

National Historical Publications and Records Commission
Executive Summary Minutes
November 17, 2023

The meeting was called to order by Dr. Colleen Shogan, the Archivist of the United States at 10:01 am via teleconference.

Commission Members Present:

Colleen Shogan, Archivist of the United States
Glen Asner
Jonathan Bronitsky
Kim Gallon
Adam Howard
Christine Lamberson
Janice Ruth
C. James Taylor
Darin Waters
Kathleen Williams
Tanya Zanish-Belcher
Robyn Engibous, for Senator Dan Sullivan
Annmariee Goyzueta, for Representative
Jahana Hayes

NHPRC staff present:

Christopher Eck, Executive Director
Darrell Meadows
Jeff de la Concepcion
Keith Donohue
Julie Fisher
Nancy Melley
Annette Paul
Anastacia Scott

National Archives staff:

Ellis Brachman

I. Welcome

Dr. Shogan welcomed everyone and expressed her excitement to be serving as Archivist of the United States these past six months. She reported visiting 26 NARA facilities to date and plans on visiting the rest in 2024. That year also marks the 90th anniversary of the National Archives as well as the 60th year of grants through the Commission. She endorsed the idea of moving from an individual reviewer process to a panel process, and she also informed the Commission that appropriations for FY 24 are under a Continuing Resolution until February 2, 2024. After introductions all around, a resolution of thanks to retiring Member Geoff Shepard was presented and approved by the unanimous consent of the Commission:

GEOFFREY SHEPARD was appointed to the National Historical Publications and Records Commission in October 2020 by President Donald J. Trump. A graduate of Whittier College and Harvard Law School, Mr. Shepard was selected as a White House Fellow in 1969 and assigned to the Treasury Department, where he worked under Paul Volcker, then undersecretary for monetary affairs.

Following his fellowship year, Mr. Shepard joined John Ehrlichman's Domestic Council staff at the Nixon White House, where he served for five years, first as a staff assistant and ultimately as associate director. He also worked on President Nixon's Watergate defense team. In 1975 he left the Ford administration and embarked on a 35-year career in the insurance industry. Since 2010, Mr. Shepard has helped produce a series of over three dozen Nixon Legacy Forums, co-sponsored by the National Archives and the Richard Nixon Foundation, and broadcast on C-Span's American History channel. Mr. Shepard is the author of three books on Watergate. In 2021, his work was adapted in an Off-Broadway production, *Trial on the Potomac*, with the role of Nixon played by actor Rich Little.

Geoff brings great wit and insight into the work of the Commission. He is a keen and incisive listener, routinely asks the tough questions, and challenges conventional narratives with grace and humor. He is vigilant in pursuit of the best public policies for archives and historical scholarship. Geoff will be very much missed, and, with our sincere respect and affection, the Commission thanks him for his dedicated service and myriad contributions to its programs.

II. Minutes of the May 2023 Meeting and Agenda

Dr. Shogan called for approval of the Minutes and Adoption of the Agenda, and a motion was approved by unanimous consent.

III. Executive Director's Report

Overview of the November 2023 Grant Cycle

Mr. Eck welcomed the Commissioners and expressed how busy the Commission was in FY 2023. The NHPRC received in this cycle 35 applications requesting \$2,818,277 in FY24 appropriated grant funds. Staff is recommending support for 27 proposals totaling \$2,009,467 in awards for projects in 26 states.

Additionally, NHPRC received 16 applications requesting \$1,755,781 from the NHPRC-Mellon Planning Grants for Collaborative Digital Editions in African American, Asian American, Hispanic American, and Native American History and Ethnic Studies program. This will mark the last of three annual grant cycles for this program, made possible by a \$2.35 million grant from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation. Staff is recommending support for 11 planning grant proposals totaling \$1,274,074 in awards for projects in 9 states.

