Local Government Records. 1982.

#### **Electronic Records, Information Management, and Information Policy**

*Crossroads*, a periodical circular concerning developments in electronic records management and information technology (<http://www.nagara.org/crossroads/crossroads.html/>)

Archival Administration in the Electronic Information Age: An Advanced Institute for Government Archivists ("Camp Pitt"). Eight institutes held at the University of Pittsburgh, 1989-1997.

"Government Information Policy and Technology Issues: a special issue of the *Bulletin of the American Society for Information Science*. October/November 1991.

A New Age: Electronic Information Systems, State Governments and the Preservation of the Archival Record (jointly issued with NASIRE). 1991.

#### **Preservation**

NAGARA Guide and Resources for Archival Strategic Preservation (GRASP).

Preservation Needs in State Archives (Howard Lowell). February 1986.

#### **Local Government Records**

(\*published jointly with the International Institute of Municipal Clerks and the National Association of Counties)

Archival Programs for Local Governments (Kay Lanning Minchew). 1995.

Applying Computer Technology to Records Systems\* (Ken White). 1992.

Using Microfilm\* (Julian Mims). 1992.

Protecting Records\* (Harmon Smith). 1992.

The Daily Management of Records and Information\* (David O. Stephens). 1991.

Managing Records on Limited Resources\* (Stephen E. Haller). 1991.

Selection and Development of Local Government Records Storage Facilities\* (A.K. Johnson). 1989.

archival leaders within their states. Inevitably some have taken fuller advantage of these opportunities than others.

The most significant body of work propelled by NHPRC through the State Historical Records Advisory Boards has been the Statewide Historical Records Assessment and Planning Projects. The first round of grants for these projects was made in 1981 when the Reagan administration's downsizing initiatives threatened NHPRC with extinction. The Commission "wanted to leave a legacy of assessment reports that the states themselves could use as central planning and action documents."<sup>7</sup> Fortunately, NHPRC survived, but the state assessments proved to be a wise investment nonetheless. By the mid-1990s, all fifty states had completed at least one such project; several of the earliest had actually gone on to complete reassessments to monitor progress, or strategic planning projects in order to carry progress forward.

To an even greater extent than Posner's *American State Archives*, these reports often became catalysts for change. Perhaps it was because the process itself—the surveys, analyses, and strategic planning—was ultimately as important or more important than the written document. By the time each project ended, the report was not just one person's opinion but a collaborative effort that the SHRAB's constituents had a stake in. In a number of states, archivists from public and private repositories worked together over many months with genealogists, attorneys, local government officials, librarians, and educators to identify needs and propose solutions. With leadership from the state archivist in his or her role as State Historical Records Coordinator, many of these alliances have been maintained and have prospered in the years since the assessment projects were conducted.

One of the areas that the NHPRC specifically asked each state to evaluate was state government records. There are numerous examples of concrete, positive actions taken as a result of recommendations made in the assessment reports. At least two states (Rhode Island and Idaho) appointed their first professional state archivists as a result of NHPRC-sponsored studies. Several reports made successful arguments for new state archives buildings (in New Mexico, South Carolina, and Delaware). In Pennsylvania, the records management function was transferred to the state archives. Many have developed training and assistance programs for local governments and for private archival repositories. One area of special emphasis across state lines has been improving the management and preservation of electronic records. In the best of these projects, the models developed or lessons learned could be adopted by other states, broadening the effectiveness of specific projects to national significance.

### Profile of State Archives and Records Programs in the 1990s

While the size, authority, and organization of specific states archives vary greatly, it is possible to summarize the overall status of state archives and records programs as we

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<sup>7</sup>Larry Hackman, "A Perspective on American Archives," *Public Historian* 8 (Summer 1986): 20. Hackman notes that the first twenty assessment reports were reviewed in a summary for the 1983 meeting of State Historical Records Coordinators, published as Lisa B. Weber, ed., *Documenting America: Assessing the Condition of Historical Records in the States* (Albany, N.Y.: National Association of State Archives and Records Administrators, 1984).

near the end of their first century.<sup>8</sup> Statistical and anecdotal data gathered since 1990 by NAGARA through its annual program reporting process and by COSHRC in two detailed surveys and reports provide rich resources for describing and evaluating the current state of state archives.<sup>9</sup>

It is indeed a mark of progress that all fifty states now have a functioning repository for their archival records. The existence of a program, however, does not guarantee that it is healthy or even adequate. The 1993 COSHRC report characterized Arkansas' program as "limited," overseen by a state historian who has insufficient resources to maintain a fully professional state archives program. The status of the programs in some other states was also somewhat tenuous. Colorado's governor tried to abolish the Colorado State Archives altogether in a 1991 budget-saving move. To survive, the archives had to begin generating one-third of its operating funds through cost recovery fees that came to include a charge to patrons for use of the reference room, and a cost for photocopies of \$1.25 per page.

