



Presidential Libraries

A Background Paper
on their
Museums
and their
Public Programs

December 2004



The Princeton meeting and report

Twelve invited participants assembled on April 9-10 2004 under the auspices of the Center for Arts and Cultural Policy at the Woodrow Wilson School, Princeton University, to consider the character and status of selected programs of the presidential libraries coordinated by the National Archives and Records Administration. The programs emphasized were those aimed at the public, especially permanent and temporary exhibits, programs for teachers and students, and special programs and events. The Princeton meeting appears to be the first such independent discussion of these “museum” functions of the presidential libraries. The discussion was facilitated by Stanley Katz, director of the Center for Arts and Cultural Policy.

A summary of the Princeton meeting and the priority recommendations advanced by participants are contained in an after-meeting report issued in December 2004. That report is being distributed to key stakeholders in the presidential library system as well as to relevant professional associations and other interested groups. The report is available in PDF format at www.princeton.edu/~artspol/ or in hard copy by contacting the Center at 609/258-5180.

The background paper below was the main memorandum reviewed in advance by participants in the Princeton meeting and frequently was referenced during the meeting itself. Most of the main recommendations of the Princeton group drew substantially on the information, ideas and suggestions contained in the background paper and are consistent with its findings and recommendations. The paper was written by Larry J. Hackman, retired director of the Truman Presidential Museum and Library and former president of the Harry S. Truman Library Institute, its non-profit partner and supporter.





Participants in the Princeton Meeting

The following individuals, reflecting a wide range of relevant experience and expertise, participated in the discussions at Princeton:

Willard “Sandy” Boyd. Professor of Law, University of Iowa. Formerly President of the University of Iowa, President of the Field Museum in Chicago, and Chairman of the Truman Library Institute.

Edwin Bridges. For more than 20 years, Director of the Alabama Department of Archives and History, which administers the State museum.

Lynn Scott “Scottie” Cochrane. Director of Libraries, Denison University. Author of a Public Administration Ph.D dissertation on the presidential library system. Book in progress on presidential libraries.

Bruce Craig. Historian and author. Executive Director, National Coalition for History, Washington DC.

Terry Davis. Executive Director, American Association for State and Local History, Nashville.

Larry Hackman. Recently retired Director, Truman Presidential Library and Museum and President, Truman Library Institute. Formerly Director of Oral History and of Special Programs for Kennedy Library and State Archivist of New York.

Benjamin Hufbauer. Assistant Professor in Art History, University of Louisville. Ph.D dissertation on the way America memorializes its presidents. Completing a book for University of Kansas Press, *Presidential Temples: The Transformation of Presidential Commemoration since 1900.*



Stanley Katz. Professor of History, Princeton, and Director of the Center for Arts and Cultural Policy, Woodrow Wilson School. Formerly Director of the American Council of Learned Societies and President of the Organization of American Historians.

Daniel Linke. University Archivist and Curator of Public Policy Papers, Seeley G. Mudd Manuscript Library, Princeton University.

Harold Skramstad. Museum consultant. Former Director of the Chicago Historical Society and President Emeritus, Henry Ford Museum and Greenfield Village.

George Vogt. Director, Hagley Museum and Library. Formerly Director of the South Carolina Department of Archives and History and of the Wisconsin Historical Society, and President, American Association for State and Local History.

Robert Warner. Formerly Archivist of the United States and Dean of the Library and Information School, University of Michigan. Member, board of directors, Gerald R. Ford Library Foundation.

Sharon Fawcett, Deputy Director of the Office of Presidential Libraries at the National Archives, and **Cynthia Koch,** Director of the Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library, participated in portions of the Princeton discussions.



**Background Memo for the
April 9-10, 2004 Princeton Meeting
on Presidential Libraries**

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Introduction

Presidential libraries have been developing for a half century now as part of a system authorized in Federal statute and overseen by a Federal agency, the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA).. However, each library mainly has been driven by unique circumstances that have given it a unique character, particularly in the way it presents itself and provides programs to the general public, in its collaboration with other institutions, and in the nature and extent of its support from individuals and organizations beyond government. While the presidential library system can be prized for its variety, its centrifugal nature has been one force against assessment of its overall success. As the number of presidential libraries increases, along with the range and reach of their programs, a fresh and independent look is needed.

The proposal for the Princeton working meeting on presidential libraries and their programs for the public developed from conversations during 2002 and 2003 between Stanley Katz, the director of the Center for Arts and Cultural Policy at Princeton, and Larry Hackman, the recently retired director of the Harry S. Truman Library. They had been acquainted when Katz was president of the American Council of Learned Societies and Hackman was State Archivist of New York. Both worked in the 1980s on behalf of independence for the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) and, subsequently, for more effective and responsive NARA policies. After considering alternatives, they agreed that the Center for Arts and Cultural Policy, directed by Katz at Princeton University, was an appropriate sponsor for an initial discussion and they secured support for the meeting.

The Center, founded by Katz and sociologist Paul DiMaggio, focuses on a wide range of cultural and arts policy issues – training graduate students to be cultural policy analysts, doing research on cultural policy and working to make cultural policy data widely available. www.princeton.edu/~artspol/ Katz has been particularly interested in museum, library and archival policy for a number of years.

Princeton participants were selected for their knowledge, experience and leadership, and for their shared interest in the way American history is interpreted and presented to the public. Their proposed



purpose at the Princeton meeting was to explore the possibility of improving presidential libraries so that: (1) programs for the public are strengthened in quality and content; (2) the library system, in serving the public, becomes more than the sum of its parts; and (3) operations become more transparent to taxpayers and other supporters. The intent is positive – to encourage useful dialogue and, ultimately, better policy and practice.

In a January letter, the head of the Office of Presidential Libraries at the National Archives was invited to attend most of the Princeton meeting and to bring additional National Archives staff of his choosing. Selected policy materials were requested from the Office of Presidential Libraries by March 1. A list of issues expected to be discussed at Princeton was provided to that office with an invitation for comments that could be sent to participants before the meeting. The response letter to Stan Katz from Sharon Fawcett, which was distributed to all participants before the meeting, is attached to this report.

