

# The Impact of Grantsmaking: An Evaluation of Archival and Records Management Programs at the Local Level

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## Abstract

This study examines the effectiveness of local government programs created or revitalized with funding provided by the National Historical Publications and Records Commission. With the multitude of local government archival and records management programs throughout the United States, this assessment is undertaken to help evaluate why some programs survive and thrive, while others wither and cease functioning. By examining evidence of program activity, this study reports on the number of local government programs that make a contribution to their governments (warranting ongoing general fund appropriations) and those that do not and whose programs end when grant monies expire. This study concludes by suggesting how local government archives and records administrators can leverage support from their governments and alternatives for federal funding agencies to appropriate funds that will deliver the greatest impact to local governments nationwide.

## Introduction

Local government archival and records management programs that have dedicated funding streams and can demonstrate program effectiveness with measurable goals are best prepared to deliver quality services to the government, the citizens of their jurisdictions, and the broader research community. The challenge for archival and records management professionals is to

*This article was written as a product of the author's participation in the 1997 Research Fellowship Program of Modern Archives administered by the Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan, and funded by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, the National Endowment for the Humanities, and the University of Michigan. The author wishes to thank Francis X. Blouin, Jr., Director, William K. Wallach, Assistant Director, and the 1997 Research Fellowship Program participants. The views expressed in this article are those of the author and do not represent the views of the National Archives and Records Administration or the City of Philadelphia.*

secure the initial funds to begin the local program and then to demonstrate program effectiveness in order to sustain it with general fund appropriations.

Programs for archives and records management can be found at the county, city, town, township, and borough level; in municipal- or state-chartered authorities; and in school and special service districts. (Hereafter all such programs will be referred to as local government programs.) Many of these programs rely on external public and private sector funding sources to initiate archival and records management services in their jurisdictions. It is essential that grantmakers who fund local governments to initiate these programs ask if these local government programs survive once external funding ends, or if they cease functioning. More specifically, do local government administrators convey the value of their programs to senior government administrators so they will come to understand that sustaining local government records programs is good public policy? Do they make clear how these programs translate into improved accountability and citizen services? And, do local government records administrators widely report to colleagues and stakeholders the success of innovative programs so they too can leverage resources to ensure the survival of their local government records programs?

Local government records are important because they document the areas in which the local government touches the lives of its residents—areas such as health, education, human rights, transportation, natural resources, economic development, and the administration of justice, taxes, land use, and property. This study seeks to examine the sustainability of local government programs that were created primarily with external funds provided by the National Historical Publications and Records Commission (NHPRC). In addition to looking at the subsequent health and vitality of local government programs, this study evaluates and recommends funding alternatives other than direct subvention grants to local governments.

Cross-sectional studies of state government archival and records management programs are common, due in part to their quantifiable nature (i.e., the fifty states), the large populations they serve, and the importance of the records they hold.<sup>1</sup> However, few studies exist for local government programs. Clearly, any comprehensive evaluation of the nation's 84,955 local government jurisdictions with their varying levels of programmatic sophistication would be extremely difficult.<sup>2</sup> This study, therefore, targets its analysis on a specific issue: the impact of NHPRC grantmaking on the long-term survivability of local government archival and records management programs. The sample is further

<sup>1</sup> See for example Victoria Irons Walch, *Maintaining State Records in an Era of Change: A National Challenge* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society, 1996) and Ernst Posner, *American State Archives* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964).

<sup>2</sup> U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Statistical Abstract of the United States, 1996* (Washington, D.C., 1996), 295. This total includes all counties, municipalities, special service districts, and school districts.

defined as the 49 local government programs (of the 77 programs funded) which received NHPRC funds specifically for program development projects.<sup>3</sup> NHPRC's "program development" grant awards to local governments (as opposed to the "access and preservation" or "electronic records" projects) were selected because the recipient governments were planning new archival and records management programs or had programs that were going through a period of reinvigoration after years of neglect. This selected sample represents a cross-section of jurisdictions, from small localities such as Alpine County, California, and Jackson County, Arkansas, to large metropolises like Los Angeles County and the City of Philadelphia. Table 1 lists the 49 governments selected for this study and includes the year of the grant award and the total funds awarded.

There are a number of other grantmakers supporting archival and records management programs, such as the National Endowment for the Humanities and the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation. State grant programs, and state regrant programs (funded by the NHPRC) also contribute to archival programs within the spheres of their jurisdictional and eligibility guidelines.<sup>4</sup> Each grantmaker could have been studied, and perhaps should be studied, in order to develop a fuller understanding of public and private philanthropy, program development, and organizational change. The literature on grantmaking and organizational change, especially as it relates to public sector organizations, is scant. The NHPRC was selected for this study because it is the major grantmaking organization supporting archival and records management programs nationwide.

### **Grantmaking and Local Government Archives and Records Programs**

Generally, when grantmakers provide funding to new programs, there is an expectation that the program will continue once external funding has ceased.<sup>5</sup> External funding enables local governments to "bootstrap" their programs for one, perhaps two years, after which time it is expected that the programs should have proven their value to their government leaders, who will then approve post-grant funding for the programs. Unfortunately, local government archival and records administrators have done a poor job in articulating the value these

<sup>3</sup> From the beginning of the Records Program in 1976 until 1997, the NHPRC awarded more than \$3,000,000 to municipal and county records programs in 106 separate awards to 77 municipal/county governments. This represents approximately five percent of the total grant funds awarded by the NHPRC. The 77 governmental programs include two multi-jurisdictional programs.

<sup>4</sup> Some states administer large-scale grant programs. The New York State Archives and Records Administration, for example, awarded \$5,083,189 to 430 local governments in 1997 through its Local Government Records Management Fund. See <<http://www.sara.nysed.gov/new/97grants.htm>>.

<sup>5</sup> See, for example, National Historical Publications and Records Commission, *Program Guidelines* (Washington, D.C.: National Historical Publications and Records Commission, 1998), 7.

