



State & Local Records News

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State Historical Records Advisory Board receives \$66,964 from NHPRC

On May 15, the National Historical Publications and Records Commission (NHPRC) awarded the Alabama Historical Records Advisory Board (HRAB) \$66,964 in grant funding for historical records preservation. Government Records Division staff of the Alabama Department of Archives and History (ADAH) will administer the grant. This is the Archives' first grant for local records preservation since the Local Government Historical Records Grant Program of 1993-96.

As noted in our March issue, the new grant will fund training workshops to instruct records holders on proper procedures for preserving historical records, allow ADAH to establish an online directory of Alabama records repositories, and create press releases and other publications to promote HRAB programs. Finally, \$50,000 will be available for regrants to fund local records projects, as outlined in the article below.

Regrants once again available for local records projects

Unlike our earlier regrant program, this one will be open to non-profit historical entities (such as historical associations, genealogical societies, and non-government archives and museums) as well as local governments. With only \$50,000 to distribute statewide, the HRAB may limit individual

awards and give preference to small-scale, short-duration records projects. Grant funds can also cover records-related equipment and supplies.

Examples of eligible projects and expenses might include:

- Hiring temporary workers to inventory neglected records storage areas, apply RDAs, and improve storage and access conditions for historical records
- Hiring a consultant to plan a local archives program, evaluate potential facilities, and locate additional funding sources
- Purchasing acid-free boxes and folders, archival shelving, or climate control and monitoring equipment for an historical records storage area
- Undertaking limited conservation or reformatting work to preserve historical records or make them more widely accessible
- Developing a disaster preparedness plan to protect vital, historical records

Under NHPRC requirements, regrant recipients must be prepared to provide a 50% cost-share of the total project budget in direct monetary or in-kind contributions. Detailed guidelines and application procedures will be forthcoming shortly. HRAB staff hopes to begin accepting regrant applications in July or August.

If you have questions about this or other HRAB-related programs and activities, contact Tracey Berezansky, HRAB deputy coordinator, or

Tom Turley, Local Government Records Archivist, at (334)242-4452, or records@archives.alabama.gov.

Records Commission News

At its meeting on April 23, 2008, the **State Records Commission** approved a new RDA for the Alabama State Tenure Commission and revised RDAs for the Alabama College System, the Alabama State Bar, and the Department of Revenue. The commission also reviewed annual RDA implementation reports from 37 state agencies.

Also meeting on April 23, the **Local Government Records Commission** approved a revised RDA for county probate offices and two local RDA revisions for the City of Montgomery. The commission also reviewed a report on RDA implementation by 33 local health care authorities.

The next commission meetings will occur on **Wednesday, July 30, 2008**, at 10:00 a.m. (State) and 1:30 p.m. (Local). They will convene in the Region's Board Room at ADAH.

Agencies can now complete ADAH records forms online

State and local agencies can now complete and submit ADAH records management forms (such as records transmittals, annual reports, and destruction notices) over the ADAH website. Forms are accessible at <http://archives.alabama.gov/officials/forms.html>.

Although these forms have been available for downloading from the site for several years, our web guru, Mark Palmer, recently revised them for online completion and submission. The change can speed up both the submission process and ADAH response times.

For help with submitting the forms, contact Richard Wang (state agencies) or Tom Turley (local agencies) at (334)242-4452.

Note: Because May was Disaster Preparedness Month, the rest of this issue is devoted to that theme. Several of the articles appeared in previous editions of *State and Local Records News*.

Identifying Vital Records

Vital records are defined as records required to carry on the government's essential operations, to protect its legal and financial interests, and to assist in its recovery during a period of emergency or natural disaster. NARA/FEMA guidelines establish two broad categories of vital records:

Emergency operating records are necessary to get an agency "up and running" again after a disaster and begin the process of recovery. Some must remain available to the agency even as the emergency occurs. A basic list includes: the agency's disaster plan, with staff contact information and assignments; a succession list of agency officials; contact information for emergency management agencies; disaster recovery vendors; and other sources of state, federal, or private assistance; maps, utility construction plans, and blueprints of affected buildings; zoning records; transportation routes and schedules; equipment and supply inventories; and computer hardware and software documentation.

