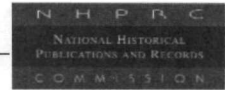


## SPECIAL SECTION



# The Concept of a National Records Program and Its Continued Relevance for a New Century

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## Abstract

Using a twelve-point statement of National Records Program Elements, this article examines the concept of a national records program as it was endorsed and has been adapted by the National Historical Publications and Records Commission from 1988 to the present. It provides the background and context for the Commission's endorsement of this statement and lists the elements adopted. In each of the areas defined, the article reviews and assesses NHPRC-supported efforts and reflects selectively on the progress made by the archival profession in the United States. Finally, noting the NHPRC's role as a collaborative mechanism, the article concludes that the concept of a national records program has continued relevance, if the archival profession and its partners can define and work together on three or four focused goals.

At its February 1988 meeting, the National Historical Publications and Records Commission resolved that it "endorses the twelve-point statement of National Records Program Elements and encourages staff to work with the historical records community toward the implementation of these elements."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> National Historical Publications and Records Commission (NHPRC). Commission Meeting files. Folder 1702-1, Transcript, February 18, 1988. The document, "National Records Program Elements," was published in *Annotation: The Newsletter of the National Historical Publications and Records Commission* 16 (April 1988): 5.

This article will examine three questions relevant to the concept of a national records program as embodied in the National Records Program Elements (hereinafter referred to as Program Elements). First, what were the elements that made up that program definition and the general context that gave rise to their definition and its adoption? Second, how were the concept and these elements applied through the NHPRC records program since 1988; what was accomplished and not accomplished? Third, does the concept have continuing relevance for the archival profession as we enter a new century, and, if so, why, and in what form?

### **The Program Definition and the General Context of Its Adoption**

The Program Elements as endorsed by the Commission in 1988 were the product of the dialogue between the Commission and its constituents about the concept of a national records program and the role of the Commission in adapting and applying that concept. This dialogue had been ongoing since the addition of a records program created the NHPRC in 1974.<sup>2</sup> The Program Elements were based on a document first presented by the Steering Committee of the State Historical Records Coordinators in August 1985 and then significantly modified by an ad hoc group of state coordinators, historical documentary editors, and historians meeting in the new Maryland Hall of Records in Annapolis in September 1986. As they were revised at the Annapolis meeting, the Program Elements also represented a renewed attempt by archivists, documentary editors, and historians to cooperate in order to increase the resources available for documentary efforts of all kinds.<sup>3</sup>

Among the numerous national reports and agendas produced in the 1980s,<sup>4</sup> the Program Elements provide a useful framework to evaluate the concept of a national records program and its application specifically by the Commission and by the wider archival and historical professions. The Program Elements are particularly apt for this evaluation because, although not formally adopted by many archival and professional associations, they were endorsed by the Commission, and they define at a high level what a national records program should achieve. A critical evaluation of the application of the Program Elements, while lacking the specific goals and measures required by today's results-based budgeting and strategic planning, can still contribute to an ongoing dialogue

<sup>2</sup> Frank G. Burke, "The Beginnings of the NHPRC Records Program," *American Archivist* 63 (Spring/Summer 2000): 21–26.

<sup>3</sup> Nancy Sahli, "A National Records Program: Where Is It Now, Where Is It Going?" (Paper delivered at the State Coordinators' Conference, Boston, Massachusetts, November 5–6, 1987, NHPRC, Director for State Program files, Folder, State Coordinators—1987 Conference).

<sup>4</sup> A partial list of these might include the following: *The Committee on the Records of Government Report, Planning for the Archival Profession: A Report of the SAA Task Force on Goals and Priorities, Documenting America: Assessing the Condition of Historical Records, Preservation Needs in State Archives*, and a national conference on preservation programs.

between the Commission and the professions with which it works about what constitutes progress and how we can and should measure performance.

Before turning to this evaluation, however, it is important to point out that two areas of potential conflict relating to the concept of a national records program and its application by the Commission were left unresolved in the Program Elements. First, was the national records program to be a federally directed, top-down, hierarchical program or was it to be a grass roots, bottom-up, loosely coordinated cooperative program?<sup>5</sup> Second, what was the relationship to be between the national records program envisioned in the Program Elements and the NHPRC with its existing Records and Publications Programs? In retrospect, a lack of clear resolution on these two points not only diminished opportunities for coordinated action but also may have contributed to the increased likelihood of conflict among the Commission's constituencies.

In the absence of a formal policy resolving the first issue, the looser construct of the national records program is the only one that can be said to have been applied. In this bottom-up cooperative approach, the NHPRC's Records Program is not synonymous with the national records program envisioned in the Program Elements, but represents only a part of that program. Moreover, the NHPRC's overall program is not described fully by the Program Elements, because the Commission's statutory mission makes clear that its program includes both records and publications.

#### **Review of the NHPRC's Application of the Program Elements**

The twelve Program Elements as endorsed by the Commission are enumerated in Figure 1. While this evaluation will focus on NHPRC's efforts to apply the elements, it will at the same time reflect selectively on the progress made by the archival profession in the United States and its allies in the areas defined by the elements. Not every element will be reviewed in detail, but the review should permit an assessment of what has been achieved in implementing a loosely constructed, cooperative, national records program.

#### ***Program Element # 1: A process that accurately describes current historical records conditions in the nation.***

The process of describing historical records conditions in the United States has been a key concern of the NHPRC since well before the inception of the

<sup>5</sup> These two views were presented in papers delivered to the State Coordinators' Conference, Boston, Massachusetts, November 5-6, 1987; Sahli, "National Records Program;" Larry J. Hackman, "Speculations on a National Historical Records Policy," (Paper delivered at the State Coordinators' Conference, NHPRC, Director for State Program files, Folder, State Coordinators—1987 Conference).