Meeting organizers propose that a report and recommendations be shared with NARA and its Office of Presidential Libraries; with the individual libraries and their main non-profit partner/support organizations; with appropriate national professional associations interested in the interpretation and public presentation of American History; and with others who express an interest.



Overview

Presidential “libraries” are peculiarly American institutions. On the one hand, as research archives, they are a basic resource to help us understand, assess and over time hold accountable our presidents, their administrations, and the presidency itself. Articles, dissertations, books and documentaries are the main enabling products that help society meet this important need. Each library’s professional archivists facilitate this research in accord with statutes and regulations or legal agreements with donors, and under extensive guidance and oversight from the National Archives and Records Administration. Documentary holdings are made accessible as soon as practical in a fair and impartial way.



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On the other hand, these same presidential libraries have become the accepted way to memorialize our presidents and promote an appreciation, some would say exaggeration, of their character, performance and legacy. This is done through each library's "museum" program. While it is presumed that execution of the archival function is objective, the museum function is inherently subjective, not only in the interpretations presented through exhibits, but also in the selection and character of other programs aimed at students, teachers and the general public.

Journalists and scholars have a direct interest in access to the documentary materials held by presidential libraries. Hence, much has been reported and debated over the years about the administration of papers in presidential libraries, especially their ownership and access. These issues have received periodic attention in the popular press and from the Congress, which acted most notably in the Presidential Records Act of 1978 to clearly establish that a president's official papers belong to the public and not to the president.

It is not surprising that museum exhibits and other programs aimed at the public have not received similar assessment. The National Archives after all is the Federal government's archives and records agency; that is the main business it is in. While the renovation of the Archives I building on the Mall seeks to present NARA more effectively to the public through exhibits and other programming, overall NARA has less expertise and less inherent interest in museums, including those in presidential libraries.

The Congress, which provides oversight and appropriates NARA's funds, has not shown deep or abiding interest in the museum side of presidential libraries and apparently has not examined closely the character or execution of the museum-related activities of, at and through presidential libraries. Perhaps this reflects the lack of organized advocacy for such a review. It may also be due to anticipated resistance to such review from former presidents, their families and associates, and the main library support organizations. In contrast to the interest of historians and the media regarding archival access, there are no self-interested or public interest groups that monitor and report the conduct of these museum programs. Anticipated resistance from influential parties, and an absence of



external monitoring by professionals, may also help account for the paucity of NARA standards and guidelines for the museum aspects of presidential libraries compared to archival administration.

NARA now operates eleven presidential libraries, including the Clinton Library, nearing completion, but not the privately administered Nixon Library, which soon will come into the system. The permanent and temporary exhibits in the presidential libraries are already visited by nearly 1.5 million persons each year, and millions more people around the country and the world now use presidential library web pages to learn about presidents' lives and administrations and the role of the presidency in American government, politics, and international affairs. Libraries are encouraged by the National Archives to make their exhibits available on-line, though no Federal funds have been made available to support this.

In recent years, nearly all of the libraries also have developed formal education programs, including curriculum materials for teachers and students. And all libraries offer special programs, including lectures, panels, book signings, conferences, celebrations, receptions, awards, and a wide variety of other programs open to the public or, in some cases, to members of Library affiliates or support organizations.

The small staff in the Office of Presidential Libraries works hard to encourage good practice in the libraries, to intervene wisely when there are problems and conflicts, and to maintain positive relationships within and beyond the libraries. The Office must always place very high priority on the current Administration and on the newest library under development, and be ready at a moments notice to put other things aside to attend to the latest crisis, complaint or demand. Despite such pressures, in recent years the Office regularly has called together library directors and specialists from each library to share ideas and methods. Formal program reviews, whereby every three years each library completes a standard review checklist and is visited by a review team from the Office of Presidential Libraries, has improved oversight and communication on the administration of the presidential libraries and the management of their collections. Overall, the Office of Presidential Libraries strives to be fair in their distribution of resources, recognizing the great differences among the libraries in their ability to obtain funds from other sources, and to be



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flexible in their decisions. To work in the Office of Presidential Libraries is to be discrete, modest and patient.

However, despite the expanding number of library programs and their audiences, no systematic survey and analysis has been undertaken of the programs of presidential libraries that aim to serve the public. There is no detailed description of the scope and nature of the public programs offered by presidential libraries and their collaborators and no ready basis for understanding how they are developed and who influences what is done and how. No assessment has been undertaken by independent experts as to program quality and no solid data gathered on what the public seeks from these programs or how it views their quality or content. The public, their representatives, and other interested parties lack a sound basis upon which to understand the operations as well as the value and performance of these important programs.

Public programs, in contrast to archival activities, depend to a much greater degree, some exclusively, on private resources, a trend strongly encouraged by the National Archives and reflected in its strategic plans, policies and day to day operations. Most of this non-government assistance is provided by a main partner/support organization for each library, organizations that are most often governed by or heavily responsive to the family, friends and former colleagues and supporters of a president, even well after a president is no longer alive. At present, little information is made available about these organizations, or requested about them by the National Archives. Like other non-profit organizations, these are not required by law to provide extensive information about their policies and practices. However, given the fact that the National Archives treats them as fundamental to the future of public programs in the presidential libraries, might the public interest suggest that the nature of these partnerships be more transparent so that the public can better understand what the libraries are trying to do and how?

Whether the National Archives is ready and able to provide sufficient oversight for the public programs of presidential libraries, concerned as it must be with maintaining political and budget support for its higher priority work on Federal archives and records management issues and with avoiding conflict with influential parties, has not been considered fully.



Given that an additional presidential library will appear soon after the end of each presidency and considering the growing breadth and reach of their public programs on site and through electronic means, it is time for a thorough and thoughtful review and report on presidential libraries and the public.

