

NARRATIVE: BUILDING AN ALABAMA ALLIANCE FOR COLLECTIONS CARE

Need and Rationale

Alabama may be best known for the Civil War and the civil rights movement, but its rich, cultural resources include archaeological artifacts from the Paleoindian period (15,000-10,500 years ago) and sophisticated, 21st century electronic collections. Throughout Alabama, libraries, archival repositories, museums, and other cultural organizations manage these important resources with dual challenges. Their long-term goal is to preserve collections for the future; their immediate goal is to improve access.

No two institutions are the same. Regardless of size or setting--public, private, or academic--resources vary. Staff training, environmental controls, and limited storage space, all affect care. Collections need cataloguing. The services of qualified conservators can be difficult to obtain. Money for supplies is limited. Funding, when it is available, often supports projects that address the needs of a single organization.

The good news is that Alabama cultural organizations have established professional networks that improve communication, provide continuing education, and enhance collections care. Strong associations of museums, libraries, and archives play key roles in developing programs that meet specific needs. Cultural organizations have formed consortiums that cross disciplines. In Alabama's Black Belt Region, their goal is economic development. For the recently-formed *Humanities Leadership Summit* (supported by the Alabama Humanities Foundation, Auburn University, and other cultural partners) the focus is new technology. IMLS funding has been the catalyst for the *Alabama Digital Preservation Network*, the result of an extensive collaboration among libraries, archives, and museums. The *Statewide Planning Grant* offers an additional opportunity to collaborate on behalf of collections care in Alabama.

Stimulated by this funding opportunity, the Alabama Historical Commission (AHC) and four partners will combine their resources to develop a statewide conservation plan. Joining with the Commission to undertake grant activities are: the Alabama Department of Archives and History (ADAH), the Alabama Museums Association (AMA), the Network of Alabama Academic Libraries (NAAL), the Society of Alabama Archivists (SALA). Together, the partners can reach every collecting organization in the state. We respectfully request \$39,610.72 in IMLS funding to support this initiative.

Based on the nationwide needs identified in the *Heritage Health Index* (HHI) survey report, we plan to:

- Create a comprehensive database of collecting organizations, and assemble a directory
- Conduct a survey of collecting organizations, an Alabama version of the HHI survey; encourage statewide participation; tabulate the results; and distribute a survey report to a broad audience
- Hold focus group sessions and meetings in which participants will review survey results, identify needs, establish priorities, develop a statewide plan, and consider a permanent alliance
- Develop an Alabama plan to promote the need for collections care and leverage public support
- Present workshops, in underserved regions of the state, that address emergency planning

Central to the grant activities is the *Heritage Health Index* survey. Only 59, Alabama collecting organizations responded to the HHI survey of 2005, resulting in a statistical reliability of +/- 9-10%. On the other hand, subsequent Alabama surveys have been successful. In 2006, the Council of State Archives (CoSA) conducted a nationwide survey directed to state archives and other institutions that manage state records programs. In addition, the Alabama Historical Records Board (HRAB) conducted a survey in 2007 that included 798 historical records and repositories. Their needs are clear, but the needs and concerns of museums, historic sites, and archaeological repositories; organizations that have not been included in the surveys of libraries and archives; require reliable data. For these reasons, the partners see every reason to undertake the HHI survey again.

By developing a comprehensive directory, the partners can reach collecting organizations across the state. They plan to actively promote participation in the survey. The partners know that Alabama's cultural collections are at risk, but survey results will help to identify the critical issues. A survey report will provide a clear statement of the threats that place Alabama's cultural collections at risk. With these basic resources in hand, the partners can then undertake grant activities that will enable collecting institutions across the state to respond. To make an informed response, the partners believe that a statewide plan to conserve Alabama's collections is essential. The partners are also committed to developing a plan that promotes the goals of the response. We want the people of Alabama to know that museums, libraries, archives, and other cultural organizations in every community are advocates for Alabama's cultural heritage. Together, these two plans, can support Alabama's cultural organizations, build public awareness, and educate decision makers.

Because the partners hope to build a collaboration that includes all collecting organizations, they want to offer educational opportunities that reflect this broader approach. Staff at museums, libraries, and archives that are located in small, rural communities do not have easy access to professional training. To offer a basic workshop that addresses emergency planning was a logical choice for the partners. Developing an emergency plan is one of the four key recommendations identified in the HHI report. In addition, the AHRB 2008 publication, *Plan for Preserving Alabama's Historical Records*, includes disaster preparedness as training activity among the goals that are to be accomplished in the next 5 years. Thoughtful, emergency planning fills a real need in Alabama. The training included in this grant proposal coupled with the national plans of the Council of State Archivists' IPER (Intergovernmental Preparedness for Essential Records Program) Project to provide emergency planning training to state and government officials will cover all sectors of organizations holding Alabama treasures.