**FIGURE 1.** Program Elements of a National Historical Records Program

1. A process that accurately describes current historical records conditions in the nation.
2. A consultative mechanism that regularly specifies principal historical records needs and priorities, and suggests how to address them most effectively.
3. An active program to communicate these needs, and the reasons for addressing them, to the general public and to the wide variety of publics that must be informed about and involved in these issues.
4. Work to influence key parties (the Congress, governors, legislators, national programs and associations, major interest groups, etc.) to act on these principal needs.
5. Major efforts to increase funding for historical records programs in the United States.
6. Advice to, and cooperation with, the National Archives, especially in respect to the Archives' activities affecting non-Federal historical records or non-Federal archival programs.
7. A program to establish and promulgate canons of good practice for historical records programs.
8. Provisions for research and exchange of information needed to identify, preserve and make available historical records.
9. Coordination of existing Federal grant and advisory programs pertaining to historical records.
10. A strong partnership between the national historical records program and the states to deal with fundamental needs that can best be approached within a state framework.
11. Promotion of documentary editions.
12. Wider use of primary historical documents in education at all levels.

records program twenty-five years ago. Although the focus of this analysis is on the period from 1988 to the present, in evaluating efforts to address this concern it is important to understand how NHPRC's efforts to describe historical records conditions have evolved over time. *The Guide to Archives and Manuscripts in the United States*, edited by Philip M. Hamer, was the first culmination of this concern and appeared in 1961. It was succeeded by two editions of the *Directory of Archives and Manuscripts Repositories in the United States (DAMRUS)*, the first published in 1978 directly by the NHPRC though the Government Printing Office, the second published in 1988 by the Oryx Press. The *DAMRUS* project was not organizationally part of the NHPRC Records Program and was aimed initially at producing automated descriptions of records holdings rather than describing conditions of records. Following the creation of the NHPRC's Records Program, *DAMRUS* developed into a product and project with a broader concept—to build a national database on archival and manuscript repositories, holdings, and condition of collections. As Frank Burke noted in the foreword to the 1978 edition of *DAMRUS*, "The Commission's broadened program [the addition of the records program] . . . gave it an added incentive for determining what the range of possible applicants was and what national records problems existed."<sup>6</sup>

<sup>6</sup> *Directory of Archives and Manuscripts Repositories in the United States* (Washington, D.C.: National Historical Publications and Records Commission, 1978), 7; See also, Richard Noble, "The NHPRC Data Base Project: Building the 'Interstate Highway System,'" *American Archivist* 51 (Winter and Spring 1988): 98–104.



This *DAMRUS* project also informed and complemented another NHPRC initiative to “accurately describe current historical records conditions in the nation”—the state assessment reports. Beginning in 1982, when the Commission was threatened with fiscal extinction, it decided to fund and support a series of assessment studies of archival needs and conditions in each of the states, or in as many as its limited resources could achieve. In this way the Commission hoped to have a lasting impact on the archival landscape of the country. When it survived as an agency, it also extended its commitment to produce an assessment study in each state. At the same time, the limited staff and resources available to the Commission, as well as evolving archival descriptive and program standards and the rapidly changing technology and tools available to the profession, led to the decision that the indefinite continuation of a centralized or even centrally directed NHPRC database or guide project was not sustainable.<sup>7</sup>

In 1992, when the Commission undertook its own initial long-range planning effort, it adopted as one of its five goals “assuring the preservation of the nation’s documentary heritage through state collaborative efforts” and made state board planning one of four top-priority objectives in its plan. A revised plan, adopted in 1997, continues to support collaboration with the state boards as one of three co-equal strategic goals. Both versions of the NHPRC plan provided for Commission funding to support not only planning but also projects conducted by the boards to implement their plans. The state board planning effort, initiated with the implementation of the Commission’s plan in 1993, did not mandate a uniform collection of data by each state. It emphasized that the states should tailor their planning projects to address their particular conditions and experience, but by providing funding and a mandate to plan, the NHPRC has achieved sustained, long-term support for Program Element 1: “A *process* that accurately describes current historical records conditions in the nation” (emphasis added). Over time, a number of factors, including evolving descriptive standards, tools, and technology, have affected the way this effort is carried out. In its support of the states, the focus has shifted intentionally from product to process, i.e., from the production of a printed report, database, or directory to the development of a strategic plan and the attempt to institutionalize such a planning process as part of an ongoing program.

In addition, these more recent planning efforts have been augmented by a series of reports produced under the auspices of the Council of State Historical Records Coordinators (COSHRC), an organization composed of the

<sup>7</sup> Two related professional initiatives during the mid-1980s to facilitate the collection and analysis of information on historical records conditions nationally received limited but important Commission support: SAA’s work to analyze and report on its census of archival institutions, and NAGARA’s effort to define and establish a uniform reporting program for state archival and records programs. Both professional organizations struggled to develop these projects as self-sustaining ongoing mechanisms. While efforts to identify a publisher that might help sustain the SAA census through the publication of directories based on the data were not successful, NAGARA has continued to gather information on state archival and records programs and report this data to its membership, first in *Clearinghouse* and more recently in occasional separate issuances.

State Historical Records Coordinators and the Deputy State Coordinators who provide leadership to the State Historical Records Advisory Boards established in almost all of the states and territories as central advisory bodies on historical records. *Where History Begins: A Report on Historical Records Repositories in the United States*, issued in 1998, includes information on more than 3,500 repositories that collect and hold records produced by private individuals and organizations. This report joins two earlier ones produced by COSHRC in cooperation with NAGARA, which focused on state archival and records programs. The most recent of these, *Maintaining State Records in an Era of Change*, was issued in 1996 and is available at NHPRC's web page.<sup>8</sup>

Taken together, COSHRC's reports, the state board planning efforts, along with other publications, surveys and planning efforts published or sponsored by SAA, NAGARA and other national associations, present substantially more information about archives in the United States than was available a decade ago. With the developing graduate education programs focusing on archives, further analysis of this information and sophistication in its collection can be expected. It is far from a perfect, scientific, or comprehensive picture, but it does give us a refined sense of the diversity of our archival system, demonstrating dramatically the tremendous variety and number of institutions and organizations that share stewardship for our nation's historical records. While some may be discouraged by the preponderance of small, volunteer-based organizations and others by the continued problems that these studies document, they provide evidence of vital, widespread, energetic, and persistent grass roots efforts to preserve our country's records.

**Program Element # 2: A consultative mechanism that regularly specifies principal historical records needs and priorities, and suggests how to address them most effectively.**

As Ann Newhall has observed, the NHPRC and its programs provide a major national consultative mechanism for regularly specifying needs and priorities.<sup>9</sup> It brings together representatives of the major national historical and archival professional organizations in the United States along with representatives of all three branches of the federal government, the Library of Congress, and the National Archives and Records Administration. The most obvious way

<sup>8</sup> Victoria Irons Walch, *Where History Begins: A Report on Historical Records Repositories in the United States*, Council of State Historical Records Coordinators (Indianapolis, Ind., May 1998); 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). There is a good summary of the latter two reports in Walch, "State Archives in 1997: Diverse Conditions, Common Directions," *American Archivist* 60 (Spring 1997): 132–51. The URL for NHPRC's web page is <<http://www.nara.gov/nhprc/>>.

