



## NEW HAMPSHIRE DEPARTMENT OF STATE

### *Vital Records Preservation Grant Program for New Hampshire City and Town Clerks*

July 20, 2006

#### **Introduction**

This document described the process for city and town clerks to receive FY 07 grants for up to \$10,000 for local vital records preservation projects. Grants will be made for (1) assessment and planning; (2) improvements to the records storage environment, records security, and related equipment; (3) rehousing, reformatting and conservation of records, including microfilming; and (4) special requests that fall outside the three other categories.

#### **Background**

The State of New Hampshire's Vital Records Improvement Fund (VRIF), created in 1991 and recodified in 2005, exists for the, "sole purpose . . . to provide revenues for the improvement of the registration, certification, preservation, and management of the state's vital records. . . . Moneys in the fund shall be allocated for software applications and development, preservation efforts, hardware, communications and technical support."<sup>1</sup> VRIF revenue is derived from a portion of the fees collected for copying and verifying vital records.<sup>2</sup>

Most VRIF expenditures to date have been used for hardware acquisitions and software development and maintenance, including providing hardware and technical support to city and town clerks to support utilization and data entry in the NH Vital Records Information Network (NHVRIN). Funds are also being used by the NH Department of State Division of Vital Records to key in records data back to 1935 so that these can be included in NHVRIN and made available to municipalities electronically.

Some of the fund revenue has also been used to support vital records preservation at the municipal level, including 1996 assessments of vital record storage and preservation

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<sup>1</sup> The VRIF, which is described in RSA 5-C:15, should not be confused with the New Hampshire local government records management improvement fund created in 2002 under RSA 5:47-51. The latter program has not, as yet, been funded. While municipal officials have a statutory responsibility to care for and preserve public records (as described in RSA 41:58-59, RSA 33-A, and Administrative Rules Mur 300), state support described in this document is confined by statute to vital records preservation and management.

<sup>2</sup> "Vital record," as defined in RSA 5-C:1, refers to a certificate or report of a (a) Birth, (b) Adoption, (c) Death, (d) Fetal death, (e) Marriage, (f) Divorce, (g) Legal separation, or (h) Civil annulment.

needs in 34 communities. In 1998, grants were awarded to five municipalities to help address critical vital records storage and preservation needs.

The present document describes the process for expanding support to city and town clerks for local vital records preservation projects during FY 07 (July 1, 2006 - June 30, 2007).

### **Current Fund Status**

An administrator was hired in May 2006 to work with the city and town clerks, the Secretary of State (SOS), the Division of Vital Records administration, and the Vital Records Improvement Fund Advisory Committee (VRIFAC) to design and implement a program to distribute VRIF grant funds to NH municipalities to address vital records storage and preservation needs.

Given the current VRIF surplus, it is anticipated that approximately \$1,000,000 will be made available to city and town clerks in state FY 07.

As it is likely that less grant money will be available in FY 08 and future years, city and town clerks are *strongly encouraged* to take full advantage of this opportunity *as soon as possible* and no later than January 15, 2007.

### **Assistance to City and Town Clerks**

Grants for up to \$10,000 per municipality will be awarded to city and town clerks in FY 07 for vital records projects, including assessments.<sup>3</sup> The actual amount per community based will be based upon need, as described in a proposal and supported in a vital records assessment. It is anticipated that every municipality that applies will receive some level of funding support. City and town clerks may submit applications in more than one category, but requests must be received by January 15, 2007.<sup>4</sup>

Proposals will be evaluated on an ongoing basis as they are received.

City and town clerks are encouraged to obtain the support of the municipal governing body, as well as provide a description of the municipality's approach to records management and the status of its municipal records committee (as required in RSA 33-A:3). The availability of matching funds and the extent to which the proposed activity

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<sup>3</sup> In the event of emergency or exceptional circumstances, or in the case that the total amount of submitted applications does not reach \$1,000,000, some municipalities may receive more than \$10,000 in FY 07.

<sup>4</sup> An exception to this deadline will be made for category two and three requests from those clerks who request assessments prior to the January 15, 2007 deadline; in these cases, category two and three requests must be received no later than one month after the assessment is completed. Emergency applications under category four will be accepted throughout the year.

will leverage additional support should be documented in the application, but there is *no requirement* for matching funds except in those cases where the request is for a prorated cost of a larger project.

