

State Historical Records Advisory Board (SHRAB)
Zoom Meeting
January 31, 2023
10:00 a.m. – 11:30 a.m.

Board Members Present: Adam Bentz, Richard Jenkins, Jack Ertell, Nick Hartley, Cara Curtis, Rachel Dreyer, Rayah Levy, Bill Whitaker, Kathy Haas, Bruce Laverty, Cathy Boyer, Molly Tighe, Barbara Zaborowski, Robert Stakeley, Celia Caust-Ellenbogen

Board Members Not Present: None

PA State Archives Staff Attending: David Carmicheal, Cindy Bendroth, Natasha Margulis, Josh Stahlman, Tyler Stump

David Carmicheal (DWC) began the meeting at 10:00. All members present introduced themselves and then DWC introduced attending staff from the PA State Archives.

DWC then gave a brief presentation outlining the history, functions, and goals of the SHRAB, as well as responsibilities of board members. He emphasized SHRAB's current efforts to return to its original message- to solicit advice from board members that the State Archives can use in its programs and operations. SHRAB members have a great sense of the community/public perspective on archives and records in Pennsylvania. The State Archives staff will make an effort to incorporate all advice into future work, within the constraints of being a government institution with limited resources.

Josh Stahlman (JS) then gave a brief overview of the Historical Archives and Records Care (HARC) grant program and emphasized the State Archives' efforts to get grant funds to small and local organizations that are less equipped to get larger grants from other sources (federal government, foundations, etc.) DWC added that the State Archives tries very hard to also make sure HARC grant funds are distributed across the state and not just in areas with concentrations of archival repositories.

With no further questions or discussion about SHRAB functions or the HARC grant program, DWC moved on and asked for approval of minutes from the most recent SHRAB meeting on February 1, 2022. Barbara Zaborowski (BZ) made a motion to approve and Bill Whitaker (BW) seconded. All members voted in favor and the motion passed.

DWC continued on to talk about the State Archives 'Community History Dialog' (CHD) program. Tyler Stump (TS) gave an overview of CHD- it's been a program the State Archives began in 2020 to better assist community groups and individuals preserve their own history without prescribing specific things or pushing them to donate their materials to an archives. CHD events encourage attendees to preserve their history on their own and raise awareness of resources and other aid that can help them do this. Since 2020 the State Archives has hosted 13 CHD events with speakers from successful community archives projects and group discussion sessions. To date 1,126 people have attended the CHD events.

A CHD event is scheduled for January 31st. Dominique Luster will be speaking about building inclusive collections. TS and DWC invited all SHRAB members to attend.

DWC also reported that a survey of CHD event attendees indicated that a majority of attendees have taken steps to preserve or share their own community's history after attending an event. He said that

the State Archives is currently looking for ways to expand the program beyond these dialog events and asked all members for advice.

Jack Ertell (JE) said that collaborative meetings of local groups could be something SHRAB could encourage. He has taken part in group meetings with members of many local historical societies in his area recently and it's been a good place to share issues and concerns amongst each other.

Kathy Haas (KH) asked if there was a listserv we could put CHD speakers and attendees on so they can continue to communicate and share resources/advice after events? Archives listservs have been very helpful for her. Rachel Dreyer (RD) agreed and said encouraging a community of practice amongst community groups would be helpful. DWC said these are great ideas that the State Archives hasn't explored yet because they would create a larger burden on State Archives staff. Currently CHD events are fairly simple events to plan and hold and don't require an intensive effort from staff.

BZ said she has heard from local historical societies in her area having concerns about maintaining their membership levels as membership fees are a large source of their funding. She also noted concerns about retaining volunteers and spreading the word about collections to the public. It can be frustrating when a group has great historical material but no one is looking at it. Could a future CHD event discuss how community groups can share their collections and get the word out to the rest of the community? Better public visibility can lead to more finds, resources, opportunities in the future. DWC agreed and said in his experience when researchers and interested members of the community want to see history they go to a large institution like a state archives or the Library of Congress. They often don't think about small repositories and community groups.

Rayah Levy (RL) said a local, in-person workshop would be good, where community members could come and learn skills and share resources with each other.

Bill Whitaker (BW) said that asking simple questions like "what is your archives" to community members can be helpful too. It's a good way to start a dialog. DWC agreed and said that sometimes a community may now even realize their things are historical and worth saving, especially if it isn't "old." Future CHD events could help tell attendees that their things are important and encourage them to think broadly about what things they have that tell their community's story.

DWC asked about other barriers that SHRAB members have seen that prevent communities from saving their own history? KH said that when a community is focused on doing its larger mission they have to prioritize other activities. Archiving their history is often a low priority. It's a bandwidth issue. Encouraging communities to take small steps, or to find help doesn't have to be a huge thing.

