

# Preserving Our Past

## A Strategic Plan for Preserving California's Documentary Heritage



California Historical Records Advisory Board  
January 2009

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## **Introduction**

### **California Historical Records Advisory Board**

The California Historical Records Advisory Board was established in 1976 in response to federal regulations that require each state to have an historical records board in order to participate in the grant funding program of the National Historical Publications and Records Commission. As the central advisory body for historical records in California, CHRAB is authorized to carry out statewide planning and assessment activities, act as a coordinator to facilitate cooperation among historical record-keepers within the state, and serve as a state-level reviewer of NHPRC grant applications. To date, California projects have received over five million dollars from the NHPRC records program.

The CHRAB is composed of a state coordinator, appointed by the Governor, a deputy coordinator, and eleven additional members. Representatives from the California State Library, California Department of Parks and Recreation, Society of California Archivists, California Association of Museums, and California Conference for the Promotion of History serve on the board. In addition, there are members representing universities and colleges, local governments, and the records management community. Three at-large members complete the board. A majority of the members must have demonstrated experience or interest in the collection, administration, and use of historical records.

The California Historical Records Advisory Board is dedicated to promoting, coordinating, and supporting efforts to identify, manage, and preserve the historical records of California. In carrying forward this mission, the board advocates professional stewardship and cooperation in the record-keeping community in order to ensure ready access to and use of the state's documentary heritage.

### **2002 Strategic Plan Update**

Although significant challenges still face the historical records community in California, a number of objectives identified in the board's last strategic plan issued in 2002 have been implemented.

The board received funding in 2005 from NHPRC for a regrant project. This project, which provided support to ten local repositories in the state, was an important first step in preserving valuable historical collections.

*The Historical Records of County Government in California* was revised and republished by the Secretary of State in 2004. This publication, long unavailable, was distributed to local government officials throughout the state and is an important resource for both local officials and researchers who want to use county records.

An annual Archives Week/Month was established in 2005. Led by the Society of California Archivists (SCA) and the California State Archives, this initiative has helped to raise the

awareness of historical record collections in the state and build grass roots support for archival programs.

Legislation was passed in 2005 that created a 75-year limit on restrictions to records maintained at the State Archives. As a result, access was provided for the first time to collections that had previously been unavailable, including mental health and prison records useful for genealogical research.

With assistance from NHPRC, a basic archives workshop program launched in the fall of 2006. Jointly sponsored by SCA and the State Archives, this program has provided a valuable introduction to modern archives management to over 350 participants. To date, fourteen one-day workshops have been offered.

With funding provided by the State Library, a group of major repositories in the state, worked throughout 2007 to explore ways in which record-keepers can collaborate to preserve California's documentary heritage. Spearheaded by The Huntington Library, the group issued a report, *California Historical Records: Coordinating Activities Among Institutions in California* that identified key areas of mutual support and cooperation.

Recommendations of the State Archives' Appraisal Task Force were implemented in March 2005. This effort is improving the process by which the State Archives reviews state agency records retention schedules and is streamlining procedures for the appraisal of large record series such as case files.

The board itself was reorganized in the fall of 2005 to better reflect the diversity of records-keeping constituencies in the state. The new board, now composed of thirteen members, includes representatives from state and local government, the historical, university, museum, archival, and records management communities, and three at-large members.

Despite this progress, the board is mindful that enormous difficulties are still encountered by the majority of California's nearly 4,000 repositories that maintain historical records. Funding for records programs remains at low levels. Lack of adequate storage areas with proper environmental conditions and lack of sufficient space are chronic. Likewise, many organizations are staffed by people with inadequate training and education. The growth of electronic records collections continues to stretch the capabilities and resources of many repositories. Without a concerted effort to change these circumstances, California's documentary legacy will continue to deteriorate.

## **Issue I: Resources for Record-Keepers**

*Lack of adequate resources for archives and records management is a defining characteristic of the California historical records landscape. In many ways, the problem of insufficient resources cuts across all other issues. Public and private record-keepers not only suffer from small budgets, but also from a lack of basic information and training opportunities.*

### **Objective 1: Identify and develop sources of financial support for historical records programs.**

Action Items:

1. Apply for funding from the National Historical Publications and Records Commission for an additional regrant program. The regrant funds would be distributed to those repositories demonstrating the greatest need in the management and preservation of their historical records, and would be in keeping with CHRAB's funding priorities.
2. Assist and help promote the efforts of The Friends of California Archives.
3. Promote programs that provide financial support for historical records, including the Preserving the American Historical Record bill (PAHR).

