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Need to Right-Size NARA
(Released for National Humanities Advocacy Day, March 12, 2024)

The National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) performs a fundamental service that is essential to America. NARA preserves and provides access to the permanently valuable records of the U.S. Government. NARA makes those records available not only to millions of researchers, veterans, and visitors, but also to all three branches of the government so that they can perform their essential services – from the incumbent President, to congressional investigators, to criminal prosecutors in accordance with court ordered subpoenas.

NARA is no longer able to fully support its core mission and is at serious risk of major mission failure, due to a decades-long gap between the ever expanding holdings and stagnant (and, in some places, reduced) resources.

Over the last 40 years, the archival holdings of the National Archives, which include all of the Presidential Libraries since Hoover, have ballooned at an unprecedented rate – from 3 billion to 12 billion pages of paper, along with over 600 million emails from just the last three presidential administrations alone (each one averaging as much as 25 pages), and petabytes of other digital files, photos, video, etc.

And yet, NARA's funding and staffing over these decades have remained stagnant, and recently diminished – at roughly \$400 million per year and under 3000 total staff across over 40 facilities around the country. And NARA has not been able to acquire and deploy the most advanced digital tools that are necessary to keep up with the ever accumulating volume of government records that we receive every year. Nor has NARA been able to make much headway toward our goal of digitizing all of our analog holdings – we are just nearing 500 million pages out of the 12 billion pages we currently have.

The result of this extraordinary gap between increased holdings and lack of resources has been frustrated requesters – researchers now have to wait over 10 years for NARA just to start reviewing records responsive to their requests and Congressional and agency investigators are also stymied at times, when their demands exceed our capacity. And NARA staff are increasingly overworked and under-supported, unable to keep up with the ever increasing demand for our national treasures.

In order for NARA to regain its role as the world's pre-eminent Archives and to fulfill its responsibilities to the American people and the Government, NARA needs to be “right-sized,” by increasing its appropriations to a level commensurate with the ever increasing volume of its archival holdings. This can be achieved with a major increase in NARA's budget over a four

DRAFT

year period that would amount to the slightest blip in the government's annual appropriations – literally 1/500th of one percent.

Increasing NARA's base budget by roughly \$100 million each year for the next four years would allow NARA to make major, and ongoing, investments in three core areas: staff, technology, and mass digitization:

- Annual increase of 200 archivists and 50 administrative support staff (for IT, HR, contracting, etc.)
- Major increased investment in ERA 2.0 Development Teams, along with increased Network Infrastructure, and increased Program Office Staffing
- Multiple mass-digitization facilities to reach a goal of 500 million pages per year.

In addition, NARA would use those funds to make commensurate and significant investments in the human, technological, and physical infrastructure to support the core archival mission, everything from major upgrades to other IT systems, to contracting and HR staffing, to more archival boxes.

In order to facilitate this essential right-sizing of NARA's budget, NARA should be excepted from the standard OMB guidance, which generally requires agencies to identify a reduction of the base budget before proposing new initiatives. After following this guidance for the past decade, NARA simply has nothing left to cut.

NARA continues to maintain bipartisan support in both the House and Senate Appropriations Committees, and the cost to the government is barely a blip within the overall budget.