



Introducing the Council of State Archivists

The Council of State Archivists (CoSA) is a national organization representing the directors of the state archival agencies in each of the 50 states, the District of Columbia, and the territories. In thirty-seven states, the state archivists also bear responsibility for records management services.

CoSA is especially active in the following areas, all of which focus on ensuring the long-term preservation of and access to records that are important to governments, communities, and individual citizens throughout the United States.



The most important effort, one that is in the earliest stages of development, is the **Partnership for the American Historical Record (PAHR)**. This effort envisions a formula-based program that would substantially increase the federal funding available for the support of archives and historical records programs

nationwide, including those in state and local governments as well as in private, nonprofit organizations, through passage of "An Act to Preserve America's Historical Records." These funds would be distributed through state-based offices administered by the state archives in a similar way to the programs now supporting libraries and historic preservation.



CoSA launched its **Emergency Preparedness Initiative (EPI)** in response to the widespread destruction of records during the 2005 hurricane season. The initiative recognizes that records are at risk from a variety of natural disasters—tornadoes, floods, earthquakes, and more—as well as a wide range of other threats, including fires, broken pipes, explosions, cyber attacks, and malicious acts. EPI components include an **Assessment of Emergency Preparedness in State Archives and Records Management**

Programs, completed in all 50 states in 2006, and the **Pocket Response Plan (PRpP)**, a compact communication and action plan designed to be carried in staff members' wallets. The EPI report, "**Safeguarding a Nation's Identity**," has gained broad attention, making a compelling case for records-related preparedness in federal, state, and local governments nationwide.



CoSA's "**Closest to Home**" project, focusing on local government archives, is analyzing current conditions and identifying the services, standards, and funding strategies that will best ensure the long-term preservation of and access to local government records. The project's task force is focusing on four major areas: sustainable funding, advocacy and awareness, training, and the implications of technology. It is also developing a case statement on the importance of providing proper archival care for records of local

governments. The task force has sought input from a wide variety of experts and allied associations. A final report and recommendations will be available before the end of 2007.

CoSA prepared a **manual for governors** and their staff members regarding the **proper management and disposition of gubernatorial records** which was published in 2006 by the National Governors Association (NGA). NGA uses the manual during its annual training session for newly elected governors each fall. CoSA hopes to extend this work to provide similar guidance for other state officials about the care of their records and their records-related responsibilities.

In April 2007, CoSA issued a **Statement on Digital Access Partnerships** in response to sharply increasing interest from both for-profit and nonprofit enterprises (e.g., Ancestry.com, iArchives, Genealogical Society of Utah) in digitizing public records and making them available online. State archivists recognize that these partnerships offer great potential benefits—broadened access, preservation of valuable holdings electronically, revenue-sharing potential. They also are keenly aware that they hold these records in public trust and must ensure that whatever contractual arrangements they make keep public records public, protect citizen rights, and provide sound investments for tax dollars. The statement provides guidance to each state archives for negotiating terms with online content providers.

An increasing number of state archives have discovered **documents offered for sale through online auction sites that were clearly public records** and therefore should have still been in the custody of state or local governments. Many have worked with their state attorneys general to reclaim these public records with generally good rates of success. Starting in 2004, CoSA led an effort to issue a statement on this issue and to educate the public, eBay and similar auction centers, and dealers about the fundamental principles involved.

CoSA is also tracking a number of other issues that are having an impact on policies and practices regarding state and local government records, including **e-discovery**, adoption of **open document formats**, and ensuring **individual rights to privacy** while fostering **public access to government information**.

CoSA's ongoing programs include:

- **Regular surveys and statistical analyses** since 1992 of state archives and records management programs and related topics, including local government records, emergency preparedness, and nongovernmental historical records repositories. CoSA is committed to comprehensive surveys of the state archives and records management programs every 10 years and more focused collections of key data every two years in between the larger surveys. State archives and records management programs have come to rely on CoSA data when developing their own performance measures and status reports to state budget offices and legislatures.
- **Support for State Historical Records Advisory Boards (SHRABs)** in collaboration with staff at the National Historical Publications and Records Commission (NHPRC). The SHRABs are administered by the state archivist, who is designated by NHPRC regulations to serve as the "state historical records coordinator." One of the primary functions of each SHRAB is to review grant proposals to NHPRC from its state. Many of these boards have also taken on leadership and coordinating roles for statewide historical records programs beyond their specific grant-review responsibilities. CoSA provides manuals for state coordinators, an orientation program for SHRAB members, and facilitates methods for sharing products and best practices across state lines.
- **An annual meeting**, which in recent years has drawn representatives from at least 48 of the 50 states plus the District of Columbia.
- **A website** (www.statearchivists.org) which includes information resources of value for the state archives, state records managers, and the SHRABs; directories of comparable agencies and officials in other states; links to manuals, technical documents, and other publications in important topical areas like electronic records and records schedules; public awareness tools like the Directory of Archives Month activities; and more.
- **A listserv** connecting all of the state archivists, providing access to advice and a quick way to check on what other states are doing to address a particular problem. CoSA also hosts a comparable listserv for local government archivists.