Closest to Home

Archival Programs for
Local Government Records

Preserving the Nation's Local Government Archives

Report and Recommendations of the CoSA Local Government Archives Task Force

January 2008

CoSA
Council of State Archivists

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Co-Chairs

Kaye Lanning Minchew
Director, Troup County Archives

Roy Tryon (through fall 2007)
State Archivist and Records Administrator, South Carolina Department of Archives and History

Jodie Foley (beginning fall 2007)
State Archivist, Montana Historical Society

Task Force Members

Paul Bergeron
City Clerk, Nashua, NH

Joan Decker
Records Commissioner, City of Philadelphia

Virginia Fritzsch
Local Government Records Archivist, Wisconsin Historical Society

Raimund Goerler
Assistant Director of Libraries, The Ohio State University

Lisa Johnston
Assistant City Clerk, Artesia, NM

Shirley Wilson
Director (Retired) Sumner County (TN) Archives, and Certified Genealogist

Ex Officio

Howard Lowell
National Archives and Records Administration

Richard Cameron
National Historical Publications and Records Commission (through October 2006)

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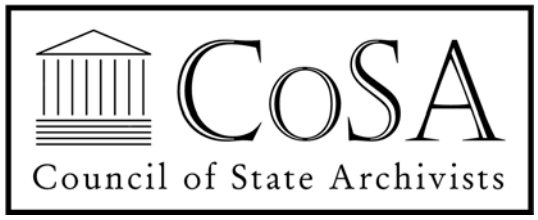

The Council of State Archivists is grateful to the National Historical Publications and Records Commission, which provided funds in support of this project through NHPRC grant number NAR06GRANT-010.

Council of State Archivists
308 East Burlington Street #189
Iowa City, Iowa 52245

Voice: 319-338-0248
Fax: 319-354-2526
Email: info@statearchivists.org

This report and other products of the Closest to Home project are available for download from the Council of State Archivists website at http://www.statearchivists.org/lga/

January 2008

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Acknowledgements

The Task Force would like to express its appreciation to the many people who contributed directly or indirectly to this project, particularly:

Project staff which included Vicki Walch, CoSA Executive Director, who served as project director, and Jenifer Burlis-Freilich, CoSA Program Officer, who provided essential administrative support.

Bruce Dearstyne who deserves special thanks for serving as coordinating consultant. In that role, he prepared background material, established important links with other communities, and prepared drafts of key documents. His insights, experience, and focused attention ensured that the project stayed on track, established important links to allies in other communities, and developed substantial and usable products.

Everyone who served on one of the Expert Panels.

All the attendees at any one of the meetings sponsored by the project who provided advice, feedback, and recommendations.

Everyone who posted an opinion to the online survey or otherwise contributed a suggestion to the project.

The consultants who contributed reports and advice to the project.

The National Historical Publications and Records Commission for providing the funding support for this project.

Of course, the Task Force, while very grateful to everyone who assisted this work, is itself responsible for this report and its recommendations.

Introduction

This report presents the findings and recommendations of the Local Government Archives Task Force, a group established by the Council of State Archivists (CoSA) in early 2006 and supported by a grant from the National Historical Publications and Records Commission.

Members of the Local Government Archives Task Force

Co-Chairs

- **Kaye Lanning Minchew**, Director, Troup County Archives
- **Roy Tryon** (through fall 2007), State Archivist and Records Administrator, South Carolina Department of Archives and History
- **Jodie Foley** (beginning fall 2007), State Archivist, Montana Historical Society

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- **Paul Bergeron**, City Clerk, Nashua, NH
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- **Shirley Wilson**, Director (Retired) Sumner County (TN) Archives, and Certified Genealogist

Ex Officio

- **Howard Lowell**, National Archives and Records Administration
- **Richard Cameron**, National Historical Publications and Records Commission (through October 2006)

Project Goals and Objectives

The goal of the project was to identify strategies and approaches to enhance the identification, preservation, and use of archival records—records with enduring value—in the more than 81,000 local governments nationwide. The title of this project underscores the fact that these records are, indeed, "Closest to Home." In every community throughout the United States, archival records include essential information to sustain both government operations and the lives of individual citizens. They document our marriages, homes, lands, and businesses; provide insight into social, educational public safety, and other services; establish government's authority and responsibilities; and preserve our individual and collective rights. Many have transcending legal value and are therefore essential in litigation. Others document the origin, development, and administration of major government programs. Still others are laws, ordinances, and similar key documents that define fundamental policies, rights, and obligations.

Despite their importance to individuals, communities, and governments themselves, too many local government records that should be stored permanently because of their archival value are lost or unusable. Some are not retained because there is no systematic records management program in place

that would differentiate those of long-term importance from those of shorter term value. Others are stored under conditions that hasten their deterioration. Still others have not been described or inventoried, leaving them inaccessible and unused. The near-universal use of computers to create records in recent times adds a new dimension to the picture. Electronic archival records can be made broadly available via the Web and the Internet, but are even more vulnerable to rapid deterioration or technological changes that make them unusable in just a few years. Strategies for the preservation of these electronic records are still under development, but there are measures that can be taken to ensure their long-term survival.

Given these broad concerns, the Task Force decided to focus its work on the following specific objectives:

- Identifying and examining the key issues that affect the preservation of and access to local government records of long-term value and commissioning consultant reports on those that the Task Force determines to be the most important.
- Reviewing and analyzing existing data and reports to develop a thorough understanding of current conditions and concerns.
- Developing a case statement on the value of local government archives to use in educating key stakeholders about the value of local government archives, including why they are important and why they constitute a national priority.
- Identifying and describing how states are currently addressing local government records (e.g., how local government programs are financed, how funds are distributed, and how and by whom support services are delivered) highlighting the approaches which may serve as best practices.
- Communicating with local government officials and key user groups through national associations and, at the state level, through the State Historical Records Advisory Boards, many of which include representatives from these constituent groups.
- Considering the feasibility of developing measures and common data elements for local government records programs.
- Delineating how funds available through a possible federally funded, state based grant program would be distributed to benefit local government archives.

- Developing an action plan and recommendations for state and local governments, professional associations serving archivists and local government officials, and individuals who work in these programs.

At its first meeting in March 2006, the Task Force decided to explore four issues in greater depth by commissioning consultant reports in each of these areas:

- How to raise awareness and strengthen advocacy among local government officials about the importance of local government records of continuing value?
- How to identify sustainable funding for preserving these records?
- How to provide training in archival techniques and procedures for local government records custodians?
- How to assess and deal with the impact of new electronic information technologies?

The Task Force wishes to emphasize that this is a report about local government ***archival*** records, not about records management in general. We have steadily tried to keep that focus—in our written materials, charges to the consultants, discussions at meetings, and solicitation of advice from members of the project's Expert Panels and contributors to the online survey. Archives are only a small, and very select, percentage of the totality of local government records. Their preservation is a matter of long-term considerations and obligations, as opposed to the more immediate issues related to creation, access, and use that are the most common concern of records management. Archival records have important long-term documentation and historical significance. They generate a different, sometimes larger, and almost always more long-term, user base than non-archival records. Concerned local institutions such as historical societies and libraries may play an active role with regard to local government archives, including lobbying for their adequate care and, in some cases, assuming custodial responsibility for them.

In practice, however, we found, it is difficult to entirely separate archives from records management, for a number of reasons: good records management is usually an essential precursor to the identification and survival of archival records; archival work and records management overlap in the area of appraisal and scheduling and some other areas; electronic records systems that include archival records need in-built provisions at the outset to preserve

those records; and in many settings, records management and archives are combined in a single office.

The Task Force reviewed several previous surveys and studies of local government archives and identified a number of strategies for increasing the likelihood that this project will have a greater lasting impact than earlier reports:

- Using Web-based tools to draw on the perspectives and recommendations of successful practitioners;
- Garnering the advice and enhancing the interest of important groups beyond the archives/records community, e.g., associations of local government officials;
- Engaging expert consultants for in-depth analysis of particular issues; and
- Beginning to implement strategies recommended in this report during 2008 before the project concludes.

Information Gathering: Process and Products

The Task Force carried out an extensive program of information gathering, consultation, and analysis. The objective was not only to discern what works and does not work in building archival programs; it was also to attract a broad range of interest, involvement, and investment in the project so that there is widespread interest in carrying out its recommendations for sustained improvement.

The Task Force's information-gathering process included the following:

- Two open discussion sessions at the August 2006 joint annual meeting of CoSA, the Society of American Archivists (SAA), and the National Association of Government Archives and Records Administrators (NAGARA).
- Two open, online surveys to solicit advice from local government records and archives custodians, users, and others interested in local government archives, September–December 2006. The Task Force publicized the surveys widely and several hundred people responded. The results were primarily used by the four project consultants in preparing their reports.

- Appointment of three Expert Panels (members are listed in the table at right) to provide input on key issues and review reports and recommendations.
- Establishment of a listserv for people interested in the project and in local government archives issues.
- Invitational meeting at the National Archives in Washington in February 2007 attended by representatives of national archival and records associations and representatives of associations of local government officials.
- Presentations and information/discussion sessions at the 2007 annual meetings of CoSA, NAGARA, SAA, the International Institute of Municipal Clerks, and the American Association for State and Local History.

Staff and consultants prepared a number of reports and other publications, most of which are available via the CoSA website[1]:

- Report on services provided to local governments by state archives and records management programs, including training, records scheduling, storage, and advice and consultation.
- Annotated bibliography of publications on the management of local government records and archives, 1972-2005.