Legal and financial records are needed to ensure the agency's legal and fiscal survival and to maintain the continuity of its operations and services. Ideally, they should be accessible within 12 hours after a disaster has occurred. Examples include: financial records (accounts payable/receivable, bank accounts, bonds, budgets, general ledgers, licenses and permits, property tax assessment records); personnel, payroll, Social Security, and retirement records; deeds, contracts, insurance policies; charters, minutes, ordinances, and resolutions; police identification records (fingerprints, mug shots); and court calendars and dockets.

Vital records are determined by an agency's mission, legislative mandate, and responsibilities to its constituency. Generally, they make up only

about 10% of the agency's total records volume. Any record appraised as "permanent" in a state or local government records disposition authority (RDA) is likely to be vital, but some non-permanent records will qualify as well. Although state and local RDAs will designate certain vital records with an asterisk (*), agencies are still responsible for identifying any other records that may be vital to their work.

What to do when the wind starts blowing

While the following emergency measures are no substitute for a disaster plan, they may enable agencies that have no plan to survive the immediate emergency. If a flood or hurricane approaches, these steps can be taken quickly to protect your vital records:

Take back-up computer disks and tapes, as well as microfilm, out of the office and as far away from the potential disaster site as possible. Ideally, the temporary storage area should have a properly controlled environment and a means of access to the records (back-up computer equipment, microfilm reader-printers, etc.).

Wrap each computer in a plastic garbage bag and secure the bag with a tie around the electrical cord. Leave the computer plugged into the wall, as the cord will act as an anchor. Make sure the computer is turned off, and turn the electricity off at the breaker box.

If you are unable to remove paper records from the site, get them as far above the floor as possible. Wrap all shelves in plastic, and tape the plastic down to hold it in place.

If flooding occurs, or if your agency's primary facility becomes unusable, identify a temporary site or sites where agency functions can resume and records salvage operations can be started. ADAH Government Records Division staff can provide contact information for disaster recovery assistance vendors.

Obtaining quick assistance in developing a disaster plan

Archival and library collections are at risk from natural disasters—such as high winds, tornadoes, hurricanes, or flooding—and from accidents, building defects, or inappropriate environmental systems. Collections are particularly vulnerable during renovation or construction projects. A disaster plan that addresses both prevention and disaster response and recovery can reduce the risk of disasters and minimize losses if they occur.

Doing the necessary research, surveying the building and the collections, and writing the plan deters a lot of people from creating a disaster plan. The Northeast Document Conservation Center in Andover, MA, and the Massachusetts Board of Library Commissioners in Boston, have developed **dPlan**, a free on-line disaster planning tool that helps to simplify the process.

dPlan is best suited to small and medium-sized institutions. It enables one to enter data to an on-line, fill-in-the-blank template to create and print a customized disaster plan. The plan is available at www.dplan.org. At this site, it is possible to run through a demo, register as a new user, and enter information. dPlan is available in both Microsoft Word and PDF. While the 127-page plan requires extensive data entry, it saves an agency from having to develop a disaster plan from scratch. dPlan includes institutional information; disaster prevention, response, and recovery data; supplies and services; and staff training. Agencies can also review and update their disaster plans.

Once an agency develops a disaster planning and recovery document, another useful tool is the **pocket response plan** (PReP), which is available from the Council of State Archives (CoSA) at www.statearchivists.org. A template for PReP enables one to enter the names and telephone numbers of the primary agency contacts; first responders (police, fire department, and emergency management); the disaster recovery team; utilities,

emergency services providers (document recovery services, data recovery services, and freezer space); mutual aid partners (staff from other institutions and volunteers); regional preservation services; and other useful contacts. The plan, which is easy to update, folds into a Tyvek pocket. This pocket can be carried in a wallet or purse, so that it is readily available. It can be purchased from CoSA for a small fee.

