

## State Historical Records Advisory Board (SHRAB)

### Skype Meeting

October 15, 2020

2:00 p.m. – 3:30 p.m.

**Board Members Present:** David Carmicheal (SHRAB coordinator) John Paul Deley, Martina Soden, Nancy Avolese, Stacey Peeples, Adam Bentz, Jack McCarthy, Jim Beidler, John (Jack) Ertell, Richard Jenkins, Rachel Grove Rohrbaugh.

**Staff Attending:** Cindy Bendroth, Josh Stahlman, Tyler Stump

David Carmicheal (DC) began the meeting at 2:01 by stating that this meeting would be a non-voting meeting. A sunshine meeting notice was not put out in time for this meeting and PHMC counsel advised that no matters should be voted on except the approval of previous minutes.

DC took roll and 10 board members were present.

DC gave a quick update on the State Archives: construction on the new archives building is still underway. State Archives staff are still working remotely due to the Covid pandemic and are managing to be very productive while working at home.

DC then brought up the most recent minutes and asked if there were any comments or issues with them. With no questions or comments, Jack McCarthy (JM) made a motion to approve the motion and Nancy Avolese (NA) seconded. All members present voted to approve the minutes.

DC then moved on to discuss the Historical and Archival Records Care Grants. The application period for the 3<sup>rd</sup> grant cycle ended at the beginning of October. There were 63 applications in total, 10 from local governments, 45 from historical societies and libraries, and 8 from academic institutions. DC said that we wanted to make sure that the available grant funds would be distributed in a way that was fair and generally proportional to these categories and proposed splitting total funding into four parts: local governments; historical societies and libraries; academic institutions; and a 4<sup>th</sup> pot to facilitate changes during the panel discussion. Several members said they liked this division and decided to divide the total funds in this manner.

JM said he thought this division was a good solution to the issue of large, well-funded academic institutions competing against small local historical societies that don't have grant-writing experience. John Paul Deley (JPD) agreed but also commented that this does not incentivize applications that involve partnerships between organizations. He asked how can we incentivize cooperative projects and suggested setting aside a certain amount of money that can *only* be used for cooperative projects. DC said that after this grant SHRAB will need to meet again and discuss what the next grant cycle and evaluation will look like.

JPD then asked if NHPRC was able to partially fund or match HARC grants. Josh Stahlman (JS) indicated that the Board anticipates receiving NHPRC State Board Programming funds in July 2021 and therefore would not be eligible to again apply to that particular opportunity until June 2022. JS said he is waiting to hear from Dan Stokes from NHPRC if there are other grant opportunities that SHRAB might apply for. JPD clarified that he believes that Dan Stokes said other NHPRC funds are available to match HARC.

Rachel Grove Rohrbaugh (RGR) asked about the breakup of grants by category--she is concerned with SHRAB looking at *type* of institution and not *size*. What if an academic institution is small and not well funded? She said SHRAB shouldn't always assume that because an institution is academic it's well funded or not doing local history. Could there be an option to divide by operating budget? DC said that the divisions of HARC applicants needed to be more manageable for the SHRAB review panels and that this was the easiest way to divide them based on the information supplied in the applications. But in the future if SHRAB decides that an applicant's budget is important to consider it can be added to future HARC application instructions.

JPD asked if we could classify applicants by type of grant (digitization, processing, etc.)? DC said in future grant cycles yes, but applicants would have to self-identify that information when they apply. That will be saved for the future SHRAB discussion.

Jim Beidler (JB) asked if any collaborative projects were submitted by applicants this year? JS said he was not sure at this point, the applications haven't had their initial review yet. JB said in future cycles there should be a separate pool of funding for collaborative projects. DC said this is a good idea, and if we get more NHPRC funds in the future then that will be an easy thing to do.

RGR agreed about adding an extra fund category for collaborative projects. She also asked if State Archives staff look at grants before they get sent to SHRAB reviewers? Do SHRAB reviewers only see applications that actually meet grant requirements? DC said that for this current cycle, he proposes the following: one SHRAB member and two State Archives staff will review the local government applications (staff members will not out vote the SHRAB reviewer); two SHRAB members will review academic institution applications; and two SHRAB members and State Archives archivist JS will review historical societies and library applications. Since the bulk of applications are from historical societies, JS will read them all, rank them, and weed out ones that don't meet basic criteria. Those two SHRAB reviewers will then decide how they want to proceed; review all in that category, or only the top 30 or so. DC said he hopes this will make the reviewing easier on all SHRAB members who are grading applications. RGR liked DC's plan.

JM said that it is still hard to review 30 or so applications. He wondered if we could have two split panels for all the historical societies, it would be easier to divide them further? Then those reviewers do not have to read as many. DC said this would make it harder to ensure consistency in applications reviews. In previous years it was a problem when one group graded higher than the other and we do not want this impacting the historical society and library category. This proposed plan will at least cut down a lot of the work that was required of reviewers last year, even though its not perfect. DC also said next year SHRAB can require more information in the application so it would naturally arrange the applications in more manageable groups for graders. JM said this was a good idea, anything that can make the grading more manageable for reviewers is good.