EXPERT PANEL MEMBERS

Local government officials, coordinated by Task Force member Paul Bergeron. Members: Margaret Anderson, Records Manager, Collin County, TX; Diana Bradrick, Manager, Cartography and Records, Washington County, OR; Thomas Clingan, Clerk, Albany County, NY; Ross King, Deputy Director, Association of County Commissioners, GA; Patricia Moore, City Administrator, Storm Lake, IA; Glenda Morgan, City Clerk, Mobile, AL; Kristie Smithers, City Clerk, Wasilla, AK; and Val Wood, Deputy Archivist, Office of the Secretary of State, WA.

Users of local government archives, coordinated by Task Force member Shirley Wilson. Members: Barbara Vines Little, CG, Dominion Research Services, Orange, VA; Martha Doty Freeman, professional historian, Austin, TX; Jan Alpert, National Genealogical Society, Hilton Head Island, SC; Patrick B. Bauer, College of Law, University of Iowa, Iowa City, IA; Cindy Compton, LandAmerica, Greenwood Village, CO; Robert Macieski, Associate Professor of History, University of New Hampshire, Manchester, NH; and Tod von Mechow, CIBER, Inc., Wayne, PA.

Archivists and records managers working directly with local government records, coordinated by Task Force co-chair Kaye Lanning Minchew. Members: James L. Baggett, Birmingham Public Library Archives, Birmingham, AL; Jelain Chubb, State Archivist, Ohio Historical Society, Columbus, OH; Scott Cline, CA, Seattle Municipal Archives; Terry B. Ellis, Director, Administrative Services, Records Management and Archives, Salt Lake City UT; Douglas K. King, Records Manager/FOI Officer, Sedgwick County, Wichita, KS; John Mackintosh, South Carolina Department of Archives & History, Columbia SC; Mark J. Myers, Electronic Records Specialist, Public Records Division, Kentucky Dept. for Libraries and Archives, Frankfort, KY; C. Richard Roberts, Director, Records and Archives Division, City of Hollywood, Florida; and John H. Slate, CA, City Archivist, City Secretary's Office, Dallas, TX

[1] The Task Force home page contains links to many of its products: http://www.statearchivists.org/lga.

- Historical retrospective on previous initiatives that attempted to strengthen the management of local government records, prepared by consultant, Jeremy Brett.

Central to the deliberations of the Task Force were detailed consultants' reports on four key issues:

- Raising Awareness and Strengthening Advocacy,
  by Bruce Dearstyne
- Sustainable Funding for Local Government Archives,
  by Geof Huth
- Training in Managing Local Government Archival Records,
  by Jamie Awalt
- Impact of Information Technology on Local Government Archival Records,
  by Gregory Hunter

Bruce Dearstyne, the project's coordinating consultant, also prepared a number of internal reports for the Task Force on manuals, publications, and web sites as partial models for consideration; local government associations with potential interest in archival records; and potential sources of foundation funding and support for implementing project recommendations.

What's Ahead

The Task Force will continue its work through November 2008 and expects to issue a number of additional products as it begins to implement specific recommendations. The final section in this report, "2008: A Year for Action," outlines the Task Force's plans for the coming year, during which we hope to make substantial progress on several of the "Action Steps" described under the recommendations. Its products will include the case statement called for in the original project proposal, which illustrates and champions the vital importance of local government archival records. The Task Force will also produce, or collaborate with others to produce, a number of other items highlighted in the Action Steps presented in the narrative that follows.

Challenges Facing Local Government Archives

Through its work, the Task Force has attempted to identify the most important challenges that stand in the way of better-managed, well-preserved local government archival records. The challenges relate mostly to lack of understanding, resources, support, and leadership; like the solutions that this report advances, they are interrelated and affect each other. The challenges occur in twelve general areas:

1. **There is an absence of widely accepted standards as to what constitutes "adequate" or "sufficient" care and management of local government archival records.** Lacking such a benchmark makes it difficult to gauge the gap between "what is" and "what ought to be," to rally advocates, and to inspire concerted action for improvement.

2. **Records management, including the management of archival records, is not a priority of local government executives and legislators,** who tend to focus on higher-visibility, higher-stakes issues such as taxes, crime, social welfare, education, and other topics. Given these other issues, local officials don't understand the "business case" for soundly-managed archives.

3. **Local officials may see archival records as a negative or a burden**: a storage cost; difficult to explain or justify to taxpayers who are always concerned about the cost of government; taking up storage space that might better be used for more recent, active records; seldom sought or used, except by a very small number of people; and a possible liability with the potential (however remote) for critics to find information that may cast the official in a bad light.

4. **The federal government's role is poorly defined and not recognized in this area. State archives and records programs have a much more substantial role, but face challenges from inadequate resources.** The state's role is usually longstanding and statutory, to regulate retention/disposition and sometimes to provide technical advice and training. But these state programs, stretched thin by their responsibilities for state government records and relatively low or modest funding resources, may not be able to devote much attention to local government records.

5. **There is a fairly high turnover of incumbents in positions with custody of local government archival records,** such as town, city, and county clerks. These records custodians often have their hands full with responsibilities other than records or archives management *per se*, such as issuing licenses and permits. Training and professional development opportunities are lacking; helpful publications are scarce; standards, guidelines, and other publications may be unknown. All of these factors mean that local government records custodians often lack the time, understanding, or interest to give adequate care to their archival records.

6. **Local government archives have their champions and advocates but, for the most part, they are not sufficiently well organized, versed in lobbying, or influential** to effect major improvement.

7. **On the other hand, associations and groups with more influence and power to get attention and effect change, such as associations of local government administrators and executives, usually do not have archives high on their agendas.** As a result, they don't push their local government members—who look to these associations to help them define key issues—to attend to their archival records or provide training and guidance in this area.

8. **Local government archives are used fairly extensively by genealogists and family history researchers; but they are underutilized by government itself, local history experts, other historians, legal researchers, and others.** In part, this is the result of the lack of guidelines on how to do research in archives; in part, the result of lack of arrangement and description. But those two gaps, in turn, contribute to continuing underutilization and low visibility.

9. **There is no national professional association devoted exclusively—or even primarily—to local government archival records.** All the major archival and records management groups have some concern for them, but not enough to make them a priority. An association may become interested for a while and issue some reports or brochures; another, at another time, may produce some manuals and books. But then other priorities, all of them worthy, intervene and the associations move on to other things. As a result, local government archives do not receive sustained attention.

10. **All of the above factors contribute to a fundamental, bottom-line concern: the absence of funding and other resources to care for archival records.** Archives are unlikely to have a separate budget line; even relatively large local governments may not support even one position entirely devoted to the management of archival records.

11. **Computers and electronic information technology are now used by almost all local governments, meaning that many archival records are now "born digital."** Electronic archives offer some startling advantages over their tangible, analog counterparts, including the capacity to be reproduced and transmitted over the Internet instantaneously. But many, such as e-mail with archival potential or significance, are simply deleted and lost. Even where they are identified for preservation, the systems, techniques, and resources for adequately handling them are absent or underdeveloped. Printing out to paper copies may be a partial, stopgap solution for some static electronic records but won't work for newer, more complex ones, e.g., GIS systems, wikis, and ever-changing databases. As a result of all these factors, we are losing archival electronic records at an alarming rate.

12. **In many local governments, IT departments are being superseded by CIO's (Chief Information Officers) with broader responsibilities for information resources, particularly those in electronic form.** This sometimes presents an opportunity—records managers and archivists may find ways of working with this powerful office. But more often, it may mean that records issues are further submerged because of CIOs' emphasis on cost-reduction, efficiency, current information, interaction with the public, and portals and web sites.

Recommendations

The Task Force advances eleven recommendations to strengthen the care and management of local government archival records over the long term. The strategic approach advocated here is to define a national goal to provide a vision of where we should be going; identify who needs to play a leadership role in moving things in that direction; and then to discuss some key issues and strategies that are essential for making progress. The recommendations are interrelated and mutually reinforcing; progress seems unlikely unless they are pursued simultaneously or at least in a coordinated fashion.

National objective

Most local government archival records will be cared for in place by their local governments through programs that meet minimum expectations or in state archives or other appropriate repositories.

Leadership and support in moving toward this objective

1. Establish criteria and provide guidance for local governments seeking to establish sound archival programs for the records they create.
2. The state archives should play a clear leadership role.
3. National associations representing archivists, records managers, and local government officials should provide attention and leadership.
4. The federal government's responsibility and role should be revisited and redefined.
5. The circle of concern and influence at the national, state, and local levels should be broadened.

Strategic approaches for moving toward this objective

6. Increase funding for local government archival records.
7. Strengthen advocacy for local government archives.
8. Publicize existing publications and educational opportunities and develop new ones where needed.
9. Address the concerns raised by and capitalize on the opportunities offered by electronic information technology.
10. Draw creatively on the power of the network of interested professionals.
11. Develop a web site focal point for interest and activity.

National objective

Most local government archival records will be cared for in place by their local governments through programs that meet minimum expectations or in state archives or other appropriate repositories.

The Task Force believes that local government archival records, like other local government resources and assets, are primarily a local government responsibility, warranting and requiring adequate attention and resources. The project's Case Statement articulates the vital importance of these records to government itself, to the taxpayers and citizens it serves, to the community, to researchers, and to posterity. The majority of a local government's archival records should be cared for in place by an adequate program, or in alternative repositories.

Recommendation 1:
Establish criteria and provide guidance for local governments seeking to establish sound archival programs for the records they create.