Overall, state records management programs are faring less well. In 1993, Arkansas was completely devoid of records management, and programs in Idaho, Montana, and West Virginia appeared to be fairly limited. Since then, others, including Ohio and Iowa, have seen their resources shrink to the point that their services are minimal.

The wave of privatization that has swept through governments during the 1990s has often targeted two specific records management functions—records centers and micrographics. South Carolina successfully argued that it was cheaper for the state to run its own records center, but in Rhode Island and West Virginia, the state records centers are now operated by private corporations. Ohio and Montana were considering similar arrangements in the mid-1990s.

A century into their existence, state archives seem to have found their place as a permanent part of state government. Records management's fortunes may continue to rise and fall, especially as it is redefined in relation to information resources management and other functions affected by the proliferation of electronic technologies.

**Joint Versus Split Programs.** Regardless of the specific parent agency, it appears generally true that archives and records management are both more likely to function well when they have close links to each other within state government. In thirty-four states the two are assigned to the same agency. In ten states, archives and records management are administratively split. Sometimes micrographics is further removed to a third agency (see Figure 4).

Over the past several decades, the trend has clearly been toward merging archives and records management. Thirty years ago, Posner found only twenty-four joint programs and sixteen split ones. In four states, the state archival agency has been given responsibility for records management in just the last few years (New York in 1987, Pennsylvania and

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<sup>8</sup>Several documents have systematically analyzed and described the individual program and functional components of a state archives and records program. The most recent and comprehensive set was prepared by Howard Lowell in the form of benchmarks, published in "Elements of a State Archives and Records Management Program," *ARMA Quarterly* 21 (October 1987): 3–14, 23.

<sup>9</sup>NAGARA statistical reports have appeared in the following issues of *NAGARA Clearinghouse*: 6 (Spring 1990): insert following p. 8; 7 (Spring 1991): 6–17; and 8 (Summer 1992). FY 1994 data were published in a separate volume. The two COSHRC reports were Victoria Irons Walch, *Recognizing Leadership and Partnership: A Report on the Condition of Historical Records in the States and Efforts to Ensure Their Preservation and Use* (Des Moines, Iowa, April 1993), and Walch, *Maintaining State Records in an Era of Change: A National Challenge* (St. Paul, Minn., April 1996).

**Figure 4. Placement of State Archives and Records Management.** Programs in several states are listed under more than one parent agency. For instance, the Florida State Library is a division of the Secretary of State, so the joint archives and records management program for Florida is listed under both of these parent agency categories.

Parent agencies	Joint Archives & Records Management		Archives Only	Records Mgt Only
INDEPENDENT	Alabama Indiana Mississippi	New Mexico South Carolina	Maryland	
DEPARTMENT OF ADMINISTRATION	Colorado Utah	Vermont		Minnesota Ohio South Dakota Wisconsin
DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE	Wyoming			
DEPARTMENT OF CULTURAL RESOURCES	Nevada North Carolina	Pennsylvania	Iowa West Virginia	
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION	Alaska New York	Virginia	South Dakota	
DEPARTMENT OF GENERAL SERVICES	Hawaii	Vermont		California Iowa Maryland Tennessee
DEPARTMENT OF MGT & BUDGET				Michigan North Dakota
DEPARTMENT OF PARKS & TOURISM	Arkansas			
SECRETARY OF STATE	Delaware Florida Georgia Illinois Maine Massachusetts	Missouri New Hampshire New Jersey Oregon Rhode Island Washington	California Michigan Tennessee Vermont	
STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY	Kansas		Iowa Minnesota Montana Nebraska North Dakota Ohio Wisconsin	
STATE LIBRARY AGENCY	Alaska Arizona Connecticut Florida Kentucky	Nevada Oklahoma Texas Virginia		

Rhode Island in 1992, Kansas in 1995). Vermont's state archivist now heads the Records Management Advisory Board although he does not administer the program. The strength of the ties between archives and records management is becoming increasingly important as they begin to reach out to the new information resources managers and try to develop cohesive policies for records in electronic information systems. The more fragmentary the authority over records and information is, the more difficult it will be to develop sound programs for their long-term administration.

**Placement.** As states established their archives and records management programs, the organizational structures they chose varied widely. Only a few created wholly new agencies like the departments of archives and history in Alabama and Mississippi. Most assigned the duties to existing departments. In the earlier years, the most common placements were state libraries or state historical societies, but today many departments of administration, management, and general services also house records-related functions (see Figure 4).