<sup>9</sup> Ann Clifford Newhall, "The NHPRC in the New Records Age," *American Archivist* 63 (Spring/Summer 2000): 69–70.

consultation occurs is in the meetings and other communications among the members who serve on the Commission.

At the national level, the NHPRC, through its members and staff, annually participates in the national meetings of the professional organizations that are represented on the Commission and regularly participates in numerous other meetings of national and regional associations and organizations. In addition to participating in these meetings, NHPRC staff serve in non-governance capacities on committees and task forces of these organizations.<sup>10</sup> The Commission has always encouraged such participation as a means for individual professional development for its staff, as a necessary action for maintaining its effectiveness in evaluating a wide range of proposals and projects, and as an essential part of the Commission's role in planning and identifying national priorities in American documentary and records fields. In addition, the Commission funds occasional special national conferences, such as the just concluded National Forum on Archival Continuing Education or earlier conferences on electronic records and the documentation of the immigrant experience. Finally, the Commission continues to fund and participate in the work of numerous task forces and working groups undertaking collaboration in a variety of areas.

The Commission's ongoing partnership with the states provides it with extensive additional consultative mechanisms at both the national and state levels. Commission staff meet regularly with the Council of State Historical Records Coordinators, and also meet individually with state coordinators and state board members and attend regular meetings of state boards as much as travel funds and itineraries permit. Appointed through their states, more than six hundred professionals and concerned citizens, a majority of whom have records or archival experience, participate as members of the state boards. Together they provide a broad grass roots network for regular consultation.

At an individual level, NHPRC staff have contact on an annual basis with hundreds of records officers, librarians, archivists, state and local officials, organization officers, historians, editors, educators, and concerned citizens from all over the country wishing to discuss potential projects, to confer on challenges and opportunities in administering current projects, or to request advice in addressing pressing preservation or records concerns.

The results of all of this consultation are plans and agendas at both the national and state levels, as well as strategies to achieve them. Does this mean that all of the plans and agendas fit into a nicely resolved hierarchical national plan and strategy? Certainly not. It has meant, most notably in the debate leading up to the Commission's adoption of its 1997 strategic plan, serious conflict among the various participating viewpoints and constituencies. While points of disagreement can certainly still be found, more importantly, points of agree-

<sup>10</sup> This is done in strict observation of the Commission's own separate conflict of interest policy as well as applicable policies and standards established for employees of the National Archives and Records Administration and the federal government.

ment have been identified on which concerted action is being taken. Most importantly, a national consultative mechanism has been sustained and strengthened that gives us an avenue for coordinated national action.

The Society of American Archivists is currently engaged in its own national planning effort for the archival profession; other national archival and historical organizations also engage regularly in planning for other segments of the archival profession or allied professions. Rather than being duplicative or competing, these efforts are crucial both for the organizations involved and for the wider universe of historical records concerns. They demonstrate success at institutionalizing planning as an ongoing concern and function of the profession, and they are a necessary prerequisite to coordinated action at the national level.

***Program Element # 3: An active program to communicate these needs, and the reasons for addressing them, to the general public and to the wide variety of publics that must be informed about and involved in these issues.***

The NHPRC can point to a wide variety of efforts to communicate historical records needs and priorities to a wider public. At the national level, NHPRC's own 1996–97 planning effort attracted significant comment not only from its professional constituencies, but also in the general press. A good deal of this comment was critical of the plan initially adopted. It is not productive to renew that debate, and any summary of such a controversy risks misrepresenting particular arguments or points of view. Suffice it to say that much of the debate centered on whether the Commission would or should give priority to the records or publications part of its program.

A few articles did provide follow-up coverage on the revised plan the Commission finally adopted in June 1997, but, as frequently happens, the most extensive coverage was of the conflict and debate, not of its resolution and compromise. The compromise achieved recognized three co-equal priorities and the Commission's continued commitment to both aspects of its program, records *and* publications. Nevertheless, the planning process did provide an opportunity to communicate archival issues and concerns to a wider public, and made clear the power of having a concrete, focused, and succinct message, as well as the drawbacks of not having one.

From many archivists' point of view, developing such a message is something at which the Commission and the archival profession as a whole have not been successful. Although records are in the news almost daily, the value of archives and records to our country and the important role of archivists and records managers in the "Knowledge Age" is not widely understood or appreciated. This is not a new problem, as many SAA presidents and leaders in the profession have attested.

There are many contributing factors to this problem: the diverse backgrounds and interests in the profession, the complexity of the professional concerns, the minuscule size of the profession in comparison to other information professions, archivists' seemingly innate distaste for the spotlight, and an unwillingness (some would say inability) to expend dollars and devote energy to communication. In the specific case of federal agencies such as the NHPRC, there are legitimate statutory and regulatory limitations on expending public dollars in any way that might constitute political lobbying or other types of agency self-promotion or advertising. Within these necessary and appropriate limits, the Commission pursues its statutory mission "To ensure understanding of our nation's past by *promoting* nationwide, the identification, preservation, and dissemination of essential historical documentation" (emphasis added).

The NHPRC has pursued this mission by supporting planning and educational projects in addition to its own planning effort, by seeking to assure that the products of its grant projects are widely disseminated, and by reexamining how it can more effectively use its limited resources of staff and grant dollars to support this mission. For most of this effort, as for much of its work, the NHPRC depends on partners—on the people who actually propose and undertake the projects that it supports. Communication of the issues, results, and products of those projects begins with effective and timely reporting of the progress on grants, and the willingness to share both achievements and challenges with colleagues, the profession at large, and the officials and citizens who will benefit from this work. NHPRC guidelines provide formal advice on these responsibilities and encourage all participants to use the opportunities that grant funding and projects offer to explain the value of archival work. Many projects are highly successful at this and archivists should emulate good examples in this area as well as in the more technical aspects of archives and records work.<sup>11</sup>

The NHPRC staff support communication efforts through a variety of traditional means such as issuing press releases and focusing its newsletter, *Annotation*, on Commission projects and products. It also regularly deposits copies of all products in the Archives Library Information Center at the National Archives and Records Administration's Library, and posts this information and links to projects and products on the recently redesigned NHPRC web site. In 1998, Mary A. Giunta was designated as the NHPRC's first Director for Communications and Outreach. The Commission members share the NHPRC staff's concern that the products and results achieved by our partners,

<sup>11</sup> Good examples abound. See, for instance, the South Carolina Historical Records Advisory Board's web page at <<http://www.state.sc.us/scdah/shrab1.htm>> or Model Editions web page at <<http://adh.sc.edu/>>. In video, cable public access stations in North Carolina recently rebroadcast a program, done as part of a State Historical Records Advisory Board regrant project, providing basic information on archives and archival work. On public television, a recent documentary on Elizabeth Cady Stanton featured interviews with Dr. Ann Gordon, Editor of the Stanton-Anthony Papers. For more traditional means such as newsletters and awards, see the awards garnered by the New York Folklore Society for its archival work through a series of projects, <<http://www.nyfolklore.org/progs/arch.html>>.

as well as some of the problems and challenges of archival and records work, be shared widely. Though much remains to be done in the area of communication, NHPRC is undertaking new initiatives to reach out to its constituent groups, allied professions, and others.