### **Objective 2: Develop informational tools that promote resource enhancement for historical records programs.**

Action Items:

1. Establish a clearinghouse of information on archives and records management. The clearinghouse would include documentation on professional standards, best practices, and models, and would be widely available to record-keepers, resource allocators, and government officials.
2. Establish a circuit rider consulting service. This service would offer consultation on an intermittent basis from consultants who would be on call to deliver assistance throughout the state as needed. The service would be available to repositories at nominal cost.
3. Produce a directory of sources of support for historical records programs.
4. Produce a guide to fundraising for local historical records programs.

### **Objective 3: Assess resource needs for historical records.**

Action Item:

1. Prepare and distribute a resource needs assessment for historical records in California.

## **Issue 2: Public Understanding and Awareness**

*Record-keepers have limited recognition from the general public and within their own organizations. Even effective records programs are often not regarded as being important or even necessary. As a result, records programs receive a low priority and wage an uphill battle for resources. To date, the historical records community has done a poor job of seeking opportunities to promote archival programs.*

**Objective 1: Educate the public to value records and archives for self-understanding, government accountability, sound institutional management, and historical reflection.**

Action Items:

1. Facilitate development of partnerships among archivists, librarians, local government officials, and other collaborators to promote awareness of the value of archival records.
2. Produce promotional literature and provide guidelines and models to facilitate this work.
3. Support community forums on historical records by working with public libraries.
4. Work with religious organizations, service clubs, and similar organizations to promote the value of their records, which often have not been retained in an archival manner.

**Objective 2: Collect, share, and distribute information regarding the value of archives and records management. In particular, this information should be directed to resource allocators and government officials who control funding for records programs.**

Action Item:

1. Establish a clearinghouse of information relating to the value and importance of archival collections and programs.

## **Issue 3: Preservation of Records**

*The preservation of historical records continues to be a serious problem for both public and private repositories. A fundamental issue is the lack of current information and education for those who care for records. At the state level, concrete steps must be taken to reorganize and reinvigorate preservation efforts.*

**Objective 1: Provide access to information regarding the preservation and storage of historical records.**

Action Item:

1. Provide links to information on the CHRAB website to aid in the dissemination of information regarding the preservation and storage of historical records.

**Objective 2: Encourage grant-funding agencies to require adherence to preservation standards.**

Action Item:

1. Require grant applicants to describe the standards for preservation to which their project will adhere and how they will achieve those standards in their project.

**Objective 3: Support the development, funding, and implementation of preservation programs and training.**

Action Items:

1. Pursue a partnership with the California Preservation Program.
2. Support the passage of legislation that would require that state government records be printed on acid-free paper stock.
3. Support programs for the identification, preservation, and protection of vital records in California.

**Issue 4: Access to Information**

*More than ever, users of historical records expect, even demand, ready access to information. The board recognizes the need to promote guidelines that will ensure that minimum conditions for access are available at all repositories. In addition, record-keepers need to make use of descriptive tools that will enhance use of their holdings. The board will promote training and education that enhances access and will work with the State Archives and other organizations to revise public record laws.*

**Objective 1: Expand statewide, remote access to historical records and information about them.**

Action Items:

1. Promote training on open records laws.
2. Support guidelines for the digitization of records.
3. Promote a revision of the California Public Records Act to include a seventy-five year limit on restrictions to any public record currently exempt under the law.
4. Promote and support replevin legislation to provide a process through which public records that have fallen into private hands can be recovered and made accessible to the public.

## **Objective 2: Support Enhanced Description of Records**

### Action Items:

1. Issue guidelines for access, including the use of *Describing Archives: A Content Standard*.
2. Encourage the preparation of repository guides, on-line catalogs, and other finding aids.
3. Promote the reporting of descriptive information to national and state databases.
4. Provide basic workshops on processing.

## **Issue 5: Education and Training**

*All historical records custodians in the state of California require training, continuing education, and access to professional resources to properly create and care for the state's historical records. It is critical to promote knowledge of and adherence to standards of professional practice in the custodianship of historical records, particularly in the context of the widely divergent backgrounds of current custodians of historical records. Outreach programs are essential to help organizations that create records understand the value of their records and how to care for them.*

## **Objective 1: Identify needs, sponsor events, and promote education and training for staff of organizations that maintain historical records. Facilitate communication, coordination, and collaboration among those who provide such training.**

### Action Items:

1. Provide a single website that captures and provides links to training opportunities from diverse sources such as SCA, SAA, preservation networks, and educational institutions.
2. Coordinate training with other state institutions or associations, promote such workshops among constituencies, and encourage partnerships.
3. Continue to provide regional workshops targeted to introduce new practitioners to basic methods and techniques for the proper management and preservation of historical records.
4. Support an annual workshop on such topics as digitization, collections care and management (including electronic records), collections access, grant writing, disaster preparedness, and preservation. The workshop would be offered regionally based on funding availability.
5. Support the development of workshops and training on records management, preservation, and appraisal for local governments.