DC also said any SHRAB member can read all the applications if they want to at any time.

Martina Soden (MS) asked when do we have to review by? JS said he will have everything sent to panels on November 1st, and review panels would have until December 18<sup>th</sup> to review and make comments in ESA, and then around January 19<sup>th</sup> the State Archives will schedule a panel discussion. After that the recommendations go to PHMC's commissioners for final approval.

JM asked about outside reviewers volunteering (Non-SHRAB?) DC said we have considered that already, but if we pay external reviewers it comes out of grant monies and we do not want to do that. JM said maybe we could find volunteers in the future? JPD said outside reviewers are great, but they should be outside of Pennsylvania if we ever do that. RGR said outside reviewers can also struggle to see the big picture sometimes and she did not think it'll help us much. If grants are split up amongst multiple reviewers inconsistencies will remain. She did say she likes having State Archives staff involved.

DC then asked for SHRAB members to volunteer to review the HARC grants. Richard Jenkins (RJ) volunteered to review local government applications, JM and Stacey Peeples (SP) volunteered for historical societies and libraries, and RGR and Jack Ertell (JE) volunteered for academic institutions.

JS then talked about existing HARC grants. The first cycle grant projects will conclude in May 2021. He has heard from some grantees who have already completed their projects, including the Schwenkfelder Heritage Center, which transcribed and digitized an 18<sup>th</sup> century midwife ledger, which is available on PA Power Library. There will also be an article in Pennsylvania Heritage about it. Status reports are due November 1<sup>st</sup> so we'll know more soon from grantees.

JS also talked about second cycle grantees, all but one of which have been funded despite initial delays due to the Covid pandemic. The outstanding grantee is still waiting for grant funds because of administrative issues on their end.

JS said both grant cycles have been affected by the pandemic, as some closed facilities and some vendors were not available. We anticipate offering extensions for both cycles as necessary. The State Historic Preservation Office is helping us with that process. We will probably reach out to grantees 90 days prior to the end of their grant cycle to see if they need more time. There will be a formal application process, which includes official approval through all the legal/fiscal workflow stops. SHPO advised that small changes to projects—such as changes in timelines and minor purchase differences should be reviewed by the Grant Manager for approval.

JPD said regarding the fourth round of HARC grants that we have talked about growing this program over time, can we start gathering data to show demonstrated need for archival collection care in Pennsylvania? He suggested going back to the PHMC commissioners to ask for more grant funds. JPD said SHRAB should make a business case for this using site visits and status reports. DC clarified that the commissioners do not approve the PHMC budget. The budget is submitted by our Executive Director which goes to the Governor's Budget Office and then to the General Assembly. HARC grants are not a line item in the budget. The State Archives gets a certain amount of Keystone funds, and DC then requests from the Executive Director that HARC gets \$150,000. In the future it is possible SHRAB could get more Keystone money, especially when money freed up by the new State Archives building is available. But DC did say that JPD's suggestion would be useful for when he does make future requests like this or similar ones to NHPRC. This data should be collected.

JPD talked about CARES Act funds and that SHRAB needs to think about getting some of that funding directed to archives in Pennsylvania. DC agreed and said that museums have advocacy groups that help them get this money. But PHMC cannot directly advocate for money because it is a government entity. SHRAB can tell PHMC that we'd like to see more advocacy, but SHRAB needs to build more advocacy to get this money. JPD said it is not feasible at this time to start a new archives advocacy group in Pennsylvania, but perhaps SHRAB can be a catalyst to start a dialog between existing archivist groups in

Pennsylvania like the Delaware Valley Archivists, Three Rivers Archivists, the Pennsylvania Historical Association, Penn State, the Pennsylvania Humanities Council, etc. SHRAB could be a “dialogue convener” to start these advocacy conversations. We need to be more proactive and that needs to start with visibility.

RGR said MARAC does have an advocacy budget, this year it was sent to the SAA Emergency Fund because of the Covid pandemic, but MARAC does have a budget already set up for future advocacy. She agreed that it is not a good idea to start a new archival organization.

DC said SHRAB can have its own website, probably, but if it is going to be within the Commonwealth web server SHRAB cannot do advocacy through that website because it is government. SHRAB can have a non-government website, but they’ll have to pay for it on their own. JPD asked if SHRAB needs approval to set up its own website? DC said maybe, it depends on how its set up. Since SHRAB is a product of PHMC, we should have its (the commissioners’) blessing before we start.

DC moved on to on discuss site reviews of HARC grant recipients. NA, JPD, and Adam Bentz (AB) previously discussed on-site visits to grantees. DC thinks its a great idea for SHRAB members to visit grantees near them to spread goodwill and encouragement as they work on their projects, but not to police them. NA, JPD, and AB drafted a “visit checklist,” which was distributed before this meeting. DC reviewed the draft checklist with everyone and asked if everyone liked the idea of making visits, who would want to do that, and if they would use this checklist?