Cara Curtis (CC) agreed and said she has worked with smaller institutions in her area, she's noticed they are afraid of making mistakes and want things to be perfect. She always says make it better than you found it, and that doesn't mean do everything perfectly.

Adam Bentz (AB) talked about building trust between repositories and communities/small groups trying to get started. He has been thinking about this in the context of racial justice in recent years. How does the archives work with groups that have been marginalized or ignored by the archives in the past? Sometimes organizations don't feel like there is value in their old things, and we need to help encourage them that yes, there is value in this.

RL added that creating partnerships and maintaining them is very important. Speaking from personal experience, she has been able to go to a university to get a storage space for a community's historical materials which helps eliminate stress in the moment, when the community is better able to care for their materials, they plan to return them to community storage.

DWC moved on to talk about the recent National Historical Publications and Records Commission (NHPRC) grant the State Archives received this year (and will begin in the summer). The State Archives, among other things, received \$20,000 to regrant to Pennsylvania community groups as community history microgrants. He sent a list of questions out to SHRAB members and asked for input about how to make this microgrant program effective.

Celia Caust-Ellenbogen (CC) said she was previously involved with a group doing a 'white glove brigade' that helped local repositories. Their main criteria for applicants was that their historical materials had to be accessible to the public (i.e. not in a private house). This way it was easy for non-501c3 groups to participate in the program. She suggested the State Archives consider similar criteria to determine who is eligible for these grants.

RL said she likes the idea of opening up grants to individuals (not just groups and organizations) because a lot of groups don't have 501c3. This also helps avoid organizations that will take chunks of grant funds for administrative purposes that could be avoided if given to an individual instead.

Molly Tighe (MT) asked if the HARC review could be applied to the microgrants as well? JS said parts of it yes, but we want to keep this as simple as possible. We want to eliminate the barriers to these funds as much as possible. HARC applications have a long and tedious system to go through (because funds come from the state government) and its a barrier we want to avoid in the application process.

BZ said we should allow grants to go up to \$1000, \$500 isn't enough. A group can blow through \$500 really fast. A fillable pdf or Google form should be sufficient for an application, she argued that a lot of detail isn't needed. She suggested limiting the application to asking "What's the collection you want to preserve/share, and a simple budget- what are you spending money on?." BZ also asked if the State Archives is planning on limiting what the grants can be spent on? (i.e., grants can't be for staff salaries).

DWC said he wants to see how communities will leverage grant money to do something else down the road (apply for another grant, do something to pull in funds, etc.). BZ agreed and said this needs to be explained in the grant application.

Cathy Boyer (CB) asked if categories could be put on the grant application like 'supplies' or 'outreach work' for applicants to select? If people don't know how to start an application, these can be suggestions for what they can use this grant for.

DWC said that because this microgrant funding comes from NHPRC there is much more flexibility in how applications can be done, unlike HARC grants.

AB asked what if there is a community, say a church group, that has historical materials stored in their basement. Could they use a grant to fix a leak in their basement so that visitors have an easier time looking at the materials down there? In other words, should we allow grants to be used for capital projects or other "non-collections" activities that support a community's preservation of their history? This question generated lots of discussion from other SHRAB members.

MT said she did not think these microgrants should be used to support capital improvement projects.

RD said “non-archival” work like commissioning an artist to create something based on a community’s history is an impactful way to preserve and share their history.

MT recommended steering away from capital projects and instead making the microgrants available for work that brings collections forward. She agreed that having a check box or examples of projects on the application would be helpful. An outreach project like using grant funds to buy flyers would be great. DWC agreed and said that community outreach projects would be a good use of these funds.

KH similarly suggested making the permissible grant activities as broad as NHPRC will allow. She said it’s frustrating when a group knows what they need but a grant limits what money can actually be spent on. We should trust communities to know what they need for themselves. Some suggestions/examples on the application are fine but it’s possible the criteria should be broad because communities likely already have a sense of what they need.

RL agreed with KH. Using grant money to make more money for a community would also be good. Hiring an artist or someone else to help promote a collection could in turn lead to more support and resources from the community. Several other SHRAB members also agreed that a broad interpretation of what is permissible for a microgrant is good.

BZ asked if this \$20,000 is successful can we go back to NHPRC for even more regrant money in the future? DWC said yes, we will if we can. He also said he would like to find a good way to leverage any success of this microgrant program so that we could find funds from other non-NHPRC sources in the future as well.

DWC concluded the discussion of the CHD microgrant program and thanked everyone for their advice and thoughts. If anyone else had more to add please share with Josh Stahlman.

With no further business DWC adjourned the meeting at 11:30.