Over the years, no single type of placement has emerged as best for guaranteeing the effectiveness of an archives and records program. One can find cases where being a division under a politically powerful secretary of state has enhanced the authority of the program in dealing with other state agencies. On the other hand, placement in a historical society runs the danger of marginalizing the program as merely a cultural nicety and not an essential activity for the daily functioning of government. But it is also possible to find weak programs under secretaries of state and strong, influential ones in historical societies. Ultimately, it seems more important that the archives and records management programs are jointly administered than what parent agency houses them.

**Financial Resources.** Without exception, the budgetary allocations for state archives and records programs represent a minuscule part of total state expenditures. The 1994 NAGARA/COSHR joint survey found that expenditures on archives and records programs were well below one-tenth of one percent of states' budgets across the board, with at least sixteen states allocating less than one-hundredth of one percent specifically to records.

There are wide variations in the archives and records management budgets from state to state, from less than \$200,000 in Montana to more than \$15 million in New York. Typically, however, larger states devote a much lower proportion of overall financial resources to archives and records programs than do smaller ones. This suggests that there is something of a floor, or set of fixed costs, that any state government must accept to have a functioning archives and records program. It is also likely that, in larger governments, more of the records management-related functions are handled directly by personnel in other agencies rather than by a centralized records program. If that is true, actual costs are spread across all agencies rather than focused within the records management program alone.

As small as they are however, these budgets have been subject to the same reductions experienced by other state programs as a result of the widespread financial crises in the states. Cuts in archives' budgets usually mean reductions in staffing levels because of the labor-intensive nature of the work. The other major cost factor for records programs is associated with storage space: heat, light, building maintenance, construction, or leasing when necessary. These expenses only grow with annual additions to holdings and overall economic inflation. When budgets have to be cut, storage costs are relatively fixed while staff layoffs can yield more substantial, if undesirable, reductions.



**New Revenue Sources.** Archives and records administrators have developed new sources of revenue both as a way of responding to the ever-growing demand for service from within government and from the public at large, and for maintaining programs in the face of shrinking appropriations. Several states have authorized revolving funds for their state records programs, allowing them to charge fees for services and deposit the income into a special fund, then use this fund to support staff and programs.<sup>10</sup> In 1993, Pennsylvania reported generating some \$2 million a year largely by charging other state agencies for storage in the records center. That same year, Florida's trust fund represented 50 percent of the overall budget for the Bureau of Archives and Records Management, with revenues derived from storage, micrographics, workshops, and reproduction.

Another major innovation has been to make small (\$1–\$2) increases in filing fees paid to county officials, with the extra income specifically earmarked to support archives and records management programs for local governments. Five states now have such programs in place (Delaware, Kentucky, Missouri, New York, and Virginia) and others have considered it. Kentucky's program, developed with NHPRC funds, provided the model that many others adapted. Revenue from such a program can be substantial; New York's enables several million dollars in competitive grant funds for local governments each year and supports most of its staff who provide records management advice and assistance to local governments. The Virginia State Archives was able to support five new staff positions from the \$1 increase in recording fees intended to preserve court records, while Missouri added more than twenty staff positions in its field operations for local governments.

In another innovative approach, New York and Maryland have established endowments to support their program goals. The New York State Archives Partnership Trust has been characterized as a "highly entrepreneurial effort to create a \$10 million endowment and to raise special project funds to help preserve and make accessible the archives of New York's colonial and state government."<sup>11</sup> New York received a challenge grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities to help get the Partnership Trust's work started; the federal funds had to be matched by nonfederal funds. The Trust hopes to raise funds from corporations, foundations, and individuals as well as securing state appropriations.

The most recent revenue innovation is conceptual as well as practical. Ohio successfully persuaded the legislature to view preservation of and access to state records as a capital improvement. In other words, if records are seen as an asset, just like a state building is, then preparing series description to improve access to them is the equivalent of repaving the building's driveway, and starting an electronic records management program is like adding a new wing. Capital improvements are eligible for support through the issuance of bonds, money that can be allocated without having to increase appropriations.

Like many other sectors of government, state archives and records programs have had to become more entrepreneurial in their outlook. Resources can grow, but these programs will constantly be looking for new methods of generating revenue. The most desirable approaches will be those that recover at least a portion of true costs without unduly

<sup>10</sup>A recent issue of *NAGARA Clearinghouse* asked the states to report specifically on their use of "dedicated funding streams," *NAGARA Clearinghouse* 12 (Fall 1996): 13+. Other data is from the 1993 COSHRC report.

<sup>11</sup>The trust is discussed in Larry J. Hackman, "Facing the Challenge of Scarce Archival Resources: Archives Partnership Trust," *Archival Outlook* (March 1993): 20.



restricting access by imposing prohibitive fees for reproductions or other use-related activities.