**Table 1.** NHPRC's "Program Development" Grant Awards to 49 Local Government Programs

| State                       | Municipality/County             | Grant Year | Grant Award |
|-----------------------------|---------------------------------|------------|-------------|
| <b>Alabama</b>              | Birmingham, City of             | 1978       | \$9,000     |
|                             | Birmingham, City of             | 1984       | \$74,379    |
| <b>Arizona</b>              | Tucson, City of                 | 1981       | \$21,000    |
| <b>Arkansas</b>             | Little Rock, City of            | 1987       | \$3,600     |
|                             | Jackson County                  | 1991       | \$4,000     |
|                             | Phillips County                 | 1981       | \$6,275     |
| <b>California</b>           | Alpine County                   | 1986       | \$27,000    |
|                             | Los Angeles County              | 1990       | \$30,000    |
|                             | Los Angeles, City of            | 1980       | \$34,732    |
|                             | Oakland City Government         | 1992       | \$138,253   |
|                             | Orange County                   | 1984-85    | \$79,998    |
|                             | Sacramento, City of             | 1979       | \$28,200    |
|                             | San Diego, City of              | 1986       | \$72,588    |
|                             | Yolo County Library             | 1984       | \$33,350    |
| <b>Delaware</b>             | Wilmington, City of             | 1988       | \$3,878     |
| <b>District of Columbia</b> | District of Columbia Government | 1984       | \$32,652    |
| <b>Florida</b>              | Miami, City of                  | 1994       | \$110,000   |
|                             | Tampa, City of                  | 1987       | \$61,017    |
| <b>Georgia</b>              | Rome/Floyd County               | 1985       | \$20,500    |
|                             | Troup County                    | 1985       | \$31,080    |
| <b>Idaho</b>                | Boise, City of                  | 1985-86    | \$67,702    |
| <b>Iowa</b>                 | Davenport, City of              | 1985-86    | \$45,989    |
|                             | Polk County                     | 1989       | \$93,773    |
| <b>Kansas</b>               | Johnson County Government       | 1988       | \$2,975     |
|                             | Johnson County Government       | 1990       | \$88,566    |
| <b>Kentucky</b>             | Louisville, City of             | 1979       | \$30,000    |
| <b>Massachusetts</b>        | Boston, City of                 | 1986       | \$40,000    |
|                             | Gloucester, City of             | 1992       | \$30,333    |
| <b>Michigan</b>             | Detroit, City of                | 1981       | \$2,955     |
|                             | Grand Rapids, City of           | 1980       | \$32,938    |
| <b>Mississippi</b>          | Lauderdale County               | 1989       | \$76,240    |
| <b>Montana</b>              | Great Falls, City of            | 1988       | \$55,670    |
| <b>New York</b>             | Montgomery, County of           | 1985       | \$2,750     |
|                             | Rochester, City of              | 1985       | \$55,000    |
|                             | Saratoga Springs, City of       | 1978       | \$5,500     |
|                             | Westchester, County of          | 1985-86    | \$50,400    |



**Table 1. (continued)** NHPRC's "Program Development" Grant Awards to 49 Local Government Programs

| State                 | Municipality/County    | Grant Year | Grant Award |
|-----------------------|------------------------|------------|-------------|
| <b>North Carolina</b> | Fayetteville, City of  | 1992       | \$3,720     |
| <b>Oregon</b>         | Portland, City of      | 1978–79    | \$120,667   |
| <b>Pennsylvania</b>   | Philadelphia, City of  | 1993       | \$91,231    |
|                       | Schuylkill, County of  | 1987       | \$38,274    |
| <b>Rhode Island</b>   | Jamestown, Town of     | 1992       | \$3,500     |
|                       | New Shoreham, Town of  | 1992       | \$3,450     |
|                       | Providence, City of    | 1980       | \$14,945    |
|                       | Warwick, City of       | 1991       | \$4,000     |
| <b>Tennessee</b>      | Kingsport, City of     | 1993       | \$44,413    |
|                       | Knox County Government | 1989       | \$79,400    |
| <b>Virginia</b>       | Richmond, City of      | 1987       | \$2,918     |
| <b>Washington</b>     | King County            | 1988       | \$71,457    |
|                       | Seattle, City of       | 1985–86    | \$58,085    |
| <b>West Virginia</b>  | Charleston, City of    | 1985       | \$2,933     |
| <b>Wisconsin</b>      | Milwaukee, City of     | 1987       | \$44,944    |

programs bring to their governments. Given the financial stress on local governments, making the case for these programs is not an easy task. No matter the size of the jurisdiction, local governments are experiencing financial stress on a scale not previously seen since the Great Depression as additional burdens are placed on them from state and federal governments, and additional services are demanded of them by their residents, with little or no new funding to support such obligations. Around the country, both large and small municipalities and counties face ever-pressing problems with rising crime rates, poverty, and public health issues. Further, the financial capacity of local governments ebbs and flows with changes in the economic tide. This inconsistency of funding poses additional challenges to managers trying to sustain a program over time. In an environment where social problems stress the coffers of the local jurisdictions, complacent administrators might conclude that archives and records management may be a luxury. For programs to survive beyond the grant funding period, however, it is critically important for resource allocators to understand that in the long run effective archival and records management programs will save funds that can be allocated to meet other demands. If local government archives and records administrators do not effectively make this case, it is inevitable that these programs will not survive.

While this problem seems (and is) urgent today, the problems facing local government programs continue the long cycle of neglect first articulated nearly one hundred years ago. The American Historical Association, through its Public Archives Commission, undertook the first study of state and local government records in 1900 and pronounced that “it may be doubted if in any country in the world archives of relatively so much value are so lightly regarded or so carelessly kept.”<sup>6</sup> Archival leaders such as Solon J. Buck, Theodore C. Pease, Leon De Valinger, Jr., and Ernst Posner called for centralizing municipal archives within state programs, a methodology adopted with mixed success by Washington, Wisconsin, and other states.<sup>7</sup> Urban historian Sam Bass Warner, Jr. decried municipal recordkeeping in his stinging indictment of archivists at the Society of American Archivists’ 1971 annual meeting. Warner criticized municipal archivists for lacking a systematic and comprehensive plan for managing records and echoed back to the graft and corruption profiled by journalist Lincoln Steffens’ exposé on municipal governments at the turn of the century.<sup>8</sup>

The most recent evaluation of local government programs is chronicled in *Documenting America: Assessing the Condition of Historical Records in the States*, the 1983 report by the National Association of State Archives and Records Administrators (predecessor organization to the National Association of Government Archives and Records Administrators).<sup>9</sup> Richard J. Cox, who wrote the chapter on local government records programs, subsequently incorporated the body of his report and his other writings about local government records programs into a chapter of his 1990 *American Archival Analysis* that he aptly named “Failed Opportunities: Archival Leadership and Local Government Records.”<sup>10</sup> Beginning with the Public Archives Commission up to the present time, the unanswered question remains—if professionals, scholars, citizens, businesses people, and others acknowledge the importance of records that document government transactions, why have local government records managers done such a poor job of managing this vital community asset?

<sup>6</sup> American Historical Association, *Annual Report* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1900) vol. 2, 24.

<sup>7</sup> Solon J. Buck, “Local Archives: Should They Be Centralized at the State Capital? Advantages and Disadvantages of Such a Centralization,” American Historical Association, *Annual Report* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1913), 268–71; Theodore C. Pease, “The Problem with Archive Centralization with Reference to Local Conditions in a Middle Western State,” American Historical Association, *Annual Report* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1916): 151–54; Leon De Valinger, Jr., “The Place of County Records in the State Archival System,” *American Archivist* 11 (January 1948): 37–41; and Posner, *American State Archives*, 363–64.

<sup>8</sup> Sam Bass Warner, Jr. “The Shame of the Cities: Public Records of the Metropolis,” *Midwestern Archivist* 2, no. 2 (1977): 27–32.

