



ASSOCIATION
OF RESEARCH
LIBRARIES



Council on
Library and
Information
Resources

April 18, 2007

The Honorable Norman D. Dicks
Chairman
Subcommittee on Interior and Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
B-309 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510-6023

Dear Chairman Dicks:

This letter is submitted on behalf of the Association of Research Libraries (ARL) and the Council on Library and Information Resources (CLIR). ARL and CLIR are writing to respectfully request that the Subcommittee support funding of \$177 million for FY 2008 for the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH), an increase of \$36 million above the FY 2007 level and the President's request. Such an increase would, in part, permit additional support for the Preservation and Access Division whose work is critical to preserving our American heritage; for the *We the People* initiative and for the Digital Humanities Start-up Grants, which thoughtfully extend the scope of NEH to the increasingly important digital environment.

NEH plays a vital role in preserving our cultural legacy, improving education at all levels, and helping Americans to better understand and appreciate the life of their Nation. Through its broad range of grant programs, the Division of Preservation and Access supports projects that preserve and increase the availability of resources, such as books, journals, newspapers, photographs, and films that are crucial for research, education, and public programming in the humanities.

The leadership demonstrated by the NEH has protected America's heritage from perishing, and continued funding for NEH is absolutely critical to ongoing programs of interest in the library community. Each year NEH funds projects to preserve cultural resources important to research, education, and knowledge of the humanities. Without Congressional support for NEH, fragile material in libraries and repositories in universities, colleges, and communities across the country would be in danger of permanent loss.

Congress took a significant leadership role in 1987 when it recognized the crisis confronting this country's vast printed intellectual heritage: more than 12 million volumes in research libraries of the U.S. were at risk of deterioration because they were printed on acidic paper, a highly unstable medium. As a result, Congress allocated resources to NEH to coordinate and support the efforts of the library community to preserve these resources through microfilming the intellectual content of, and to provide broad access to, fragile materials. This

effort, known as the Brittle Books Program, was envisioned as a long-term effort to preserve millions of important volumes threatened by irreparable loss. Today it is estimated that some 25-30 percent of the printed holdings in the Nation's research libraries are deteriorating because of paper acidity, and other materials, such as photographs, films, and sound recordings are in danger because of their composition and/or storage media.

This initiative remains critical to the preservation and access of America's heritage for our present and future generations. The requested FY 2008 funding will enable the Division to continue its work in areas such as:

- Microfilming the contents of brittle books and serials;
- Preserving and establishing access to other humanities resources, such as newspapers, and archival collections of unique materials;
- Enabling institutions to stabilize humanities collections by improving storage, housing, and security;
- Developing regional preservation and consultation services to help smaller cultural institutions obtain the advice and knowledge they need to preserve their collections;
- Continuing the education and training of preservation administrators and conservators; and
- Supporting research and development to improve preservation and access methods and technologies and preservation assistance grants that focus on small and mid-sized institutions.

It is also important to note the increasing role of digitization as a viable preservation reformatting strategy. ARL, CLIR, and other professional organizations such as the Coalition for Networked Information (CNI) have built community support and facilitated the development of policies, standards, guidelines, and best practices that inform our constituencies on how best to manage and develop these new technologies in support of the preservation and access of our cultural commonwealth. Both the *We the People* initiative and the Digital Humanities Start-Up Grants respond to the burgeoning digitization of our cultural legacy.

ARL and CLIR encourage the funding for the Administration's request of \$15.2 million for the *We the People* initiative. The initiative, which was created in response to the lack of basic historical knowledge among many Americans, is designed to enhance the teaching, research, and understanding of American history and culture. The *We the People* initiative has already contributed importantly to the research library community through a variety of projects and activities, including:

- Collected editions of the papers and writings of the Founding Fathers, U.S. presidents, and other important figures in the nation's history and culture; and projects to preserve and increase the availability of cultural and intellectual resources essential to the American people, such as books, newspapers, manuscript collections, audio and visual materials, and objects of material culture.
- National Digital Newspaper Program: the NDNF supports projects to digitize historically important U.S. newspapers into fully searchable files and to make these files available on the Internet to the public. Developed in partnership with the Library of Congress, this project will make more than 30 million pages of newspapers accessible online to students, teachers, parents, scholars, and historians.
- Challenge Grants: special awards for educational and cultural institutions to strengthen their programs that advance knowledge of the founding principles of the United States.

We also strongly support a proposed new program within the *We the People* initiative that will undertake to transcribe, digitize, annotate, and mount on the Internet the papers of the Nation's first four presidents: Washington, Adams, Jefferson, and Madison.

ARL and CLIR, like many others in our community, are heartened by the new NEH initiative on Digital Humanities Start-Up Grants that develop and utilize information technologies in the humanities, education and scholarship in innovative and creative ways. In the words of Chairman Cole, "These new digital humanities projects demonstrate the promise offered by current and future technological advances to create new approaches and bring fresh perspectives to study in the humanities. Technology offers us powerful tools to help us understand our world, and with these grants, scholars will put those tools to good use." In FY 2008, NEH has requested \$1.4 million in support of this important program. ARL and CLIR encourage you to support this program and consider additional funding to undertake these new efforts.

ARL and CLIR strongly support these and other programs within NEH that complement its preservation program with grants for the digitization of library materials. Digital technology provides new opportunities to extend the reach of the humanities; the vibrant heritage of our Nation can now be made accessible in nearly every classroom, library, and home. Many repositories of specialized and rare materials are digitizing their holdings to provide students, scholars, and educators access to them. Increasingly, libraries and other humanities organizations are providing online access to a growing body of knowledge created in electronic journals, books, and databases that are available only in electronic form.

With the excitement attendant on digital repositories and digital libraries, new challenges also arise. As with print resources, digital information requires preservation; collaborative agreements and efforts involving authors, publishers,

technologists, and librarians are requisite to ensure long-term availability and access. It will be important for NEH to continue to receive sufficient funding to allocate grants so that the public can be assured that the raw materials of scholarship in all major repositories will be preserved for future generations.

Information, education, and knowledge are the pillars of our country's domestic progress and leadership in the 21st century. Never before in our history has so much information been accessible, nor has there been a greater time of urgency to master the complex challenges we face as a Nation. The principle characteristics of the humanities that help to ensure our democracy and engage our citizens in this invigorating era we refer to as the Age of Information—reflection, participation, and thoughtful communication—have similarly never been more important. The Subcommittee's continuing support of the National Endowment for the Humanities is greatly appreciated, for NEH embodies those fundamental qualities and promotes the projects and programs that can assure our future while preserving and building upon our rich and salient traditions.

Sincerely,



Duane Webster
Executive Director
Association of Research Libraries



Charles Henry
President
Council on Library and Information Resources