**Personnel Resources.** As with all other program elements, the number of full-time equivalent (FTE) positions allocated to archives and records management also varies widely from state to state. Logically, factors that affect staff size include the extent of services provided by the archives and records management program and the relative population of the state. In 1994, the largest staffs were in New York (105 FTEs), Tennessee (96), Texas (83.75), and Illinois (79.5). The smallest are in Montana (4 FTEs) and in Iowa, Nevada, and New Hampshire, all with five employees.

Programs that include large micrographic operations tend to have the largest number of FTEs, but these operations are often self-supporting so that salaries are paid with fees charged to other state agencies for services. Programs that have substantial field operations to provide advice and services to local governments also tend to have larger than average staffs. The states that support their local government programs with supplemental filing fees have often seen substantial FTE growth as a result.

A number of states have historical societies that provide care for both official government records and nongovernment materials like personal papers and records of private organizations. In these institutions, processing and reference services for both public and private materials are provided by the same individuals, making it difficult to give accurate estimates for the number of FTEs devoted solely to the care of government archives.

**Facilities.** If bricks and mortar are a sign of support from resource allocators, then many state archives across the country are valued indeed. There has been an extraordinary surge of building in the last fifteen years, in many cases to replace aging structures that were long outgrown. More than half of the existing state archives buildings have been built since 1970, with several buildings now under construction and several more in the planning stages.

This building boom is good news because the need for better facilities is well-documented. In 1986, Howard Lowell conducted a study of preservation needs in state archives. His report indicated that "proper physical storage conditions, with modern fire detection and suppression capabilities, security systems, positive environmental controls, and programs that use preservation-quality supplies for housing archives holdings" were among the most urgent needs.<sup>12</sup> In 1994, the NAGARA/COSHR survey found that nineteen state archives buildings were already full to capacity and fifteen more (31.3%) would be full in the next five years. Ten records centers were already full, while an additional eighteen would be full in five years.

Six states (Alaska, Colorado, New Hampshire, North Dakota, Ohio, and West Virginia) have no separate records center facilities. Colorado and New Hampshire store temporary records in their state archives buildings; the others do not provide any centralized storage for semiactive or temporary agency records.

**Holdings.** The combined holdings for all state archives in 1994 amounted to more than 1.7 million cubic feet of paper records and more than ten million photographs, all official government records. Many state archives also collect nongovernment manuscripts; in two states (Arkansas, Montana) there are more nongovernment than government records in the state archives. In eight archives, one-third or more of the total holdings are non-

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<sup>12</sup>Howard Lowell, *Preservation Needs in State Archives* (Albany, N.Y.: NAGARA, 1986), 1.

government materials. Most of these holdings are in states in which the state historical society is assigned to perform the archival function for state government.

The statistics reported by the COSHRC surveys indicate that growth in the volume of paper records was continuing at a level of just under one hundred thousand cubic feet per year for all state archives combined.<sup>13</sup> The average volume of paper records was 22,473 cubic feet in 1986, 32,310 cubic feet in 1992, and 36,980 cubic feet in 1994. On the other hand, the amount of microfilm held by state archives appears to have stabilized. The 1994 survey shows that there is a total of just over 2.5 million reels in all state archives, a slight decrease from the 1992 survey.

Relatively few state archives have accessioned electronic records. However, there are substantial quantities of photographs, moving images (film, videotape), maps, blueprints, and drawings. At least nine state archives have significant collections of artifacts and other three-dimensional materials.

The 1996 COSHRC report listed a total of more than four million cubic feet of paper records stored in state records centers. There was also a significant volume of electronic record media stored in records centers in some states, probably held as security backups for active files. As the twentieth century closes, state archives stand on top of a still-growing paper mountain as they scan the technological horizon for signs of new electronic records challenges awaiting them.

### Current Challenges and Priorities in State Archives and Records Programs

The rapidly developing information technologies of the 1990s are affecting state governments in many ways (Figure 5). State archivists and records managers believe that they have much to bring to the table when states are developing policies and creating new connections for maintenance and delivery of information services. A working group of records professionals, gathered at the NAGARA/University of Pittsburgh Institute on Government Information Policy ("Camp Pitt") in June 1996, prepared the following description of basic responsibilities and the significance of archivists and records managers in the information resources realm:

- Through statutory and other legal mandates, archivists and records managers are the responsible stewards of government records and information.
- Archivists and records managers establish the institutional memory of government by identifying and ensuring the preservation of records which document the work and impact of federal, state, and local governments.
- By identifying and preserving records that possess enduring value, archivists and records managers protect the legal and economic rights and interests of government, citizens, and private organizations.
- Archivists and records managers serve as a central resource to assist citizens as well as government officials to identify, locate, and make accessible, government information.
- Archivists and records managers assist government agencies in guaranteeing open, timely, and unobstructed access to records and information deemed public, while

<sup>13</sup>The 1993 COSHRC report used statistics on holdings gathered by NAGARA for fiscal year 1992. These figures were compared to data for holdings in 1986 compiled by Howard Lowell in his study of preservation programs, *Preservation Needs in State Archives*.

simultaneously ensuring the security and confidentiality of records to which access is restricted by law.<sup>14</sup>

Archivists and records managers in state government have been working on several fronts to address changing technologies, organizational structures, and demands on their programs. The sections that follow will highlight some of the more recent and innovative projects in these areas.

