March 25, 2009

The Honorable Norman D. Dicks
Chairman
Subcommittee on Interior,
Environment & Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Michael K. Simpson
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Interior,
Environment & Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Dicks and Ranking Member Simpson:

On behalf of the Association of Research Libraries (ARL) and the American Library Association (ALA), we write to express strong support for funding of the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) Division of Preservation and Access. With NEH’s support, libraries engage in numerous activities to preserve and provide access to our local, state, national and international cultural heritage. We also urge you to support the overall funding for NEH at the level of $230 million, an increase of $75 million. Additional appropriations would permit the Agency to address the high level of unmet needs by supporting a greater number of humanities projects.

NEH funding is central to libraries across the country as this funding supports core activities including the preservation of unique collections, the training of librarians to preserve these culturally valuable resources, and to making important research tools broadly available for use by the public. For example, NEH funding supports regional field offices and academic programs in conservation as well as providing individual awards that support basic preservation activities in libraries, archives, museums and historical organizations throughout the United States. These include preservation training programs that reach thousands of individuals across the United States. NEH support of workforce development and training efforts is critically important as librarians, archivists and museum professionals employ digital and networked-based technologies while, at the same time, preserving books, manuscripts, photographs, and other artifacts in many other formats. Recent examples of NEH grants in each of these areas include:

- The purchase of equipment to monitor environmental conditions in the Harbor History Museum, which houses collections that document the Native American and immigrant heritage of the Gig Harbor Peninsula. Collections
include furnishings, textiles, farming implements, boating tools, documents, maps, photographs, and American Indian baskets, tools, and trade beads; Gig Harbor Peninsula Historical Society, Gig Harbor, WA.

- A preservation assessment of records and artifacts at the Holocaust, Genocide and Human Rights Education Center, documenting conditions in several concentration camps during World War II. The collection includes original memoirs of holocaust survivors, correspondence, maps depicting camp layouts, and an original concentration camp cookbook; Brookdale Community College, Lincroft, NJ; and

- A regional field service program that provides workshops, consultations, preservation surveys, disaster response assistance, reference services, and educational materials on preservation and digitization to libraries, archives, and cultural heritage organizations in the Southwest. Similar programs are hosted throughout other regions in the United States; Amigos Library Services, Inc., Dallas, TX.

In addition to funding training and preservation activities, the NEH Division of Preservation and Access also provides awards to support the creation of a wide range of research tools and reference works such as online encyclopedias, ancient language dictionaries, and catalogs of rare materials. Support of these diverse projects results in broad access to important educational reference works and creates new analytical capabilities allowing for widespread participation in research by students and teachers. Such projects and authoritative reference tools build the foundation for research, and in digital form, enable wider and effective access to key resources. Examples of recent awards include:

- Preserving and providing access to the historic videotape collection and supporting production materials from the series “American Black Journal” produced by Detroit Public Television. http://matrix.msu.edu/~abj/ Michigan State University, East Lansing, MI;
- Creating a digital archaeological atlas of selected sites from the greater Near East (North Africa to Central Asia) based on CORONA satellite images. www.uark.edu/home/ University of Arkansas, Fayetteville, Fayetteville, AR;
- Transferring to digital format 2,350 hours of analog audio recordings from seven collections held in the university’s Southern Folklife Collection, which documents the history and culture of the region through music and oral history. www.lib.unc.edu/mss/sfc1/ University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, Chapel Hill, NC;
- Completing an electronic database on transatlantic slave voyages and creating a two tiered Web-based resource to service scholars, students and the public; Emory University, GA; and
- Cataloging and digitizing 236 Islamic illuminated manuscripts which contain 53,000 folios that date from the 9th to the 19th centuries. Images and catalog data will be freely accessible via the museum’s Web site; www.thewalters.org/ Walters Art Museum, Baltimore, MD.
Finally, the Division of Preservation and Access has provided support to stabilize humanities collections for institutions whose collections and facilities were adversely affected by the mid-west flooding in 2008 and were severely impacted by hurricanes Rita and Katrina. In the case of the mid-west flooding in 2008, NEH funding focused on disaster assistance that assessed, stabilized, and treated collections damaged by the flooding. Examples include:

- Stabilizing and treating mold damage in collection storage areas that houses resources and artifacts dedicated to the heritage and service of African American men during World War I and the service of women in World War II, and provides an educational resource center for students and educators. Fort Des Moines Museum and Education Center, Des Moines, IA;

- Salvaging, treating (e.g. freeze-drying) and transporting flood-damaged historical collections of the National Czech-Slovak Museum and Library which is dedicated to preserving and interpreting Czech and Slovak culture and history through public programming and exhibitions of its extensive permanent collection of folk and fine art, textiles, artifacts, and historical documents. The research library and archives are used by scholars and the general public. National Czech-Slovak Museum and Library, Cedar Rapids, IA; and

- Assessing and treating flood-damaged historical collections relating to African history, the Underground Railroad and early Iowa history, the Civil War and Civil Rights, and the African-American experience today. African American Museum of Iowa, Cedar Rapids, IA.

In FY 2008, the NEH Division of Preservation and Access received 532 funding applications for a total of $85.8 million. NEH was able to support 187 of those requests for a total of $20.188 million. Clearly, the need for federal funding in support of preservation and access activities far exceeds available resources. We urge Members of the Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies to consider additional funds for the NEH Preservation and Access Division activities and for NEH overall.

We appreciate the Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies’ support for NEH’s preservation and access activities in the past and request your ongoing support as you and other members of the Subcommittee consider the NEH Fiscal Year 2010 budget request. We particularly want to thank you for the increase of $10 million in the Endowment’s FY 2009 budget. Thank you in advance for your consideration of this request. Please let us know if there is additional information that we can provide.

Sincerely,

Prudence S. Adler
Associate Executive Director
Association of Research Libraries

Lynne E. Bradley
Director, Office of Government Relations
American Library Association