Note: There has been surprisingly little scholarly analysis of the development, operation or characteristics of the presidential libraries system or of individual libraries. The most thoughtful and detailed by far is Lynn Cochrane's 1998 dissertation in Public Administration and Policy. *The Presidential Library System: A Quiescent Policy System* examines the overall system, looks in depth at three libraries but closely at all of them, and describes the development, operation and the present state of the presidential library system. Among her observations are the absence of a clearly understood or articulated mission for the library system or the individual libraries, the lack of strategic planning for individual libraries and the library system, the paucity of policy guidance and programmatic oversight from the National Archives on museum and public programs, the increasing reliance on non-profit partners to support such programs, the difficulty of obtaining information about these main support organizations for the libraries and the lack of effort by the National Archives to obtain it. Cochrane explored implications for future research and recommended an academic conference on presidential libraries in the 21st century sponsored by an "impartial" university, i.e. one not affiliated with or seeking to house a presidential library. The Cochrane dissertation is available on the web through the Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University.

The only critical study of the relationship of a presidential library and its non-profit partner/supporter is Larry Hackman's February 2002 report, *A Presidential Library Partnership: The Harry S. Truman Library and the Harry S. Truman Library Institute for National and International Affairs*. This report includes a narrative overview and a detailed chronology of the history of that relationship, a discussion of "lessons learned" from the major changes made in the 1990s, and a description of unresolved issues. Appendices include the statement of partnership principles adopted by the Truman partners as well as a seven point "Presidential Library Partnership Readiness Check List." The latter was drafted in part for the consideration of other libraries and their



partners. A PDF version of this report may be obtained from the Truman Library Institute via an e-mail request to Kay.morris@nara.gov.

A special issue of the journal, *The Public Historian*, devoted to presidential libraries, is being prepared and is likely to appear in 2006.



Issues for discussion at Princeton

The issues below fall into three categories: planning, direction and oversight; programs; and partnerships and resources. These could be considered during the Princeton meeting – or/and in subsequent discussions or studies.

Some issues may be judged of insufficient consequence to warrant further review and some may not appear susceptible to action, no matter the findings or recommendations. All of the recommendations suggested here are viewed as appropriate for all of the libraries, whatever their stage of development and their present character, performance and relationships. The aim was to identify issues on which sound recommendations, if thoughtfully acted upon, might have a positive long term impact. It seems unlikely that some matters will be raised by the National Archives on its own. On some issues, NARA may be more likely and more able to act on recommendations from an independent outside group presented in a report to be shared with parties valued by the National Archives.

Issues Relating to Planning, Direction and Oversight



Priorities and plans for presidential libraries

Presently it is not easy, and perhaps not possible, to discern what individual presidential libraries are seeking to accomplish, how and when or to determine the same for the overall presidential library system. While facts and figures are available on some matters (e.g. the number of researchers, volume of holdings, museum attendance, earned income) for most libraries no formal strategic or institution-wide multi-year planning system is in place. And the same is true for the presidential library system. Libraries are not required even to articulate their vision, mission, critical issues, goals and objectives and strategies for addressing them – what might be thought of as the “upper levels” of a strategic plan.

Any discussion of presidential libraries must recognize that the National Archives faces large and complex challenges as it seeks to apply effective policies and bring sufficient influence to bear on the management of the Federal government’s records and to see that those of enduring value are retained and properly administered. That’s a huge task and the National Archives is trying hard to carry it out. Therefore, ordinarily Presidential libraries cannot be a high priority for the NARA. (See NARA’s 2003 strategic plan and those for all recent years.) The presidential library system is virtually invisible in these planning documents. The new 2003 plan, for example, mentions presidential libraries as a separate matter only within one strategy under a broad goal relating to the preservation of records in an appropriate environment; the strategy is that “We will work with Presidential Library support organizations to increase private funds for major renovations and additions to presidential libraries.” Nothing in recent plans indicates a strategic concern with the content or quality of presidential library programming for the public.

When it comes to presidential libraries, NARA obviously must give highest priority to the interests of the current President and to the opening of the Library for the most recent former president. Other



particular presidential libraries may receive special attention from time to time, especially when some serious problem or special opportunity arises. This may come when the leadership of a given library's partner/support organization decides to seek substantial federal support and/or major private resources for a library project, usually for a museum renovation or addition. It may also come when influential persons are dissatisfied about the programs or performance of a particular library.

While such attention is necessary, it is not sufficient. Without some sort of planning framework for the presidential library system, the public, and prime supporters as well, are unable to know what each library is seeking to accomplish and how. Neither can oversight bodies nor, in fact, NARA itself. True, other offices or units in NARA do not ordinarily have their own strategic plans, but others are not given the same degree of independence as individual libraries, especially regarding their programs for the public.

That each library is unique is no reason to bypass one of the most basic tools of modern institutional development – strategic planning. A shared approach to the process will not threaten their uniqueness. It would raise the level of internal analysis and communication and improve decision making and the allocation of resources within libraries and across the system. And it should also improve communication, resource development and program coordination with the non-government partners and supporters that NARA prizes so highly.

Potential recommendations for discussion:

1. NARA should require a strategic plan from each library, including statements of its vision, mission, critical issues, goals and objectives, and main strategies for accomplishing these. This level of information ought to be shared among the libraries, their support organizations, and be available to other interested organizations and the public. Such information should be available via the web site of the Office of Presidential Libraries in the National Archives.
2. Progress in addressing these strategic plans should be a main instrument in the periodic program review of each library



conducted by the Office of Presidential Libraries -- and when it reviews their requests for resources.

3. With strong encouragement from NARA, these plans should be developed in partnership with each library's main non-government support organization.
4. The Office of Presidential Libraries should help create and support a strategic planning process for each library. This assistance could include training on strategic planning and support for a strategic planning consultant/facilitator.
5. The Office of Presidential Libraries should have its own strategic plan, incorporating the strategic plans for individual libraries so that system wide priorities are based soundly and are easier to understand.