<sup>9</sup> Richard J. Cox, Jr., “Consultant Report: Local Government Records Programs,” in *Documenting America: Assessing the Condition of Historical Records in the States*, edited by Lisa B. Weber (Albany, N.Y.: National Association of State Archives and Records Administrators, 1983), 19–36.

<sup>10</sup> Richard J. Cox, *American Archival Analysis: The Recent Development of the Archival Profession in the United States* (Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow Press, 1990), 69–97.

## Methodology

The methodology used in this study consists of an examination of grant applications and final reports for 51 funded projects undertaken by 49 governments who received program development grant awards (Birmingham, Alabama, and Johnson County, Kansas, each received two grants); an analysis of survey data about the current operations of archives and records programs by those governments; and an evaluation of the evidence of program activity based on specific criteria.

### • *Grant Applications and Final Reports*

The analysis of the 49 “program development” grant recipients initially consisted of examining the grant applications and final reports submitted to the NHPRC, and internal staff memos and reports that are found within the pre-1980 files accessioned into the National Archives.<sup>11</sup> The files that were examined typically describe the program development work to be done with NHPRC funding, the methodology to be employed, and expected outcomes. Applications also include background information such as the status of the program at the time of application, an organizational history, the administrative placement within the government hierarchy, and whom the program serves. The final reports contain information about how well the local government programs met the proposed goals of the project and how the grants “jump started” the local government programs.

Specific information culled from the files included:

- the type of project undertaken with NHPRC funds;
- the amount and form of cost share contributed to the project;
- the enabling local legislation that created the archival and records management program;
- the expertise of the staff in archival and records management practices;
- the level of training the program staff sought or provided to records creators about archival and records management practices;
- the level of education and training of the program staff, measured by the purchase of professional literature and participation in professional associations; and
- the leadership and support delivered by the state archival and records management authorities (hereafter referred to as the state authorities).<sup>12</sup>

It must be acknowledged that grant recipients may at times exaggerate positive aspects and minimize negative aspects in their final reports. Despite that,

<sup>11</sup> I would like to thank Daniel Stokes at NHPRC for providing me with masked copies of post-1980 grant applications and final reports.

<sup>12</sup> I choose to use the term “state authorities” instead of the more common “state archives” so as not to de-emphasize the records management role that many state programs administer.

the final reports proved to be a unique resource in this project for understanding the utility of the grant funds in program development and sustainability once the funds were fully expended.

#### • *Survey Data*

During the spring of 1997, each of the 49 local governments received a survey instrument, similar in content to the 1996 survey conducted by the Council of State Historical Records Coordinators and the National Association of Government Archives and Records Administrators. Twenty-four (49%) of the surveys were returned, however many were incomplete. Nevertheless, selected data were analyzed to the extent possible, including placement of the archival/records management program within the government organization, program office budget, staffing levels, and experience and training. These data elements were generally complete.

#### • *Evidence of Program Activity*

Finally, in order to evaluate the effectiveness of NHPRC funding in enabling local governments to sustain program activity, it was necessary to select criteria to measure sustained activity after grant funding ended. The following criteria were selected for this evaluation:

- cataloging of grant-funded products or other program publications in OCLC;<sup>13</sup>
- web pages and their extent;
- entries of local government programs in Chadwyck-Healey's *Archives USA*;
- personal or organizational membership in professional associations; and
- return of the survey form.

These five criteria are certainly subjective, but they were considered to be the best indicators of local government program activity once NHPRC funding has ceased, and presumably continued with local government general fund appropriations.

#### **Local Government Environment**

As local governments work to develop and sustain their records programs, there are four areas, perhaps unique to this environment, that force archivists and records managers to work creatively in bringing the value of these programs to their governments:

<sup>13</sup> RLIN was not included in this analysis as many of the local governments are not members of the Research Libraries Group and would not contribute bibliographic records to the RLIN database.

• **Federal Devolution and Local Governments**

The impact of the federal devolution on local governments forces them to carry out services previously provided by federal and state governments with little or no new revenue sources to support such programs. The hard-core realities of municipal life are aptly summed up by former Philadelphia mayoral chief of staff David L. Cohen: "Increasingly, the criterion we use to decide if we can afford to provide services is whether *not* providing them will kill people."<sup>14</sup> It is in this environment that archives and records programs must function, contribute to the service mission of their governments, and fight for funding support.

• **Local Government Environment**

Local government archivists and records managers also work in an environment where they report to one administrator, but serve many government units that may not be within the reporting hierarchy of their senior elected or appointed official. A Knox County, Tennessee, official reported that "unlike the federal government or corporate environments, there is little central authority. Courts, fee offices, elected officials, and administrative units do not all report to one position on an organizational chart. Thus, at the local level the overall management of the recordkeeping process usually becomes an organizational orphan."<sup>15</sup>

• **Four-Year Election Cycle**

The four-year election cycle, typical of the American political landscape, forces program managers to adopt strategic plans that are likely to be changed with each political administration. All organizations derive benefits from strategic planning and benchmarking those planning efforts with annual targets. However, changing administrations can halt or curtail initiatives where considerable work was undertaken by past administrators. In addition, there is some evidence that suggests that the average length of employment is considerably shorter for elected or appointed officials than their private sector counterparts, thus hampering long-term development and execution of strategic plans within local governments.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>14</sup> *Philadelphia Magazine* 88 (March 1997): 9.

<sup>15</sup> National Historical Publications and Records Commission, "Knox County Government Records Program Grant Application, Grant No. 89-082TN" (Washington, D.C.: National Historical Publications and Records Commission, 1989, photocopy), 12.

<sup>16</sup> While no such data is available for appointed officials in local government, the Office of Personnel Management reports that appointed officials have an average tenure of 25 months in the Clinton Administration (based on an analysis between January 1993 to September 1996) and had an average tenure of 22 months during the Bush Administration (based on an analysis between January 1989 to September 1992). Office of Personnel Management Central Personnel Data File, as reported by Jim Hall, facsimile to author, 21 January 1998.

## • *Organizational Structure*

Program managers must also be cognizant of the functions of their parent agencies. Many programs are administrative subunits within a county or municipal clerk's office, and those offices have other responsibilities in addition to ensuring that government records are appropriately controlled and managed. For example, in cities such as Sacramento, California, Fayetteville, North Carolina, and Philadelphia, the archives and records programs are found within Community and Visitor Services, Information Services, and the Recorder of Deeds, respectively.

## **Findings**

The research findings are presented below in two groups. The first group consists of the findings of static data based on information derived from the grant applications and final reports, and to a lesser extent, the survey data; the second group examines more dynamic data—evidence of continuing program activity.

### **Static Data: Grant Applications and Final Reports**

The findings presented in this section have been derived from the 51 program development grant application files for the 49 governments. For simplicity, all of the findings, except for the "type of projects" are based on the 49 governments. The "type of projects" results are based on the analysis of the grant projects per se, and not the governments, hence these results were based on a total of 51.

