

NORTH CAROLINA: CONNECTING TO COLLECTIONS

2. Narrative

Need and Rationale

The State of North Carolina has done significant work during the last decade to identify its cultural heritage institutions and assess their needs. In 2000 the State Library partnered with the State Archives and Duke University to launch *North Carolina Exploring Cultural Heritage Online* (NC ECHO), an ambitious, LSTA-funded project to identify every cultural heritage institution in the state and to administer an extensive survey to each institution's caretakers to learn about their collections and their needs. The scope of this undertaking turned out to be much greater than anyone anticipated, and it has taken eight years to gather the data. To date over 950 institutions have been identified, including museums, archives, libraries, and historic sites. Most have been visited in person by project staff, and 761 have completed the survey--an astounding 80% response rate, made possible by the care and deliberation of project staff in working directly with institution staff to obtain the necessary information. The vast amount of data from the survey is currently being analyzed by a professional statistician. Publication in several formats is expected within the year, and complete data tables and analysis will be available to inform the planning process proposed in this application. (A copy of the survey document is appended to this application.)

The NC ECHO survey solicited information about a wide range of concerns, including staffing, financial support, environmental conditions, preservation issues, and disaster preparedness. The sheer number of cultural heritage institutions we discovered in North Carolina far surpassed anyone's expectations, and it is not surprising that many of these institutions are small, have little funding, no paid staff, no disaster plans, and environmental conditions ranging from poor to actively destructive. Many have their entire collections on public display in unfavorable conditions because they have no storage space. Moreover, North Carolina's geographic location, with its exposure to Atlantic storms, its vast, low-lying coastal plain, and its narrow mountain river valleys, make the state highly vulnerable to weather-related disasters. In recent years several institutions have experienced major damage from hurricane winds and flooding, particularly from Hurricanes Fran in 1996, Floyd in 1999, and Isabel in 2003. There have also been major fires, most notably at the Thomas Wolfe Memorial State Historic Site in 1998, closing the doors for six years, and at the Tweetsie Railroad Museum in 2008, where the building and all its collections were completely destroyed. Preliminary data analysis of the survey data, as well as years of experience in evaluating and assessing local and statewide conditions, indicate that the state needs to address three recommendations noted in the Heritage Health Index:

- that cultural heritage institutions provide safe conditions for their collections;
- that they develop an emergency plan; and
- that they marshal public and private support for and raise public awareness about collections care.

Planning Process

North Carolina is in the unusual position of having already conducted a survey of cultural heritage institutions such as other states are now undertaking. The result is not merely a snapshot or broad view of the state's collections preservation and disaster preparedness needs, but a highly detailed exploration of the specifics from every community and corner of the state. North Carolina also benefits from numerous, strong, largely volunteer organizations that provide extensive support in these areas to their institutional communities. While we have a well-developed infrastructure in place, however, it lacks coordination and cross-organizational awareness, and communication among the many stakeholders must be improved. We need to improve the overall awareness and coordination of these wide-ranging activities and seek a sustained commitment from the state to continue and enhance collection preservation and disaster preparedness for cultural heritage institutions.

Thus the **North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources** (NCDCCR) proposes a planning initiative to:

- identify, coordinate, and assess collections preservation and disaster preparedness activities in the state's cultural heritage community; and
- facilitate deeper partnerships among individual entities and their professional associations and build relationships with community representatives and political supporters to plan for sustainable, long-term success in these activities.

NCDCCR is the state's lead agency for cultural heritage support. The agency's numerous divisions, sections, boards, and commissions include:

North Carolina State Archives
State Library of North Carolina
Division of State Historic Sites (27 locations)
Division of State History Museums (8 locations)
North Carolina Museum of Art
Office of State Archaeology
State Historic Preservation Office
State Records Center
State Historical Records Advisory Board
Historical Commission
State Library Commission

NCDCCR will partner with the **North Carolina Preservation Consortium**, the **North Carolina Museums Council**, and the **Federation of North Carolina Historical Societies** in this endeavor and will seek ongoing participation from numerous other state and local entities during the planning phase. Each of our partnering organizations is a key association of entities and individuals committed to furthering the success of North Carolina's cultural heritage organizations. The North Carolina Preservation Consortium (NCPC) is the state's leading preservation organization, providing education,

coordination, and advocacy for cultural heritage preservation efforts in North Carolina, including free information and consultation, low-cost workshops and conferences, and grants for a wide range of preservation activities. The North Carolina Museums Council (NCMC) is the state's museum association, representing the majority of all cultural heritage institutions in North Carolina. NCMC supports museums and museum professionals through consultations, networking, information gathering and dissemination, grants, and conferences. The Federation of North Carolina Historical Societies (FNCHS), a long-time partner with NC ECHO in providing continuing education opportunities to cultural heritage organizations, offers workshops and conferences for its members and other interested parties, as well as a revolving, interest-free loan fund.