Direction, oversight and evaluation from Washington

The National Archives is an archival agency staffed mainly by archivists and records analysts. This applies as well to the Office of Presidential Libraries. No professional trained in museum management, exhibit design and development, or museum education has been employed in the Office of Presidential Libraries for many years. That office has been headed for the past decade by NARA career managers experienced chiefly in records management. Oversight from this office tends to emphasize archival administration and, to a lesser degree, the management of artifact collections. Exhibit research, interpretation and design, whether by staff or through contracted services, is left almost entirely to the individual libraries. The same is the case generally for educational and public programs, though the Office of Presidential Libraries has fostered the sharing of experience through more frequent meetings of specialists within the libraries, including education specialists and museum curators. But no significant policies or guidelines exist for these activities, and they do not appear to receive meaningful evaluation, either by the office of presidential libraries or, on its behalf, by others qualified to provide it. Though some libraries may

perform very well for some programs, it is unlikely that maximum quality is achieved on a consistent basis. Greater attention to the program development process, to professional standards and guidelines, and to formal program evaluation should lead to stronger programs.

Increased formal guidance from Washington on the development and evaluation of programs is almost certain to be resisted by library directors and staff and perhaps by the library partner organizations, accustomed as they are to minimal “interference” on the selection and administration of exhibits and other public programs. There is a natural alliance between library directors and the partners against stronger controls and guidelines from Washington. Exceptions arise when a support group is unimpressed with the leadership or viewpoints of the library director and also when a director appeals to Washington to rule against an action he or she opposes that is being pressed by the non-government support organization. Ordinarily, however, both want to be free to do what they want to do, especially for museum and public programs where funds appropriated to NARA provide none or only some of the support.

Potential recommendations for discussion

1. The Office of Presidential Libraries should develop guidelines on program development, including the process for selecting programs and for evaluating them, and should issue standards of good practice for each major museum related function.
2. The Office of Presidential Libraries should make systematic use of external experts both for periodic evaluation of museum exhibits and public programs across the library system and for technical assistance to the individual libraries and to the Office of Presidential Libraries.
3. The Office of Presidential Libraries should include on its staff proven professionals in museum administration with emphasis on exhibit development, education, public programs, and visitor services.



Issues Relating To Programs For The Public



Permanent exhibition programs

All presidential libraries have a major “permanent” exhibition that interprets the life of the president and the events and conduct of his presidency. Permanent exhibits provide the core of the visitor experience. They are ordinarily developed when a library is created and, while they may be “tweaked” from time to time, for most libraries, permanent exhibits are replaced infrequently, perhaps once in two or three decades.

New permanent exhibits most often are created when there is an addition or renovation to the main library building or some other large initiative. Increasingly the National Archives looks to private funds from a library’s non-government partner for most of the resources for such initiatives, including new permanent exhibits, though a one-time Federal appropriation, usually advocated from the outside, may support some aspects of a major renovation. Federal appropriations or earnings managed through the National Archives Trust Fund ordinarily pay for the continuing museum staffing and exhibit maintenance. The extent to which the providers of the external funding influence the content and design of permanent exhibits has not been formally examined.

For most citizens, the exhibits in presidential museums, not the archival services, are the basis on which they assess the particular library and presidential libraries generally. For most, it’s the only National Archives program they ever directly experience. Yet surprisingly little is known about what the public thinks of the quality or content of these permanent exhibits in the individual libraries or comparatively among the libraries visited.

NARA policies presently do not seek to guide or substantially influence the research, conceptual design, interpretation, fabrication or other core aspects of permanent exhibition development or to evaluate them or insure their evaluation by others. Perhaps the National Archives lacks sufficient interest or expertise. More likely, it feels that it should not be held fully accountable if it cannot



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sufficiently control the development of this major museum component of each library. Most of all, the Archives may fear that a more formal policy on exhibits would create high tension with influential individuals interested in such exhibits, especially in the libraries of living presidents.

For these reasons, and perhaps others, NARA seems to have concluded that it is unwise to have formal policy and procedure on permanent exhibits. The approach needs to be kept informal, undemanding and flexible for all libraries -- through all stages of their never-ending lives. The question needs to be raised: will there never be a time when the National Archives takes a stronger stance on the development of the permanent exhibition programs in presidential libraries in order to enhance their quality and ensure against weak research, unbalanced interpretation or poor design? Could thoughtful guidelines be introduced in a way that would produce positive results over time?

One useful initial step toward acceptance of a richer policy might be a well-planned, independent, expert assessment of present permanent exhibit programs and plans to refine or replace them. The findings from such an analysis could be provided confidentially to the Office of Presidential Libraries. The report might be shared with all the libraries or only to individual libraries regarding their own permanent exhibit. The libraries would then each have, for the first time, an assessment by a team knowledgeable about exhibit design and development. The Office of Presidential Libraries would have for the first time the individual assessments and a system overview with recommendations. That would provide a basis for more meaningful dialogue between NARA and the individual libraries, and could provoke discussion among the libraries as well. The evaluation report, or portions of it, should be provided to the main partner/support organization for each of the libraries as a way to promote greater awareness and accountability.

The initial assessment project might involve a team, perhaps contracted through a museum/exhibit consulting firm, but including qualified museum experts and public historians, who would visit all the libraries, perhaps over a summer, to review their permanent exhibition program and any plans for renewal or replacement. This team, working with the Office of Presidential Libraries, would



identify the written materials needed by the study team in advance of the visits and then on particular issues to examine in the assessments and reports. Ideally this same overall project would include a study of visitor views on the permanent exhibits so that professional and public judgments are both brought to bear.

Potential recommendations for discussion:

1. An initial evaluation and report, possibly privately funded, to NARA on permanent exhibits in all presidential libraries by a team of independent experts including persons experienced in the design, development and evaluation of history museum exhibits. The study should include rigorous visitor evaluations for the permanent exhibit in each library. The report would be to the Office of Presidential Libraries which could share it in whole or in part with individual libraries and their main partner/support organizations.
2. Development of clearer and firmer NARA guidelines on the design of permanent exhibits and a requirement for a periodic independent evaluation of these exhibits across the library system.
3. A published report by NARA describing the findings of the study described above as well as NARA's new plans and guidelines re the creation and replacement of permanent exhibits in presidential libraries.
4. National Archives encouragement and cooperation so that appropriate professional journals, such as the *Journal of American History* and *The Public Historian*, will regularly review new permanent exhibits and major temporary exhibits in presidential libraries.