If they are cared for in place—realistically, the most viable option for most local governments—programs should conform to professional archival and records management practices and meet the minimum requirements established by the state archives, e.g., for retention/disposition. Practical considerations of budget, space, time, and other resources will determine exactly how programs are developed, configured, and operated, but they should have at least these elements:

Clear definition of roles and responsibilities. The archival program, like the records management program or any other program, needs clear authority to operate and a delineation of its roles and responsibilities for the archival records of government.

Adequate resources. The program needs adequate resources that are dependably available from year to year, and that increase when the workload and/or volume of holdings increases.

A planning framework. The program needs to have a clear mission, goals, objectives, and activities and performance metrics to guide its work, to set expectations, to serve as a basis for budget requests, and to keep everyone moving in the same direction.

Qualified personnel. The program needs to be under the charge of someone who, through education and experience, is clearly qualified to carry out the work. There needs to be enough staff to get the work done.

A secure, adequately sized, well-equipped facility. Records of enduring value warrant a secure facility where the records are safely maintained with appropriate climate and security controls.

Systematic approach to the identification of archival records. Archival programs need a clear, consistent approach to identifying archival records. This means development of clear criteria and use of a consistent appraisal process.

Consistent approach to arrangement and description. Archival programs should follow commonly accepted archival approaches to processing, arranging, and describing archival records.

Clear policy on access. Generally, all archival records should be open to all researchers who want to use them, on an equal basis, during the hours that the facility is open for business.

Finding aids and access tools. Records in an archives that lack finding aids are in a sort of archival abeyance—they exist, but no one can get at them. Finding aids need to be developed so that researchers know about the records and can access them. Archival records not in archival custody should be identified and described using surveys and inventories.

Customer-centric researcher services. Within the limits of available resources, archival programs need to seek out users, encourage use, respond promptly to requests for information, and serve people who come in to use the archives.

Educational and outreach programs. Archival programs need to undertake appropriate work to educate local officials, researchers, and others about their functions and holdings. They also need to consider broader outreach, for instance, through newsletters and exhibits, document packets, etc.

Preservation. They need a systematic, cost-effective approach to preservation.

Electronic archival records. To the degree necessary, they need to provide for the preservation of archival electronic records, as well as paper ones.

In some states, by law and tradition, local government archival records are transferred to the state archives. This arrangement has some benefits, including centralizing valuable local government records in one secure place under professional custody where researchers interested in a particular topic can use them; and some disadvantages, including removing them from their home communities where people interested in local history might use them. It is a workable arrangement in most cases provided the state archives has sufficient resources and staff.

In many communities, libraries or historical societies take custody of some or all of the local government archival records and administer them along with their other collections related to local history. This is also an acceptable arrangement, provided: (1) the repository administers the records in accord with the principles outlined above and applicable laws; (2) there is a written agreement that spells out responsibilities, custody, access, resources, and other key issues; and (3) the historical society or library has sufficient staff, space, and resources to care for the records in a way that ensures that the public is served by the records being available.

The basic need in this area is to reach a consensus among the local government archival community, the state archives, and concerned national agencies such as the National Historical Publications and Records Commission, that we need to clearly articulate what constitutes "adequate care." Then we need to work toward the goal of having most archival records under such care in the near future.

Action Steps for Recommendation 1: Establish criteria and provide guidance for local governments seeking to establish sound archival programs for the records they create.

1.a. Develop a checklist identifying the minimally acceptable elements of programs for caring for local government archives, elaborating on the outline provided as part of Recommendation 1, above.

1.b. Prepare a document that defines archival records and clarifies how they are distinct from operational records.

1.c. Develop an electronic publication, *Alternatives for Managing Local Government Archival Records*, that will provide practical and systematic advice, examining factors to be considered in deciding between in-house, transfer to other organizations, or a mix of the two options. Use the LGATF reports and other literature to provide starting points.

Recommendation 2:
The state archives should play a clear leadership role.

The nation's state archives and records management programs must play a significantly expanded leadership, advisory, educational, and regulatory role if there is to be sustained improvement in the care of local government archival records. The substance of this recommendation came up in one form or another dozens of times in Task Force meetings, discussions with the Expert Panels, the online surveys, and the consultants' reports. Absent strong state archives leadership, significant progress seems unlikely. There are no viable alternatives for clear leadership and direction.

This recommendation for broader leadership has two dimensions or sets of responsibilities, involving both the state archives and the local governments they serve.

The first dimension is the relationship between state archives and local governments. Local governments are authorized under state constitutions giving the state the right to make laws that prescribe their procedures and rules. The extent to which this has been applied to the management of archives and records varies widely from state-to-state. In some, as noted above, the state archives takes legal and physical custody of at least some local government archives. In others—the majority—the relationship is more complicated, based in law, history, and traditions about how state agencies relate to local governments in each state. One aspect almost always present is state authority to set retention periods for, and regulate the retention/disposition of, local government records. This authority, often going back decades, is rooted in a philosophy that the state has the obligation to regulate its local governments, including requiring certain compliance from them. It reflects an awareness of the importance of retaining local government records with continuing value.[2]

In most states, the relationship is a comfortable and mutually beneficial one: local governments welcome having the state carry out the research and analysis that underlies state retention schedules; and they feel confident disposing of records that have outlived their state-

[2] In most states, the state government constitution or statutes serve as the authorizing authority for organizing local governments. See for instance, David W. Owens, "Local Government Authority to Implement Smart Growth Programs: Dillon's Rule, Legislative Reform, and the Current State of Affairs in North Carolina, *Wake Forest Law Review*, vol. 35, pp. 673-679, for a review of North Carolina's delegation of authority for local government s with specific respect to smart growth policies.

sanctioned retention periods. Several of the state archives also issue regulations for technical applications such as e-mail, and guidelines for various aspects of records and archival management.

But the relationship is underdeveloped, and the available materials insufficiently robust. More is needed—to appeal beyond archivists and records custodians; to elevate the profile of records and archives issues, to upset complacency, to deal with the turnover of Clerks and other officials, and generally to set higher and firmer expectations for acceptable minimal practice. As noted in several of the recommendations below, particularly no. 8, significantly expanded training, publications, and other educational initiatives are needed in several areas. In some cases, the state archives need to publicize and encourage the use of already-existing materials; in other cases, they need to develop or upgrade and expand their own. The areas include:

- Responsibility for local government archives, including factors to take into account when considering an arrangement with a local historical society, library, or other entity for taking responsibility for the government's archival records.
- Appeals to executives, legislators, taxpayers, and citizens, about the harm that results from the loss of archival records, the responsibility of government officials, and the advantages of improved care.
- Advocacy—making the business case for local government archival records; strategies for getting resources and developing programs.
- Makeup and administration of effective records management and archival programs. What are minimally acceptable standards and elements? How should local governments write laws and regulations that anchor such programs? How should programs be organized? How to estimate appropriate resources that are needed? Who should be in charge? How should appraisal, arrangement, description, preservation, and other activities be carried out?
- Records appraisal and making decisions on retention/disposition.
- Encouraging use of local government archival records beyond the genealogical community, including by local government officials, local historians, academic historians, legal researchers, people interested in various issues in government, teachers, and students.

- Management of electronic records, including common records such as e-mail, newer areas such as portals and web sites, and emerging applications such as blogs and wikis.

This recommendation has a second dimension. The state archives, as a recent CoSA survey reaffirmed, are themselves overstretched with modest resources and rising expectations from governors and state agencies.[3] State archivists would like to do more with local government records, recognizing both the needs and the immense informational value of these public resources. But to do so would mean slighting their primary constituency, state government. In order to provide more leadership, guidance, and education to local governments, the state archives will need more resources. In order to get those resources, local governments and their associations—which are accustomed to advocacy work in the various state capitals for state policies and resources beneficial to their members—will need to lobby effectively for what is needed. National associations can set the right tone from the top and professional associations will also play a key role, as discussed below, and of course, each state archives needs to work in a politically effective way with its local records community.

Furthermore, three other factors make the time opportune: (1) several state archives are already serving as exemplars and models in their work with local governments; (2) much of the content needed is already at hand in individual states—it was developed for use with state agencies and just needs revision and modification to make it applicable to local governments; and (3) delivery via the Web (discussed below) vastly simplifies and reduces the cost of services.

Action Steps for Recommendation 2: The state archives should play a clear leadership role.

2.a. CoSA and NAGARA should cooperate on a best practices statement for the advisory/educational services that state archives should provide to local governments. The statement will identify the core components of a local government archives program that every state archives should strive to implement and point to programs already in place that can be looked to as models.

2.b. Develop an inventory and analysis of and links to model state archives' standards and guidelines for local government records. Many of these are excellent materials but they are relatively unknown, particularly beyond their home states.

[3] Council of State Archivists, *The State of State Records: A Status Report on State Archives and Records Management Programs in the United States* (Iowa City, Iowa: January 2007). http://www.statearchivists.org/reports/2007-ARMreport/.

Recommendation 3:
National archival and national local government associations should provide attention and leadership.

The Task Force believes that national associations—and their state counterparts—need to work in tandem with the state archives to provide attention and leadership in the area of local government archival records. These associations, in general, fall into five categories: archives/records associations; associations of historians and other users; associations of custodians of local government records; associations of other local government officials; and associations of state government officials. The archival community is at the core of the first category and has spent a good deal of time on the second category. But the third, fourth, and fifth categories have, by and large, been neglected.