NCDCR will convene a Working Group to:

- gather information on collections preservation and disaster preparedness activities;
- create and enhance databases to make this information more broadly available;
- hold regional meetings to share existing institutional survey data, seek input on local needs, and facilitate building relationships between and among statewide organizations and local institutions; and
- hold a statewide meeting to solicit support from key stakeholders and political representatives in sustaining and enhancing North Carolina's preservation and disaster preparedness activities.

Phase 1. Identify, Coordinate, and Assess

The project will begin with the convening of a Working Group of NCDCR staff, representatives from project partner organizations, and representatives from other interested organizations to map out detailed strategy for the project. The Working Group will begin identifying current collection preservation and disaster preparedness activities – workshops, conferences, grant programs, consultation services, etc. – currently taking place in the state and will lay the groundwork for coordinating these various efforts. The Working Group will outline specifications for new or enhanced database(s) to maintain information about (1) all identified collection preservation and disaster preparedness activities, and (2) all available personnel, supplies, equipment, and sources of expertise for cultural heritage emergency response teams. In addition the Working Group will establish parameters for enhancing the existing NC ECHO institutional profile database with GIS and floodplain location information. A project assistant and partner organizations will aid the Working Group in soliciting information statewide to populate these databases, and a database programmer will assist existing NCDCR staff in developing the database structures. Using these databases and the NC ECHO survey data, the Working Group will also assess what collection preservation and disaster preparedness needs are still unmet.

Phase 2. Facilitate Partnerships and Plan for Long-Term Success

The Working Group will sponsor regional meetings for the cultural heritage community to learn about these coordinated resources and the scope of concerns reflected in the NC ECHO survey data. The program at these meetings will raise awareness about the need for preservation and disaster preparedness planning and will encourage local institutions

in developing relationships among themselves and with project partner organizations so that each local community is better prepared to address its specific needs. Attendees will also help the Working Group refine long-term strategies for sustaining current preservation and disaster preparedness efforts and initiating new efforts to address unmet needs. The regional meetings will culminate in a final, statewide meeting to be held in Raleigh in connection with the 2010 session of the North Carolina General Assembly so that stakeholders and legislators can learn together about the state's collection preservation and disaster preparedness needs. The outcome of these meetings will be a final, long-term plan for seeking legislative assistance in sustaining current efforts and addressing unmet needs.

By the end of the project, we hope to achieve the following outcomes:

1. Enhanced databases are available to provide information on:
 - institutional profile, geographic location, and flood risks for each cultural heritage institution;
 - all collection preservation and disaster preparedness activities available in North Carolina that are relevant to cultural heritage institutions; and
 - all available personnel, supplies, equipment, and sources of expertise for cultural heritage emergency response teams.
2. The cultural heritage community in North Carolina is better aware of its collection preservation and disaster preparedness needs, both locally and statewide.
3. Cultural heritage organizations are building stronger relationships among themselves, both locally and statewide.
4. Key stakeholders and political representatives are prepared to take action to address the state's cultural heritage preservation and disaster preparedness needs through a legislative initiative to support current and new efforts.

Project Resources: Budget and Personnel

North Carolina's Connecting to Collections planning project will be led by four staff from NCDCCR who will work as a team to convene the Working Group and oversee project activities. NC ECHO project manager Andrea Gabriel will serve as project manager, historic sites curator Martha Battle Jackson and preservation and conservation archivist Sarah Koonts will provide professional expertise and coordination for the project's subject-specific activities, and assistant state librarian Grant Pair will provide technical support for database issues and other planning assistance as needed. A temporary, part-time project assistant will be hired to assist in information collection and meeting planning, and a temporary database programmer will carry out the necessary database work. Each partner organization will designate a primary representative to serve on the Working Group, and additional Working Group members will be solicited from the broader cultural heritage community in the state, with an emphasis on ensuring representation from libraries, archives, and museums of all sizes and in all areas of the state.

The majority of the project budget will pay for the expenses for four Working Group

meetings, three regional meetings, and one statewide meeting, including per diem support for all attendees and travel and per diem support for the Working Group members who will conduct and facilitate the meetings. Most of the remainder of the budget will pay for a temporary project assistant and a portion of a database programmer position, and a small amount will provide supplies for staff and meetings.

NCDCR is committed to the success of this project and to its long-term goal of securing ongoing support for coordinating and enhancing collection preservation and disaster preparedness in North Carolina. The agency will continue to maintain and enhance the databases created as a result of this project, and the final, long-term plan will serve as the basis of the agency's request for state funding to support the planning grant goals.