Obtaining emergency response and salvage information

In 1997, the National Institute for the Conservation of Cultural Property, Inc., in cooperation with the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), produced the Emergency Response and Salvage Wheel. It offers a series of emergency response steps for agencies when salvaging records damaged by water from fire hoses, floods, severe storms, or broken pipes. The wheel should be used within 48 hours after the emergency, for quick action is critical to saving records that might otherwise be lost.

Side one of the wheel lists steps to address the critical stages of disaster response: stabilizing the building and environment, assessing damage, and establishing salvage priorities. Side two, Salvage Steps, provides practical tips for salvaging various types of collections: books and paper (records), photographs, electronic media, paintings, textiles, and furniture. There is also a glossary of such terms as air-drying, freezing, vacuum freeze drying, etc.

To purchase an Emergency Response and Salvage Wheel, contact: Heritage Preservation, 1730 K Street, NW, Suite 566, Washington, DC 20006; telephone (202)634-1422; e-mail www.heritagepreservation.org/programs/rfwheel.htm. Information may also be viewed on FEMA's web site: http://www.fema.gov/r-n-r/ers_wl.htm.

Remember that the wheel is only a quick reference guide. In an actual emergency, contact conservation specialists for advice as soon as

possible. For questions on records conservation issues, contact Linda Overman at the ADAH Government Records Division, (334)353-4726, e-mail Linda.Overman@archives.alabama.gov.

Salvaging fire- and water-damaged records

If paper records are only charred or smoke damaged, salvage can be postponed indefinitely. Carefully wrap charred records between sheets of cardboard to prevent crumbling. Later, pages can be trimmed, soot removed, and books rebound. Records can also be photocopied, microfilmed, or scanned, after which the damaged originals can be either wrapped and saved or destroyed according to the Local Government Record's Commission's approved procedures.

Air-drying is usually employed for paper records that are only damp or wet in places. Move them to a clean, dry area where temperature and relative humidity can be kept low to prevent mold growth. Place a dehumidifier in the room and use fans to keep the air moving at all times. Cover floors and tables with Visqueen (plastic sheeting) before placing records on them. If the volumes will stand up without sagging, they may be stood on end, with a stack of paper towels under them to absorb water. Volumes may also be dried "flat" by placing paper towels between pages at 25-page intervals. Replace the towels when they get wet.

Vacuum freeze-drying may be necessary when records are thoroughly soaked or there are too many to salvage immediately. Because of its expense, freeze-drying is most appropriate for permanent or vital records. With this process, wet or frozen records are placed in a specially designed chamber and the oxygen pulled out to create a vacuum. Water passes from a solid (frozen) phase to a vapor phase without going through a liquid phase, which lessens the chance of additional damage to the paper.

Water-damaged records are usually recoverable if salvage work begins within two days. Thereafter, mold and mildew develop rapidly. Because the disaster site will be extremely humid, salvage must be undertaken elsewhere. Ideal is a clean, dry area with a temperature of 65 degrees and a relative humidity of 40%. Cover floors or tables used as work areas with plastic sheeting, and move water-damaged records with extreme care. Milk crates or similar ventilated plastic cartons are good carriers. Do not try to separate stuck-together pages as long as they are saturated. When the pages are drier, paper towels may be placed between them to absorb water. Change the towels frequently, using fans to circulate air over damaged records.

Damp microfiche can be air-dried on a clean, lint-free white cotton sheet. Do not unroll wet microfilm, as this may cause the emulsion layer to separate from the base film. Leave wet microfilm rolls in their containers and place them in clean water. Contact the vendor to have the film dried within 48-60 hours. Recovery of water-damaged computer disks is problematic, and placing a wet disk in the drive can seriously damage your computer. Contact the computer equipment's manufacturer for assistance in drying disks, magnetic media, and hardware. For a list of vendors who specialize in recovering computerized records, call the Government Records Division at (334)242-4452 or records@archives.alabama.gov.