This needs to change and those groups need to be enlisted as advocates. They are the groups whose members are, in many cases, the decision makers and resource allocators in local governments. Many of them have counterparts in the states, so working with the national associations has a double payoff: they become more interested in local records and archives issues and their state counterparts take notice of this and *they* become interested; and work at the national level can serve as a good model for initiatives in the states by the state archives and by individual local governments.

The potential for doing this was demonstrated at the Task Force's invitational meeting in February 2007, attended by representatives of a number of associations. The Task Force and the association representatives quickly identified common ground, issues where joint efforts might be possible, and some awareness building/consciousness raising that could be started right away, such as sessions at professional conferences (National Association of Counties) and articles for newsletters and other publications (International City/County Management Association).

The first category of associations includes a community of archives and records associations, such as the Council of State Archivists (sponsor of the Local Government Archives Task Force), National Association of Government Archives and Records Administrators, Society of American Archivists, Association of Records Managers and Administrators (ARMA International), AIIM–The Enterprise Content Management Association, and others. Archives and records issues are their central focus. However, local government archivists constitute a very small minority of any of

these associations, one of the reasons that the associations themselves tend to give limited attention to local government archival records. The project found that in fact some local archivists were not aware of, or at least did not make active use of, common archival publications such as those put out by the SAA. These associations need to play a leadership and coordinating role in advancing the recommendations in this report; and to broaden their publications, education, and advocacy work to explicitly include local government archives.

The second association category, historical and other researcher groups, includes such organizations as the American Association for State and Local History, the National Genealogical Society and the Property Records Industry Association. These groups are users of, and advocates for local government archives; and in fact some years ago, AASLH launched a major publications series in this area. These groups need to step up their advocacy roles, and encourage their members to do the same.

The third and fourth categories of associations have the most untapped potential for leadership and making for real change in this area. Associations made up primarily of custodians include the International Association of Clerks, Recorders, Election Officials, and Treasurers (IACREOT); International Institute of Municipal Clerks (IIMC); and the National Association of County Recorders, Election Officials, and Clerks (NACRC). Associations comprised of other local officials—including executives and legislators, whose support is vital for making progress on archives—include:

- Association of School Business Officials International
- County Executives of America
- International City/County Management Association
- National Association of Counties
- National Association of State Auditors, Comptrollers, and Treasurers
- National Association of Towns and Townships
- National Emergency Management Association
- National League of Cities
- Property Records Industry Association
- Public Technology Incorporated
- United States Conference of Mayors

The fifth group of associations includes state government officials (other than archivists and records managers) who might be interested in local archives from several angles: federal/state/local relations; costs to the state for providing local services; concerns about local taxation levels; or access to government. These associations might include:

Conference of State Court Administrators
Council of State Governments
National Association of Secretaries of State
National Association of State Chief Information Officers
National Center for State Courts
National Council of State Legislatures
National Governors Association

Engaging these types of associations—and their state counterparts—holds vast, largely unexplored and untapped potential for getting the word out and engaging advocates and supporters well beyond the archives/records community. The county legislator may pay more attention to the county archivist's request for increased funding if the legislator has just returned from a NACo conference where there was a session on records and archives. The city administrator, always having to stretch budgetary dollars, may be more open to the need for a records and archives program if she has read an article on how archives saves money in ICMA's *Public Management*. A publication from the U.S. Conference of Mayors that summarizes how good archives management may help in legal situations may carry more clout with a mayor than the exact same argument coming from the city clerk.

There are at least four ways of engaging associations in the last four categories noted above, for engaging their counterparts state-by-state, and for encouraging them to cooperate with each other.

Publicity. Every one of these associations has a newsletter, broadcasts news via its web site or a listserv, or has some other way of getting news and information out to its members. Surprisingly often, they are actually looking for material of interest to fill their pages. This presents an opportunity to get out news and advocacy materials about archives by sending materials to the associations with the hope and expectation that they will disseminate it to their members.

Potential partnerships on local government records and archives management. Some of the associations actively partner with other groups on issues of common interest, to enhance their capacity and reach, or for other reasons. IIMC, for instance, has published a series of local government records management booklets and is revising them; ICMA has published a book on electronic records management. Partnerships might include such things as jointly sponsored workshops, technical manuals, books and professional development seminars.

Thematic connections. Many associations may not have a declared interest in local government archives *per se*. But many are interested in some aspect of information management

and may have some other interest that has a potential thematic connection to archives. For example:

- *Effective, cost-efficient government*. A number of associations are interested in "good government" issues including efficiency, economy, and services to citizens. There might be potential to get them to expand their interests to include records management as an essential part of good government, and to engage their support for improved preservation of archival records.

- *Disaster preparedness*. Many organizations are concerned with this topic after Hurricane Katrina's devastation. Disaster planning could be tied to planning for preservation of archival records.

- *Information technology*. Management of digital information is an interest of several of these associations, and it is the sole mission of one of them (Public Technology Incorporated). This interest has potential for discussions about preservation of local government electronic records management and preservation of electronic archival records.

- *Pride, sense of heritage.* A sense of pride is apparent in reading the mission statements and other documents of these associations. County associations, for instance, point with pride to the history and contribution of counties in the United States; the Conference of Mayors is, naturally, laudatory about the role of mayors. This sense of pride, heritage, and historical contributions could be a basis for fostering interest in local government archives, the source of documentation for most of this history.

- *Preservation and use of historical source material.* A number of the associations might be interested in preservation of local government archival records as sources for historical and genealogical research.

Local governments and recordkeeping in the federal system. Several of these associations lobby in Washington and are sensitive to the issue of federal mandates on the states and localities, particularly if commensurate administrative resources do not accompany the mandates. There is a potential records/archives issue here—local governments such as counties carry out federally mandated or funded programs, create records in the process, but often must rely on

local resources to administer those records. Some of the state government associations, e.g., Council of State Governments, National Council of State Legislatures, National Governors' Association, as well as several of the associations of local government officials, might be interested in discussing approaches to bring some federal resources to the records and archives created at the local level from federal programs. Several are either headquartered in Washington or have offices there and so might be potential allies if the project leads to recommendations for increased federal funding.

Action Steps for Recommendation 3: Associations representing archivists, records managers, and local government officials at the national and state level should provide attention and leadership.

3.a. CoSA and NAGARA establish a coordinating council in cooperation and with key local government associations along the lines recommended in the Report—publicity, potential partnerships, thematic connections, and lobbying for federal resources. (See also the first recommendation under heading 5, below).

3.b. LGATF will develop a toolkit for state archives and records management programs to enable them to take the message about the importance of local government archives to state level associations of local government officials. This "toolkit" would include a brochure or handout, a generic PowerPoint presentation that could be customized to address each state's circumstances, and similar materials to facilitate presentations by state archives staff at local government association meetings.

3.c. Continue the momentum with ICMA and NACo through a proposal of informal, long-term cooperation including but not limited to: sessions at each other's conferences, articles for their newsletters and other materials distributed to their members, publications, joint projects.

Recommendation 4:
The federal government's responsibility and role should be revisited and redefined

Many of the programs administered by local governments are mandated by or funded by the federal government, or both. Federal agencies pay administrative costs in many cases. In other cases, such as medical care and social welfare programs, the situation is more complex, involving some funding—and some administrative work and resulting records—at all three levels of government. But in very few cases do federal agencies pay for the management of the records and archives that are necessary for, or that result from, those programs. In fact, those costs are usually not calculated, underestimated, ignored, or disregarded as being incidental to administration. In fact, they are sizeable and significant, particularly for large federally funded programs. Presumably the federal government also has other, indirect interests in local government archives, e.g., preservation of the nation's history included in its "closest to home" documents and study of source material by school children and other students as an element of citizenship and civic consciousness. But other than limited competitive funding from the National Historical Publications and Records Commission—a program with very modest resources—federal support for local government records and archives is very limited.

There should be some ways of getting more federal support for local government records, in some cases along with support for state agency recordkeeping and archives work where both state and local governments are involved with program administration and service delivery. The issue needs discussion, analysis, and, perhaps some pilot studies to answer several questions:

- What are the most important examples of programs which are federally funded and/or mandated but administered solely or primarily by counties, cities, towns, and other local governments?
- How can we calculate the costs of records management for these programs and the cost of identifying and managing records of enduring value—archival records?
- What, if any, precedents are there for federal agencies paying for records-related costs?
- What provisions are made for federal support for computers, software, and other information technology—much of which is used to produce records?

- What criteria or principles should apply in deciding on whether there should be federal support for local records in these programs and, if so, at what level?

There are at least four good places to start this discussion. One is the studies (limited in number) that have been done of the impact of federal recordkeeping requirements on state and local governments, such as the reports and article on the federal Food Stamp program and other intergovernmental programs as part of the Intergovernmental Records Project in the 1990's.

Another place to raise the issue is the ongoing discussion about "unfunded mandates." This is an issue of concern to local governments, which often have limited resources because of their tax base but also more and more requirements on what they must do. The increase in spending for security in the wake of 9/11 is one example. Several major national associations are interested in the issue of "unfunded mandates" and there is an opportunity to interject records and archives issues into this discussion. The federal government should not initiate laws, rules and regulations and other actions and activities that will mandate new costs for local governments, notes a National League of Cities policy document, without providing reimbursement funds that will compensate local governments for their costs.[4]

A third place to begin the discussion is the ongoing and growing interest in government portals and "one-stop" places on the web where citizens can find government information and services they need, regardless of level of government or agency or department that is offering them. The notion of interrelated, interlinked information systems available to the public may provide insights into linkages between records systems as well.