The 51 NHPRC program development grant projects selected for review fall into three categories: *consultant studies* (n = 14, 27%); *program development* (n = 20, 39%), comprising archives, records management, and joint projects; and *program expansion* (n = 17, 33%), consisting of records management adding archives, archives adding records management, and general program expansion). Because of the emphasis of NHPRC's enabling legislation on historical records, 23 (45%) of the funded programs were newly established archival programs or existing records management programs seeking to add an archival component.<sup>17</sup> In fact, although 13 programs (25%) claimed to have existing records management programs in place, a closer analysis reveals that some governments simply provided for basic inactive records storage and did not have an active records management program.

<sup>17</sup> 36 CFR § 1206.32 specifies that "through its support for records projects, the National Historical Publications and Records Commission encourages a greater effort at all levels of government and by private organizations to preserve and make available for use those records, generated in every facet of life, that further an understanding and appreciation of U.S. history. In the public sector, these historical records document significant activities of State, county, municipal, and other units of government."

The NHPRC application guidelines require that the applying institution contribute at least fifty percent of the total project budget, presumably to ensure that NHPRC dollars would leverage additional local services and dollars.<sup>18</sup> In almost all of the cases studied, the governments attributed their permanent staff as their cost share contribution. In some cases, applicants did attribute their cost share allocation to the purchase of shelving and facility improvements. Only the City of Birmingham, Alabama, obtained new, non-NHPRC funded personnel during the life of their grant project. This was accomplished with support from the Alabama Department of Archives and History, which loaned their head of the Archives and Records Division for ten days, valued at \$2,400 (in 1984 dollars).<sup>19</sup> In general, many governments met the cost share requirement with existing funds that would have been appropriated whether or not those governments obtained NHPRC grant funds. In other words, the applicant institutions largely skirted the cost share requirement in the sense that few new dollars found their way to the project.

Local legislation creating a permanent and ongoing records program is essential for program survival, and yet only ten out of forty-nine governments passed some form of local legislation at the conclusion of their NHPRC funding: two either passed an executive order by the end of their project or had one in place at the outset; four passed Council legislation; one was codified in its home rule charter; and three governments passed resolutions, although this type of legislation is less permanent than other administrative or legislative vehicles.

The level of staff experience showed some promise with the existing staff at 14 programs (29%) having professional level archival or records management work experience, and staff at 5 programs (10%) having related experience. Nearly half of the governments (n = 24, 49%) used NHPRC funds to hire new grant-funded staff, who came to their jobs with experience that supplemented existing staff who did not have any. Counted among those 24 projects are 6 consultant projects, meaning that only 18 program development projects employed professionally trained archivists and records managers to begin their programs. One program had an employee with just academic credentials while seven programs (14%) neither had, nor hired, anyone with direct work experience.

Due to the changing nature of the profession, training for archival and records management professionals is an essential component to ensure program success. Further, it is equally important for archival and records professionals to develop training programs for personnel creating records to ensure compliance with the records program. Despite that, few of the governments actively engaged in such activities. Four programs (8%) engaged in training for the archival and

<sup>18</sup> National Historical Publications and Records Commission, *Program Guidelines*, 4.

<sup>19</sup> Edwin C. Bridges to Marvin Whiting, 19 January 1984, in National Historical Publications and Records Commission, "Birmingham Public Library Grant Application, Grant No. 84-135AL" (Washington, D.C.: National Historical Publications and Records Commission, 1989, photocopy), Appendix A.



records management program staff. Training for record-creating personnel fared slightly better with 10 programs (20%) receiving training by the program staff. Five programs (10%) both sought training and provided training, while 32 programs (65%) did neither.

Professional staff development is closely tied to participation in professional associations, such as the Society of American Archivists, the National Association of Government Archives and Records Administrators, and the Association of Records Managers and Administrators. Professional association activity was measured through attendance at annual conferences, enrollment in workshops, and the purchase of publications. The level of professional activities mirrors the findings of training above, with 17 programs (35%) participating. One government, the City of Tampa, Florida, sent an employee to attend the National Archives and Records Administration-sponsored "Modern Archives Institute" in Washington, D.C. This, however, was clearly the exception. A full 34 programs (69%) neither had staff participate in professional associations nor purchased publications. Regional and local associations were not tracked, largely because of the proliferation of such associations and the difficulty of capturing all of the data about such participation.

As stated earlier, NHPRC and other funding sources have expectations that grant-funded projects will continue at the conclusion of the funding. That does not necessarily mean the retention of grant-funded employees. However, if the programs are new and only 29% of the non-grant funded staff have experience, as noted above, one can infer that the only way to further develop the archives and records management program is to 1) provide expertise to permanent staff during the grant project, or 2) retain grant-funded employees. For the purpose of this analysis, the consultant studies were excluded since NHPRC funds were used to pay for consultant services, not grant-funded employees. Therefore, the base number of governments in this section is 37 (49 program development projects less 12 consultant studies). A review of the final reports shows that 21 programs (57%) did not retain grant-funded employees; 10 programs (27%) retained 1 of 1 grant employees; 4 programs (11%) retained 1 of 2 employees; and 2 programs (5%) retained 2 of 2 employees.

In most cases, local governments are political subdivisions of their states, and the records they create can be considered state records. Therefore, it is essential that there be coordination and consultation between the local government programs and state authorities. The level of contact between the local government programs and state archival and records management authorities was measured using four criteria. Five programs (10%) had extensive contact with state personnel. Such contact included many meetings, state-funded consultation such as the City of Birmingham example discussed above, or seeking other consultation from the state authorities. Ten programs (20%) met with state personnel on an infrequent basis during the life of their pro-



ject. Fourteen programs (29%) used records retention schedules issued by the state programs. However, an amazing 22 programs (45%) had no contact whatsoever with the state programs, including no use of schedules or technical publications.

In addition to the measurements cited above, several other non-quantifiable trends are apparent.

- *Uniformity in proposal.* There is an extreme uniformity in the scope and methodology of the grant applications. Without exception, every local government program proposed that their project would be a model program for other municipalities or counties in their state. Yet few of the projects proposed to do anything innovative. This is perhaps due to an applicant government seeking to model their proposed project on a successful (and already funded) program. Further, the uniformity of proposals could be attributed to the similar challenges facing local governments starting an archival and records management program after many years of inaction.
- *Lack of measurements.* The local government programs funded by NHPRC have not articulated, in quantifiable terms, the success of their grant-funded initiatives in terms that are understandable to elected officials and the public. This is especially true for strictly archival programs divorced from the records management programs. This is not to imply that there are no quantifiable numbers. It is common, for example, to report the arrangement and description of a specified number of cubic feet of records, the issuance of a specified number of records schedules, or the production of a specified number of reels of microfilm and the corresponding destruction of paper records. However, program managers have not translated these archival and records management measurements into terms that relate to the overall mission of these programs (e.g., cost effectiveness, risk mitigation, institutional memory, public service). For example, there were few cost studies showing how the archives and records management program will help the governments of which they are a part. Except for San Diego, no governments provided any transaction-based cost-benefit analysis of providing archival and records management services. San Diego, Johnson County, Kansas, and Tampa are the only programs that describe business plans in their applications.
- *Contributing to the government mission.* The grant applications and final reports show a common thread among some archival and records management administrators: they are not part of, or do not contribute to, the broader government mission of providing services to their governments. As corporate archives, the programs must serve their primary constituency—their government—first, and the citizens and other users

of public records second. Many archival programs convey a sense that they are preserving historical records for history's sake. They fail to convince government administrators that historical records provide unique and essential services to their government. Many applicants used NHPRC grant funds as an opportunity to begin or revitalize their archival/records management programs and indicate in their proposal that they would continue the program once grant funding ended, as is the expectation by NHPRC clearly stated in their published guidelines.<sup>20</sup> Yet, as the final reports reveal, many local government programs failed to articulate how future government appropriations for the programs would support the work of governing, thereby making it difficult to justify future appropriations upon completion of the project.

