



The
**Archivists
Round Table**
of Metropolitan
New York,
Inc.

P.O. Box 151
New York
NY
10274-0154

September 15, 2015

Kathleen Williams, Executive Director
National Historical Publications and Records Commission
National Archives and Records Administration
700 Pennsylvania Ave NW, Suite 114
Washington, DC 20408

Dear Ms. Williams,

The Archivists Round Table of Metropolitan New York, Inc. (A.R.T.) welcomes the opportunity to comment on the draft strategic plan for the National Historical Publications and Records Commission (NHPRC). Founded in 1979, A.R.T. is a not-for-profit organization representing a diverse group of more than 650 archivists, librarians, and records managers in the metropolitan New York area.

We are particularly encouraged by the move to streamline the application process and to clarify the intent and meaning of the term "national significance." Our hope is that such changes will better enable smaller repositories to benefit from NHPRC grants. Changes to the application process that reduce the initial burden of grant writing, while also opening up the types of collections eligible for funding, will not only benefit repositories applying for grants but will also broaden the spectrum of archival records that are accessible to a wider audience.

In that regard, we are also encouraged by the emphasis in the draft strategic plan on expanding access to the nation's historical records. Every repository should have as its core mission the goal of expanding access and use of the materials entrusted to its care. While leveraging technology to open more materials to public access is increasingly the goal of archives both large and small, we cannot lose sight of the basic archival processes necessary to make digital access of analog materials possible. In particular, basic tasks such as processing, arrangement, stabilization, and conservation of materials are often a prerequisite to digitization of and online, open access to many collections. Too often, in our collective experience, these basic needs are obscured in the drive to digitize collection materials. An explicit acknowledgement of this reality would reassure us that these basic needs would still be supported by NHPRC funding within the overall goal of sustaining digital resources and access.

We also welcome NHPRC's commitment to developing and promoting best practices. Collaboration with professional and regional organizations to support continued professional development is key to ensuring the historical record is accessible to future generations. Such initiatives should support integrating best practices within existing graduate programs in archival studies to ensure newer professionals possess the necessary knowledge to actively contribute to the field.

Finally, we also support greater public engagement with archival records and in what we do as a profession. Volunteers have repeatedly proven their value to repositories both small and large, and we support the idea of funding for the creation and sharing of crowdsourcing tools when collections lend themselves to this use. However, reliance on such volunteer resources should not be viewed as a substitute for a staff of



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professionally trained archivists. We are concerned about enshrining in a strategic plan dependence on these resources, as well as the implications inherent in the term "Citizen Archivist." Archival work requires specialized skills, knowledge, and abilities, which we as professionals use in preserving and providing access to historical materials. This specialization comes from a significant investment in training, often including graduate school, and ongoing professional development. We encourage the NHPRC to include language in its strategic plan that supports the creation and sustainability of professionally trained archivist positions at institutions that receive funding.

Sincerely,

Janet Bunde
President