Budget Expenditures for FY23

Discrepancies in our FY23 Congressional Appropriations language (PL 117-328, 136 STAT 4690, Sec. 530) will shape our FY24 funding scenario. First, as reported at the May meeting, Congress appropriated an additional \$22.573 million for a specific list of directed, or earmarked, projects. In the process of completing those obligations, NARA Budget and Finance discovered a discrepancy between the total amount provided in the appropriations language (\$22.573 million) and the supplemental list of projects (\$23.772 million). In mid-September, the Office of General Counsel at NARA, working with staff members from the Department of the Treasury, the General Accounting Office, and NARA's budget office determined that the total amount appropriated (\$22.573 million) in the language of the bill was the actual amount to be used.

As a result, and in conversation with the Chief Financial Officer, Office of General Counsel, Congressional Affairs, as well as Congressional staff, we used unappropriated no-year funds to make up the shortfall, in order to obligate the Congressionally-Directed project funds by September 30. Actual obligations amounted to \$23,769,385, whereby Commission funds covered a deficiency of \$1,196,385. Based on conversations with Congressional Affairs, we are hopeful that Congress will make the Commission whole in the FY24 appropriation for this use of its funds for the shortage in our FY24 appropriation, but that remains uncertain.

Additionally, the NHPRC's final FY23 appropriations language indicated an increase to \$10 million for competitive grants, but omitted specific language to indicate that this amount included \$3 million that the agency wished to see directed to the development and implementation of a specific grant program for HBCUs. As a result, staff recommendations for the FY23 grant cycles (November 2022 and May 2023) were premised on the full \$10 million available, rather than \$7 million. The result was that the total of FY23 awarded funds (as well as the use of funds for the Congressionally-Directed Spending described above) together exhausted nearly all of the \$3 million difference. Once our FY24 appropriation is finalized, we will be working closely with NARA Budget and Finance on plans for restoring funds to create an HBCU program with \$3 million in funds.

Appropriations for FY24

As of November 1, 2023, Congress has not completed its work on full-year appropriations for the NHPRC. The appropriated funds available for competitive grants under the current Continuing Resolution is a prorated amount of \$1,311,000, based on our FY23 funding levels. This allotment is supplemented by the Commission's no-year, unobligated carryover grant funds (including unspent funds recaptured from prior completed awards) of approximately \$745 thousand (see the Financial Summary). Total available grant funds for the November meeting are \$2,056,000.

Impact of Congressionally-Directed Spending Projects

Managing the Congressionally-Directed Spending (CDS, or "earmark") awards over the past two years has placed additional strain on our small staff which has processed nearly \$30M in earmarks over the past two fiscal years after a 20-year hiatus, the staff has developed a process for managing these awards that is based on the way in which the competitive grant programs function.

Financial Statement

Mr. Eck explained that in FY 23, Congress had actually approved a list of projects while failing to fund the required total dollar amount. The shortfall of about \$1.2 million was covered by regular grants funds from the NHPRC, as described above, and we hope that Congress will restore those funds in the FY 24 budget. On a positive note, staff has streamlined the necessary mechanisms to handle any new FY 24 earmarks and has worked out improved processes for obligating funds with the agency's budget office.

Because of the uncertainty over the final appropriations for FY24, the staff is recommending the amounts provided in this funding cycle as a conservative approach.

Mr. Eck also explained that the \$2 million additional funds for Congressional Papers projects remains on the budget. We hope to work with the Commission to develop new Grant Announcements for both the HBCU and Congressional Papers in time for consideration at the May 2024 meeting.

Implementation of Live (Virtual) Review Panels

Following the recommendation of our Recruitment and Processes Subcommittee, we established a revised peer panel review system for applications, which now includes a live virtual panel discussion and the payment of honoraria to all panelists. The payment of honoraria (\$500 per person) to review panelists was also a first for the Commission and staff worked closely with the budget office, Office of

General Counsel, and the Trust Fund staff to make this possible. The applications before you (with the exception of the Mellon Planning Grant applications) all followed the new panel process and the payment of honoraria to reviewers.