Temporary exhibition programs

The development of strong temporary exhibit programs in the presidential libraries has not been a priority for the National Archives and it does not appear that temporary exhibition programs are viewed as a significant area of concern by the Office of Presidential Libraries.

Though the temporary exhibit programs in the presidential libraries never have been formally examined, it is nonetheless apparent that they vary greatly among the libraries. Programs differ by scope, content and quantity and by quality of design and fabrication. These variations reflect the priorities of the library director and talents of library staff and especially, and more and more, the interests and resources of the non-profit support partners. Federal appropriations decreasingly support such exhibits. In several libraries lack of space also limits what can be done.

Expectations for quality, character and frequency of exhibits are undefined by the Office of Presidential Libraries -- and so are boundaries regarding acceptable subject matter. What is clear is NARA's expectation that funding for temporary exhibits must come from the non-profit support organizations or from a library's earned income through its account in the National Archives Trust Fund.

In their temporary exhibits some libraries mainly address topics relating to their president and his presidency that are not covered in permanent exhibits -- or they expand on these. Some use temporary exhibits mainly as a way to display artifacts from the library's collection that would not otherwise be seen by the public. Some occasionally bring in exhibits developed by other museums, e.g. the National Portrait Gallery's presidential portraits or developed by private vendors, e.g. The Miniature White House. Some exhibits in some libraries have no apparent relationship to presidents, the presidency, or even to public affairs.

At first glance what may be most surprising about temporary exhibit programs in the presidential libraries is the almost total absence of collaboration among the libraries -- beyond lending documents and artifacts. Collaboration presumably would make possible exhibits on important issues that cut across some or all presidencies as well as

exhibit quality not ordinarily possible by a single library. Certainly such collaboration would make better use of resources when viewed system wide. Individual libraries would carry less of a burden themselves to produce strong exhibits. As the library system continues to expand, the benefits of collaboration would increase -- as will the costs of every library museum operating entirely on its own. Library visitors would be the main beneficiaries of exhibits stronger in their research, design, and presentation, and the benefits could expand greatly through on-line versions.

The lack of collaboration on temporary exhibits, and on other programs, is less surprising when we recognize that most exhibits are supported by non-profit partners whose interests mainly are confined to a single library and a single president. Realizing the potential of collaboration on temporary exhibits, and other public programming, will require leadership and consistent encouragement from the Office of Presidential Libraries -- along with some seed funding or other incentives so that the burden for exhibits on broad topics does not fall solely on a single originating library. One practical approach would be to draw annually from the National Archives Trust Fund accounts of all libraries to do what is in the interest of all libraries and their audiences. Although the advantages of such collaboration were discussed in a working meeting called by the Office of Presidential Libraries five or so years ago, there has been no follow up. Every tub is still on its own bottom and largely dependent on its particular friends to keep it afloat.

Potential recommendations for discussion:

1. The Office of Presidential Libraries should issue general guidelines on the preferred/acceptable scope and content of temporary exhibits.
2. The Office of Presidential Libraries should make a sustained effort to identify timely topics of broad interest or high significance for temporary exhibits that would apply to multiple libraries and to provide the leadership and incentives or outright support needed to develop such exhibits. Perhaps one such exhibit could be developed each year to travel in the library system. Support should be sought through the Foundation of the National



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Archives, or taken from the National Archives Trust Fund, or sought from the Congress.

3. The Office of Presidential Libraries should sponsor a periodic independent evaluation of and report on the temporary exhibit programs in the libraries.
4. The Office of Presidential Libraries should seek information that would enable it to understand the amount of funds and their source devoted to temporary exhibits in each library.



Programs for students and teachers

In earlier years, presidential library programs for students and teachers, if they existed at all, consisted mainly of packets for students when their class visited the library's museum. Some libraries also began to offer programs to encourage use of historical documents in the classroom or in class visits to a library and several became district or state sponsors for the National History Day program. More recently, some libraries have begun to develop broader and more sophisticated programs. According to the Office of Presidential Libraries this can be attributed to several factors: strong examples provided by the Hoover and Truman libraries in the late nineties, encouragement from the Office of Presidential Libraries which brought together education staff in the libraries, a 2000 survey and report on education programs in the libraries by the Office of Presidential Libraries, and the efforts of this office to help the libraries hire professional educators when opportunity has arisen. The planning for the National Archives "experience" in the renovated Archives I building on Constitution avenue has increased the overall agency enthusiasm for experiential and participatory programs for students.

While NARA's staffing plan indicates that each presidential library is to receive one education position, this is not yet the case for all libraries. Although the National Archives has provided no new funds for education programs, the Office of Presidential Libraries has helped through reclassifications of existing positions or by supporting reassignment of existing staff. The extent to which support from the



non-profit partners has played a central role is unclear overall. At the Truman Library Institute, millions of dollars were raised in the "Classroom for Democracy" campaign which included creation of an experiential learning center, The White House Decision Center. At the Truman Library all three professional educator positions are supported entirely by Institute funds.

Presidential library programs for students and teachers is the one area in which the Office of Presidential Libraries has done its own internal survey of programs. In April 2000 it issued a very useful report, *Presidential Library Education Programs: An Examination of K-12 Educational Programs at the Presidential Libraries*. The report described the program in each library and includes both "Observations and Conclusions" and "Recommendations" for the libraries. Recommendations highlight the need for libraries to offer programs designed to satisfy state and local curriculum requirements; to plan educational programs by drawing on all the library's programs, staff and collections; to hire education professionals and let them specialize; to create space for programs for student programs; to deliver educational content via the Internet; and to collaborate with education staff in other libraries.

The Office of Presidential Libraries will soon be calling together library education coordinators for the third time. Among the issues they want to address together are developing an overall vision for educational programs in presidential libraries and how to develop programs and curriculum that can be used in many of the libraries to address issues of broad interest. Perhaps one way to undertake such collaborative projects, as well as significant work through individual libraries, would be to take advantage of Federal grants for teaching of American History. One or more of the non-profit partners of the libraries could serve as the applicants and administrators for such projects.



