



**FISCAL YEAR 2022 BUDGETS FOR THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND RECORDS
ADMINISTRATION AND THE NATIONAL HISTORICAL PUBLICATIONS AND
RECORDS COMMISSION**

**Submitted by the National Coalition for History to the House Appropriations Committee's
Subcommittee on Financial Services and General Government**

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The Honorable Mike Quigley
Chairman
Subcommittee on Financial Services
and General Government
House Committee on Appropriations
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Mr. Chairman:

The National Coalition for History (NCH) urges funding of \$433 million for the National Archives and Records Administration's (NARA) Operating Expenses (OE) budget in fiscal year (FY) 2022, which is an increase of \$56 million from the FY 21 level of \$377 million.

NCH urges funding in FY 22 for the National Historical Publications and Records Commission (NHPRC) grants program at a level of \$13 million. The NHPRC received \$6.5 million in FY 21.

The National Coalition for History (NCH) is a consortium of 44 organizations that advocates and educates on federal legislative and regulatory issues affecting historians, archivists, political scientists, documentary editors, teachers, students, genealogists, and other stakeholders. Thank you for the opportunity to submit our views on the National Archives and

Records Administration's proposed fiscal year (FY) 2022 budget. As researchers and conservators of American history and culture, we care deeply about the programs and activities of NARA and the National Historical Publications and Records Commission.

NARA has reached an inflection point. For too long it has been neglected and underfunded. As the quantity of material increases exponentially, NARA will have difficulty dealing with federal records generated each year, let alone tackling the massive backlog of older, historically important paper records that should be digitized. Backlogs in declassification and the processing of records at presidential libraries have already increased. Perhaps most importantly, the quality and quantity of services provided to our citizens may deteriorate if not addressed in this budget cycle. There are indications that NARA may be unable to manage these important responsibilities, a trend that has only been exacerbated by the pandemic and ensuing shutdown of on-site services.

Increased federal spending for archives is necessary to manage, preserve, and make accessible the federal government's records. NARA's operating expenses budget has remained stagnant for more than a decade at a time when the transition to use of electronic records by federal agencies is already underway. In the past 35 years, the volume of NARA's holdings has increased more than threefold, yet it currently has fewer full-time equivalents (FTEs) than in 1985. Investment in human capital, including professional archivists, is vital in providing a high level of service to the public. For too long Congress and the administrations of both parties have, unfortunately, viewed NARA as a mere housekeeping agency—one that makes sure the Charters of Freedom are safe, that records are processed and stored in an orderly fashion so that a

perceived limited universe of stakeholders can access them, rather than as a vital agency that ensures transparency, efficiency, and historical documentation for the nation.

NARA’s FY 20 operating expenses budget was \$359 million, which is \$14 million less than the FY 19 level of \$373 million. While NARA did receive a slight increase of \$18 million in FY21, up to \$377 million, those funds were for one-time costs related to the Presidential transition, resulting in functionally flat funding. NARA requires a level of appropriations commensurate with its vastly expanded responsibilities. This chart provides a summary of the NARA and NHPRC budgets over the past decade.

NARA and NHPRC Appropriations, FY 2011 to Present (in millions of dollars)

	FY 11	FY 12	FY 13	FY 14	FY 15	FY 16	FY17	FY 18	FY 19	FY 20	FY 21
NARA	\$339	\$373	\$353	\$370	\$365	\$372	\$381	\$385	\$373	\$359	\$377
NHPRC	\$10	\$5	\$4.75	\$4.5	\$5	\$5	\$5	\$6	\$6	\$6.5	\$6.5

As recently as FY 18, NARA’s OE budget was \$385 million. In inflation-adjusted dollars, NARA’s OE budget has declined for more than a decade. No federal agency can absorb such significant decreases in funding without concomitant decreases in public services. As you can see from the chart above, NARA received nearly the same amount in the current fiscal year as it did in FY 12. Current funding levels are not adequate to serve legitimate public needs for accessibility and government accountability. American citizens rely on access to immigration and naturalization and census records (held by NARA) to conduct daily activities. Veterans and their families rely on military records (held by NARA) to gain access to their benefits. And in recent years, NARA has had to reduce hours at its research rooms and limit the number of

materials that individuals can access at one time, thus increasing the time required to conduct research.

In recent years Congress and the executive branch have placed additional responsibilities on the agency without providing the funding necessary to assume these functions. These include transitioning from the preservation and storage of paper records to the preservation and storage of electronic records, reducing backlogs of records awaiting declassification, and the addition over the past decade of three presidential libraries. Each new presidential library created and placed under NARA's care adds additional costs for staff, maintenance, and records management. NARA will likely soon be facing the costs associated with yet another presidential library.

The federal government's transition to electronic records, including email, has dramatically increased the number of records that NARA must process and catalog. In 2019, NARA and the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) announced that the agency will no longer accept paper records from federal agencies as of December 31, 2022. We are concerned that with diminished resources NARA will not be prepared to continue this transition without serious disruptions. Many doubt that this deadline can realistically be met without additional resources, both human and technological.

NARA lacks the funding needed to meet the demand to digitize its existing holdings and make them more accessible to the public online. In addition, the need to manage large volumes of textual records is not diminishing. In fact, two to three million cubic feet of permanent federal records will be eligible for transfer to NARA in the next 15 years. We urge you to provide

NARA the funding necessary to ensure a seamless transition to all digital recordkeeping in the coming years.

National Historical Publications and Records Commission

The NHPRC is the grant-making arm of NARA. It enables the National Archives to provide leadership through grants that support exploration of major archival issues, such as preservation of electronic records, disaster preparedness, and coordination and communication among archivists nationwide. The agency also provides grants for the creation of documentary collections (books and electronic) of the papers of nationally significant individuals and institutions. As an example, NHPRC has funded an ongoing project to make the papers of the Founding Fathers available for free online.

The Trump administration repeatedly proposed eliminating the NHPRC. Congress, in a bipartisan manner, rejected these proposed cuts. In FY 21, Congress provided funding of \$6.5 million—which is half of the \$13 million the NHPRC received in FY 10. This is barely adequate to support ongoing programs and implement critical new digital initiatives. To provide context, the NHPRC received \$10 million in FY 1999. We urge the subcommittee to restore funding back up to the level of \$13 million for this small but important program.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit these comments.