***Program Element # 4: Work to influence key parties (the Congress, governors, legislators, national programs and associations, major interest groups, etc.) to act on these principal needs.***

A large part of this element is specifically political and, as has already been noted, political advocacy is not and cannot be part of NHPRC's program, since the Commission is funded with public tax dollars. The responsibility for influencing key parties, at least in the political sphere, falls to individual citizens and their organizations.

***Program Element # 5: Major efforts to increase funding for historical records programs in the United States.***

The last decade has seen limited success at increasing funding for the NHPRC and for historical records programs nationally. The current level of \$6 million in NHPRC's discretionary grant funding represents an increase of 20 percent or \$1 million over the amount appropriated in 1990, and also reflects some stabilization at that level. This modest increase has been achieved during a decade which has focused on downsizing and limiting government operations and expenditures.

The Commission has also achieved success in leveraging additional support for records programs. NHPRC's regrants to state boards illustrate such success.<sup>12</sup> The Commission policy of requiring that its applicants give substantial support to all total project costs through cost sharing and/or matching funds also assures the stretching of every grant dollar.

Cost-sharing requirements, while leveraging the limited public funding available, also put severe pressure on already strapped records and archival programs. The recent Council of State Historical Records Coordinators' report, *Where History Begins*, found that only about 10 percent of the 3,500 repositories surveyed reported annual budgets of \$50,000 or more. Most are small programs with very limited discretionary budgets.<sup>13</sup> On the positive side, the same report concluded that there is more stability in the last few years and modest optimism among many about chances for increased support in the next three years. Of

<sup>12</sup> Newhall, "The NHPRC in the New Records Age," 78–80.

<sup>13</sup> Walch, *Where History Begins*, 13.



course, the current environment is one of sustained economic growth and limited inflation, but also one which inherited a legacy of chronically underfunded historical records programs.<sup>14</sup> Sufficient resources are still a major problem for archives and records programs, a fact that can be discouraging in the light of the challenges to be confronted.

***Program Element # 6: Advice to, and cooperation with, the National Archives, especially in respect to Archives' activities affecting non-Federal historical records or non-Federal archival programs.***

As noted under Program Element #1, the Commission provides a regular consultative mechanism that brings together the Archivist of the United States and representatives of the major national archival and historical associations in the United States. The Commission's focus on programs dealing with non-federal records complements NARA's program that is responsible for the essential evidence created or maintained by the federal government. NARA has an active program for regularly consulting with a wide range of officials, professionals, and the general public on issues of mutual concern.

Coordination with NARA is appropriate and necessary. With NHPRC's Executive Director serving on the Archivist's leadership team, there are regular opportunities for high-level exchange with key NARA office heads. In the area of electronic records, the Commission has benefited greatly from the addition of Mark Conrad to its staff as Director for Technology Initiatives. Conrad has extensive past experience working with electronic records, on an NHPRC-supported project and in NARA's electronic records program. He also currently serves on NARA's Fast Track Team, which is identifying currently available "best practices," and provides guidance quickly on electronic records issues that urgently confront federal record keepers now—information that can be used while work goes forward on developing more complete and longer-term solutions. This promotes easier sharing of experience and findings in this area between Commission grantees and NARA staff, and helps to assure the maximum benefit from the electronic records work undertaken.

***Program Element # 7: A program to establish and promulgate canons of good practice for historical records programs.***

The NHPRC Records Program has consistently supported the establishment and promulgation of canons of good practice for historical records pro-

<sup>14</sup> Walch, *Where History Begins*, 29. 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, 1983), 5.



grams. Since “canons of good practice” is a very general phrase, for the purposes of this brief discussion, this program element is defined as including standards, guidelines, conventions, and other devices to capture and transmit good archival and records management practices relating to historical records. It involves a number of different processes, including research, development and adoption, dissemination, and revision.<sup>15</sup>

At the most fundamental level, this program element can involve research, where new knowledge or methodology is required before a standard or guideline can be developed. Another level of the process is development and adoption. This is necessarily a collaborative process. As Vicki Walch comments in her introduction to *Standards for Archival Description*, standards are products of consensus.<sup>16</sup> Usually adoption also implies a formal process including review and adoption by a body with recognized authority in a relevant area. Yet another part of the process is dissemination, which can involve publication, education and training, and selected implementation. Finally, review and revision can occur at various stages in the process, and the various parts of the process are not necessarily sequential.

In the past decade, NHPRC has funded projects utilizing every process outlined above relating to various archival and records concerns. Certainly some of the most important work that the Commission has supported has related to this program element. Several examples illustrating different parts of the process demonstrate the NHPRC’s active role in this important area. It is also important, however, to recognize that the Commission’s role is as a facilitator, funder, and promoter of these activities, not as the primary action agent for their accomplishment. Although the Commission has a statutorily authorized educational role, it is not a research agency, a standards body, a publisher, or archival institution per se. These roles fall to other partners in the decentralized archival system of the United States.

The NHPRC’s support for research will be discussed under Element #8 which deals specifically with research and the exchange of information. In the area of the development and adoption of canons of good practice, NHPRC’s involvement can be illustrated by the project that produced the SAA handbook, *Standards for Archival Description*.<sup>17</sup> Not only was this effort significant in compil-

<sup>15</sup> For more careful definitions of the various types of standards see, Victoria Irons Walch, comp., *Standards for Archival Description: A Handbook* (Chicago: The Society of American Archivists, 1994), available at SAA’s website at <<http://www.archivists.org/catalog/stds99/index.html>>.

<sup>16</sup> Walch, *Standards for Archival Description*.