A fourth place is the proposed Partnership for the American Historical Record (PAHR), supported by CoSA, NAGARA, and SAA.[5] PAHR would provide federal funding for records held by state and local governments as well as historical societies, libraries, and related organizations, for such activities as emergency planning, research/development in electronic records, creation of access tools, preservation, initiatives to encourage use in education and historical research, and training and education programs for archivists.

[4] National League of Cities, *2007 National Municipal Policy: Finance, Administration and Intergovernmental Relations (FAIR)*. http://www.nlc.org/ADVOCATING_FOR_CITIES/nationalmunicipalpolicy.aspx
[5] http://www.archivists.org/pahr.

Action Steps for Recommendation 4: The federal government's responsibility and role should be revisited and redefined:

4.a. CoSA and NAGARA work with NARA to produce a statement on the federal government's responsibilities for local government records. This statement should consider to what extent the federal government should assume responsibility for the management of intergovernmental records that states and localities must create as a result of federal mandates. As part of this effort, one or more state archives will study the records-related impact on state and local governments of a particular federal program.

4.b. At a meeting to be convened by CoSA in January-February 2008, begin discussions with CSG, NGA, NCSL, NACo, Conference of Mayors, and other national associations concerned with federal/state/local relations, "unfunded mandates," and related issues, to enlist their counsel and lobbying support.

Recommendation 5:
The circle of concern and influence at the national, state, and local levels should be broadened

This recommendation is related closely to several of those above, especially #3, and to some of those that follow, especially #6. Much of our advocacy work in the past has been focused mainly on the archives/records/history community. For instance, brochures produced by professional associations and books written by professionals have been used mainly by other professionals. That has been helpful in providing all of us with sound, clear, well-developed techniques and arguments about the need for archival programs that seemed convincing. Several associations have played leadership roles in this area in the past, and their continuing support and action needs to be enlisted. These include AASLH, ARMA International, CoSA, NAGARA, and SAA.

But we need to make the case more broadly and forcefully to additional groups with power and influence to achieve real progress, and to get *them* to make records and archives part of *their* agenda, or at least something where they are interested and articulate. There are several examples of groups and movements not far removed from our arena that have increased their visibility, and the respect and resources accorded to their programs and concerns, over the past several years, that might serve as partial models. For instance:

Historical agencies and historical commemoration groups have capitalized on public interest in historical events (some brought to life by TV shows or movies) and by interest in *heritage* to garner support for community history programs and facilities.

Several state archival programs, and some local government archives, have built mutually satisfactory relationships with school systems and individual schools, in effect transforming teachers and—more important—young people into fans of archives.

The news media, good government groups, citizens' groups, and others lobbied successfully for "Freedom of Information" laws to provide access to records and require that access tools exist to let people know what is there. This has been a major incentive toward improved records management.

The library community, with its emphasis on reading, literacy, access, and libraries as community sources, have helped propel libraries successfully indo the digital age.

Auditing—a community heavily dependent on systematic information and records management—has, over the past few years, repositioned itself from a not-very-visible back office function to a front office management function that is tied to legal and managerial accountability.

One of the ways of increasing support for local government records management and archives is to widen the circle of people who know and care about this issue—well beyond the archives/records community. Associations of state and local government officials, discussed under Recommendation #2, above, are a key constituency. But there are several others where a greater effort is needed—and a commensurate payoff in terms of advocacy and support can be expected. These might be different for every local government and every state, but might include such groups as:

- Companies that are profiting from selling information technology products and services to local governments which, in turn, use these tools to produce records; examples would include IBM and Microsoft
- Good government groups, e.g., League of Women Voters
- Members of the press and news media, editors, and TV networks. Local archives can provide important source material for stories; and the news media community, always concerned about freedom of information/public access issues, would also be interested in the benefits of sound records and archives management.
- Groups and organizations that recognize and reward exemplary programs in government, e.g., Pew Center on the States Government Performance Project and Center for Digital Government's Digital Counties and Digital Cities projects.
- University teaching and research centers that are recognized for their leadership in government policy issues, e.g., John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University, Center for Technology in Government at SUNY Albany.
- Major foundations that might be interested in supporting initiatives to improve care and access to local government records, or that might be interested in working to improve the

capacity of local governments to take care of these materials. There are also hundreds of community foundations that are interested in local institutions and local history.

This requires a sophisticated business case and also the ability to customize the message depending on the audience. The business case required to broaden the circle of interest and concern might include these strategic themes, as outlined in one of the project's consultant's reports:

Archival programs help support the economy by facilitating access to an important information resource. Archival records can help ensure the success of public, private, and educational enterprises.

Information is one of local government's most important assets, probably second only to its employees. Information is central to the operation of government. Much of information is in fact *recorded information,* or records; and archives are the most important and enduring records. This means that archival records are centrally important information resources.

Records and archival management saves money by reducing the volume of records, cutting costs for storing inactive records, and making it quicker and easier for government employees to find the information they need to do their work and serve the public. Good records and archives management means a more productive staff.

The initial (and perhaps most important) value of archival records is to the *government itself*. They are the central documentation of key policies and services. They may be needed for legal actions initiated by or directed against government agencies. By providing documentation on the origins and administration of key policies, they offer a resource for the government itself to learn from its own past. This is particularly important because of the rapid turnover in both elected and appointed offices; *continuity of government* is assisted by *continuity of records*, including archival records.

Taxpayers and citizens expect local government officials to care for and manage these important resources in a systematic, responsible way. It is one of the responsibilities that elected and appointed officials have and need to discharge. Good recordkeeping practices are a sign of good, efficient government.

Archives are a *service* to the public—something the public has every right to expect.

Supporting archives is part of caring for the history of the community, preserving the community's heritage, boosting community pride, and serving youth by ensuring the preservation of a documentary heritage.

An archives program, tied to records management, helps save money and space by encouraging the disposition of the vast majority of records as soon as they become obsolete (and are legally disposable pursuant to state law and schedules and local procedures) as well as preservation of that small percentage of records that are archival.

While there are not hard and fast *standards* for local government archival programs, there *are* standards that are applicable for some aspects of such programs, and there are *guidelines* and *canons of good practice*. This makes an archival program a good investment—local officials can have confidence that good policies and practices are available, can be put in place, and followed.

Archives provide immensely valuable source material for research by local historians, genealogists, family history specialists, and a range of other researchers, e.g., environmental history, ethnic history, the history of education, agricultural history, urban history, history of the police and court systems, and the history of parts of our communities and even buildings. Because local governments touch the lives of people in so many ways—they are so *close to home*—so also are the records rich in detail and *close to home*.

Records management and archival programs are particularly important in these days of heightened awareness about natural disasters and potential terrorist attacks. A plan for safeguarding *vital* records (those essential to resuming or continuing government services and for documenting and protecting citizen rights in the event of a disaster) is connected to a plan for safeguarding *archival* records because, in many cases, key records fall into both categories.

Archival programs need adequate resources but they are not expensive (particularly in comparison to the benefits). They are a good investment for local government.

Local officials are expected to be responsible custodians of important records. They may be criticized or embarrassed if, for instance, a record is sought by a citizen or by the news media under the Freedom of Information Law but cannot be found. Revelations that records were

inadvertently disposed of (or illegally disposed of, if they did not meet minimum legal retention periods) may cast an appearance of impropriety. The way to avoid this problem is sound, systematic records/archives management.

Action Steps for Recommendation 5: The circle of concern and influence at the national, state, and local levels should be broadened.

5.a. Each Task Force member "adopts" an association, solidifies the relationship, and agrees to continue as liaison/champion on a volunteer basis at least through 2008

5.b. Build on momentum with ICMA through a continuing series of articles on local government records and archives management for their publications, Management Insight and Public Management, written by state archives personnel and the network of interested professionals, including case studies and descriptions of model programs. At least 4 per year for 5 years.

5.c. Identify and/or develop models on how state archives can engage state affiliates of local government associations to advance this action agenda.

5.d. Develop with ICMA or NACo (CoSA provides the content, they publish) a publication making the "business case" for archives and records management for elected and appointed officials, e.g., Why Local Governments Need Archives and Records Management Programs.

5.e. Make presentations at at least four national meetings of local government associations each year.

Recommendation 6:
Increase funding for local government archival records

Sustainable funding was one of the Task Force's paramount concerns and it is the subject of a separate consultant's report, by Geof Huth. While standards of what constitutes "sufficient" funding support are lacking, the Task Force, like every study before it, concluded that the current level in most jurisdictions is well below a reasonable expectation of adequacy. Programs, where they exist, usually lack the wherewithal to do the work that needs to be done. The basic problem, already introduced and referred to a number of times earlier in this report, is that archives are rarely understood to provide a public service. The remarkable variation in size and responsibilities among local governments, even within an individual state, further complicates the picture. The problem is growing because archives are "organic" in a sense—the longer government functions, the more records—and archives—it produces. The project consultant recommended, and the Task Force endorses, several strategies (which are compatible with other insights and recommendations in this report) and include:

- Develop a robust and coordinated system of support for local government archives that includes the National Archives and Records Administration, state archives, and national and regional associations.
- Develop a coordinated system of advocacy that can lobby effectively at various levels of government.
- Provide training in advocacy, funding options, grant writing, and cost-benefit analysis, including training in the political realities of lobbying.
- Educate public officials about the importance of archives by showing how archives support government and government operations—costs avoided and savings achieved by having an organized archives, problems and costs avoided by having a good disaster plan.
- Educate the public about the importance of archives by showing how archives affect their lives.
- Find champions within the government who understand and will support archives.
- Forge alliances within government, e.g., with IT departments.