**Involvement in IRM and Information Policy Development.** State governments, like the private sector, are recognizing that "information is a strategic resource and that government needs a policy for managing it."<sup>15</sup> They are responding by establishing new agencies and developing new policies to coordinate and regulate information-related activities and investments throughout government, but "no two states are attempting to provide solutions in exactly the same way. . . . There is great diversity in organized design and the manner in which authority is vested in these organizations."<sup>16</sup> As these programs and policies evolve, state archivists and records administrators know that it is essential that they assert their interests by raising records-related issues: definition of what constitutes a record; authenticity; adequate documentation; longevity; accessibility; and legal admissibility.<sup>17</sup>

For the 1996 COSHRC report, state archivists and records managers were asked to report on the existence of Information Resources Management (IRM) and information policy organizations in their state governments

**Figure 5. Trends in State Government Influenced by Electronic Recordkeeping**

A study conducted by the New York State Archives and Records Administration identified trends that state archivists and records managers must be aware of as their governments move from paper-based to electronic communications and commerce:

- ✎ stagnant or shrinking budgets
- ✎ heightened demands for accountability in government operations and in the use of public resources
- ✎ rising expectations by the public and by businesses for rapid, easy, affordable access to government information and services
- ✎ available technology for creation, management, storage, and distribution of information in electronic form
- ✎ new technological innovations such as the "information superhighway" that eliminate geographic barriers to accessing information and foster information sharing
- ✎ reductions in the cost of digital storage and capture
- ✎ growing recognition that better information management is a key to quality improvements in service delivery
- ✎ increasing awareness that information is a strategic resource that must be managed systematically.

*NYSARA, Building Partnerships for Electronic Recordkeeping (1995).*

<sup>14</sup>"Camp Pitt Working Group: The Role of Archivists and Records Managers in Information Resources Management," *NAGARA Crossroads* (1997-2): 1.

<sup>15</sup>Bruce Dearstyne, "Government Information Policy: A Framework for Records and Information Management in the Public Sector," *The Records and Retrieval Report* 13 (February 1997): 2.

<sup>16</sup>National Association of State Information Resource Managers, *State Information Resource Management Organizational Structures* (Lexington, Ky., 1996), 3.

<sup>17</sup>Bruce Dearstyne, "Changing Contexts for Records and Information Management," *NAGARA Clearinghouse* 13 (Winter 1997): 2.

as well as their own participation in related activities. In sixteen states, there is both an IRM and information policy entity that involve the archives and/or records management agency. An additional four states have an IRM agency that involves archives/records management and five other states have an information policy entity that involves archives/records management. Seven states have either IRM or information policy but archives/records management personnel do not participate.

The placement of the archives and records management programs within state governments might be a major factor affecting their participation in information policy issues. Those states in which archives are either independent agencies or are housed in the Department of Administration (where information authority often resides) or the Department of Education were both more likely to have a central IRM/information policy entity and to involve the archives/records management program in its activities. Those with archives in the state historical society or cultural resources department were less likely to have an information program, and only a few of those involved the state archives. There is a mix of activity in those states which house their archives in either the state library agency or the secretary of state's office.

This pattern suggests that state officials who view archives/records management programs as part of the active administration of state government are more likely to have developed a comprehensive approach to information resources in all forms. Those who deal with archives primarily as a cultural resource, unconnected with the daily business of state government, may not be managing their information resources as well: they may not fully recognize the valuable resources available among the state's permanent records, or the expertise of the archives and records staff.

Kentucky's Department of Library and Archives (KDLA) was one of the first state archives to assert itself into the information arena and has continued to be among the most active. The KDLA staff reviews information resource plans biennially from all state agencies, allowing it to assess their impact on records management and to assist agencies in meeting recordkeeping requirements in the development of electronic systems. As Kentucky's state government has placed ever greater emphasis on the use of emerging technologies, the state archives has participated in committees and workgroups to develop plans and implement applications, better ensuring that a long-term perspective is an integral part of these systems.<sup>18</sup>

**Records-related Legislation and Standards.** As new recording media were introduced, one of the first areas of concern, beginning with microforms in the 1940s and more recently in electronic systems, was to make sure that the legal definition of a "record" encompassed all possible forms and conditions under which information could be stored. Many state laws are modeled after the 1943 Federal Records Act which added the phrase "regardless of physical form or characteristics" in an attempt to cover all possibilities. In a 1992 study, Dennis Neilander found this same "catch-all" phrase in twenty-five state laws defining public records.<sup>19</sup>

All forty-eight states responding to the 1996 COSHRC report indicated that they had formal definitions of what constitutes a record. Forty-six were based in statutes, while the

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<sup>18</sup>"Re-engineering Planning Underway," and "Information Resource Plans Reviewed," *NAGARA Clearinghouse* 13 (Summer 1997): 13.