### **Four Categories of Funding Assistance**

The program will provide assistance to city and town clerks in four categories as follows:

#### **Category One: Assessment and Planning**

Every municipality *must have a completed assessment* of their vital records *before* they can apply for assistance to categories two or three.<sup>5</sup> Each new or updated assessment will be paid by the VRIF, conducted by an expert consultant from the VRIF approved list, and will include:

- (1) A description and photographs of the current status of vital records: physical space, storage conditions, environmental conditions, security, availability of storage equipment and supplies, fire and flood protection, emergency alarms, and disaster planning, as well as a general description of the quantity and condition of existing vital records (including evidence of mold, brittleness, discoloration, prior damage, etc.) and the extent to which paper records have been microfilmed or imaged electronically (note: a full vital records inventory is not required);
- (2) A description of problem areas, highlighting the most critical needs;
- (3) Practical recommendations that the municipality can implement using existing personnel and resources (for example, creation of a municipal vital records disaster plan); and
- (4) Specific recommendations requiring VRIF assistance or other grant funding, in priority order, with cost estimates for each recommendation.

It is anticipated that assessment requests submitted by city and town clerks will be quickly and routinely approved. Upon receipt of a completed application, the VRIF grant administrator will provide the city or town clerk with the contact information of an approved consultant. The clerk will then contact the consultant directly and set up a mutually agreed upon work schedule (including one or two days on site) for the assessment. Upon receipt of a copy of the assessment report, the VRIF grant administrator will pay the consultant directly for his or her services and travel, consistent with a prior established payment rate.

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<sup>5</sup> A number of communities have completed prior records assessments, including those funded by the VRIF in 1996 and by Dartmouth College's NH Local Records Education Project (NHLREP) in 1998. In the event that a municipality has had such a prior assessment, the city or town clerk may choose to (1) have a new, updated assessment or (2) proceed directly to a category two or three request. In the latter case of being a "grandfathered" municipality, the city or town clerk shall attach a copy of the prior assessment to its application form for a category two and/or three grant, along with a brief narrative that summarizes any changes in status since the assessment was completed.

While the focus of the assessment is on vital records, it is understood that some issues such as storage require a broader perspective on municipal records as a whole. Consultants will be encouraged to make general observations and recommendations about municipal records management with the understanding that the assessment focus remains on vital records.

### Category Two: Improving the Document Storage Environment

*“A benign storage environment is the first order of business in preserving permanent . . . records.”*<sup>6</sup> Applications in this category are intended to address priorities described in the municipality’s assessment report that improve the storage environment for long term preservation of documents.<sup>7</sup> Given the importance of environmental considerations, communities are encouraged to address the most critical category two issues before applying for a category three grant. Funds may be used to:

- Acquire equipment or supplies to monitor, prevent, or regulate temperature, humidity, mold, ultraviolet radiation, pollutants, insects, and/or dust (including hygrothermographs, data loggers, dehumidifiers, and HEPA - high efficiency particulate air-filter vacuum cleaners)
- Protect records from potential water or fire damage, including smoke alarms, wiring fire alarms directly to fire departments, flood alarms, and fire suppression (such as sprinkler systems)
- Acquire metal shelving, compact shelving, or linear roll-out shelving to replace wooden shelves or other inadequate shelving
- Undertake minor renovations to an existing storage facility
- Support the design or construction of a new document storage vault or facility
- Acquire a prefabricated modular vault
- Improve records security, such as segregating vital records (for example, installing a caged-in area in a larger records storage facility) or initiatives to comply with pending intelligence reform federal legislation<sup>8</sup>

Note: in the event that *any of the above* needs (such as the design or construction of a new storage facility) exceed the \$10,000 threshold, the committee will consider supporting a *prorated* portion of the total cost; any such request must clearly delineate in the application precisely what the grant funds will purchase, the percentage of the project that relates to vital records, as opposed to other municipal records, and include

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<sup>6</sup> “Records Management and Archives for Local Governments in New Hampshire,” NH Local Records Education Project, Dartmouth College, [www.dartmouth.edu/~nhlrep/about/index.html](http://www.dartmouth.edu/~nhlrep/about/index.html)

<sup>7</sup> In March 2005, a letter was sent to the city and town clerks of 34 municipalities assessed in 1996, including a form requesting a description of current priority needs; this is the type of information that should be included with the municipality’s category two or three application, and the communities that completed the 2005 form may wish to attach a copy with their proposal.

<sup>8</sup> Final determination of federal requirements is pending, and the SOS and VRIFAC are setting aside additional VRIF funds to assist city and town clerks to comply with these anticipated regulations.

documentation/certification on the availability of the additional matching funds needed to complete the project.