- Encourage broader state archives leadership.

A number of states have developed competitive grant programs, some based on fee surcharges on documents filed with county clerks and other local governments. A few of these programs, such as the one in New Jersey, are impressive in size. Fee-based programs, which have attracted considerable attention, are a way of getting records-based activity to generate records-supporting resources. But there are some downsides: the amount available rises and falls with the number of documents filed; revenues can be diverted elsewhere by governors and legislatures; the fee remains the same over time, even if needs change; taxpayers may oppose them as a "hidden" fee; and they can become a substitute or excuse for local governments not providing enough funding from their own budgets.

State grant programs are no panacea for the financial problems facing local government archives. They do, however, provide the state with opportunities to help local governments strengthen their programs, for instance, by providing limited grant funds in a way that encourages (or requires) local governments to provide additional support of their own. Federal grants, particularly from the National Historical and Publications and Records Commission, can also help with individual projects. The proposed Partnership for the American Historical Record (PAHR), discussed above, could make a helpful contribution. But grants will never provide more than a small amount of the resources needed. The goal of grant programs should be to develop and grow local government programs, to encourage local governments to provide sufficient resources from their own budgets, and to encourage collaboration and cooperation among local governments and among the levels of government regarding archival records issues.

Action Steps for Recommendation 6: Increase funding for local government archival records.

6.a. Publicize the impact and advantages of state grants programs

6.b. Develop a short electronic publication (based mostly on already existing materials and related to the item in the third bullet under no. 5, above): Why Investing in Records and Archives Management Makes Fiscal Sense (management of public assets, people, infrastructure).

6.c. Aggressive support for PAHR or some alternative to provide more federal financial support for local government archival programs.

6.d. Give local archivists more tools to argue for increased funding on a business basis.

Recommendation 7:
Strengthen advocacy for local government archives

The Task Force identified awareness and advocacy as a priority concern and it is covered by a separate consultant's report, by Bruce Dearstyne. The issue is a broad one, encompassing program promotion by archivists and records managers within government; encouragement of local officials to apply common archival techniques and guidelines; and broader efforts to raise the visibility of local government archival issues. More advocacy is needed in order to gain attention and resources, encourage the public to take more of an interest in this area, foster better understanding by local government officials, and generally raise the level of archival administration.

The Project found that many of the advocacy arguments, and a significant number of materials, already exist. But their existence is unknown beyond the program that created them, they are underutilized, they are outdated and need updating, or they need to be refined and customized for local government archives.

The Task Force was particularly interested in several aspects of this issue:

The role of standards and guidelines. There are *standards* in some states, established by the state archives via regulations, for a few aspects of local government archival work, such as retention/disposition schedules, microfilm and digital conversion of paper records. *Guidelines*—suggestions, recommendations, canons of good practice—are more common, and are issued by both state archival programs and professional associations. The pattern is uneven. Adherence depends to a large degree on whether there is professional staff devoted to archival work—if not, records custodians may be unaware of either standards or guidelines; there is considerable variation across the country; and state records retention and disposition schedules may be inconsistently applied. The standards and guidelines that exist fall into a few key areas: the makeup and administration of local government archival programs; how to play an advocacy role; how to promote and measure use; how to measure and report on program effectiveness.

Encouraging broader use of standards and guidelines. Two main, and inconsistent, insights emerged here. One, encouragement through constant lobbying, education, training, etc.,

particularly emphasizing *why* the guidelines should be followed. This advice is consistent with other recommendations in the project—but it is difficult to apply where programs are small or non-existent. Two, clear standards and other requirements and full use of laws, regulations, and directives as *enforcement* mechanisms. Several people who made comments in the online survey suggested, in addition, the use of legal penalties for non-compliance.

Incentives for local government officials to support sound management of their archival records. Local officials, by and large, are so busy with other complicated responsibilities that they lack time—and interest—to attend to records and archives issues. There is a need for constant "education"—by archivists and records managers, but also by the organizations they belong to and to which they look for guidance. The case has to be a businesslike one, stressing efficiency, cost savings, legal issues, improved productivity through the availability of records, etc. Sometimes, they also need to be reminded of the negative consequences of neglect—loss of legal documentation, disservice to history, and criticism in the press and public if there is a perception of indifference to history.

Role of outside advocates. The picture here is mixed, but in general outside advocates have had modest success in fostering program development. In other cases, they work for establishment of a program but lose interest once it gets started. In still other examples, they are interested primarily in a few types or series of records rather than archival records as a whole or development of a comprehensive program. Outside advocates are most effective when they can work with someone on the "inside"—an interested local government Clerk, or an archivist already on staff.

Several insights emerged from this part of the project:

Constant advocacy is essential. Making a meritorious case, achieving an initial success, and then relaxing or moving on, is just not effective. Elected and appointed officials are too busy, have too many other demands on their attention and resources, and may have relatively short tenures. Archivists and their allies need to constantly get the word out—through speaking at meetings, participating in historical events and commemorations, documenting beneficial uses of archives, pointing out dire consequences of neglect, publicizing professional canons and model programs—about the importance of local government archives.

The role of state archives is critical. The state archives not only need to serve as models themselves, they also need, through education and publications, to stress both the practical and legal reasons for archives; emphasize their contribution to good government and the cause of history; and recognize model programs as benchmarks. Much of their work needs to focus on building up the ability of local archivists and advocates to lobby successfully for resources for archival work.

Professional associations have a major role to play here, beyond exemplary work like sponsoring "Archives Week" or "Archives Month." They need more by way of publications, seminars, and other educational opportunities for local archivists, and others interested in archives, to learn how to be effective advocates.

Cooperate with allied groups. Strong collaborative ties with allied associations, particularly those in the community, helps marshal the critical mass that is needed for lobbying and support. These include such groups as historical societies and genealogical groups; chambers of commerce and business organizations; school and teachers' groups; good government groups; and others.

Make the case in understandable, concrete terms. The case needs to be businesslike, as noted above, and to be customized for setting, circumstances, and audience. Advocates need to use concrete examples; to make the case in personal terms that people can understand (this is about *you, your* house, *your* community, *your* legal rights).

Get others to make the case. This strategy is related to a number of points noted above. It particularly relates to the potential role of associations of local government officials—getting the state association of counties or municipal league to carry the banner for archives is more likely to persuade leaders of local government than the same argument coming from the state archival group.

Highlight/recognize good models. State archives and professional associations can have a major impact here. One of the most effective advocacy strategies is recognizing excellence, giving awards, bestowing recognition for archival excellence. The recipient governments welcome it and it gives them incentive to become champions for the cause. Other local governments see that it can be done, come to understand the concrete benefits, realize that the costs are modest, and are also encouraged to try it because there are models to follow.

Find ways to increase the use of local government archives. There is a need to increase use of these invaluable materials; more use would, in turn, provide evidence of value and justification for requesting more resources and would also increase the number of champions and advocates. Archives languish in part because people don't know they exist; this can be addressed through production of finding aids, research guides, public events, speeches to interested groups, and classes in how to do research in archives. The most common use, now, is genealogical research. There are vast opportunities for increasing use in other areas: by government officials themselves; by subject-area researchers and news media seeking background or contextual information; by legal researchers; and by historians of all types.

The project also identified five model approaches to advocacy; none is one hundred percent certain to work, but they are all worth consideration:

1. Direct, multi-tool advocacy that appeals to government officials, the public, and the press. Example: Canadian Council on Archives online *Awareness Kit*, which includes guidelines, helpful sources, links, and other materials for individuals and groups interested in advocating for stronger programs.

2. Multi-faceted approach to fostering the development of archival programs using educational materials, training, and grants. This category goes beyond advocacy. One of many good examples is the New York State Archives' Local Government Records program, which includes grants, regional offices around the state, training and educational workshops, recognizing model programs through annual awards, and working with teachers and students.

3. Training, advocacy films, and online materials. Taking a different tack, some programs have turned to films, videos, and online approaches to get their messages across. These items can be expensive and technically challenging to produce; but they can be good investments in terms of low cost of reproduction and dissemination. Examples: ARMA International's films *For the Record, Buried Alive* and *Back in Business*; NYS Archives film *Public Records, Public Trust: Local Government Records Management in New York State*; Ohio Historical Society's online slide show, *Local Government Records: Just the Basics*; and Oregon State Archives' online shows, *Oregon County Government: Basic Records Management Training* and *What's In YOUR In-Box?*

4. Making a multi-part, systematic case with multiple appeals. One approach is to advance one argument and justification after another to appeal to multiple audiences and interests, and also to build a strong cumulative case. Example: Association of Canadian Archivists' manual (also available online), *Municipal Archives: Promoting Efficiency and Effectiveness*.

5. Making optimal use of "Archives Month." Many states now commemorate this month in October each year. The event is coordinated through the Society of American Archivists, regional archival associations, state archives, and other groups. This is a useful time to kick off, or accelerate, a campaign to establish a local government archival program or strengthen an existing one. The Society of American Archivists' booklet (also available online): *American Archives Month, 2007: Celebrating the American Record,* provides excellent suggestions.[6]

Action Steps for Recommendation 7: Strengthen advocacy for local government archives.

7.a. Publish the Case Statement developed by the LGATF and develop a promotion plan for distributing it encouraging use by state archives and advocates at the local level. The case statement will be accompanied by a template for an insert that could be customized by state archives and local governments so that they can present information on their own programs and needs. The case statement will also be accompanied by guidance for its use.