<sup>19</sup>Dennis Neilander, "Presentation to the Legislative Commission's Subcommittee to Study the Laws Governing Public Records and Books: Comparisons of State Public Records Laws," [Nevada] Legislative Counsel Bureau (10 January 1992).

definitions used by Oregon and Tennessee were contained in regulations.<sup>20</sup> In the past ten years, twenty-eight states have revised their statutory or regulatory definitions of a record. Thirty-five states reported that their current definitions cover electronic records (including five states whose laws predate 1980), and four more indicated that they had revisions in progress to make such coverage explicit. Only fifteen specified that electronic mail was covered, while five more have legislation pending to do so.

Changes in recording media also have forced reconsideration of what is admissible in court. Only one of the forty-eight states responding to the 1994 survey (Rhode Island) did not have a statute providing for the admissibility of microfilm as valid evidence in a court case. More than two-thirds of the reporting states also had some provisions for admitting optical images or electronic records in court or are in the process of developing statutes or regulations that will make this possible. Several states, including Alabama, North Dakota, and Wyoming, indicated that such records were currently admissible under judicial rules of evidence.

The promulgation of such legislation or rulemaking has received a strong push from the professional community and imaging industry representatives. In 1993 the Association for Information and Image Management received a modest grant from the NHPRC to develop a guideline covering two basic concerns: (1) the admissibility of records produced by information technology systems as evidence in federal or state courts; and (2) the acceptance of records produced by information technology by federal or state agencies.<sup>21</sup>

Optical imaging standards, also promulgated by the imaging professionals, have been incorporated into the regulatory frameworks of more than half the states since 1991. The 1996 COSHRC report noted that only two had been passed as statutes; most take the form of regulations or administrative rules.

**Developing Programs for Electronic Records.** The process of retooling state archival programs to address electronic records has been greatly facilitated by the series of annual institutes held for state archivists and records administrators at the University of Pittsburgh. A total of eighty-eight archivists from thirty-seven institutions in thirty-five states attended one or more of the six institutes, affectionately known as "Camp Pitt," held between June 1989 and June 1994. In 1996 and 1997, institutes were cosponsored by NAGARA and the National Association of State Information Resource Executives (NASIRE). The hope was to facilitate collaboration between state archivists and records managers and their counterparts in state information resources management and information policy offices. The scope and influence of "Camp Pitt" over the last eight years are described in more detail by David Olson later in this issue.

One of the direct outcomes of the lessons learned at "Camp Pitt" is the significant number of state archivists and records managers who have been working to incorporate

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<sup>20</sup>This appeared to be something of an improvement over the situation documented by George Bain in his 1983 analysis of state archival law. At that time, twenty-four states had detailed and explicit definitions, sixteen had detailed but ambiguous definitions, eight had only oblique or summary coverage, and two had no definitions at all. George Bain, "State Archival Law: A Content Analysis," *American Archivist* 46 (Spring 1983): 164-67. Hawaii and Louisiana were the two with no definitions in 1983. Hawaii passed legislation containing a definition in 1988; Louisiana did not respond to the survey. The eight found to have inadequate definitions in 1983 were Connecticut, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Mississippi, Nevada, New Hampshire, and North Dakota. Only two have amended their laws since then: Maryland (1984 and 1994), and New Hampshire (1995).

<sup>21</sup>"The Legal Admissibility of Records Produced by Information Technology Systems," *NAGARA Crossroads* (1997-2): 3-4. The guideline was published in four parts as an American National Standards Institute/Association for Information and Image Management Technical Report (ANSI/AIIM TR 31) in 1992-94. Part IV includes a proposed Uniform Records Act and a model rule.



current thinking about the need for "functional requirements" into their programs for managing electronic records. The intent is to design electronic information systems in such a way that the characteristics necessary for their long-term preservation and use are automatically built into the creation and maintenance of records. Those developing the functional requirements have identified three critical components of records: content, structure, and context.<sup>22</sup> No matter what media are used to capture information, all three elements must be retained in order to fulfill the requirements of accurate and complete recordkeeping. Once defined, these requirements can be translated into technical specifications and incorporated into software so that adequate recordkeeping practices become an automatic byproduct.