Hurricane preparedness, in particular, is a primary educational goal for the state. Visitors who explore the state's official Web site, www.Alabama.gov, will find extensive hurricane preparedness information. Statistics reveal why: Alabama copes with 1 hurricane every 1.5 years. In September 2004, Hurricane Ivan made landfall at Gulf Shores. As the hurricane headed northward and traveled the length of the state, it caused \$3 billion dollars in damage that included historic structures, cemeteries, landscapes, and cultural collections.

Alabama is 330 miles long and 150 miles wide. It is located in a humid, sub-tropical region, that exposes the state's material culture to the effects of hot summers; mild winters; and, until recently, year-round precipitation. The state is a magnet for tornadoes, hail, and lightening strikes. In 2006, after lightening struck a visitor's center at Old Cahawba (an archaeological site managed by the AHC), it burned to the ground. In the Heart of Dixie, wind and water coupled with extremes of heat and humidity threaten cultural collections throughout the year. Grant funding that enables professional training can fill a well-documented, Alabama need.

The Planning Process

Partners and Participants

In addition to the five partners who have agreed to implement grant activities, other organizations support this *Statewide Planning Grant*. They want to participate and see the wisdom of developing a statewide collections plan. The Alabama Humanities Foundation, University of West Alabama, Alabama's State Archaeologist, and others have written letters of support that are annexed to this application. (*Optional Attachments.*)

Because one of the basic objectives of this IMLS grant is to collaborate, the partners have been guided by a planning process that is inclusive. The process also provides opportunities for organizations across the state to network in face-to-face meetings. In proposing activities whose success depends upon participation, the partners will organize focus group sessions, a statewide planning meeting, and workshops throughout the state. We want to generate interest in collections stewardship and reach a broad audience.

Management

The partners will communicate by telephone and e-mail. In addition, the partner representing NAAL, the Network of Alabama Academic Libraries, created a private *wiki* which the partners used to develop this grant. Documents can be uploaded there, providing a central venue for editing and circulating news. Partners used the *wiki* to develop this proposal, and, if successful, we will continue to use these communication methods during the course of the grant. They are efficient and economical.

We plan few partnership meetings. Partners are located in Birmingham and Montgomery, a 90 mile drive. Two meetings will be held with consultants. A third meeting (organized by the Birmingham partners representing AMA and SALA) will provide the forum in which collecting organizations and other stakeholders will develop the Alabama collections plan. The focus group sessions that will be conducted after the survey report is distributed, will be held in conjunction with regularly scheduled meetings of the partnering organizations. Because the partners want to blanket the state with their training sessions, the workshops they plan will be held in locations that are not close to the urban centers of Birmingham and Montgomery. The AMA partner will coordinate the workshops and develop local arrangements. At least one partner will attend each workshop to ensure a smooth presentation.

Preliminary Data

The most recent Alabama collections surveys have been undertaken on behalf of archives and government document repositories. The Council of State Archives (CoSA) conducted a survey in 2006, and the Alabama Historical Records Board (AHRB), survey took place in 2007. Because these commendable surveys, and their results, contributed to the *Needs and Rationale* section of this narrative, they were described more fully there. They will be useful models to follow, as the partners develop the statewide survey that is essential to this grant proposal. The partner who represents the ADAH was pivotal to the CoSA and HRAB surveys, and she will take a leadership role in organizing Alabama's HHI survey.

In addition, a directory, created by the Alabama Department of Archives and History (ADAH), will be expanded to suit the scope of this proposal. Funding for this database came from a SNAP (State and National Archival Partnership) grant that was awarded to the HRAB. Currently, it includes public libraries, members of SALA (whose members represent all university archives; municipal and county archivists; city, court, and probate clerks), local school boards, and Alabama's genealogical and historical societies. As of September 30th, the directory contained a database of 1186 Alabama collecting organizations.

The database will be expanded in order to implement the statewide survey that the partners plan. The 125 members of the Alabama Museums Association are currently included in the existing online directory, but the AMA partner will share essential information about museums that do not belong to AMA. In addition, any of NAAL's 38 libraries that do not have archives will be added. The 10 historic sites of the Alabama Historical Commission will be added, and the AHC partner will gather information about archaeological repositories that are not museums. As additional collecting organizations are identified, they too will be included in the database. After the survey of collecting organizations is completed, ADAH will add an additional field that pertains to three-dimensional materials.

Summary of Major Activities

As the lead agency, AHC will be responsible for financial aspects of the grant, secure professional services, file required performance and financial reports, and coordinate overall grant activities to ensure a successful project.

