
NEW YORK DOCUMENTARY HERITAGE PROGRAM

ACTION CALL AND FACT SHEET

February 1990

ACTION CALL

The Documentary Heritage Program (DHP) in 1990-91. The Regents requested \$998,000 for the DHP in FY 1990-1991. This would support \$400,000 in project grants and extend full regional advisory services to three additional 3R's regions while continuing services in METRO, South Central, and Western New York, i.e. six of the nine regions statewide would be receiving full support next year. However, the Governor's Executive Budget proposes to continue the DHP at the \$250,000 level.

The National Historical Publications and Records Commission (NHPRC) has recently offered a conditional matching grant of \$200,000 to the State Archives for "regrant" funds for historical records projects in conjunction with the DHP. The offer is contingent on the State appropriating at least an additional \$100,000 for DHP grant funds for Fiscal Year 1990 and \$50,000 beyond that the following year. Acceptance of this offer would provide a minimum of \$200,000 for DHP project grants in 1990-91. However, the offer will be withdrawn in April 1990 if the 1990 Budget does include an increase to at least match the NHPRC offer of \$100,000 for FY 1990.

Note: State funds of \$600,000 would match the Federal offer and support expansion from three to six regions.

ACTION NEEDED NOW

Write now to your Assembly Member and Senator. Send copies to Assembly Speaker Mel Miller and Senate Majority Leader Ralph Marino and to the Assembly Ways and Means and the Senate Finance Committees. Advocate an increased local assistance appropriation to the State Education Department for the DHP. Stress the aspect of the DHP that is of greatest interest to you, e.g. funds for services in additional regions or increased project grants for particular types of records, activities, or archival programs. Point out the soundness of the DHP and its importance to New York's present and future citizens. Note the impending loss of Federal grant funds, the current absence of any funds for DHP project grants, and the fact that six of nine regions are not able to provide the services envisioned in the DHP Law of 1988. The address for the Legislature is Legislative Office Building, Albany New York, 12247 (Senate) and 12248 (Assembly).

FACT SHEET

Purpose and Background. New York's Documentary Heritage Program (DHP) began on September 1, 1988 when Governor Cuomo signed the Documentary Heritage Law (Ch. 679, L. 1988). The DHP Law authorizes support for institutional archives, libraries, museums, historical societies, and other programs that collect, hold, and make available historical records, and for organizations providing advisory services to such programs. Under DHP, project grants are available to strengthen historical records programs, arrange and describe records, encourage use, and support other activities. Aid is to be made available to the nine Reference and Research Library Resources Systems (3R's) to provide advice and training to historical records programs in their regions. Aid is also to be provided for the central administrations of CUNY and SUNY to guide development of university-wide archival programs. The DHP is administered by the State Archives and Records Administration (SARA) in the State Education Department (518-474-1195).

The origins of the program can be traced to Toward a Usable Past, the State Historical Records Advisory Board's 1984 report to Governor Cuomo. The report noted that many of New York's historical records programs are undersupported, underdeveloped, and lack adequate staff and resources. The report recommended establishment of a regionally-based advisory service system to assist these programs, and a state grant-in-aid program to provide partial support for strengthening repositories statewide. The DHP reflects these recommendations.

Activities, 1988-1989. The Legislature appropriated \$250,000 to initiate the DHP in the last half of FY 88-89. From this amount, \$105,000 in aid was provided to three of New York's nine 3R's -- Western New York (Buffalo region), South Central (Ithaca region) and METRO (New York City and Westchester County) - to assess needs and begin advisory services and educational programs. Each of the three Systems established a regional historical records advisory committee and hired an experienced archivist to provide training and advice to historical records programs within the region on the proper care of historical records and sound administration of historical records programs. Within each region, a preliminary needs assessment was carried out and a report prepared on conditions and needs of historical records programs. The reports also advance strategies and objectives for improving historical records programming in the region. Also, DHP Archivists held introductory workshops on the core elements of historical records program administration, and provided on-site technical consultations.

Forty repositories applied for the \$105,000 available for project grants, requesting more than \$600,000. Fifteen were funded, most at less than the level requested, after review of applications by a panel of outside experts. Included were support for a planning conference on identifying and acquiring environmental records; for a records survey of New York's Puerto Rican community by the Library of the Center for Puerto Rican Studies; for processing key collections at the Wagner Labor Archives and the Buffalo and Erie County Historical Society; for archival consultant projects at a number of museums, historical societies and other non profit institutions; and for the production of a historical documents teaching packet and a study on the use of historical records to support the New York State Social Studies curriculum. One grant supported a "circuit rider" archivist to provide expert and cost-effective assistance on high priority collections to five small repositories in the lower Hudson Valley. CUNY assembled an advisory committee, developed a preliminary needs assessment, and obtained software to begin automated description of archival records on CUNY campuses.

Activities, 1989-1990. The Legislature added \$250,000 to the State Budget to support the Documentary Heritage Program for the period July 1, 1989 through June 30, 1990. After consultation with the State Historical Records Advisory Board, SARA concluded that the best use of these limited funds would be to sustain the regional advisory work begun in FY 88-89 and to encourage the other six 3R's to begin preparing to offer advisory services in the future. Funds totalling \$200,000 were allocated for the three 3R's that initiated services in FY 88-89. Each of these is increasing the number of workshops and on-site consultations, issuing a newsletter with information for programs in the region, and carrying out other activities to address conditions identified in their first year assessments.

Funds totalling \$24,000 were allocated to preliminary DHP activities in the other six regions. Each region has received up to \$4,000 to assemble an advisory committee, assess needs and develop preliminary strategies and objectives. Some regions are also holding introductory workshops on the core elements of historical records programs and on records description.

SUNY is formally designating an office to coordinate records management and archival development, assembling an advisory committee, engaging an archival consultant, and drafting policies and action plans. CUNY is continuing archival planning and is enhancing and standardizing archival description on CUNY campuses using software purchased with DHP funds last year.