<sup>17</sup> The project is described in detail in Victoria Irons Walch, “Report of the Working Group on Standards for Archival Description,” *American Archivist* 52 (Fall 1989): 446. For a review of the history of automated description and descriptive standards during this period, I am also indebted to Lisa Weber, for copies of her unpublished papers, “The National Historical Publications and Records Commission and Statewide Databases: Current Status, Problems, and Possibilities,” presented to the National Meeting of the State Historical Records Coordinators, Washington, D.C., 1 November 1989, and “Putting Archival Cooperation into Focus,” presented to the Society of American Archivists’ Meeting, Montreal, Quebec, Canada, 4 September 1992.

ing many of the standards and guidelines that apply to archival work, but also in contributing to the growing professional acceptance of the importance and applicability of standards, whether in the area of archival description, archival education, or other areas of practice. While many different factors and efforts led to the establishment in 1990 of what is now SAA's Standards Committee, certainly this particular project contributed significantly to the development of this mechanism for the archival profession.

Although developing good practices and having a formal method for their adoption are key parts of this program element, equally important are the promulgation and selective dissemination of the good practices. This is done through the development of tools and case studies, publications, and educational offerings. The NHPRC has had a significant role in supporting promulgation both through publication and the development of curricula and educational tools. An excellent recent example can be found in the area of descriptive standards in the support given to SAA for the development of its Descriptive Standards Curriculum. Other examples involving publications include SAA's Archival Fundamentals manuals and its *Oral History Cataloging Manual*.

Selective dissemination of canons of good practice helps to assure effective promulgation of the standard to the wider range of allied professions and groups that archivists work with on a regular basis. It can involve projects like those undertaken by State Historical Records Advisory Boards in a number of states in conjunction with their planning or regrant programs to identify and distribute information on good practices.<sup>18</sup>

The NHPRC and the archival profession in the United States have made considerable progress in establishing and promulgating canons of good practice, standards, and tools. Nevertheless, they must be applied and used properly and vigorously, and then evaluated and improved. Significant challenges and questions remain about how to sustain meaningful involvement of United States archivists in the development and adoption of standards and how best to carry forward the educational and publications programs that help to assure widespread adoption and use. At this writing, it is encouraging to see a number of important efforts going forward at the national level to address these concerns, including SAA's own planning process, the NHPRC-funded National Forum on Continuing Archival Education sponsored by the Council of State Historical Records Coordinators and the American Association for State and Local History, the National Association of Government Archives and Records Administrators' focus on education for its 2000 annual meeting, and the

<sup>18</sup> Recent examples include the Wisconsin SHRAP's development of best practices manuals in conjunction with the Wisconsin Association of Public Librarians (WAPL), and the Registers in Probate Association (RIPA), see the board's web page at <<http://www.shsw.wisc.edu/archives/whrab/bpdesc.html>>; for the recently published *Manual for Religious Archives and Recordkeeping* published by the South Carolina SHRAP, see the board's web page at <<http://www.state.sc.us/scdah/shrab1.html>>.

creation of the Task Force on Education by the Academy of Certified Archivists.

***Program Element # 8: Provisions for research and exchange of information needed to identify, preserve and make available historical records.***

The best example of the NHPRC support for research has been in the area of electronic records. Ann Newhall's article covers the Commission's efforts in this area in much more detail than can be attempted here, but the Commission's leadership can be illustrated by briefly highlighting a couple of key projects and developments.

First, the Commission funded the Working Meeting on Research Issues in Electronic Records nearly a decade ago. A key purpose of that meeting was to establish a national agenda for research in the archival management of electronic records. Rather than a research project, this project represented some of the "exchange of information" necessary for fruitful research to be undertaken. The project made a significant contribution to establishing a national agenda for research in electronic records.<sup>19</sup> The Commission itself endorsed the research agenda coming out of the working meeting and made electronic records one of the top priorities of its 1992 plan. In the five years that followed the publication of the agenda, the Commission funded more than twenty electronic records projects, and a 1996 conference held at the University of Michigan acknowledged the critical role that the Commission had played in establishing and launching that agenda. That conference also pointed out the need for sustaining NHPRC's effort and expanding it to a much broader partnership to support ongoing research.<sup>20</sup> Subsequently, the Commission confirmed its continuing support for the research agenda and electronic records as one of the three co-equal goals in its revised strategic plan adopted in June 1997.

Recent funding for projects addressing the research agenda such as the United States component of the International Research on Permanent Authentic Records in Electronic Systems (InterPARES Project) and support for a major project at the San Diego Supercomputer Center (SDSC) demonstrates this commitment both to ongoing NHPRC support and to expanded partnerships in this area. The SDSC's project builds upon its previous research on the long-term preservation of and access to software-dependant data objects, which it has conducted for the National Archives and Records

<sup>19</sup> *Report of the Working Meeting: Research Issues in Electronic Records* (St. Paul, Minn.: Minnesota Historical Society, 1991); Newhall, "The NHPRC in the New Records Age," 73.

<sup>20</sup> *Electronic Records Research and Development: Final Report of the 1996 Conference held at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, June 28–29, 1996* (Ann Arbor: School of Information and the Bentley Historical Library), ix, 8, 17.

Administration, the National Science Foundation, and the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency, and other sponsors. The NHPRC-funded project will specifically look at the scalability and usefulness of the technology in archives other than NARA.

Following its November 1999 meeting, the NHPRC announced a new electronic records initiative to broaden the base and raise the level of archival expertise relating to electronic records.<sup>21</sup> This initiative builds on the Commission's ongoing support for the research agenda as well as recognizes the need to involve a much broader range of stakeholders in addressing the challenges of electronic records.

While electronic records have been the high priority for NHPRC in this program element, the Commission has funded other important projects supporting research, analysis and development in preservation, in the use of records, and in appraisal and documentation.<sup>22</sup>

***Program Element # 9: Coordination of existing Federal grant and advisory programs pertaining to historical records.***

The NHPRC is the smallest of the federal grant agencies which support work relating to historical records in the United States. It is also the only one whose sole mission is the documentation of the history of the United States. It works cooperatively with other federal granting agencies in a number of different ways to address this program element.

Since the early 1990s, Commission staff have participated regularly in an informal interagency group of staff from federal grant programs that fund historical records projects. These meetings enable the grant programs to share information about funding priorities, policies, and important developments in the field. They provide federal grant program staff the opportunity to keep up-to-date on funded projects that are of potential interest to grantees and applicants and to others in the field with whom the staff may have contact.