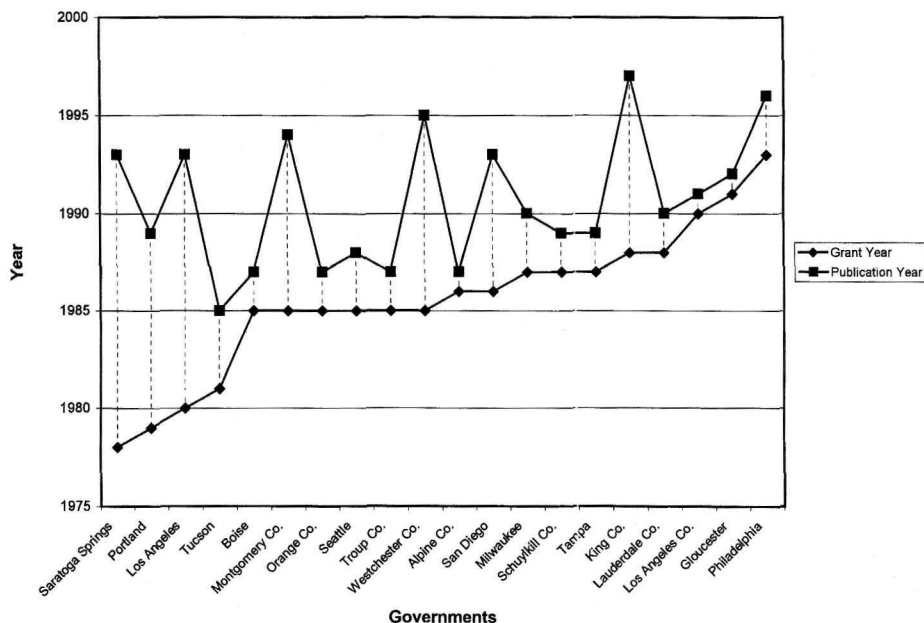
#### ***Dynamic Data: Evidence of Program Activity***

In order to determine if local government programs continue to provide services after their NHPRC grant funding has ceased, evidence of program activity based on the criteria listed earlier was sought for the 49 local governments that received NHPRC funds. In other words, were NHPRC dollars a wise investment that spawned ongoing and sustainable programs, or did they result in short-lived programs that could not generate ongoing general fund appropriations by their local governments? A review of evidence of program activity will allow us to draw some conclusions.

One might expect that at the conclusion of the NHPRC-funded project, the municipality's local library would catalog in OCLC any grant-related products such as descriptive inventories, records schedules, and final reports submitted to NHPRC. One might further expect that the local library would catalog the grant-funded products one, perhaps two, years after the conclusion of the project. The healthier programs are those that continue to produce additional non-grant related products years after the conclusion of their NHPRC project. The evidence of such products is additional OCLC cataloging entries. This indicates that their programs are alive and well and producing products worthy of cataloging by their local library. This is perhaps one of the strongest findings of evidence of program activity by the local government programs with 24 programs (49%) having their products cataloged in OCLC. One could further conclude that the programs with a larger span between grant year and publication year are more productive as they continue to produce publications years after concluding their NHPRC-funded project (see Figure 1).

<sup>20</sup> "The Commission prefers projects that do not die when NHPRC funding runs out. All projects come to an end, but the results or benefits they produce should be sustained." National Historical Publications and Records Commission, *Program Guidelines*, 7.

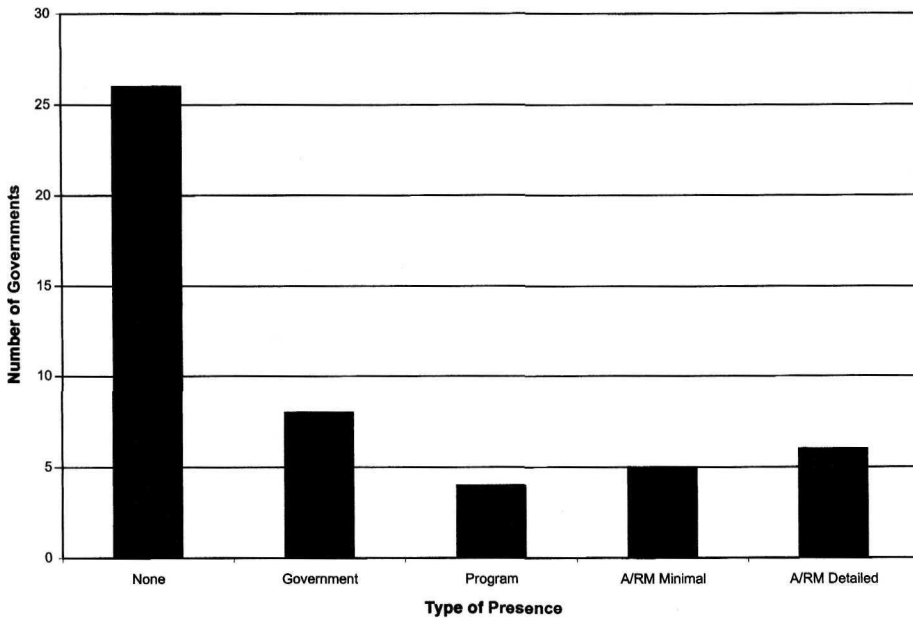
FIGURE 1. OCLC Cataloging



With the exponential growth of the World Wide Web, local government archival and records management programs do indeed have a presence on the Web, with increased availability of descriptive finding aids, records schedules, and technical leaflets for browsing and consultation by users worldwide. It is clear that the Web has become the preferred access tool for archival repositories. However, the extent and depth of Web presence for the 49 governments in this study is mixed. This can be attributed to many factors, some of which may be outside the control of the archival and records management program. As Figure 2 illustrates, 26 of the governments (53%) have no presence on the World Wide Web; 8 of the governments (16%) have websites; and 4 (8%) of the administrative offices (i.e., a county clerk's office) that have responsibility for archival and records management programs have websites. Within the archival and records management programs, 5 programs (10%) have websites with minimal information (i.e., one page with no links) while 6 programs (12%) have websites with detailed information (i.e., a multi-page site with many links).<sup>21</sup>

<sup>21</sup> To identify websites, I used Public Technology, Inc. (PTI), the non-profit technology R&D organization of the National League of Cities, the National Association of Counties, and the International City/County Management Association (available at <<http://pti.nw.dc.us/links/index.htm>>). Within PTI, I searched for individual local governments. If none were listed, I then linked to the state government websites and browsed down their respective links to local governments within their states. These searches were conducted during July 1997 and do not reflect additional activity since that time.