Overall, staff and panelists valued the new process. Because this was our first iteration of the new process, we invited panelists to share their ideas for improvement, and we will be incorporating some of those recommendations, including a “pre-meeting” with panelists at the outset, to provide context and set expectations before panelists begin their evaluations.

Oversight Sub-committee

At the May meeting, the Commission approved the formation of an Oversight Committee to review progress on the Archives Leadership Institute and to provide general guidance on NHPRC programming and budgetary concerns. Members are Kathleen Williams (chair), Janice Ruth, Tanya Zanish-Belcher, Glenn Asner, and Christine Lamberson. The Subcommittee met in July, August, and September.

They agreed to review curricula plans from the University of Virginia for the next iteration of the Archives Leadership Institute, as well as related promotional announcements. Ms. Williams asked NAGARA to host a webinar for UVA to do an online workshop, which was held on October 17, 2023.

The Subcommittee also began its consideration of possible revisions to the “What We Fund/What We Do Not Fund” webpage designed to summarize the Commission’s policies on eligible activities for grant support.

Incoming Commission Member

The American Association for State and Local History has named as its representative Dr. Darin Waters, the Deputy Secretary of the North Carolina Office of Archives and History.

Staffing Changes

In September, Julie Fisher was appointed as director for NHPRC's Publishing Programs. Jeff de la Concepcion was named Grants Management Specialist. Anastacia Scott was named director for NHPRC's Access Programs, with responsibility for the Archives Collaboratives program and our forthcoming HBCU program.

V. Executive Committee Report

Ms. Zanish-Belcher reported from the Executive Committee meeting of November 16. She reported on the progress of the Archives Leadership Institute, requesting that curricular materials be shared with the Oversight Committee.

In response to discussions regarding the NHPRC list of eligible project activities (the “What We Do/Do Not Fund” list), the Oversight Committee recommended changes to the current language.

Under “What We Fund,” the Executive Committee approved the following changes:

Add as the final bullet in section one: “oral histories as a component of a historical records collection.”

Replace current language in section two with:

“collecting, describing, preserving, compiling, digitizing, and publishing historical records collections significant to the history of the United States”

“conducting institutes, trainings, and related educational programs that build capacity and support the work of archivists, documentary editors, and related practitioners”

Adding:

“Conducting oral histories related to Native Americans

Under “What We Do Not Fund”:

Striking: ~~“to undertake an oral history project unrelated to Native Americans”~~

Ms. Williams offered a change to the first item to read “conducting oral histories as a component of a historical records collection.”

A resolution was made to approve the language changes, as amended, and was passed unanimously.

Ms. Zanish-Belcher concluded her remarks by observing that the discussion with staff about the new panel process was overwhelmingly positive.

[The Commission went into recess for 15 minutes at 10:45 am)

IV. Program Review

Archives Collaboratives

Mr. Eck presented the proposals for Archives Collaboratives. Ms. Williams asked if in the future the lists of grants might include the amounts requested on the summary sheet. Ms. Williams asked that the University of North Texas be encouraged to revise and resubmit its proposal. Mr. Eck responded that was the recommendation of the panel.

The Grant Announcement and Staff Recommendations were approved by a unanimous vote.

Major Collaborative Archival Initiatives

Ms. Melley reported that there have been declining applications for this category over the past three years. She expressed some hope that outreach efforts will spark greater interest in the program.

Ms. Ruth asked about the differences among the Archival Projects, Archives Collaboratives, and Major Collaborative Initiatives. She wondered if the NHPRC might find a way to make those differences clear to potential applicants, such as through the use of a summary table to be posted on the website.

During consideration of RM-103660 (Utah Valley University), Ms. Zanish-Belcher expressed some concerns about funding proprietary entities. Ms. Williams thought the conditions in the staff recommendation should clarify such matters.

