

National Archives and Records Administration and the National Historical Publications and Records Commission

Founders Online Initiative

Project Overview: For several decades the National Historical Publications and Records Commission (“NHPRC” or “the Commission”), the grant making arm of the National Archives and Records Administration (“NARA” or “the Archives”), has provided leadership and funds in support of publishing the extensive documentary editions of the papers of six Founding Fathers. The NHPRC and the National Archives are committed to widening access to these seminal primary sources by ensuring that the public has free online access to the work of the six independent projects that produce these documentary editions.

Goals:

1. Make existing digital versions of the papers of the Founding Fathers available online in a searchable database format.
2. Publicize the availability of these resources to the public.
3. Incorporate these resources where possible into online educational resources sponsored by the National Archives or other entities.
4. Increase awareness of related historical document resources that are available at the National Archives and other repositories.

Background:

The NHPRC was founded at the same time as NARA to encourage the publication of the papers of important Americans. At first the Commission, chaired by the Archivist of the United States, played an advisory role, bringing together historians to recommend publishing priorities and urging federal support for such work. In 1964, the NHPRC began financial support for a handful of editorial projects, beginning with its support to publish the papers of Thomas Jefferson. Immediately following this investment, the NHPRC began supporting projects to publish the papers of John Adams, Benjamin Franklin, Alexander Hamilton (completed in 1987), James Madison, and George Washington. Over the years each of these research endeavors has operated separately with their own directors and staff, received support from several sources, and made distinct arrangements to publish the volumes with a handful of academic presses. They share a common goal of preparing authoritative, carefully verified transcriptions of the writings of the Founders, annotating them as necessary, and preparing indices that facilitate access. The resulting volumes have allowed people who cannot visit the dozens of archives that hold the originals to read the Founders’ writings and prepare their own histories of the period.

The NHPRC supports many documentary editing projects that focus on key individuals and movements spanning the 17th-20th centuries. However, facilitating access to the papers of the Founding Fathers has always been a top priority for the Commission. With \$4.5 Million in funds appropriated to support this endeavor in 2010, the National Archives and NHPRC will facilitate access to these materials through a **Founders Online Project** that will result in free online access to the thousands of documents that make up the documentary editions. The work will

build on recent initiatives undertaken by the editorial projects themselves and their academic publishers and will meet the public's expectations to discover and use these rich research resources online in one rich resource.

Planning and Development

Partnerships with publishers, non-profits, and editorial projects will allow the Archives to develop the Founder's Online Initiative into a reliable, usable resource for individuals interested in the Founding Era of the United States.

The Archives and the NHPRC believe that their partners in this endeavor must meet the following expectations:

1. Security for online tools (e.g. website) and related servers that will meet federal agency requirements and will be reviewed by the National Archives' Information Technology staff.
2. All portions of online tools (.e.g website) must meet the standards for accessibility as defined by the Rehabilitation Act Section 508 (29 U.S.C. 794d), whereby agencies must give disabled employees and members of the public access to information that is comparable to the access available to others." Guidelines are available at <http://www.section508.gov/index.cfm>
3. Usability testing will be conducted on all online tools at key stages in their development. Such testing will take place with a range of users to ensure optimal functionality, appearance and ease of use.

Specific Components of the Founders Online Initiative:

A. The Founders Online – Published Volumes (estimated cost: \$2 Million)

Almost two-thirds of the projected volumes of the six Founders have been completed and made available in traditional print formats. Many of the published volumes have been converted for presentation online, and many of the future volumes are being produced in a manner that will facilitate their online availability. To make the already published volumes available online, the Archives will use the expertise of its staff, including the staff of the NHPRC, along with its cooperative agreement authority to engage qualified partners in this conversion work. The Archives will provide financial, technical and project assistance that will include:

1. Procuring an appropriate domain name for the website;
2. Arranging and conducting regular meetings on all necessary features of the website;
3. Developing and providing regular project evaluations, assessments, and reviews,
4. Providing accurate and timely information regarding federal financial, progress reporting, and other requirements; and
5. Facilitating the sharing of information and best practices

B. Access to Unpublished Transcriptions of Founders Materials (estimated cost \$2.5 Million)

Other materials collected by the editorial research projects and planned for publication have not yet received the extensive research that is necessary to present them as reliable transcriptions. To provide the public with early access to the initial transcriptions of these documents, which number in the thousands, the Archives will use the expertise of its staff, including the staff of the NHPRC, along with its cooperative agreement authority to engage qualified partners in this work. Qualified partners (TBD) will be responsible for the following key components of this work:

1. Working with the editorial projects for the papers of Adams, Franklin, Jefferson, Madison and Washington to accurately identify those documents to be published and to obtain copies, as necessary; and
2. Converting the initial document transcriptions into a standard electronic format for online display. This work will not only provide early public access to the unpublished transcripts but will also facilitate the projects' extensive research and final transcription activities.

The Archives will provide financial, technical, and project assistance that will include:

1. Negotiating an agreement to place the unpublished transcriptions online in the same places as the completed transcriptions;
2. Arranging and conducting regular meetings on all necessary aspects of the work;
3. Developing and providing regular project evaluations, assessments, and reviews,
4. Providing accurate and timely information regarding federal financial, progress reporting, and other requirements; and
5. Facilitating the sharing of information and best practices in order to assist in the project's results.

C. Additions to Founders Online resources as New Materials are Completed

Upon completion of the initial projects outlined in A and B above, the National Archives will have supported the creation of a rich website with robust search functionality and user friendly design. The Archives must ensure that the website's contents, design, and search functions remain up-to-date and this research resource is adequately maintained after its initial launch. Mostly like this will require the Archives to identify and partner with qualified entities on a regular basis to conduct the necessary intellectual and technical upgrades.