### Category Three: Document Rehousing, Reformatting and Conservation

Grant assistance in this category will be made available if the municipality can demonstrate/document that it has addressed the most critical storage improvements in category two or, at the very least, that the rehousing documents will be stored in an adequate storage environment. Funds may be used to:

- Acquire archival storage boxes or other archival storage supplies
- Conserve and rebind records, focusing on the most vulnerable
- Encapsulate vulnerable documents and acquire plastic boxes
- Microfilm documents or imaging of microfilm
- Hire a consultant to undertake vital records reformatting<sup>9</sup>
- Purchase of equipment, such as a microfilm scanner and reader or edge platen photocopier attachments (i.e., Binder Minder™) to protect book bindings when photocopying.<sup>10</sup>

### Category Four: Special Requests

The VRIFAC will review requests that fall outside the three basic categories, on a case by case basis. Special requests might include support to develop a municipal vital records disaster plan; disaster recovery assistance not covered by insurance; or other appropriate security or preservation measures, such as funding off-site storage during renovations.

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<sup>9</sup> The committee may also consider requests to support the short term hiring of temporary help (such as summer college students) to undertake document conservation “housekeeping” (such as removal of staples and tape) or preservation photocopying under the supervision of the town clerk; the availability of matching funds would enhance such requests.

<sup>10</sup> Given current concerns about the long-term preservation of electronic documents, the committee is reluctant to fund scanners and imaging software. Any municipality requesting support for technology enhancements such as document scanning must include a rationale for the choice of the selected technology, as well as formatting and equipment specifications, vendor qualifications, and a description of how the municipality will continually move forward technology development in future years to ensure that electronic files will be accessible.

## **Process for Submitting Proposals**

Please submit your request on the one-page form with any attachments. The process is designed to be as simple, straightforward and “user friendly” as possible, while ensuring inclusion of the information necessary to evaluate requests.

Submit an electronic copy of your complete proposal to: [douglass.teschner@sos.nh.gov](mailto:douglass.teschner@sos.nh.gov)

and five paper copies to:       Dr. Douglass Teschner  
Vital Records Preservation Grant Program  
Department of State  
Division of Archives and Records Management  
71 South Fruit St.  
Concord, NH 03301

Receipt of all funding requests will be acknowledged within ten working days. Notification of approval or disapproval will be made within sixty days of proposal receipt.

## **Evaluation of Proposals**

During FY 07, requests for assistance will be evaluated as soon as possible after they are received. The VRIFAC and grants administrator will review proposals and determine awards.

Proposals will be evaluated for (1) completeness, (2) adherence to the assistance category and criteria, (3) compliance with the objectives of the VRIF grant program, (4) consistency with respect to the municipality’s priority needs (as identified in the assessment), (5) reasonableness of the budget to meet the stated objectives, (6) integration of the proposed activity in the municipality’s records management program, (7) the extent to which the proposed activity includes matching funds or leverages additional support, and (8) urgency of need. If necessary, supplemental or clarifying information will be requested.

## **Additional Information and Resources**

Information on the Vital Records Preservation Grant Program for City and Town Clerks will be available on the Secretary of State web site (<http://www.sos.nh.gov>) and updated regularly, as modified. Proactive, outreach efforts will be undertaken to inform city and town clerks about this program.

“Best practice” guidelines for record preservation (including recommendations for storage, paper record preservation, microfilming, and digital imaging) and links to various resources will be made available on the SOS web site.

The SOS will offer workshops on grant writing and vital records preservation for city and town clerks, and information on these will be posted on the SOS web site.

City and town clerks are encouraged to apply for additional record preservation funds to supplement or complement VRIF funding and address municipal record preservation needs designated in RSA 33-A that are not funded by the VRIF grant program. One such funding resource is the NH Moose plate program implemented by the NH State Library in the NH Department of Cultural Resources which provides grants up to \$10,000.

The SOS is planning to pursue other opportunities for municipal records preservation funding, including the possibility of federal funds through the National Historical Publications and Records Commission (NHPRC) of the National Archives and Records Administration.

Any questions about New Hampshire’s Vital Records Preservation Grant Program for New Hampshire City and Town Clerks may be addressed to Dr. Douglass Teschner at [douglass.teschner@sos.nh.gov](mailto:douglass.teschner@sos.nh.gov) or (603) 271-2236. Site visits to NH municipalities may also be conducted to assist city and town clerks interested in applying.