FIGURE 2. World Wide Web Presence



*Archives USA*,<sup>22</sup> a Web-based service offered by Chadwyck-Healy that updates and supersedes the *Directory of Archives and Manuscript Repositories in the United States* (last published in 1988), was used as an additional measure of program activity. It must be acknowledged, however, that strictly records management programs would not be listed in *Archives USA* (although only two such programs were funded by NHPRC).<sup>23</sup> Eleven programs (22%) of the local government programs are represented in *Archives USA*.

Archival and records management professionals holding membership in professional associations, and employed by governments who received NHPRC funding, is another good indicator of program activity. Membership in the following national associations were analyzed for this purpose: the Society of American Archivists (SAA), the Association of Records Managers and Administrators (ARMA) and the National Association of Government Archives and Records Administrators (NAGARA). However, membership in professional associations, especially individual memberships, are often at the initiative and interest of the government employee and may not necessarily reflect the commitment of the employer. That possibility notwithstanding, membership in SAA

<sup>22</sup> See <<http://archives.chadwyck.com>>.

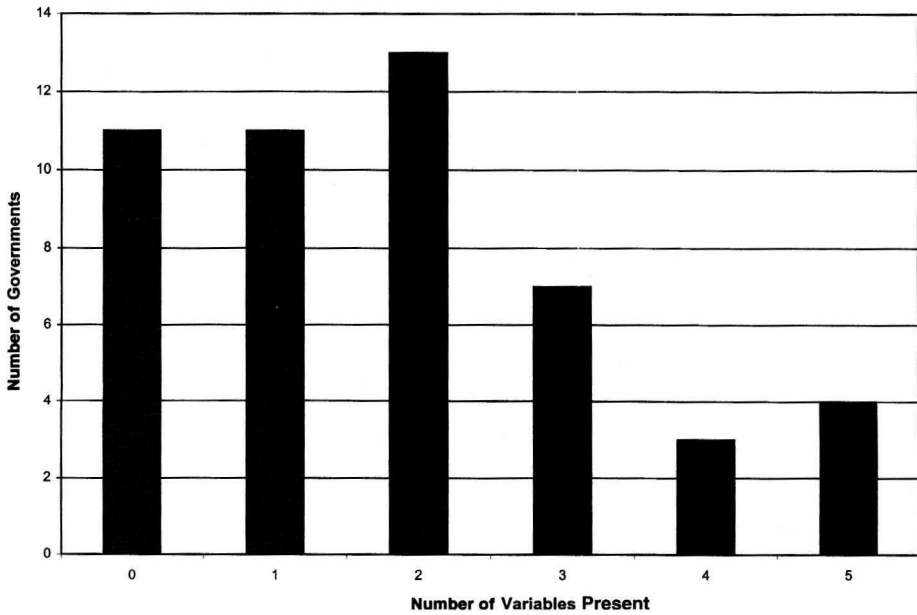
<sup>23</sup> The two programs were the City of Rome and Floyd County, Georgia (a multi-jurisdictional project) and City of Great Falls, Montana.

accounts for 16 programs (33%), ARMA accounts for 14 programs (29%), and NAGARA accounts for 12 programs (24%).<sup>24</sup>

Finally, continued program activity can be measured by the number of governments that made the effort to return this study's survey form. As noted earlier, at the beginning of this project, 49 local governments embarking on program development projects were selected for study. Each of the 49 local government programs received a survey form and were asked to report on their programs. The aggressive survey techniques resulted in a commendable return by the survey recipients, with 24 programs (49%) returning their survey forms.<sup>25</sup> Any local government program that returned a survey form is included in this count, regardless of how well or how poorly the compilers completed the form.

The evaluation of local government programs, based on each of the specific criteria described above, provides a provocative view of local government

FIGURE 3. Presence of Criteria Variables in Local Government Programs



<sup>24</sup> All applicable membership categories offered by the associations were counted. The following sources were used to check membership: Society of American Archivists (individual and organizational memberships)—*Yellow Pages*, 1996–97; ARMA International (individual memberships)—Barbara Windham, facsimile to author, 21 July 1997; and National Association of Government Archives and Records Administrators (organizational memberships)—*Membership Directory and Roster of State and National Archives and Records Officials*, 1995–96 Edition.

<sup>25</sup> In order to get the strongest response to the survey, I followed the guidelines specified in Don A. Dillman, *Mail and Telephone Surveys: The Total Design Method* (New York: Wiley, 1978). This adopted methodology included the initial mailing in mid-May 1997, a follow-up postcard two weeks thereafter, and a third mailing to non-respondents in mid-June 1997. I wish to thank Victoria Walch for the reference to the Dillman book.

program survivability. Consolidating all the variables allows us to draw some very powerful conclusions. Based on the best measurements of program activity, 4 programs (8%) have the strongest programs in that those programs meet all five variables, consisting of 1) having one or more post-grant products cataloged in OCLC, 2) having archival and records management service bureau Web pages, 3) having a program description in *Archives USA*, 4) holding membership in one or more of the national professional associations, and 5) returning the survey instrument. Less strong are those programs with any four of the variables described above ( $n = 3$ , 6%), three variables ( $n = 7$ , 14%), and two variables ( $n = 13$ , 27%). The weakest programs, and the ones that we can conclude are providing minimal, if any, archival and records management services, are those with one variable ( $n = 11$ , 22%) and no variables ( $n = 11$ , 22%) (see Figure 3). Summing the weakest programs together, based on evidence of program activity, one must conclude that a full 22 programs, 44% of those begun with NHPRC funding, are no longer providing services to their governments and the citizens of their jurisdictions.

### Recommendations

NHPRC's support has had a profound effect on those governments that received NHPRC funding, although for nearly half of the grant recipients, that effect was short-lived. For the 27 (55%) of the program development grants meeting two or more measures of continuing program activity, the NHPRC has had a lasting impact that has spawned or renewed local government programs in providing a critical government function that was perhaps unrecognized or unappreciated prior to NHPRC intervention. However, exclusive of NHPRC funds for regrant projects administered through the states, this direct funding has, unfortunately, had a marginal impact on other local governments throughout the United States.

Two questions emerge based on the results of this study: one, how can local government archives and records administrators leverage support from the mayors and county executives of their governments; and two, what is the best way for federal funding agencies to appropriate funds that will deliver the greatest impact to local governments nationwide?

### Leveraging Support

Archives and records administrators must embrace a new way of doing business to ensure that they and their programs continue and grow as we approach the new century. If we do not, mayors and county executives will reallocate our responsibility centers to other program units whose business practices are more in line with current and evolving realities.