In addition to this communication among grant programs, Commission staff participate in other ad hoc and periodic meetings that focus on shared constituencies or concerns. At a broader level, Commission staff attend meetings and follow the work of the more formally constituted Inter-Agency Electronic Grants Committee (IAEGC). The IAEGC is established to coordinate, promote, and facilitate the effective use of electronic commerce (EC) throughout the federal grants community, under sponsorship of the Federal Electronic Commerce Program. The IAEGC coordinates inter-agency efforts

<sup>21</sup> Newhall, "The NHPRC in the New Records Age," 76.

<sup>22</sup> See for instance, Ann D. Gordon, *Using the Nation's Documentary Heritage: The Report of the Historical Documents Study* (National Historical Publications and Records Commission in cooperation with the American Council of Learned Societies, 1992).

relating to grants, such as the Federal Commons, which seeks to enhance service by providing “a common face of the Government” regarding grants administration.<sup>23</sup> Finally, the NHPRC Executive Director meets at her initiative with the heads of other related federal and private sector granting programs to provide for better coordination of efforts in this important area.

Taken together, these efforts demonstrate an active commitment, at least in the federal grants area, to achieve better coordination and service, but they do not constitute the comprehensive coordination implied in this program element. For instance, coordination with other federal “advisory programs pertaining to historical records,” however this is defined, is beyond the scope of this article. As with many of the other Program Elements, there has been some progress in addressing the element, but numerous challenges remain in its implementation. As with other Program Elements, if this element is to be pursued, specific objectives and outcomes should be defined. In particular, the benefits to the participating agencies and the people they serve must be clear. In this regard, the work of the IAEGC and similar inter-agency initiatives should be followed with interest.

***Program Element # 10: A strong partnership between the national historical records program and the states to deal with fundamental needs that can best be approached within a state framework.***

Since the inception of the records component of the NHPRC in 1974, building a strong partnership with the states through the mechanism of the State Historical Records Advisory Boards has been a key goal. A continuing commitment to that goal has been demonstrated over the last decade in a number of important ways.

First, the position of Director for State Programs was added to the NHPRC staff soon after the endorsement of the Program Elements by the Commission.<sup>24</sup> Second, the Commission has supported, through grants and cooperative agreements, regular meetings and collaborative projects proposed by the Council of State Historical Records Coordinators, an organization composed of the gubernatorially appointed state liaisons for NHPRC’s records program and their deputies. Third, the Commission has given priority in both its first long-range plan and its current strategic plan to supporting collaboration with the state boards through planning and carrying out jointly funded programs at the state level. Finally, the Commission continually seeks ways to strengthen and improve this partnership by encouraging the participation of every state, and by recognizing the key leadership role that state archival insti-

<sup>23</sup> For more information on the IAEGC see their website at: <<http://www.financenet.gov/financenet/fed/iaegc/>>.

<sup>24</sup> The author has served in that capacity, with some variation in working job title, since its inception in 1988.

tutions play in this partnership. At the same time, the NHPRC encourages the state coordinators and state boards to identify challenges and strategies that will benefit the broad range of historical records programs represented in the American archival landscape.

For their part, the states, through the state coordinators and state boards, have actively engaged in this partnership. As Ann Newhall details in her article, forty states have active boards. At any given time, about half of the state boards have active grants funded by NHPRC. As with any NHPRC grant, these grants are competitively awarded and require substantial cost sharing and staff commitments both by state coordinators and state board members. A recent report of the Council of State Historical Records Coordinators documents the support for the state board planning initiative and identifies significant results and outcomes from this collaboration with the states, including new facilities, leveraged funding, new collaborations within the states, and increases in preserved and accessible records.<sup>25</sup> The report also cautions that the results and outcomes of these planning efforts are very difficult to measure, especially across widely varying programs and goals. The report specifically recommends the development of a few specific measures that could be applied to all such planning efforts and for which data would be universally collected. In receiving this report, the Commission instructed NHPRC staff to work with the states in developing such measures.

Although the COSHRC report on the state planning initiative documents broad support for this effort among the state coordinators and boards, it also notes that this support is not uniform and is dependent, to some extent, on continued availability of NHPRC and other outside funding. The report summarizes a key challenge facing the NHPRC partnership with the states:

Most state archives have long had a focused, legislatively mandated mission to preserve and make accessible the records of state and possibly local government. Few have seen their core mission as being the leader of statewide historical records planning and advocacy, or as improving the condition of records held in community repositories throughout their states.

The NHPRC posits a role for the State Historical Records Advisory Boards of serving as a link between national archival efforts and local communities. Where this NHPRC-encouraged stepping out of the state archives box is successful, it can result in much broader public support of the state archives program and an enhanced role for archives across the state. But because it is not an altogether comfortable role, it will continue to be greeted with different levels of enthusiasm and financial support from state to state.

The report concludes: "The NHPRC's efforts to leverage a relatively small federal grant program into something that touches historical records throughout the nation is commendable and remarkably successful." To further strengthen this

<sup>25</sup> Sandra Clark, *The NHPRC Planning Initiative: An Evaluation* (Council of State Historical Records Coordinators, January 1999). Available at <<http://www.coshrc.org/surveys/planning/sclark.htm>>.



partnership, the report argues that NHPRC must “clearly communicate its expectations” about this program, encourage expanded national collaboration, and “raise the priority of this work with other funding organizations.”<sup>26</sup>

**Program Element # 11: Promotion of documentary editions.**

The primary focus of historical documentary editing is original historical research and contributing new understanding and information to our historical knowledge. Within the context of a national records program it is important to recognize that historical documentary editing plays a key role not only in disseminating essential historical documentation on our nation’s past, but also in promoting its identification and preservation. These efforts cannot replace sound archival programs and practice; neither should they be viewed simply as extensions of the archival role of making documentary materials accessible.

Ann Newhall has forcefully asserted the value to both professions of a renewed partnership between these allied fields.<sup>27</sup> The promotion of documentary editions is one of the program elements for a national records program, and it is clear that historical documentary editing and documentary editions are a vital part of the NHPRC’s statutory mission and program. In the past decade, the NHPRC has continued to demonstrate its strong commitment to this element in its program.

In reviewing just the middle years of the decade (1994–1997), the 1997 NHPRC Annual Report noted the publication of sixty-five letterpress volumes by NHPRC-supported projects, and the completion of three microfilm and comprehensive guide projects comprising a total of 164 reels of microfilm.<sup>28</sup> However, these quantitative output measures do not speak to the quality of the products or to the wider impact that these efforts make both in promoting an understanding of the value of archives and encouraging the identification and preservation of essential historical documentation. The quality of the products continues to be praised widely in reviews appearing in professional journals, and to win professional and scholarly prizes and awards.

