



**THE PRESIDENT'S PROPOSED FY 2020 BUDGETS FOR THE NATIONAL  
ARCHIVES AND RECORDS ADMINISTRATION (NARA) AND THE NATIONAL  
HISTORICAL PUBLICATIONS AND RECORDS COMMISSION (NHPRC)**

**Submitted by the National Coalition for History  
to the Subcommittee on Financial Services & General Government**

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The Honorable Michael B. Quigley  
Chairman  
Subcommittee on Financial Services  
& General Government  
House Committee on Appropriations  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Mr. Chairman:

**The Trump Administration has recommended funding of \$345.6 million for the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) Operating Expenses in fiscal year 2020, which is a reduction of \$27.4 million from the FY 19 level of \$373 million. The National Coalition for History (NCH) urges funding at a level of \$410 million for FY 20.**

**The Trump Administration is proposing elimination of the National Historical Publications and Records Commission (NHPRC) grants program. NCH urges the subcommittee to reject this proposal and to support funding for NHPRC at a level of \$10 million.**

The National Coalition for History (NCH) is a consortium of more than 50 organizations that advocates and educates on federal legislative and regulatory issues affecting historians, archivists, political scientists, teachers, students, genealogists, and other stakeholders.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit our views on the National Archives and Records Administration's (NARA's) proposed fiscal year (FY) 2020 budget. As researchers and conservators of American history and culture, we care deeply about the programs and activities of the National Archives and the National Historical Publications and Records Commission (NHPRC).

The budget request for NARA's operating expenses in FY 20 is \$345.6 million, which is \$27.4 million less than the FY 19 level of \$373 million. By comparison NARA's budget in FY 11 was \$339 million. No government agency can absorb such significant decreases in funding without concomitant decreases in public services. Current funding levels are not adequate to serve legitimate public needs for accessibility and government accountability. American citizens rely on access to immigration and naturalization and census records (held by NARA) to conduct daily activities. Veterans and their families rely on military records (held by NARA) to gain access to their benefits. And in recent years, NARA has been forced to cut back on public services and research hours at its facilities because of lack of funding.

We understand that Congress continues to face enormous fiscal challenges in crafting the federal budget for FY 20. Although we've come to expect cuts as a result of these tight budget parameters, we are disappointed that the President has chosen to target programs at the National Archives that facilitate public access to the agency's holdings and provide citizens with the historical context to appreciate and understand our democratic heritage. Increased federal spending for archives is necessary to manage, preserve and make accessible the federal government's records.

We repeatedly hear the adage that, like all federal agencies, NARA must learn to do more with less. But the reality is that the National Archives has, in fact, been doing more with less since it gained its independence from the General Services Administration in 1985. According to NARA's 1985 annual report, the agency had 3,096 full-time equivalents (FTEs) in that year. In FY 18, NARA had just 2,787 FTEs! For too long Congress and the administrations of both parties have, unfortunately, come to treat NARA as a mere housekeeping agency—one that makes sure the Charters of Freedom are safe, that records are processed, and that records are stored in an orderly fashion so that a perceived limited universe of stakeholders can access them.

NARA has taken on the added responsibility of setting policy for and providing oversight of the government's classification system—covering 71 federal agencies—through its Information Security Oversight Office (ISOO). It has added a Freedom of Information Act ombudsman, the Office of Government Information Services. It has added a National Declassification Center to expedite the release of classified records to researchers and the public. And it has had to meet an enormous technological challenge to develop and implement an Electronic Records Archive to address the proliferation of electronic records. At the same time NARA has dealt with an exponential increase in the number of traditional archival records it has had to process.

In addition, since 1985 NARA has added five presidential libraries (for Presidents Carter, Reagan, GHW Bush, Clinton, and GW Bush). NARA is also incurring the costs associated with the development of the new "virtual" presidential library for President Obama and preparing for the presidential libraries of the future.

Finally NARA is in the throes of preparing for a December 31, 2022, deadline after which it will no longer accept transfers of permanent or temporary records in analog formats and will accept records only in electronic format and with appropriate metadata.

NARA's budget requests \$22 million to accelerate the processing and release of large volumes of high-value digital government information via mass digitization of paper records and at-risk special media records (audio, video, and motion picture records). The requested funding would provide for the design and renovation of space and related improvements to the National Archives facility in College Park, Maryland. This project would convert existing space into dedicated mass digitization space, modernized special media labs, new cold storage space, and a new storage area for archival records. We support this initiative.

NARA is significantly underfunded when compared to similar organizations supported by the federal government. In FY 19, for example Congress appropriated slightly over \$1 billion for the Smithsonian Institution and \$696 million for the Library of Congress. The National Coalition for History urges Congress to provide the National Archives and Records Administration with the additional funding it needs to serve its core mission. As Americans, we have a fundamental right to access to the records of our government. This is not a luxury that can be swept aside in the name of budget austerity.

### **National Historical Publications and Records Commission (NHPRC)**

NHPRC is the grant-making arm of NARA. It enables the National Archives to provide leadership through grants that support exploration of major archival issues, such as preservation of electronic records, disaster preparedness, and coordination and communication among archivists nationwide. The agency also provides grants for the creation of documentary collections (books and electronic) of the papers of nationally significant individuals and institutions. As an example, NHPRC has funded an ongoing project to make the papers of the Founding Fathers available for free online.

NHPRC grants leverage state, local, institutional, foundation, and other private funding by requiring 50 percent cost sharing—that is, every federal dollar invested is matched by a dollar from another source. NHPRC grants serve as the linchpin of many projects' funding structures; without federal dollars, even long-standing projects could be terminated.

For the third year in a row, the Administration has recommended eliminating the NHPRC grants program. Thankfully Congress has rejected these proposed cuts and instead provided funding of \$6 million—which is less than half of the \$13 million provided in FY 10. This is barely adequate to support ongoing programs and implement critical new digital initiatives.

We urge the subcommittee to reject the Administration's proposal to eliminate NHPRC and instead provide funding of \$10 million for this small but important program. To provide context, the NHPRC received \$10 million twenty years ago in FY 1999.

To summarize, NARA's operating budget has remained stagnant over the last decade at a time when the transition to use of electronic records by federal agencies has increased exponentially. Despite added responsibilities, NARA today has fewer employees than it did in 1985. We ask the subcommittee to reverse these years of financial neglect for this agency that is so vital to our democracy.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit these comments.

Sincerely,



Lee White  
Executive Director  
National Coalition for History