There must be a greater synergy between the archives and records management professions. Throughout this essay, I have referred to “archives and records management administrators” and “archival and records management programs,” never drawing a distinction between the two sides of the records management life cycle. Government programs have done a commendable job of integrating archival and records management programs over their non-government, institutional-based colleagues, but more work remains to be done. In his 1955 presidential address, the Society of American Archivists’ President Morris Radoff lamented the schism between the evolving records management profession and the archival profession.<sup>26</sup> Ernst Posner echoed similar concerns to the Society of American Archivists’ Committee on State and Local Records while researching his *American State Archives*: “archives and records management are essentially one task and should be combined [and] in the undeveloped States [and by extension municipalities and counties] an archival program cannot be ‘sold’ alone but should be offered in conjunction with a records management program.”<sup>27</sup> A most casual review showed that *Records Management Quarterly* (as of 1999 *Information Management Journal*) and other journals directed toward records management professionals address those professionals as “records and information management” professionals. This is a trend, I fear, that will widen, not close, the gap between the archival and records management professions.

We also need to build organizational change into business practices. Peter Drucker reminds us that “society, community, and family are all conserving institutions. They try to maintain stability and to prevent, or at least to slow, change. But the modern organization is a destabilizer. It must be organized for innovation.”<sup>28</sup> Changes in the railroad industry did not come from changes in railroading, but rather from alternative transportation modes such as the car, the truck, and the airplane. Like the railroad industry, changes in archives and records management practices have largely been external—and we can chose to be proactive change agents, like railroad giants CSX and Norfolk Southern, or to be reactive to change like the formerly mighty Penn Central Railroad, which now lives on as a much smaller real estate company whose records grace the shelves of nine archival repositories. The archival and records management professions are certainly adapting to change. The question is how adept are we at adapting to change. I would suggest that more work needs to be done here.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>26</sup> Morris L. Radoff, “What Should Bind Us Together,” *American Archivist* 19 (January 1956): 3–9.

<sup>27</sup> Gust Skordas, “26th Annual Meeting,” *American Archivist* 26 (January 1963): 109.

<sup>28</sup> Peter F. Drucker, “The New Society of Organizations,” *Harvard Business Review* 70 (September/October 1992): 96.

<sup>29</sup> It is encouraging to see organizations such as the National Association of Government Archives and Records Administrators who selected as their 1997 annual conference theme “Sustainable Change: Getting to the Heart of Our Challenges” with keynote addresses such as “Organizational Change—What Is It And What Does It Mean For Records Professionals.”



Likewise, the local government records community must develop the expertise required to be part of, and ultimately to take the lead in, the areas of information technology and electronic recordkeeping. Work is underway by a number of local governments which have formed strategic partnerships between the records management program, the information technology department, and MIS personnel from municipal government agencies that are currently in the process of developing new, electronic record-generating, information technology systems. Records management professionals must cultivate such stakeholder relationships to discuss electronic records management issues and develop appropriate policy recommendations. These actions will ensure the continued viability of archives and records management professionals in the modern government environment.<sup>30</sup>

Archival and records management administrators need to serve the government of which they are a part *first!* The trend of some archival administrators to preserve records for the sake of history or serving the public first must end. Government archives and records programs are the corporate archives of the government, and if we do not serve our organizations first, government administrators will see marginal value in the services we do provide. The federal devolution has, and will continue to have, a detrimental effect on local government as the burdens once borne by federal and state governments are shifting to state and local governments. In this environment, archives and records programs cannot afford to be seen as luxuries.

As part of this service, archival and records management administrators need to develop sound business measurements and market those findings to government administrators. Records managers have been more effective in this regard.<sup>31</sup> Among the county executives and mayors of the 49 governments in this study, 12 (24%) are members of the National Association of Counties, 25 (51%) are members of the National League of Cities, 19 (39%) are members of the International City/County Management Association, and 22 (45%) are members of the U.S. Conference of Mayors. Government archives and records administrators need to stop talking to each other and must begin talking to the government leadership associations about how archives and records management services makes good business sense to their governments and the citizens of their jurisdictions.

Further complications confront the local government archives and records administrator. A literature search conducted in March 1998 about local gov-

<sup>30</sup> For an example of this kind of partnership, see the City of Philadelphia's "Philadelphia Electronic Records Project" stakeholders' page, available at <[http://www.phila.gov/departments/records/Divisions/RM\\_Division/RM\\_Unit/PERP/Stakeholders.htm](http://www.phila.gov/departments/records/Divisions/RM_Division/RM_Unit/PERP/Stakeholders.htm)>.

<sup>31</sup> See for example Susan K. Goodman, "Measuring the Value Added by Records and Information Management Programs," *Records Management Quarterly* 28 (April 1994): 3-13; and Julie Gable, "Net Present Value: A Financial Tool for Complicated Times," *Records Management Quarterly* 26 (January 1992): 3-5, 18.



ernment archives and records management programs in *Governing*, the major periodical read by state and local government administrators, retrieved only two articles.<sup>32</sup> A larger search in the Lexis-Nexis “news-magazine” library (comprising 153 journals) brings up twelve articles (including the two *Governing* articles). Many of the articles, while addressing archives and records management concerns, were directed toward information technology. It is clear that the profession needs to be proactive to keep archives and records programs relevant and in clear view of government leaders.

### **Federal Funding Alternatives**

Funding intermediaries instead of direct recipients might be viewed as a radical departure from past giving practices. However, I am convinced it is the best way to ensure that the limited funds the NHPRC has at its disposal for the entire Records Program will be the most wisely deployed and used. The NHPRC’s strategic plan, approved on June 19, 1997, specified that the Commission would concentrate its efforts and its resources on three equal strategic goals within its broader mission: 1) completing publication of the Founding Fathers papers; 2) helping archivists solve electronic records problems and helping prepare for electronic publication of documents; and 3) collaborating with state records boards to widen the range of protected records available in archives to scholars, students, and the public.<sup>33</sup> The last goal is in line with the broader federal block grant program, an approach to funding federal programs in which federal funds are allocated under one authority and the level of rules and reporting requirements, usually associated with categorical funding, are theoretically reduced.

Under such an approach, the state historical records advisory boards should serve as leaders in articulating a strategic vision for archives and records within their states. Unfortunately, the state boards have played a limited role in doing so with more or less blanket approval of NHPRC grants submitted for their review and approval.<sup>34</sup> The third goal of the new NHPRC strategic plan strengthens the state boards and the state authorities to take a much more proactive

<sup>32</sup> *Governing*’s monthly circulation was 87,947 copies as of December 1997, as reported by BPA, International. *Governing* was nominated as a finalist for a 1996 National Magazine Award for general excellence in the under-100,000 circulation category. The following search strategy “hlead (Archiv! or (Record w/3 Manag!)) w/25 Local or city or county or municipal! w/2 government)” directed the Lexis-Nexis research service to find all articles with the phrase “archives” or “records management” within 25 words of local, city, county, or municipal governments in the title or the lead paragraph.