6. Continue to promote the Western Archives Institute, including expansion of the program for targeted constituencies.

**Objective 2: Promote professional archival standards and disseminate information regarding those standards using both existing publications and electronic tools.**

Action Items:

1. Encourage historical records custodians to attend professional meetings such as the annual meeting of the Society of California Archivists (SCA), and to take advantage of other related educational opportunities.
2. Hold meetings at annual organizational meetings to encourage collaboration with affiliated groups such as SCA, the California Library Association (CLA), the California Association of Museums (CAM), and local chapters of the American Records Management Association (ARMA).
3. Produce articles on government records issues in relevant publications such as the California State Association of Counties (CSAC) and SCA newsletters.
4. Maintain information on experts in various archival management areas, including disaster preparedness and preservation.
5. Collaborate with college history programs and schools of library and information science to seek internship placement opportunities for students.
6. Create or sponsor workshops and guided study programs, with particular emphasis on managing information in electronic formats, for beginning archivists, records custodians, and other information professionals.

**Objective 3: Seek support to continue training and professional development opportunities for staff of historical records repositories.**

Action Items:

1. Encourage the Society of American Archivists and other professional organizations to hold training programs in the state.
2. Seek grant funding to support or underwrite such training opportunities.
3. Identify areas of need on a continuing basis so training and professional development are focused on the areas of greatest need.

## **Issue 6: Adequacy of Documentation**

*Although California is rich in the number and diversity of its collections, work is overdue in identifying subjects and communities under-represented in the historical record. Ensuring an adequate and accurate documentation of the state's history, in all its forms, is a crucial part of long-term planning. Oral history is a vital component of historical documentation and is deserving of greater recognition.*

### **Objective 1: Promote efforts to identify under-documented topics in California history.**

Action Items:

1. Establish a task force to identify under-documented topics in California history.
2. Convene a California Records Congress to discuss issues related to adequacy of documentation.

### **Objective 2: Promote oral history programs on the history of California.**

Action Item:

1. Form a task force to review existing programs and make recommendations to CHRAB.

## **Issue 7: Electronic Records**

*Electronic information systems are making radical changes in the ways records are created, maintained, and used, affecting long-term access to and preservation of historical records. The board recognizes a special imperative to encourage the development of standards and protocols to insure information contained in electronic records is, and remains, a record by demonstrating content, structure, fixity, context and evidential nature over time.*

### **Objective 1: Promote and support educational opportunities to record keepers regarding electronic records and digital collections.**

Action Items:

1. Help records creators to understand the critical importance of electronic records to the permanent historical record of California.
2. Promote and encourage training in and use of applicable best practices, including ISO standards and ANSI / AIIM standards.
3. Provide information to local governments on managing the storage and protection of electronic data, both on and off-line.
4. Support regular workshops, user-group meetings, and training on electronic records.

**Objective 2: Encourage development and use of state standards and best practices for electronic record keeping and managing digital collections**

Action Items:

1. Support the creation of state standards, including auditing and compliance, for incorporating electronic record keeping into records and information management functions.
2. Promote the development of model guidelines for electronic records programs implementation.
3. Encourage the Secretary of State's office to develop electronic records policies for local governments and state agencies.

**Objective 3: Support the development of grant programs, technical assistance programs, and networks for managing electronic records and digital collections.**

Action Items:

1. Identify sources of financial support for electronic records management.
2. Encourage the creation of disaster plans specifically targeting electronic records.
3. Support programs for the identification, preservation, and protection of electronic vital records in California.
4. Advocate for improvements in records-keeping programs and encourage the incorporation of electronic record keeping into records and information management functions.

**Objective 4: Encourage collaboration among professional records management organizations and local government records holders to promote improved management and preservation of electronic records.**

Action Items:

1. Collaborate with allied organizations to provide a clearinghouse of information and training opportunities related to electronic record keeping, data curation, and managing digital collections.
2. Foster dialogue among archivists, records and information managers, information technology and legal departments to identify roles and responsibilities and encourage collaboration to ensure proper record keeping.

3. Promote the establishment of an interdepartmental / intergovernmental committee to develop model standards and strategies to manage and preserve information in electronic formats.

## **Issue 8: Records Management**

*Essential to the long-term welfare of archival work in the public and private sectors is the proper establishment and maintenance of a records management program based on professional standards and procedures. Too often, however, records managers struggle for support. Many of California's cities and counties have not yet taken the first steps toward developing a program for their active records. Many private organizations and corporations have no records management program in place. It is imperative that the historical records community takes immediate action to encourage and promote sound records management practices to those who create and manage active and inactive records.*

### **Objective 1: Develop resources for improving the awareness of sound records management practices among local governments and private organizations.**

Action Items:

1. Develop a clearinghouse of best practices and model records retention schedules that will be available for review on the CHRAB website.
2. Provide programs and/or speakers at professional meetings of state and regional records management organizations.
3. Create a brochure for distribution to local government officials and records coordinators explaining the value of records management.