Some Potential Recommendations for discussion:

1. The Office of Presidential Libraries should work with the libraries and others to develop a formal statement of their vision and preferred purposes and priorities for educational programs so that individual libraries have a framework within which to develop their programs for students and teachers in the future.
2. The Office of Presidential Libraries should obtain expert advice to develop system-wide instruments or methods for ongoing evaluation as to the appropriateness and effectiveness of its programs for students and teachers.
3. The libraries should collaborate so that the overall system plays a role in the development of curriculum relating to the presidency and to issues that apply to many libraries.
4. The Office of Presidential Libraries should encourage libraries and their non-profit partners to seek Federal grant funds for projects to improve the teaching of topics relating to the presidency, both projects at individual libraries and collaborative projects to serve students and teachers.
5. Curriculum and educational materials developed by presidential libraries whenever possible should be accessible via the internet to teachers and students who cannot come to the library for its programs.

Issues Relating To Partnerships And Resources



Background

Almost every presidential library benefits considerably from the support of a non-profit organization created mainly for that purpose. These organizations support in whole or in part a range of programs at, through, with or on behalf of their library. In fact, it is now the policy of the National Archives that these organizations are to be the main, and an ever increasing, provider of resources for Library programs for the public. This

includes not only temporary exhibits, lectures, panels, and other special events, but also the design and development of new permanent exhibits and building renovations and additions. Many of these foundations also support programs for students and teachers and grants and fellowships for scholarly research and writing drawing on the holdings of the presidential library.

In most cases these non-profit organizations now directly pay some or all of the costs of a given program, rather than transfer funds to the National Archives to be used by the library for that purpose. While permanent National Archives positions are ordinarily not funded by the partner organizations, some of them support their own full time positions such as education coordinator, volunteer and intern coordinator, outreach coordinator, and similar positions located in the library building. Most have full or part-time administrative and fund raising staff.

Not surprisingly, there is considerable variation in the role of these non-profit organizations and in their relationship with their library partner. Partly this reflects the history of the non-profit and its formal or perceived mission – whether it exists chiefly or exclusively as a partner for the library or has a broader mission to promote the ideals, interests and legacy of the former president through multiple means. The variations, of course, also reflect the leadership of the non-profit and of the library. Some relationships seem to be smooth and settled; others appear tense and volatile. Some of the non-profit partners seem to provide substantial funding year after year, while others are irregular and more modest. Some have undertaken major initiatives to renovate a library and upgrade and expand its programs, while others have been unwilling or unable to do so.

Some of the non-profit partner organizations offer many programs themselves, operating relatively independently with only modest consultation with the library. Others offer programs only in close collaboration, often with the library coordinating the programs. In some of these organizations, a former president, members of his family and former members of his administration are highly active; in others this is no longer the case.

The role of the library director in these partnerships also varies considerably. Some have limited access to the leadership of the non-



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profit and little influence on its decisions. In others the library director plays a key, even the lead role. Through a series of legal opinions and policy statements in recent years the National Archives has given library directors much greater leeway with the non-profit partners, including active participation in their governance, administration and fund-raising. In at least one library the library director is, under the by laws of the partner, the president of the non-profit and coordinator of its programs. While working closely with a chairman of the board and its treasurer, it is the library director who “informally” supervises its staff, prepares its budget, and oversees its day to day operations – though technically Federal employees are prevented from supervising non-government staff. Some of the other partner organizations hire an executive director and may also have program and administrative staff. A number of these organizations have offices located in the library building itself and several own public spaces adjacent to the library. Some even charge the library to use these spaces for programs.

Partnerships vary greatly also in degree of integration of their planning, budgeting and coordination of staff. In at least one partnership the non-profit’s fiscal year has been changed so that annual budgeting for the library and the partner can be done effectively with a shared spread sheet encompassing all functions for both parties and all sources of revenue.

Some of these organizations greatly influence the programs that are offered by, through or at a presidential library because of the amount of funds at their command or because of the influence of the leadership of the non-profit partner. Others are more modest in their resources or influence.

In reality, most library directors are supplicants for support for programs for which the National Archives will not request Federal appropriations. They are expected to get along and, except in egregious cases, to go along with the leadership of the non-profit partner. Though relations between the partners are positive and productive in many instances, in others they are not. For some libraries, the media and the public often perceive that it is the president of the support group, or its executive director, not the library director, who is the key spokesperson on programs at the library. Some library directors have felt a high level of frustration and



resentment with these relationships and perceptions. In several cases the professional preferred by the Archivist of the United States for appointment to direct a library has been rejected by a former president or by the leadership of a non-profit organization and someone else has been appointed who is informally approved by representatives of that partner organization.

The issue to be considered is not so much the present status of these diverse organizations, but rather, if they are to be key partners in the future of presidential libraries, especially on their museums and public programs, what might be done to make these partnerships highly successful in all cases. What should the National Archives and the Office of Presidential Libraries do to influence the evolution of these organizations and their adoption of “best practices” when viewed from the library system perspective? While these relationships ordinarily do not change greatly in the short term, in the medium to long run almost every presidential library partnership can and should change considerably. This can be the case, over time, even among those partners which presently find it difficult to envision a different way of doing business together.

It may well be in the interest of the National Archives and the individual libraries – and the public -- for these partnerships to evolve in certain “preferred” directions. Shaping the partner relationships will depend most of all on strong, wise, and active but patient leadership from each library director and from the National Archives.

What are the desirable characteristics of these partners and their partnerships, and how to proceed? Recommendations may warrant consideration in two areas.





Information to, from and about the nonprofit partner/supporters of the presidential libraries

At present, the partner/support organizations of the presidential libraries operate, in most cases, as a kind of “hidden hand” in their behind-the-scenes roles associated with their presidential library partners.

The National Archives does not seek information about the priorities, plans, resources or budgets of these organizations, even though it has declared its policy is to seek more of their support for basic presidential library programs for the public and for major initiatives such as renovations, additions, and new permanent exhibits. NARA does not maintain lists of the boards of directors of these organizations or gather their annual reports or reports they are required to file under Federal statutes. Library directors are not required to report their requests to these organizations or to report the support provided for programs sponsored or cosponsored by the library, unless the funding is contributed directly to the library’s account in the National Archives Gift Fund.