NA said yes, she would like to do that, it would be good SHRAB and for HARC recipients to see how they’re doing and encourage them.

JE agreed but said not to call the draft document an evaluation because that does not sound friendly.

JM said SHRAB doesn’t want to police anyone. In the past SHRAB said that we just wanted members to go and write up a paragraph about the visit, not ask a checklist of questions like this. He also said if we use this checklist then State Archives staff should be doing official visits. NA said we didn’t intend for this to be bureaucratic; it is supposed to be an outline for what SHRAB members should look out for, a starting point for discussion. JM disagreed and said this checklist is too structured and seems consequential. He asked if this this draft is just internal or would be sent out to HARC grantees before a visit? JPD said this checklist isn’t meant to be proscriptive...RGR agreed with JM and said that this checklist seems like a review of how well grantees are doing, and she thought that in the previous meeting it seemed like any SHRAB member visits were going to be much more informal.

DC said if there is a formal review of grantees, then it has to be done by State Archives staff. He suggested that JM sit with the draft checklist and use it to write a list of questions that SHRAB members could ask when doing site visits, would be helpful for members who don’t work in archives or aren’t sure what to ask. JM agreed to this, but he wants something that is very informal. DC said OK, but SHRAB should have something that helps us compare between grantees even if it is conversational and not actual criteria.

Rich Jenkins (RJ) suggested that perhaps HARC applicants don’t realize that don’t have to do everything in one bite. They can apply for money over grant several periods and complete work in phases. He sees site visits as an opportunity to offer goodwill and guidance.

DC moved on and talked about a potential online directory of archival organizations. PHMC put in its current strategic plan (in current development) that it will create a repository of historical and cultural organizations in the state. Because this is a big task, they are planning on doing it over several years, but that SHRAB could set the direction of the directory by defining the parameters of information SHRAB wants to see in the directory. DC wants to have a SHRAB task force to start an email discussion on what sorts of things would go into this directory (DC will also be on this too). He asked for volunteers; JPD, NA, and MS volunteered. JPD asked if the task force could start with the 1990s State Archives repository survey and build off of that? He said SHRAB shouldn't have to tinker with that much.

JM asked if a PACSCL representative could be on this task force too since it works closely with most repositories in Philadelphia. JPD said if we include PACSCL then we should include a representative from Historic Pittsburgh too. DC said we'll push this decision to the task force.

DC moved on to discuss the idea of a possible SHRAB staff liaison, which was brought up by JPD previously. PHMC commissioners don't approve the PHMC budget. The idea of a SHRAB staff liaison is a good idea but it would have to be an existing staff person at the State Archives. The Archives budget is pretty slim at this point, current archives staff that already work with other state agencies (for example Tyler Stump works with the Department of Education) will help connect SHRAB with staff in those agencies.

DC also said \*JS will compile a list of potential regrant opportunities available from NPHRC, IMLS, and NEH for SHRAB. He suggested SHRAB could apply for a grant as an organization to distribute to other organizations in the future. The Pennsylvania Heritage Foundation could be a holder for grant funds we get, but they would take out some money for administrative needs.

DC then moved to discuss the updated SHRAB action plan. NA was surprised that the current plan was so old (was last issued in 1999). JPD said that the first page of the plan says that SHRAB will post the plan on their website, it will be updated every 5 years, and will be evaluated every year too. So why don't we do this? JPD suggested that the new plan address the challenges identified in the 1999 document and go from there. It still needs to talk about convening key stake holders and start outlining how to bring them to the table. SHRAB doesn't have a communication network. PHMC used to have the PennNotes newsletter and it was really great. But it went away. JPD suggested SHRAB take over PennNotes and use its new website to be a clearing house for this information to share. He asked if we could use PennNotes as a model for this.

DC said the reason the old plan was not updated (he thinks) is because the SHRAB members don't have the time or the energy to move the plan forward, the State Archives can't do it alone. If there is a SHRAB member who can take on this work they can do it. \*Cindy Bendroth (CB) will send JPD a copy of an old PennNotes so he can see it and make sure anything new has consistent language.

DC said SHRAB can update the 1999 plan and its easily done, we just need board members to go in, track changes and make suggestions on how its to be changed so SHRAB as a whole can approve all changes. DC said it was easier in the past when NHPRC gave SHRAB money for this kind of thing, but they don't now. If SHRAB members can do this work, they'll have the support of the State Archives.

DC asked if there was any other business? JPD asked if anyone from SHRAB doing anything at the upcoming PALA or PHA meetings? SHRAB needs to get on these associations and work with them. As a

short term action item, he suggested \*all SHRAB members list what state history-related organizations they're involved with so we know who can communicate with them in the future easily. JPD also said SHRAB could give members the handouts to distribute to the associations they work with in the future too.

NA volunteered to help with the strategic plan work when needed.

With no other business, DC adjourned the meeting at 3:37 p.m.

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