New York was one of the first states to start applying functional requirements in actual practice, but others have followed. Delaware has produced "Model Guidelines for Electronic Records," one of the latest applications of the functional requirements to a specific setting.<sup>23</sup>

As they develop policies that will govern electronic records management, archivists and records managers are learning that it is not enough to put the requirements for good recordkeeping practices in writing. To have a real effect on the proper creation and maintenance of records, archivists and records managers must go out to state and local agencies and provide ongoing guidance and training. Simply telling agencies that they must do something will not produce the desired results unless the staff is shown how to do it.

This conclusion was one of the key findings in a recently completed three-year project undertaken by the New York State Archives and Records Administration (NYSARA). The project was designed "to develop a framework for a comprehensive electronic records program that would integrate electronic recordkeeping and archival requirements into the mainstream of agency information management practices."<sup>24</sup>

New York, like many states, has a statutory definition of records that clearly includes "computer-readable materials" along with other media. NYSARA had been requiring agencies to use conventional records management practices for all types of records: inventorying records using standard forms and procedures, developing disposition schedules, obtaining authorization from the state archives to dispose of records, and transferring records to the state archives when their useful life in the creating agency had ended. Virtually every state archives and records program applies these same requirements to the government records in their jurisdictions. New York, along with many others, also had a number of additional requirements for electronic records: to collect information about hardware and software necessary to use the records, to maintain documentation, to prepare back-up copies, and to store magnetic media under specific conditions.

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<sup>22</sup>See discussions of these concepts in David Bearman, "The Electronic Office," in *Electronic Evidence: Strategies for Managing Records in Contemporary Organizations* (Pittsburgh: Archives and Museum Informatics, 1994): 148-49; and Terry Cook, "It's 10 O'Clock: Do You Know Where Your Data Are?" *Technology Review* 52 (January 1995): 51-52. The Functional Requirements for Evidence in Recordkeeping, developed by the University of Pittsburgh, and related documents, are available from the university's website, <<http://www.sis.pitt.edu/~nhprc/evidence.html>>.

<sup>23</sup>New York State Archives and Records Administration, *Building Partnerships for Electronic Recordkeeping* (Albany, N.Y.: New York State Archives and Records Administration, 1995). Delaware's guidelines are described in *NAGARA Clearinghouse* 13 (Winter 1997): 13.

<sup>24</sup>NYSARA, *Building Partnerships for Electronic Recordkeeping*.

Although the law and regulations were based on standard practices in widespread use, NYSARA found three key deficiencies that illuminate the disjuncture between the intent of laws or regulations and how they are followed in actual practice:

- NYSARA had not published and distributed sufficient basic guidance to state agencies to enable them to distinguish between records and nonrecords and to incorporate records retention requirements into the design of electronic information systems;
- some aspects of NYSARA's regulations were too burdensome or too focused on process and procedure instead of outcome;
- NYSARA needed to provide specific tools or methods to enable agencies to apply the regulations effectively.

At the conclusion of the project, NYSARA found that, "Although the definition of a record in state law remains valid, the records management procedures proposed in the regulations cannot be implemented easily in the current policy and technology environment."

**Uses of Information Technology for Access to Records.** Like all archival repositories, state archives are making increased use of information technologies to provide better descriptions of and access to their holdings. Some states have moved more rapidly than others, often because progress is heavily dependent on the overall computing environment in their respective state governments.

There has been no greater change in the last several years than in state archives' use of the Internet to provide access to potential users. In early 1993, only five state archivists even had basic electronic mail capability, and several of those were through personal accounts paid for by the state archivists themselves. Today, nearly all have Internet e-mail, and many state archives have their own websites, with more in development.<sup>25</sup>

**Government Information Locator Services (GILS).** As part of the broadscale National Information Infrastructure (NII) initiative, a growing number of states are developing systems that mirror the federal Government Information Locator Services (GILS). Just as the National Archives has been central in the development of the federal GILS, a number of states have turned to state archives staff for the expertise they need to develop state GILS. They bring detailed knowledge about the kinds of records created in every state agency gained through their records management activities; they have developed efficient, easily understood, and standardized methods for describing the wide range of records found in governments; they have a long-standing commitment to providing access to government records; and they know how to deliver the reference services most desired by private citizens and government employees alike.

A recent issue of *NAGARA Crossroads* describes eight state-level GILS now in operation.<sup>26</sup> One well-developed example in which the state archives has had significant participation is the New York Information Locator Service (<http://www.nysl.nysed.gov/ils>). This on-line directory, developed by the State Archives in cooperation with the State Library, tells users what information is available about a particular topic or from a particular source through New York state government. It also provides direct access to all government Internet services and full texts of key documents like the governor's budget and annual state of the state message. The South Carolina Department of Archives and

<sup>25</sup>The NAGARA web site (<http://www.nagara.org>) has links to all active state archives home pages.