Grant Activity/Steps	Description	Responsible Partners
1. Expand Existing Directory	Partners share membership directories not already incorporated; add additional organizations and three dimensional collection information from survey results	ADAH, using temporary, student staff, will undertake data entry of additional organizations and add additional field.
2. Conduct Alabama, (HHI) Survey	HHI used as basis; conducted via SurveyMonkey.com; survey mailed to those without Internet access; marketing firm to refine analysis and write a survey report	ADAH will prepare and upload survey questions, disseminate paper copies using temporary, student help. AHC will hire the marketing firm, oversee the production of the report, disseminate to partners, and prepare press releases. Partners to conduct focus groups at meetings of their organizations, compile comments, and promote a Birmingham planning meeting.
3. Create a Statewide Collections Plan	Include partners' members, survey participants, other collecting organizations, and stakeholders. Plan to identify: mission, vision, goals, objectives	AMA and SALA will organize the Birmingham planning meeting. AHC will hire facilitator and provide copies of survey report. ADAH will provide raw survey data.
4. Develop Promotional Plan	Focus on a logo and press kit package template, electronic placeholder page. Want a consistent face, Internet, print, and for future marketing.	AHC will hire advertising/marketing firm; partners to share ideas and approve design.
5. Present Workshops on Emergency Planning [Supplement planned CoSA emergency training for state and local officials]	Present four, basic workshops on <i>Disaster Preparedness</i> , hiring SOLINET. Workshops planned for locations away from large, urban areas. Content covers two and three dimensional artifacts.	AHC will hire workshop presenter; AMA will coordinate workshop planning with partners. Partnering organizations will sponsor individual workshops.

Expected Results

The partners hope to foster a permanent coalition of collecting organizations to implement the collections plan. Grant activities, and the products of these successful activities will achieve the following outcomes:

- A comprehensive database of collecting organizations that will be useful for future projects
- Data from Alabama's HHI survey and survey report, basic educational tools
- A statewide plan to address collections care, an action plan with achievable goals.
- A plan to promote stewardship that can leverage public support
- Workshops that address emergency preparedness, a catalyst for a statewide emergency plan

Project Resources: Personnel and Budget

Personnel

Alabama Historical Commission (AHC): Chief curator, Clyde Eller, will administer the grant and oversee all grant activities. She has been chief curator for 6 years overseeing the curatorial needs of 10 active, historic sites

and has over 25 years museum experience as a curator, division head, and director. Through her civic activities, she gained experience in networking, building a statewide alliance on behalf of historic preservation. AHC's Outreach Division staff will assist her with press releases throughout the two-year grant period.

Alabama Department of Archives and History (ADAH): Tracey Berezansky has over 20 years experience as an archivist and has been the ADAH Assistant Director, Government Records Division for 12 years. She has advanced computer skills; experience with online directories, surveys, Web sites; and oversees the State Records Center. Dr. Thomas Turley, Head, Local Records Section, also will support the project activities.

Alabama Museums Association (AMA): Stefanie Rookis has been president for 2 years and has played a leadership role since 2000. At the University of Alabama Birmingham, she is an assistant professor and curator for the Alabama Museum of the Health Sciences Historical Collection, positions she has held since 1996.

Network of Alabama Academic Libraries (NAAL): Dr. Sue Medina has been director since 1985. NAAL is a consortium of 38 academic libraries that thrives because of ongoing collaborations. She has just completed an IMLS National Leadership Grant that led to the creation of the Alabama Digital Preservation Network.

Society of Alabama Archivists (SALA): Jennifer Beck is the organization's newly elected president who has served as an officer for four years. Since 2004, she has been library assistant for the University of Alabama at Birmingham Archives.

Grant Activity	Costs
1. Expand Existing Directory	\$1692 temp, student help; \$300 paper and postage
2. Conduct Alabama, (HHI) Survey	\$1692 temp, student help; \$600 paper, postage, printing; \$4600 marketing services, report; \$210.60 travel (review final marketing report), \$1023.75 travel, focus groups
3. Create a Statewide Collections Plan	\$1500 facilitator; \$315.90 travel, \$350 printing, postage
4. Develop Promotional Plan	\$5950 advertising/marketing services; \$300 printing, postage; \$315.90 travel, creative meeting
5. Present Workshops	\$6800 SOLINET programs; \$819 travel; \$200 supplies at venues

Alabama Department of Archives and History (ADAH), Alabama Historical Commission (AHC), Alabama Museums Association (AMA), Network of Alabama Academic Libraries (NAAL)

Project Evaluation/Sustainability

This IMLS *Statewide Planning Grant* is an enabling grant. The statewide collections plan, a major grant activity, will include goals and objectives that all of Alabama collecting organizations can share. The document will serve as an action plan for achieving responsible stewardship. If Alabama collecting organizations can make a strong case for improved collections care with one clear, united voice, that would be the best, possible outcome. A statewide alliance, that all organizations can support, would be the means to that end.

The partners see an opportunity to create that alliance with a mission to: implement Alabama's collection plan, act in concert with existing professional organizations, create a cultural initiative, and elicit public support. A logical, first program of the alliance could be to foster a coordinated statewide emergency plan.

To build an alliance, a basic framework is required, and the partners believe that the grant activities they complete will serve that need. The data base that the partners create to support current grant activities will be maintained by ADAH and available for future projects. The survey data, the survey report, the statewide collections plan, and the promotional plan can serve multiple needs. Together, they document current conditions and serve as educational tools. They can also stimulate new and creative partnerships. The current IMLS grant offers the opportunity to plan. The Alabama partners have taken that opportunity to heart. Implementation will be the next logical step.