### **Objective 2: Encourage local governments to institutionalize sound records management practices in their operations.**

Action Items:

1. Advocate the reactivation of Historical Records Commissions within county governments.
2. Support legislation that requires records management programs for local governments.
3. Educate state and local officials on the importance of properly managing and disposing of their records by offering training sessions.

## **Issue 9: Leadership for the Historical Records Community**

*One of the principal roles of the California Historical Records Advisory Board is to act as a coordinating body for issues related to historical records statewide. With that responsibility, the board is positioned in a leadership role for the historical records community and to encourage communication and collaboration among organizations and institutions.*

### **Objective 1: Promote collaboration and discussion relating to archives and records management.**

Action Items:

1. Encourage creation of regional forums for discussion of common concerns relating to archives and records management.
2. Continue to develop and maintain a CHRAB web presence that includes promotion of collaboration among historical records repositories.
3. Continue to coordinate and support statewide publicity and activities for Archives Month.
4. Support grant projects and other mechanisms encouraging collaboration among institutions.
5. Collaborate with allied organizations and the broader historical records community to garner greater support for historical records activities statewide.

### **Objective 2: Advocate for local government records and support of local historical records programs.**

Action Items:

1. Support a legislative initiative that will revive the County Historical Records Commissions as advocates for local government records.
2. Support federal funding opportunities such as the Preserving the American Historical Records bill (PAHR) that will benefit historical records programs in California.

## **Issue 10: State Archives**

*The California State Archives occupies an important leadership role in the state and in the statewide historical records community. The board recognizes that support of the State Archives and its programs provides benefits to repositories throughout California and to the people of California.*

### **Objective 1: Support the efforts of the State Archives to increase archival resources available to local governments.**

Action Item:

1. Advocate for funding and staffing of the State Archives' Local Government Records Program.

**Objective 2: Support restoration of the State Government Oral History Program.**

Action Item:

1. Advocate for restoration of funding for the State Government Oral History Program.

**Objective 3: Support reunification of the archives and records management functions within state government.**

Action Item:

1. Encourage reunification of the state's archives and records management functions under the Secretary of State through the merger of the Archives Division of the Office of the Secretary of State and California Information and Records Management (CalRIM) in the Department of General Services.

**Objective 4: Support a unified approach to management and preservation of state government historical resources.**

Action Item:

1. Encourage the California Department of Parks and Recreation, the California State Library, the California State Archives, and other state agencies to cooperate in the management and preservation of historical materials within state government.

# Funding Priorities

*To assist California's record-keepers in seeking external funding, CHRAB has developed the following list of funding priorities. CHRAB encourages the historical records community to develop collaborative and innovative approaches to addressing the issues identified in the strategic plan. Organizations interested in pursuing funding from the National Historical Publications and Records Commission are urged to contact the board well in advance of the application deadline for assistance.*

## Priority One

- 1. Improving preservation of and access to historical records of all types.**
- 2. Educating and training staff to manage historical collections in accordance with professional standards.**

## Priority Two

- 3. Increasing awareness of the significance of archives and records programs.**
- 4. Promoting collaborative efforts within the historical records community.**
- 5. Developing effective programs for the management and preservation of electronic records.**

# California Historical Records Advisory Board

Nancy Z. Lenoil, State Coordinator  
California State Archives

Laren Metzger, Deputy State Coordinator  
California State Archives

Gary Brutsch  
At-large representative

Gabriele Carey  
At-large representative

Christine Figueroa  
Records Management representative

Wendy Franklin  
California Department of Parks and Recreation

Jim Henley  
California Association of Museums

Jim Hofer  
Local Government representative

Gary Kurutz  
California State Library

Waverly Lowell  
Colleges and Universities representative

Charles Palm  
At-large representative

Chuck Wilson  
California Council for the Promotion of History

Jennifer Martinez Wormser  
Society of California Archivists

**Copies of this document may be downloaded from the board web site at:**

**<http://www.sos.ca.gov/archives/pdf/strategicplan.pdf>**

**California Historical Records Advisory Board  
1020 O Street  
Sacramento, CA 95814**

**Telephone: (916) 653-0401**

**Fax: (916) 653-7134**

**Web site: [www.sos.ca.gov/archives/level3\\_shrab.html](http://www.sos.ca.gov/archives/level3_shrab.html)**