One example will serve to illustrate the importance of these efforts in promoting an appreciation of the value of archives as well as in identifying and preserving essential documentation. The Race and Slavery Petitions Project, established in 1991 at the University of North Carolina, Greensboro with an NHPRC grant, is locating, collecting, organizing and publishing relevant legislative and county court petitions. In surveys of fourteen state archives and 175 county courthouses covering fifteen states, the project has located and copied 17,000 such petitions and thousands of related documents covering the period

<sup>26</sup> Clark, *The NHPRC Planning Initiative*.

<sup>27</sup> Newhall, “The NHPRC in the New Records Age,” 88–89.

<sup>28</sup> National Historical Publications and Records Commission, *Annual Report* (Washington, D.C., 1997), 5–7.



from 1776 until 1867. The resulting microfilm series and the selective three-volume book edition will “create a much more detailed picture of African-Americans seeking their legal rights at local and state levels.”<sup>29</sup> The project will make scarce and essential resources on this important and underdocumented topic readily accessible. It will also serve to dramatize the crucial role of archives and records programs at the state and local levels as well as the importance of documentary editions in preserving and disseminating such information.

The reach of this project has extended well beyond students and scholars. Between 1994 and 1996, the editor Loren Schweninger and Brenda Schleunes, the founding director of the Touring Theatre Ensemble of North Carolina, developed a script based on these documents. With funding raised from other sources, a production in North Carolina beginning in 1997 played to approximately six thousand people in fifteen counties. The production has also been filmed for public television.<sup>30</sup>

As with its archival and records projects, the Commission is committed to assisting documentary editors “to overcome the obstacles and take advantage of the opportunities posed by electronic technologies.”<sup>31</sup> The Model Editions Partnership, a consortia of seven historical editions, supported by the NHPRC, joined forces with leaders of the Text Encoding Initiative and the Center for Electronic Text in the Humanities, to develop a standard markup scheme for documentary editions based upon the architecture of the Standard Generalized Markup Language (SGML). The project recently presented to the Commission and the public a series of prototypes to demonstrate approaches for the publication of historical documentary editions in electronic form. As archivists and documentary editors place selected documents on the Internet, both professions and the people they serve can benefit by sharing efforts to develop standards and good practices.<sup>32</sup>

**Program Element # 12: Wider use of primary historical documents in education at all levels.**

All of the Commission’s constituents recognize a common goal in promoting the educational use of historical documents. Although the

<sup>29</sup> Loren Schweninger, “Race, Slavery and Free Blacks: Petitions to Southern Legislatures and County Courts, 1776–1867: A Documentary History,” *Annotation: The Newsletter of the National Historical Publications and Records Commission* 26 (June 1998): 3.

<sup>30</sup> Schweninger, “Race, Slavery and Free Blacks,” 4.

<sup>31</sup> “NHPRC’s New Strategic Plan: The Full Text,” *Annotation: The Newsletter of the National Historical Publications and Records Commission* 25 (Summer 1997): 9–10. The Strategic Plan is also available on the NHPRC website at <<http://www.nara.gov/nhprc/strategy.html>>.

<sup>32</sup> At its November 1999 meeting, the Commission adopted a new policy statement on digitization indicating that it “prefers not to spend its limited funds on projects that primarily involve digitization activities.” The policy reflects the Commission’s acute awareness of the difficult preservation and access issues that confront both archivists and historical documentary editors as their work moves to electronic technologies.

Commission's 1992 long-range plan included a specific objective addressing this program element, the current strategic plan does not specify this area, but continues to allow the Commission to support, on a highly selective basis, projects that address it.

The Commission has directly funded a few projects in the past decade that addressed this Program Element directly using Commission funds. For instance, it supported the completion of a book by David Kobrin, *Beyond the Textbook: Teaching History Using Documents and Primary Sources*.<sup>33</sup> The book was designed to help teachers, preservice teachers, and teacher educators understand the importance and advantages of using primary documents as teaching tools. The Commission has also funded direct collaboration with teachers in projects such as one being conducted by the Alaska Department of Education to develop document-based, secondary-level curriculum materials about the Klondike and Alaska Gold Rush era (see <http://www.educ.state.ak.us/lam/goldrush/>).

Because of its limited resources, the Commission has provided little direct funding to support this Program Element. However, Commission-funded projects and products are constantly being used to support the wider use of documents in education. Several of the state regrant projects have supported small individual projects to enhance the use of documents in schools, but more often these are developed not as part of the project, but based on the materials supported by the project. The work of many documentary editing projects is exemplary in this regard.<sup>34</sup>

One justification for limiting the Commission's direct involvement in addressing this Program Element is that growth and development have been accelerating with other funding sources and partners making major contributions. Even an overview of the factors that have spurred activity in this area is beyond the scope of this article. Certainly, a key factor is the development of standards at the national and state levels that include the use or analysis of documents as part of a basic history curriculum. In addition, the continued growth and success of programs like National History Day have assured widespread involvement, as has the rapid development of the Internet as a readily available teaching tool in schools.<sup>35</sup> A key challenge in addressing this program element is to find ways to assure that the educational value of primary sources is widely understood and that new projects build on successful models or address unanswered challenges.

<sup>33</sup> David Kobrin, *Beyond the Textbook: Teaching History Using Documents and Primary Sources* (Portsmouth, N.H.: Heinemann, 1996). [For a review of this work see pages 189–191 of this issue—Ed.]

<sup>34</sup> See, for instance, *A Curriculum for Middle and High School Students* created by the Emma Goldman Papers Project and available through the project website at <<http://sunsite.berkeley.edu/Goldman/Curricula/>>.

<sup>35</sup> In promoting the educational use of documents on the Internet, the National Archives and Records Administration has won recognition. See more information about a recent project, The Constitution Community, and other resources like *Teaching With Documents, volume 2*, National Archives and Records Administration, 1998, visit the Digital Classroom website at <<http://www.nara.gov/education/classrm.html>>.

### ***Summary of the NHPRC's Application of the Program Elements***

This brief review of the NHPRC's work suggests both important achievements and significant remaining challenges in each of the areas identified in the Program Elements document. It reflects a broad application of those elements to a specific program of national scope, the NHPRC's implementation of its Records Program.<sup>36</sup> The review also suggests elements in which achievements have been made by other actors in our decentralized archival system. In neither case can these achievements be said to have resulted from the Program Elements.