<sup>26</sup>"GILS State by State," *NAGARA Crossroads* (1997-1): 6-7.



History is using NHPRC funds to develop its GILS (<http://www.state.sc.us/scils>). In conjunction with this project, it has developed guidelines and a model public access policy that should be applicable to initiatives in other states.<sup>27</sup> The Florida State Library, parent of the Bureau of Archives and Records Management, hosts the Florida Government Information Locator Service (<http://www.dos.state.fl.us/fgils/index.html>) which provides links to functional descriptions of each state agency, listings of key personnel, agency addresses and phone numbers, primary data provided by agency, and publicly available agency Internet servers.

**Access via the Internet.** While a significant number of state archives have home-pages, the links and access tools provided by each vary greatly. Some are in only the earliest stages of development, while others are quite sophisticated.

At this point, most carry only descriptions of records, but there is growing momentum toward providing copies of actual records electronically. The Oregon State Archives began enabling on-line access to legislative transcripts several years ago. These very recent documents were produced in electronic form, so when they were brought into the archives, it was fairly easy to establish direct access through the state archives website. New York also has made user guides and data files related to prison inmates (1956–73) and primary and secondary education (1967–81) available on its website.<sup>28</sup>

Other states are looking back to their older, paper-based materials and trying to identify those that would make good candidates for conversion to electronic form. The Illinois State Archives undertook the first state-level conversion project in the mid-1970s in a massive effort to encode all of the public land purchases into a computer database. When it established an Internet site, the enormous Public Domain file and its index became searchable online to the great delight of genealogists and other researchers. The Ohio Historical Society has become an active “content provider” to the Ohio Public Library Information Network (OPLIN), making both searchable databases and historically significant records converted to electronic format available on-line, including early statehood documents, nineteenth-century military rosters, and twentieth-century death certificate indexes.<sup>29</sup> The Illinois website received 630,000 hits in FY 1996–97, up from 82,000 in FY 1993–94. Interestingly, Illinois’ walk-in reference has also increased by 150 percent over the same period, evidently because of the increased visibility afforded by its presence on the Internet.

**Bibliographic networks.** For several years, state archives have been contributing descriptive records to national, regional, and statewide bibliographic databases. The Research Libraries Information Network (RLIN) managed by the Research Libraries Group, Inc., has attracted the largest number of state archives, due in large part to two NHPRC-funded projects to develop common guidelines for descriptive practices that would be compatible with the RLIN AMC file and provide support for preparing entries. Fifteen state archives now provide descriptive records through RLIN. Other bibliographic networks like OCLC and WLN carry some state archives data as well.

Despite the wide range of activity associated with automated access, the biggest impediment to full use of these tools may become a lag in traditional archival activities. The process of preparing descriptions of records held in archival repositories remains a

<sup>27</sup>“Information Locator Service Guidelines On-line,” *NAGARA Clearinghouse* 13 (Winter 1997): 17–18.

<sup>28</sup>“SARA Website Includes Electronic Records,” *NAGARA Clearinghouse* 13 (Winter 1997): 16.

<sup>29</sup>“Information Center Created,” *NAGARA Clearinghouse* 12 (Summer 1996): 19–20; Meribah Mansfield, “Ohio’s OPLIN: The Future of Library Service?” *Library Journal* 122 (October 1, 1997): 47.

labor intensive activity. When resources are tight, ongoing descriptive work often suffers as the workload shifts to reference demands.

Most of the state archives responding to the 1996 COSHRC survey claimed to have descriptive control of 80 percent or more of their holdings at the record group level, but only twenty-four states have control of 80 percent or more at the series level. Most critical for access via the Internet, an approach favored by a growing number of researchers, only ten state archives had 90 percent or more of their series described in automated systems. A great deal of writing and data entry lies ahead before the bulk of the state archives' series descriptions will be available for access over the Internet.

## Conclusion

As state archives approach their one-hundredth anniversary as an institution, great diversity remains among them in their level of resources and the influence and authority they wield within their jurisdictions. But all share the desire to serve their many constituents well and to ensure the preservation of each state's records well into the future. Frequent and continuous changes in recordkeeping demand attention from all archivists. Political pressures to reduce the size and cost of government while increasing service to the public present state archivists and records administrators with a significant challenge in responding to technological advances and harnessing their power.

Fortunately, the fifty state archives have recognized that none of them have to go forward alone. Through NAGARA and the Council of State Historical Records Coordinators they have found means to gather data about their programs and participate in co-operative projects to resolve the difficult issues confronting them. Funds from the National Historical Publications and Records Commission have made many of the most important collaborations possible and advanced the entire profession as a result. The 1993 COSHRC report applauded the fact that the states had embraced leadership and partnership as means for improving all archival programs. These characteristics will serve the state archives well as they continue their progress into the next century.