7.b. Develop electronic publication: Advocating for and Developing Local Government Archival Programs. It will include the best advocacy arguments and strategies from successful programs and related fields. Many of the ideas needed are already available—from the two surveys, the Coordinating Consultant's report, and the final report itself (see also the final recommendation under # 10, below)

[6] http://www.archivists.org/news/AMKit_2007.pdf

Recommendation 8:
Publicize existing publications and educational opportunities and develop new ones where needed

This was a priority topic for the Task Force and is the subject of a separate consultant's report, by Jamie Awalt. The Project found multiple publications and guidelines in active use, but there are many others that are valuable yet underutilized. Local government officials and archivists may not be aware of their existence or they apply only generally to archival settings and records but are not customized to fit local government archives. The story in this regard is similar to that of advocacy materials, noted in Recommendation #7, above. In some cases, local officials are simply too overworked to seek out publications or training or organize an archival program after they become familiar with techniques and approaches. Respondents to the questionnaires indicated a preference for in-person, hands-on training and individual courses. These are traditional methods of delivering educational offerings, and people are used to them. However, there is a need to look well beyond these methods—they are simply too labor, time, and resource intensive to deliver the educational content that needs to be delivered.

State archives are one very important source of education. However, the 50 state archives cannot reach more than 81,000 local governments where there is a rapid turnover in elected and appointed officials and records custodians solely with traditional workshops and on site consultations. Local officials want training that is relevant, inexpensive, and convenient, and they have little time or funds to travel to conferences. All of this points toward consideration of some new methods, such as a common web site and online courses, now widely used in education and professional development, and already being offered to local governments in Ohio, Oregon, and elsewhere

Basic training in records management is the most common need in local governments. The training should include ways of capturing the attention of local officials, educating them about their records management responsibilities, building in records management at the beginning of records' lifecycle. The training needs to cover other aspects of records management and archives, on the assumption that archival records are identified and preserved as part of, or in accompaniment with, good records management.

State archives have a major role to play here. A few states are setting examples of what can be done. New York has 35 full-time employees assigned to work with local governments and a fund from which competitive grants are awarded each year. Every government is required by statute to designate a Records Management Officer. The state employs nine regional advisory officers around the state, offers regional workshops, and publishes technical leaflets. Other Albany-based staff members provide expertise in micrographics, electronic records, and archives management. The South Carolina Department of Archives and History provides training and advisory services to local governments as well as state agencies, issues schedules, and provides training both in Columbia and through site visits to local governments. It also offers audio narrated PowerPoint presentations in the area of electronic records. The state archives and records management agencies in New Mexico and Texas also provide robust training programs on archives and records management to local governments.

The Ohio Historical Society offers a creative alternative to onsite training: an online slide show and a video entitled *Local Government Records: Just the Basics* (also noted in Recommendation #7, above). Oregon offers online training via their web site in basic records management, e-mail, and other areas, as well as publications and self-evaluations. The Tennessee State Library and Archives supports the establishment of local archives around the state through a combination of site visits, technical information, training, and development grants. Its workshops for local officials and volunteers on the basics of records management, particularly scheduling, have been well received. The Tennessee program is a success: when it began in 1998, there were 23 local government archival programs in the state; as of January 2007, there were 62.

National associations such as the Society of American Archivists offer publications and workshops for archivists but their role in training local government archivists is undefined. Other issues exist as well: local officials may be unaware of the offerings of professional associations; may not recognize their usefulness (for instance, volunteers and local government Clerks may assume SAA materials are for professional archivists) and may be unable to afford the costs of joining or attending conferences and training workshops. ARMA International offers more online training, but these opportunities may be better suited to advanced records managers than to beginners. ARMA has a series of local or regional chapters, and several local government records managers and archivists indicated they are active in these groups in part because of proximity.

Other associations, such as the International Institute of Municipal Clerks and the International City/County Management Association, reach thousands of local officials and have in place training and certification programs. There are rich potential collaborative possibilities here in adding—or expanding—provisions for training in archives and records management. In fact, one of the Project's insights is that there is now little coordination among associations in regard to training in this area. This means that association resources, limited to modest for all associations, probably could be better utilized through cooperative, or at least coordinated, efforts.

The Basics of Archives Continuing Education (BACE) Program is a good model for consideration in expanding and enhancing training. BACE, developed through a project administered by the American Association for State and Local History, covers the basics of archives. It is available on a CD, which includes an Instructor's Manual, PowerPoint slides, a Participant Workbook, pre and post workshops assessments, and other materials for use by an onsite instructor. Users also receive a CD with extended content in five areas: what to collect, how to collect it, processing, storage, and access/outreach. The presentation is general and introductory only, and, like most other materials in the archival field, it does not focus on local government archives. But it is a useful tool that deserves more publicity and use, and a model for other, similar items that might be produced for local government archives.

The conclusions in this area are as follows:

- There is a need for more publicity for existing materials so that they are more broadly known and used by local governments.
- There is a need to develop new materials, particularly in the areas of advocacy; alternatives for taking care of local government archives, including cooperation with community programs such as historical agencies and libraries; the organization, makeup, and management of a local government archives program; promoting access and use; and measures of program effectiveness.
- There is a need for better coordination among professional groups, the state archives, and other organizations that are offering training in this area.

Action Steps for Recommendation 8: Publicize existing publications and educational opportunities and develop new ones where needed.

8.a. Work with IIMC Records Committee on the development of a new series of local government records and archives management manuals.

8.b. Drawing on existing materials and courses, and supplementing as needed, preparing an online course on local government archives management. Constructing it so that any state can customize and add its own material.

Recommendation 9:
Address the concerns raised by and capitalize on the opportunities offered by electronic information technology

The impact of information technology was one of the Task Force's priority areas, and the subject of a separate consultant's report, by Greg Hunter. This is probably the most unsettled area in government records management and archives administration.

There are many ways in which "digital archives" are different from their paper counterparts: they are logical entities rather than physical entities; decentralized rather than centralized; time and space independent (available anywhere there is a computer hooked up to the Web) rather than time and space dependent; and widely disseminated and accessible rather than housed in compact files. The very definition of what constitutes a "record" is unsettled in the digital world. The longevity of storage media is a concern, and digital records are system dependent—both issues are of concern to archivists, whose focus is on the long term. Most records are "born digital" these days, including records that affect the rights and interests of citizens, but key issues are just beginning to be addressed, records are at risk from *ad hoc* and proprietary solutions, and even basic policies for longstanding applications such as e-mail are usually lacking (a fact often noted in the literature and confirmed by this Project's survey).

This area of archival work is unsettled, and there are no surefire solutions. At present, at least ten strategies are being used for digital archives:

1. Analog storage—printing out to paper or microfilm.
2. "Digital Archaeology"—convert digital records to a new technology only when future access to them is required.
3. "Computer museums"—keeping various versions of computers and software.
4. Backward compatibility—making sure new systems can read old data through at least two previous generations.
5. Formulating sound policies.

6. Developing standards—through the American National Standards Institute, International Organization for Standardization, and a new standard model for digital archives systems, "Reference Model for an Open Archival Information System" (OAIS).
7. Conversion and migration—translate documents into forms accessible by future generations of hardware and software.
8. Emulation—getting future computers to act like past and present day ones so they will be able to continue to "read" digital information.
9. Trustworthy Information Systems that ensure informational integrity.
10. "Persistent Digital Archives"—still in the experimental stage, designed to preserve content even if format changes.

Strategies that are worth considering here include the following:

- Educate citizens and local government officials about the challenges posed by digital records, including case studies of both successful and failed approaches
- Consider hybrid solutions that combine analog and digital records
- Educate in the area of how to decide between proprietary and ad hoc solutions
- Develop more "business cases" for digital preservation
- Form partnerships, particularly with IT offices
- Build recordkeeping and archival records management functionality into all systems

Making progress in this complicated area requires a partnership approach. An archives—or even an archives and/plus records management office—cannot do it alone. The best approach is for each local government to develop a plan for managing its digital archives. State archives and professional associations can assist in this work through educational materials, workshops, and advice. Plans should include these elements:

- Work with the IT office and others to develop a government-wide approach
- Clarify the role of the archives—e.g., as advocate for historical concerns, consultant, information locator, records custodian

- Clarify the issue of custody, including the possibility of "co-custodianship" —the archives has legal custody of archival records but delegates physical custody to a qualified third party such as the IT department or the parent organization
- Define issues and concerns
- Identify partners
- Design pilot projects
- Test approaches and solution
- Roll out the program to the entire government

Action Steps for Recommendation 9: Address the concerns and capitalize on the opportunities posed by electronic information technology.

9.a. Develop electronic publication Issues and Alternatives for Managing Local Government Archival Electronic Records, based on Greg Hunter's report, and possibly co-published by ICMA and PTI (Public Technology Incorporated)

9.b. Adapt the National Archives policy guidance on electronic records for use by local governments. Include a modification of the checklist for federal agencies to prepare electronic records for transfer to the National Archives.

Recommendation 10:
Draw creatively on the power of the network of interested professionals

The Project revealed the existence of many strong programs, excellent advocacy materials, guidelines, and other useful models. Perhaps more important, it revealed the existence of a vibrant community of several hundred interested professionals—in the various state archives, professional associations, and in local governments themselves. They responded enthusiastically to the Project's goal of better care for local government archives through attendance at the Task Force's meetings, serving on Expert Panels, and contributing to the online survey. Among them, these interested professionals have a great deal of expertise, experience, knowledge, and know-how. They understand how to build programs, take care of archives in alternative settings such as historical societies and libraries, work with and appeal to local officials, organize support from outside groups, develop budgets, carry out arrangement and description, preserve fragile materials, encourage use, work with students, wrestle with electronic records, and navigate past problems.