What, then, has been achieved by developing and applying the Program Elements? In the case of the NHPRC program, the Program Elements have been a significant point of reference in planning and program development and in the dialogue between the Commission and the states concerning their partnership. That in itself is a substantive achievement and contribution. The ideas contained in the document are not unique to the Program Elements, and the impact of the document itself on the wider decentralized archival system is diffuse and limited. However, the elements did reflect significant points of consensus among the archival profession and its allies in the historical and historical editing professions, and that too is an important achievement in an environment that accentuates contention and competition.

### **The Continued Relevance of a National Records Program**

If having a significant impact on one federal program's development and planning and achieving a degree of consensus among contending points of view represent significant general achievements, what are the lessons to be learned from the experience? First, and most importantly, the concept of a national historical records program with a broad constituency has continued relevance both now and in the future. Specialization, globalization, and technology are a few of the key external factors that continue to exert a centrifugal force on the archival profession and on the highly decentralized archival system of the United States. In this type of environment, a federally directed, hierarchical national records program does not make sense. However, the concept of a national records program as a national collaboration to identify, preserve, and disseminate records documenting the history of the United States provides a crucial strategy for archives, enabling them to benefit from and contribute to this dynamic environment. In such a national program, federal agencies like the NHPRC are key partners, enhancing coordination of efforts; encouraging research and problem solving across organizational, professional, and political

<sup>36</sup> In 1991, the Records Program and Publications Program were consolidated into one administrative unit, but the NHPRC Program continues to distinguish between two broad categories of grants: records grants and publication grants.

boundaries; and promoting the dissemination of best practices and their benefits to all parts of the system.

A second lesson to be learned from the NHPRC's experience over the past decade is that collaborating groups need to agree on the broadest outcomes that they wish to achieve together, but not necessarily on every individual goal or result they wish to achieve. Further, they need to agree on the nature and scope of their collaboration, and then focus their cooperation on a few specific goals.

A third lesson is the value of agreeing on a few basic performance measures in building both a national program and individual programs during the next decade. In addition, there must be a regular effort to gather the data that will enable such performance measures to be applied. With wide dissemination of this data and application of these measures, critical evaluation and interpretation can occur from a variety of points of view. Most importantly, archivists and their allies will be able to demonstrate the value of their service using techniques being applied by managers and administrators in other fields. They will be able to assess more effectively where strategies and programs are working and where they are not. There are risks involved in this accountability, but there are greater risks in not providing the information or the measures and not actively participating in the evaluation.

Fourth, as professionals, organizations, and American citizens, we must clearly and confidently articulate the value of archives and records. To do this effectively, we must understand what different people value, find the common ground, and work with them to achieve mutual interests.

In many ways the archival profession and its allies in other fields have been building a national program. What is needed as the new century begins is a willingness to focus on areas of agreement, use these to enunciate a coherent message, and take action together. By doing so we can concentrate and leverage our resources to maximize their benefit. We can realize additional resources at all levels. We can also communicate more effectively with other countries, other professions, and the public sector whose support we need and with whom we can and must work. With defined goals and measures, we can evaluate our progress. Most importantly we will be able to recognize and celebrate our mutual accomplishments and agreement as well as our challenges and debates.

Rather than construct a new national agenda or program definition or revise a document like the Program Elements, the archival profession and its partners should focus on three or four goals driven by our need to work together to improve our service to our fellow citizens and our communities. These goals should be determined collaboratively. The NHPRC is an important mechanism for this goal setting. The adoption of the revised NHPRC strategic plan represents a successful effort to achieve consensus among archivists, historians, and editors on the overall mission of a national agency that can serve them all and on some specific goals on which they can cooperate. Sustaining

this planning effort and working aggressively to implement its goals is an especially noteworthy achievement in a period in which these professional groups have experienced their most serious conflict since the beginnings of the NHPRC records program twenty-five years ago.

It is important to emphasize that the NHPRC by itself does not constitute a complete national records program, and its strategic plan should not be confused with the Program Elements that it endorsed over a decade ago. The NHPRC is a key partner in developing a national records program, which is a dynamic and ongoing process. Its strategic plan, with its three co-equal goals relating to electronic technologies, collaboration with the states, and documentary editions of the founding era, is not a stagnant or comprehensive document, but a tool to provide focus and enhance its effectiveness for a specific period of time. The NHPRC works to maintain its vitality and responsiveness through its ongoing planning and evaluation, its active engagement with its professional constituencies, and its personal dialogue with all of the individuals who share a concern with its mission.

There are many areas that merit consideration and support for national collaborative action and leadership. Strengthening archival education, assuring a documentary record that accurately reflects our diverse nation, continuing to develop, adopt, and disseminate standards and best practices are all crucial to a national records program. NHPRC's support for the National Forum for Archival Continuing Education held in April 2000 and its newly announced initiative to broaden the base of archival expertise in electronic records demonstrate our sustained commitment in the area of archival education while maintaining our commitment to collaboration with the states, electronic technologies, and documentary editions. NHPRC-supported, state-level documentary efforts in New York and Massachusetts, and a new cooperative effort between Minnesota and North Dakota also reflect a confluence of national goals and grass roots initiatives. Finding these intersections of interest provides focus and builds support for a national program. At the same time, the NHPRC's plan specifically reserves 40 percent of its funding for projects outside of these top-priority goal areas, so that the Commission can seize other opportunities, whether these be the development of new standards, the improvement of local government records programs, or other archival or documentary initiatives.

Working at the Commission, one becomes acutely aware that the NHPRC is a small part of our national records program. Our national records program, like the records of our national experience, is not entrusted to one institution, organization, profession, or sector. To effectively identify, preserve, and use records that reflect our diverse national experience, we must sustain a diverse system of repositories and enlist a wide range of professions, institutions, organizations, and individuals in this important work. As in our natural environment, no one part of this system operates in isolation from the others.

In developing our national records program, the slogan from the environmental movement seems apropos, "Think Globally and Act Locally." We must work collaboratively at the national level to develop plans, standards, and tools; to solve common problems, and to recognize and share best practices; and we must work through our diverse system to ensure their dissemination and successful implementation throughout our archival infrastructure. Archives are the primary source for our democratic institutions and our heritage. They are essential to the quality of life we enjoy. It is in our national interest to see that this essential evidence continues to be protected and used by our fellow citizens and our descendents well into the next millennium. That should be our professional legacy, and if we work together, it will be.