The Grant Announcement and Staff Recommendations were approved by a unanimous vote.

Mellon-NHPRC Planning Grants

Ms. Fisher discussed the final round of the Mellon-NHPRC Planning Grants program and expressed her delight with the number and quality of applications. She reported that the Mellon Foundation is pleased with the outcomes. Mr. Meadows reported that follow-up discussions with the Mellon Foundation on what we have learned through this pilot program, as well as Mellon's own efforts regarding the emerging field of community archiving, will be taking place in the coming weeks.

Mr. Asner asked about the difference in scoring between two applications—one of which was recommended and the other was not, and Ms. Fisher explained that in such cases where two projects are so closely ranked, the panel and program officers looked at capacity questions. Ms. Lamberson asked if there are other categories to which the unsuccessful applicants may apply, and Mr. Meadows reported that NEH might be a possibility.

Ms. Ruth recused herself from consideration of PL-104680.

The Grant Announcement and Staff Recommendations were approved by a unanimous vote.

Publishing Historical Records in Collaborative Editions

Mr. Meadows observed that this program has become more competitive as it seeks to broaden diversity among projects, encouraging new projects through the Mellon Planning Grants program, while at the same time ensuring that productive ongoing projects are supported.

Ms. Fisher discussed the tiered system for reviewing these applicants, and a rubric that attempts to balance three considerations: panel review and scoring; past performance; and the project's potential to advance program goals. Because of some inconsistencies in scoring, the bottom scores were dropped and median scores factored into the recommendations.

Ms. Williams asked if the tiered approach would be ongoing, and Mr. Taylor asked if the staff had seen panel results before creating tiers. He followed up with a question about whether the staff were surprised by the panel suggestions. Ms. Fisher said that she was surprised by the level of frustration expressed with some of the legacy projects in panel discussion.

There followed a general discussion about projects in the “middle” of the pack. Ms. Lamberson wondered how the panels are assessing progress by ongoing projects, whether it is measured annually or over the life of the project. Mr. Meadows said that this question is on the button. How do we treat legacy projects versus new projects?

Ms. Ruth later asked about the role that Rotunda plays in accessibility for projects, and Mr. Meadows reported on the growing dissatisfaction among review panelists with projects that put content behind a paywall. Legacy project have had since 2012, when the Commission required all projects in this

program to develop plans for online access, and since 2018, when all projects were expected to implement plans for the online publication—ideally as free and open access collections. Some projects do attempt to provide such free access, and this is going to be a continuing question as the nature of digital editions evolves, and projects initiated at different technological moments also evolves. The Commission had a general discussion about the costs the NHPRC pays to UVA Press / Rotunda for the ongoing maintenance and adding volumes to Founders Online. Ms. Ruth and Dr. Shogun had a discussion about linking facsimiles to transcriptions via the Library of Congress, and there was a general interest in expanding Founders Online, perhaps in connection with the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence. Mr. Meadows reminded the Commissioners that Founders Online was created through specific statutory language, and that any expansion of Founders Online would need to take this into consideration, as well as the anticipated costs associated with UVA Press / Rotunda's forthcoming technology upgrades (currently in the planning stage).

Mr. Taylor recused himself from consideration of PD-103648.

The Grant Announcement and Staff Recommendations were approved by a unanimous vote.

State Programs

Mr. Eck provided a brief description of the projects submitted for State Historical Records Advisory Boards, noting that the overall requested amount for funding increased and that some less active state boards applied in this round.

Mr. Waters recused himself from consideration of RC-103639

The Grant Announcement and Staff Recommendations were approved by a unanimous vote.

VI. Other Business

Mr. Asner asked if the staff could provide more information, such as a table of projects sorted by scores in the material for the Commission and that the programs take a more uniform approach to presenting their recommendations.

The Commission went into Executive Session at 12:30 pm and adjourned at 12:55 pm

ADD GRANTS LIST WHEN FINAL