

# Looking back, looking ahead

Here are excerpts from the Archivist's 2005 State of the Archives address. The full text is available at [www.archives.gov/about/speeches/2005/12-01-05.html](http://www.archives.gov/about/speeches/2005/12-01-05.html)

## The Staff

By this time, I have probably met and talked to a majority of NARA employees. . . . [A]t each installation I found at all levels and positions a dedicated staff of the highest quality: in a word, *you*.

Your professionalism, your commitment to the work at hand, your response to NARA customers and partners, your sense of mission, have all been exemplary. I thank each and every NARA employee who has contributed to my understanding of the agency. Our customers recognize, as I do, the high quality of work performed at NARA.

## The Strategic Plan

In meeting with National Archives personnel across the country, it became evident to me that most of our colleagues maintain the keenest enthusiasm for NARA as an institution. . . . This soon became even more evident as we began actual work on the new 2007–2017 Strategic Plan.

More than 1,000 NARA employees, contractors, and stakeholders have taken part in extended focus group discussions on its vision, mission, goals, and programs. . . . The focus groups have yielded valuable insights and information that have been incorporated into work on the new Strategic Plan.

The strategic plan is the critical yardstick by which the President, Congress, and our employees, stakeholders, and customers measure our progress toward defined goals and hold us accountable.

## Role in Hurricane Relief

Regarding a more sobering recent public event, the response to Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, NARA's NHPRC provided vital early funding to the archives of the affected states and played a lead role in cooperating with state and local archivists to assist records response and recovery.

I traveled with a joint NARA–state archivists' delegation to Mississippi and Louisiana (including a visit to New Orleans) to view the damage. . . . NARA has begun working with state archivists to produce damage response plans related to records recovery—and to



confirm our role as “first responders” in preventing post-disaster “identity loss.”

What NARA now seeks for this initiative is (1) a “seat” at the FEMA table, since archivists and officials in charge

of public records are not now represented in FEMA's current disaster response process and, working with state archivists, (2) 50 state plans for post-disaster records preservation, response, and recovery on the President's desk and submitted to Congress.

## Educational programs

Educational programs at the National Archives are numerous, wide-ranging, and energized. . . . Hundreds of NARA employees also play important roles as teachers, writers, and archival scholars in strengthening the fabric of knowledge concerning U.S. history and culture.

If anything, NARA has increased its educational programming throughout the agency, responding to one of its important goals—that of increasing civic literacy in the United States.

Our education programs, in Washington, at the Presidential libraries, and in the regions, are reaching out more than ever into classrooms to help teachers teach and children learn from the primary documents that tell the nation's story. In 2006, we'll be opening the Learning Center at Archives I, the final *physical* element of the National Archives Experience.

## Partnerships

As a critically important partner, the Foundation for the National Archives has made possible, through private fund-raising, several of the components of the National Archives Experience—including the Public Vaults—that have raised our profile in Washington and nationally.

The National Archives has other valuable partners, too, as part of cooperative arrangements that are woven into the fabric of the agency. These public-private partnerships, collaborations, and joint ventures have

helped extend NARA's reach to new audiences.

Close relationships with our stakeholder and customer communities have become very important to us. These groups—which include historians, archivists, genealogists, veterans, and records managers—provide us with valuable advice, expert assistance, and grassroots support. We will be placing increased emphasis on these relationships in the years to come.

## Records Preservation, Management

The funding for ERA we received for the current fiscal year will lay groundwork for building the entire system, and we hope to have initial operating capacity in 2007.

However, we still also face, and will continue to face for many years, the continuing challenge of preserving traditional paper records.

NARA's holdings of traditional records have nearly *doubled* in the last decade, but the resources available to absorb these holdings have *hardly changed*. The result is an enormous backlog of paper records that have not been properly accessioned, processed, and preserved. . . . Every day brings new recognition of how much we *should* be doing to address the deteriorating condition of records at risk.

## Goals for 2006

We can make concrete progress in 2006 in achieving NARA's mission and goals, among them:

- to successfully conclude our new Strategic Plan;
- to incorporate the Nixon Library into the Presidential library system and to strengthen the internal bonds among Presidential libraries;
- to make measurable progress in modernizing NARA's system of regional archives and records centers; and
- to make NARA the most humane yet energized workplace possible for our employees, customers, and stakeholders.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Allen Weinstein". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

ALLEN WEINSTEIN  
Archivist of the United States