<sup>33</sup> “NHPRC: Commission Confirms Priority for Founding Fathers’ Papers” Press Release, June 19, 1997. See also <<http://www.nara.gov/nhprc/strategy.html>>.

<sup>34</sup> An internal NHPRC study showed that the state boards recommended full funding for 82% of the application they reviewed; outside reviewers recommended 52%, and the Commission approved 45%, out of 225 proposals submitted to the NHPRC between 1987 and 1989. National Historical Publications and Records Commission, “Summary of State Boards Review” (National Historical Publications and Records Commission, Washington, D.C.: n.d., photocopy).

approach with all archival and records programs within their states. State authorities should use this new funding muscle to strengthen the way they work and provide services. For example, the most revealing weakness in local government programs is how little they rely on state authorities' services and products. As reported above, a full 22 (45%) of the NHPRC-funded local governments used none of the state authorities' services—meetings, training programs, record schedules, and technical leaflets. In order to further develop local government record programs within the states, the state authorities must harness the NHPRC dollars, hire more staff, and send them out in the field to proselytize the unconverted. Increased personnel from the state authorities, armed with records schedules, technical leaflets, return on investment and risk mitigation data, and regrant applications, will most surely affect a powerful change so that municipalities and counties throughout the states can begin and ultimately embrace archival and records management methodologies in their communities.

The local government records programs slight reliance on the state authorities' service is perhaps one of the local government records community's major failings. While local government programs share some of the blame for not seeking support when offered (e.g., using state promulgated records schedules), fault also rests with the state authorities and the limited staffing they have devoted to serving the political subdivisions within their states. An analysis of state authority personnel dedicated to serving local governments per the number of local governments averages 1 state authority official to every 680 governments, with New Mexico having the highest (1:43) and Michigan having the lowest (1:2,722).<sup>35</sup> Further exasperating the problem of service delivery is the geographical distance between state capitals and the larger cities in the states. This geographic characteristic, concludes John Daly in his study of Chicago, "has been the basis of a usually unspoken excuse by most state archives to make no real efforts to deal with the archival problems of major cities. Whatever the reason, the notorious fact remains that cities in the United States are the governmental units worst served in the care of archival records."<sup>36</sup>

To leverage additional new, non-federal dollars to support archives and records management programs within the states, the NHPRC should require the states' legislative bodies to match (based on a to-be-determined formula) the federal block grants to the state authorities. Doing so will garner new funds to support archival and records management programs that direct recipients have largely accounted for cost share of their project budget as a bookkeeping exer-

<sup>35</sup> Twenty-six states replied to e-mail and telephone calls made during July 1997. The number of local governments per state is taken from Bureau of the Census, *Statistical Abstract of the United States*, 295.

<sup>36</sup> John Daly, "State Archives and Metropolitan Records: The Case of Chicago," *American Archivist* 51 (Fall 1988): 474.

<sup>37</sup> H. G. Jones had similar concerns, stating that "the task of the National Historical Publications and Records Commission, then, is one of building incentive." See his "The Pink Elephant Revisited," *American Archivist* 43 (Fall 1980): 481.

cise.<sup>37</sup> This match of state dollars can be justified, at least for local government programs, as local governments are political subdivisions of the states, whose records are legally state property.<sup>38</sup>

The NHPRC and other federal funding agencies should continue to fund true model programs and applied research and development projects such as the 31 electronic records projects funded by the NHPRC.<sup>39</sup> Model programs and applied R&D are vitally important, allowing for new thinking to be tested and the adoption (or rejection) of new professional practices. It is important work and only the NHPRC and other public and private grantmakers typically provide the seed money for such endeavors.

The NHPRC and other grantmakers should also continue their support for professional associations. There has been much positive work from these groups, and more could and should be done in this area. Under the block grant scenario described above, the state authorities' personnel would be greatly aided if armed with expanded products and services. Examples of past work that needs renewed attention and expansion (all funded by the NHPRC) are: the highly successful NHPRC-funded *Local Government Records Series* jointly produced by the National Association of Government Archives and Records Administrators and the International Institute of Municipal Clerks; and H. G. Jones's *Local Government Records, An Introduction to Their Management, Preservation, and Use* and Bruce Dearstyne's *The Management of Local Government Records: A Guide for Local Officials*, both published by the American Association for State and Local History.<sup>40</sup>

I propose these recommendations not to criticize the NHPRC grantsmaking program, but to begin a dialogue on the role of public and private grantmakers, and their place in society.<sup>41</sup> Judith Simpson, senior program officer at the George Gund Foundation, stated in remarks at a February 1996 conference discussing the federal devolution and its impact on state and local governments, that grantmakers must take risks. Simpson identified opportunities for grantmakers: 1) fund baseline data now; 2) provide technical assistance to state governments; 3) fund evaluation; 4) educate grantmakers; 5) educate legislatures; 6) build intellectual capital at the regional level; 7) support advocacy; and 8) come to the table.<sup>42</sup>

Simpson's third point, fund evaluation, warrants further discussion here. The grantsmaking literature is silent on evaluations of grantsmaking and the suc-

<sup>38</sup> Exclusive of home rule counties and municipalities.

<sup>39</sup> See <<http://www.nara.gov/nhprc/ergrants.html>>.

<sup>40</sup> H. G. Jones, *Local Government Records, An Introduction to Their Management, Preservation, and Use* (Nashville, Tenn.: American Association for State and Local History, 1980); and Bruce W. Dearstyne, *The Management of Local Government Records: A Guide for Local Officials* (Nashville, Tenn.: American Association for State and Local History, 1988).

<sup>41</sup> The author has been a grant recipient of four NHPRC grants in two institutions, for which he is grateful.

<sup>42</sup> Margaret Schmid Odell, "You Say You Want a Devolution," *Foundation News & Commentary* 37 (May/June 1996): 9.

cess or failure of such funding endeavors.<sup>43</sup> As the money machine in Washington is quickly being turned off, it is critical to determine what works, what does not, and why. This essay serves as a first attempt to evaluate the effect of grantsmaking by focusing on one funding source, the NHPRC, and one subpopulation, local governments. The grantsmaking communities, along with other recipient subpopulations, must continue the dialogue. Systematic evaluations must be designed and undertaken for other recipient subpopulations—electronic records programs, documentary editions, manuscript processing projects, etc.; and other recipient populations whose work is largely undertaken with external funds. This level of analysis is needed, I believe, so the NHPRC can state with certainty that they are meeting Goal 2.8 of the National Archives and Records Administration Strategic Plan without exclusive reliance on applicant reports.<sup>44</sup> More work remains to be done so we can truly understand the cost benefit of such public investment.

<sup>43</sup> See Willoughby G. Walling, "Are Foundations Effective? Who Knows?" *Foundation News & Commentary* 38 (September/October 1997): 39–40.

<sup>44</sup> National Archives and Records Administration, *Ready Access to Essential Evidence: The Strategic Plan of The National Archives and Records Administration, 1997–2007* (Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, 1997), 31.