The non-profit partners appear also to know little about each other’s goals, roles and methods and in how they work with libraries on key functions including exhibitions, education, public programs, and promotion of the libraries through advertising and public relations. The National Archives and its Office of Presidential Libraries do not communicate regularly with these organizations, expecting library directors to do so as needed. There is a National Archives Presidential Libraries Advisory Council, and some of the non-profit partners designate a person to serve on this, but in other cases the member is a representative of a living president or a president’s family. Typically the directors of presidential libraries have not been invited to the meetings of this Council. NARA has never sponsored an open discussion meeting to which members of the boards of these organizations and the library directors have been invited.

From a legal perspective, these non-profit organizations are obligated to provide only bare bones information in their annual federal Form

990 tax filings. However, given that National Archives policy formally recognizes these non-profits as major partners and supporters, and given its strategy to rely increasingly on their support, is NARA's minimalist approach to information from and about these organizations appropriate? When the policy of a Federal agency is that non-profit organizations are fundamental to the operation of programs under that agency's direction, should that Federal agency obtain and make accessible more than the minimum information required by statute and regulation? As we look ahead, it would appear to be in the interest of all parties – the National Archives, the libraries, the non-profit partners, and the public – to better understand these partnerships that are intended to be of fundamental importance to presidential libraries, and those they serve.

Potential recommendations for discussion:

1. The Office of Presidential Libraries should regularly request information from each partner organization and each library about their partnership. This should include statements of their mission, goals and priorities. Annual partner plans and budgets relating to the presidential library should also be requested by the National Archives, and the budgets of the presidential library should be shared with the non-profit partner.
2. The Office of Presidential Libraries should maintain lists of the officers, board members and staff of the main support/partner organization for each of the libraries and, to foster greater understanding and cooperation, should periodically communicate with them in writing about developments and issues within the presidential library system.
3. The web sites of the National Archives and the individual libraries should include links to the web sites of the non-profit partners where such exists.





Ongoing relationships with and support from the non-profit partners

In order to promote productive long-term collaborations between the presidential libraries and their non-profit partners, the National Archives and the individual libraries need to foster the following conditions:

- Clarity in roles, goals and priorities and in responsibility and authority in order to minimize friction and maximize success in the relationship between the presidential library and its non-profit partner
- Collaboration in annual and long term planning, resource development and budgeting so that all resources are used to achieve maximum impact.
- Substantial reliable financial support from the non-profit partner devoted to programs that address Library priorities that are highly unlikely to be supported from Federal appropriations or Library earned revenue.
- Library coordination of programs supported by the partner where these programs relate to basic library functions including especially exhibitions, education and, when possible, other programs for the public.
- Library participation in the planning and decision making of the non-profit partner by having the library director serve as a member of the board of the non-profit and as its coordinator of library-related programs.

These conditions can be achieved over time if they are pursued actively by the National Archives and by the leadership of the individual libraries. They are not in place at most libraries at this time, and they won't be in the future without a clear focus and continuing effort from the National Archives and the Office of Presidential Libraries.



Potential recommendations for discussion:

1. The National Archives should endorse as a target the five desirable conditions listed above and should work to bring these about in the presidential library partnerships.
2. The Office of Presidential Libraries should prepare a partnership “reader” identifying what it perceives as “best practices” in existing partnerships and describing especially successful and significant collaborative projects. This should be shared with the non-profit partner boards of directors and staff and with library directors.
3. The Office of Presidential Libraries should promulgate to libraries and their main support organizations the “partnership readiness checklist” included in the February 2002 report on the Truman Library Institute – Truman Library partnership.
4. The National Archives should promote a working conference to discuss the partnerships between the presidential libraries and the non-profit partner organizations. Invitees should include the chair of the board and several key leaders from each partner, and the chief staff person where this exists, along with the director and deputy director of each presidential library. The conference should be led by an experienced facilitator prepared carefully for the meeting to help the attendees move through issues in a smooth and productive way. A main technique should be sharing of examples among the libraries and partners. Such a conference should be held at a retreat center and ideally supported by several of the support organizations or by some other external source of support. The goal of the conference should be an action plan to make the partnerships more effective and better understood over the next decade.
5. The National Archives should seek a legislative amendment to authorize the director and designated managers in a presidential library officially to supervise employees of a designated non-profit partner organization where this is needed for effective Library programs supported by non-Federal funds.



A Presidential Library Partnership Readiness Check List

The following checklist developed by the Truman Library and the Truman Library Institute may be useful to other libraries and their partners.

The following questions may help a presidential library and a non-profit partner to individually or jointly review their relationship.

1. Are there currently valid statements describing the mission, goals and priorities of the presidential library and of the non-profit partner so that each can understand these basic aspects of the other partner? Does each have a current strategic plan that has been shared with the other partner or have they developed such a plan jointly?
2. Is there a memo of understanding or similar statement describing the nature and purpose of their relationship, especially the primary roles and responsibilities of each partner, so that there is a continuing basis for mutual understanding? Do they periodically reassess their understanding of their partnership and evaluate its success?
3. Is basic administrative information regularly shared between the partners on budgets and financial projections, program evaluations, personnel and organizational changes, and similar matters so that the use of resources can be coordinated and made most effective overall? Do they coordinate closely in their annual budgeting and program planning?
4. Is there regular and sufficient coordination and communication on programs and services affecting the public so that the partners can avoid duplication, conflicts and confusion in programming and in media and public relations and make the best possible use of resources?
5. Does the non-profit partner provide for a place on the agenda of meetings of its leadership group for the Library director to report regularly on the performance, condition, plans and needs of the Library? Do the Library director and the chair of the non-profit



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partner meet regularly for discussion of the relationship between the partners?

6. Does the Library provide periodic opportunities for interaction between the board and staff of the non-profit and the Library's managers and program directors?
7. Does the director of the Office of Presidential Libraries and/or the Archivist of the United States meet periodically with the officers or board of the non-profit partner for discussion of its partnership with the Library and of the Library's performance?