Often working in relative isolation, they found that the Project provided an informal forum for them to get together, share ideas, and show pride in their accomplishments. In effect, the Project has served to begin defining and coalescing a community of interested, concerned professionals who are generous in sharing what they know and what they have learned. There is a need to keep that community together and growing and to sustain the interest and momentum that the Project has helped generate. One way of doing that is using online tools and technologies, discussed in recommendation number 11, below.

Action Steps for Recommendation 10: Draw creatively on the power of the network of interested professionals and other parties.

10.a. Send the final report electronically to everyone who attended an information session during the past year, members of the Expert Panels, and people who provided responses to the Coordinating Consultant's questions (listed in the report). Announce next steps, enlist support, call attention to web site (Recommendation 11).

10.b. Through a separate e-mailing/appeal to this same group, ask for volunteers to act as informal (unpaid) mentors/advisors/experts on local government archival records. Provide special recognition and identify these experts on the web site (Recommendation 11)

10.c. Use the web site (Recommendation 11) as a forum for enabling people interested in the project and local government archival records issues to stay in touch and cooperate creatively

10.d. Building on and integrating with the electronic publication Advocating for and Developing Local Government Archival Programs, recommended in no. 7, above, collaboratively develop a series of models/examples (through mini-essays and links to web pages, reports).

Recommendation 11:
Develop a web site focal point for interest and activity

During the Project, the Task Force saw the collaborative and creative possibilities of the newest technologies and tools. The Task Force and staff worked on a Wiki in developing and editing documents. The online survey, using the SurveyMonkey utility, helped gather, summarize, and bring together the best ideas of hundreds of people. The model online offerings for local governments in Oregon, Ohio, and elsewhere showed great potential. The Canadian Council on Archives' *Awareness Kit*, with model documents and guidelines for getting the word out, should also be considered.[7] We also observed rising public interest in collaborative technologies symbolized by the popularity of *Wikipedia* and publication of the book *Wikinomics* during the project; Task Force members are using some of these technologies themselves.

The project survey brought forth a good deal of advice about the need for more guidelines, models, standards, policies, and other materials. On the other hand, it also revealed that there is much already in existence that is unknown or underutilized. In fact, if we could draw on the best materials already in existence in the state archives and local governments and, where appropriate, in the broader arenas of records management and archives, we would have a good deal of what is needed.

There is also a need to continue a focus point for the community of interest described in Recommendation 9, above, and to give state archives and professional associations a means of collaborating with each other, reducing duplication of effort.

Finally, there is a need for a place where local officials, archivists, advocates, citizens, and others can get started—a portal or "one stop" place on the web, rich in information itself, but even richer in collaborative forums and links to other sources.

Establishment of a central web site/focal point/discussion point/wiki on local government records and archives management, harnessing the power of the Web, would constitute an effective use of resources to reach a national audience over a long period of time. It would need a sponsor and a home, and someone to act as proprietor, encourage use, solicit materials,

[7] http://www.cdncouncilarchives.ca/awareness_kit.html

publicize new materials and training opportunities, maintain links, and generally keep the web site alive, current, and vibrant.

It might include—either in the original or by linking to other sites—some or all of the following:

- New publications, such as the business case, canons of good practice, alternatives to on-site archives, management, etc.
- Developments in the management of electronic records and archives
- Examples of model materials
- Links to model materials in state archives and local governments
- Links to policy documents such as local laws, ordinances, resolutions, and regulations
- Links to resources that are identified as priority topics where local officials are searching for policies and best practices because they need to adopt them in a timely manner, e.g., guidelines for e-mail, archival management of portals and web sites
- Listing of/links to educational opportunities
- Links to other resources
- An online listserv/discussion group, or more than one, to serve as a central forum for the exchange of ideas, news, best practices, new policy documents, advocacy, problem-solving, etc.
- A place to post questions or problems and solicit suggestions and advice from peers
- A wiki or more than one for interested people to meet electronically and create or edit documents
- Online education courses; these are essential to reaching large numbers of people in a cost-effective way

Action Step for Recommendation 11: Develop a web site as a focal point for interest and activity.

11.a. Perhaps the key to continuing the momentum and visibility: Establish as soon as possible and populate a new local government records management/archives web site to link to publications, standards, best practices, models, experts, standards, etc., and serve as a discussion forum. Consider building on the current *Closest to Home* project web site/wiki. Start small/modest, build using growing interest and volunteer contributions. Consider soliciting support/assistance for selected state archives, who would find the web site useful for their own work, and ICMA and NACo (as possible hosts). Use this to continue the momentum and interest generated by the project and link to the other items recommended elsewhere in this report. "The first place to stop for anyone interested in local government records and archives management."

2008: A Year for Action

Making progress will mean that organizations, state agencies, and others need to step forward and play a leadership/coordinating role. The Task Force, which concludes its work at the end of 2008, has identified an 11-point Action Plan for the final year of the project. This effort is intended to generate both specific products as well as momentum that will carry on after the project concludes. The issues are too important for us to lose any time!

The Task Force's full report contains more detailed descriptions of the leadership and coordination needed to achieve our goals, plus suggestions for which organizations should take the lead on each. This does not mean, however, that we expect these entities to do all the work; in fact, we know that cooperation is essential to progress. The designations are meant to suggest organizations play a more general leadership role: getting things started, defining goals, assembling the resources, getting people and organizations to work together.

Another factor affecting our Action Plan is the $2.6 million that FEMA has awarded to CoSA for the Intergovernmental Preparedness for Essential Records (IPER) project. IPER will develop and deliver records-related emergency training to state and local government agencies nationwide and gives all of the state archives an opportunity to expand significantly the services available to their local governments. CoSA will be working closely with local government associations during the IPER project, offering further opportunities to expand awareness of the need for proper care of the most essential records in counties, cities, and other localities.

Action Plan for 2008. With these considerations in mind, the Task Force has selected the following activities to pursue in 2008. Responsibility for a few of them will rest primarily with the Task Force, its consultants, and staff, but most will require the active involvement and commitment from a broad range of organizations and individuals to succeed.

1. **Publish this report and distribute information about the Task Force's findings and recommendations widely.**

2. **Contact representatives of local government associations that have demonstrated particular interest in the goals of this project,** starting with the National Association of Counties (NACo), the International City/County Management Association (ICMA), and the

International Institute of Municipal Clerks (IIMC), to discuss their involvement as this project moves forward.

3. **Seek opportunities to integrate the goals of the Local Government Archives Task Force with the IPER project.**

4. **Convene a meeting of representatives of local government associations** in early February 2008. Participants will include those associations that sent representatives to a similar meeting held in February 2007 (which included NACo, ICMA, and IIMC, among others) as well as representatives from additional local government associations.

5. **Establish a Coordinating Council on Local Government Archives** to include representatives of national associations of local governments and local government archivists.

6. **Develop a strategy and toolkit to help state archivists work with state affiliates of national local government associations** in cooperation with national association staff.

7. **Prepare a checklist of the basic elements of a local government archives program** and promote awareness about its availability through local government associations, SHRABs, and other organizations. Work with SAA and NAGARA local government roundtables on this.

8. **Commission and publish booklets on specific topics of high interest** including:
    - managing local government archival electronic records
    - the business case for local government archives

9. **Develop a coordinated plan for a portal to provide access to web-based resources on local government archives**, starting with sections already available on the NAGARA and CoSA web sites, and seek support and input from the local government associations.

10. **Make presentations at meetings of local government associations** about the findings of the project and the importance of establishing and sustaining local government archives.

11. **Carry out, in concert with other groups, other Action Items selected from those advanced in the Recommendations, above.**

Products of the CoSA Local Government Archives Task Force

The following can be downloaded from the ***Closest to Home*** website at http://www.statearchivists.org/lga

Case Statement. The case statement is designed to educate key stakeholders about the value of local government archives, including why they are important (with specific examples) and why they constitute a national priority. The case statement is illustrated with photographs and compelling stories to convey how local government records affect the personal and business lives of individual citizens and enhance our communities. (available in draft)

Awareness Toolkit. The Case Statement will become a key component of a "toolkit" that will also include a PowerPoint presentation and accompanying brochure that can be customized to fit local circumstances; (2) a checklist for evaluating the quality of local government archives; and other materials that local government archivists and state archives employees can use to educate local government officials about the importance of sound archival programs. (in development)

Critical Issue Reports. The Task Force has identified four areas of special interest and engaged consultants to research, analyze, and prepare reports on each of the following topics.

- Sustainable Funding for Local Government Archives – Geof Huth
- Raising Awareness and Strengthening Advocacy – Bruce Dearstyne
- Training in Managing Local Government Archival Records – Jami Awalt
- The Impact of New Technologies – Gregory Hunter

Overview White Paper. The white paper provides context for our current efforts by summarizing previous projects related to local government records and describing the range of issues now confronting local government archives. Complementing this overview is an **annotated bibliography** on local government archives and records. There is also a selection of "**Milestone Documents**," key reports and statements on local government records and archives from the 1960s through the 1990s.

Survey of State Programs and Services for Local Government Archives and Records, completed in March 2006.

Local Government Archives Listserv established in January 2006, now has 191 subscribers. To join the list, see instructions at http://www.statearchivists.org/lga/listserv/.