National Archives and Records Administration

*8601 Adelphi Road
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March 16, 2004

Professor Stanley N. Katz
Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs
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Princeton, NJ 08544

Dear Stan:

Cynthia Koch and I are looking forward to attending the working meeting on presidential libraries in April. In your letter of invitation to Richard Claypoole, you asked for a number of items of information to which we are pleased to respond.

What is the nature and scope of the various programs offered by and through presidential libraries that have the public as their audience or which are accessible to the public?

Presidential Libraries conduct a variety of public programs that vary library to library in emphasis and customer orientation. These include conferences, lecture series, symposia, special exhibits, and educational programs. Some programs are conducted in partnership with the foundations or other institutions. For example, the Johnson Library Foundation sponsors "Evening with..." lecture series designed to be informative and entertaining while the Kennedy Library and Foundation is currently sponsoring a forum on "Writers on War" with sponsors from the local business and media community. Education programs vary widely from docent led tours of the museum to participative classroom experiences. A major priority now is to place emphasis on the development of education programs, K-12 although our emphasis is on the 6-12 grades. We continue to have an excellent reception from undergraduates, graduates, and post-graduates. The Presidential Libraries are working together to develop a system-wide concept of educational programs and cross-library projects and programs.

What policies or plans guide the selection and development of these programs?

The Office of Presidential Libraries (NL) guidelines require exhibits in Presidential libraries to be consistent with the dignity of the presidency and to present historically accurate and balanced interpretations of the former President and major events. NL guidelines require that exhibit plans be submitted for NL's approval. This plan includes the general concept of the exhibit, a brief description of the subject or subjects to be treated, and the way in which they will be treated along with cost estimates and any additional security requirements. NL has informally reviewed each library's education program and objectives and held three Directors' Conferences on education programs. Lecture series, conferences, and symposia are reported in each library's quarterly report and are frequently attended by members of the Central Office staff. NARA's current Strategic Plan, accessible on the NARA web site, calls for seeking partners to provide access to our records and exhibits. NARA goals also include educating the public about the importance of



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Government records in a democracy. This latter goal is a key to our development of education programs. Several libraries have also developed internal strategic plans to guide their development of public programs. NARA is currently drafting internal guidance for education programs.

What is the quality of these programs for the public?

During the last fiscal year, nearly 250,000 individuals participated in approximately 2,000 public programs across the Presidential library system. We perceive the quality of most of these programs to be excellent. For example, last year several libraries hosted a conference on Presidential Tapes broadcast on C-Span. Attendees at the conference spoke highly of the quality of program and encouraged us to do more such programs. C-Span regularly broadcasts from each of our Presidential libraries, providing broad dissemination of our programs to a nation-wide audience. Rarely, have any of these programs been subject to criticism about their historical accuracy or objectivity. Exhibits in the libraries are often written about, almost always positively, in the local media. Teachers who have brought classes to the libraries write to us of their appreciation of the experience for their students.

We are currently seeking to expand our knowledge of the customer experience and are seeking information from potential vendors about how to measure customer expectations and preferences along with the effectiveness of our programs.

How are these programs funded and sponsored?

Most of our public programs are funded by the Library's Trust Fund or sponsored by the library foundations or in conjunction with grants from the local business and media communities. Trust Fund revenues are derived from admissions, museum store sales, and donations. Appropriated funds support programs through the hiring of library staff such as curators and education specialists. Other positions such as exhibit specialists and visitor services staff are funded through the Library's Trust Fund. NARA has issued policy for determining the funding of key positions in the library. Programs for public events normally list who is funding or sponsoring the event, including the library, foundations, private donors, or corporate partners. Exhibits and education programs are not always acknowledged when sponsored by the foundation though usually acknowledged when there is a corporate or private donor involved.

NARA retains for itself and so states in our joint use agreements with the various Library foundations the right to final determination of exhibits, programs, and events in the Libraries. NARA requires that all events held in the libraries must be for the benefit of or in connection with the mission and programs of the Library, and must be consistent with public perception of the Library as a research and cultural institution. Our joint use agreements also require that the Foundation and Library consult on exhibits, special events, and other programs. In accordance with Federal law, NARA retains the right to decide whether to present an exhibit, or program, and the right to decide the content and final design of such presentations.

What is the role of the libraries main partner/support organizations in shaping and supporting these programs, including their content and accessibility?

For the most part, libraries and their support organizations develop annually a plan for the programs and exhibits that the foundation will support. Though the first



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permanent exhibit installed at the time of the Library's dedication is the sole responsibility of the foundation and must be designed in accordance with NARA standards, subsequent exhibits, whether permanent or temporary, are the responsibility of the library staff. The development and logistical planning of other public events varies. When the library is listed as a sponsor of the program, the director and staff normally take the lead in developing the program. Foundations that have support staff generally assist with logistical planning.

Some library support organizations retained certain public spaces in their libraries under their control and are free to sponsor their own events in these spaces. In those cases the library is not listed as a sponsor. This most commonly occurs because of space limitations imposed in the Presidential Libraries Act Amendments in 1986.

Library foundations do not normally provide NARA with their financial statements.

I also enclose for your information the following available items that you requested:

1. The April 2000 report on *Presidential Library Educational Programs* and the 2003 update.
2. Interim results of a survey on education programs (showing funding sources)
3. Copies of strategic plans from the Hoover, Roosevelt, Carter, and Johnson Libraries. The NARA Strategic Plan is available at www.archives.gov.
4. NARA policy on *The Presidential Libraries and Their Support Organizations*
5. Excerpts from the Presidential Libraries Manual on museum activities and public programs.
6. Our program review questionnaire. Our findings are accessible through FOIA requests.
7. Historical chart of museum visitors.
8. Charts for public program use for the last four years. In the future we will break out education program participants.
9. Quarterly narrative reports to NL from each library for the 1st Quarter of FY 2004 that provide information on the public programs and exhibits in the libraries for the quarter.

If I can be of any further support before coming to the working group meeting, please let me know.

Sincerely,

SHARON K. FAWCETT
Deputy Assistant Archivist for Presidential Libraries

Enclosures
cc: Larry Hackman

