



## SOCIETY FOR AMERICAN ARCHAEOLOGY

### **Testimony of Daniel H. Sandweiss, President of the Society for American Archaeology Before the Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies Regarding Fiscal Year 2026 Appropriations**

**March 14, 2025**

The Society for American Archaeology (SAA) is pleased to once again present its recommendations to the subcommittee regarding fiscal year 2026 (FY 2026) appropriations for the Department of the Interior's cultural resources preservation programs. I am Dr. Daniel H. Sandweiss, president of the SAA.

The SAA is an international organization that, since its founding in 1934, has been dedicated to research about and interpretation and protection of the archaeological heritage of the Americas. With more than 6,000 members, the SAA represents professional and avocational archaeologists, archaeology students in colleges and universities, and archaeologists working at tribal agencies, museums, government agencies, and the private sector.

The members of the SAA understand the fiscal reality with which the nation is dealing and recognize that better stewardship of taxpayer dollars is always welcome. In this context, we would like to remind legislators that the federally funded historic and cultural preservation programs created by Congress through the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) and other preservation statutes protect the historical legacy of all Americans. The dollars that fund these activities comprise the principal means of preserving and protecting our nation's irreplaceable historic, archaeological, and cultural treasures. This is money very well spent, because it balances the preservation of heritage with economic growth and project delivery, an outcome especially important with America's 250th anniversary approaching. Congress must provide federal agencies with the means necessary to effectively carry out these functions.

The following are specific requests that the SAA supports in the upcoming fiscal year:

#### **Funding Technological Advancement in Historic Preservation—\$28,430,000**

Preserving and managing our invaluable cultural resources ensures that we protect, learn, and pass on the history of the United States for future generations. The federal government has a vital role to play in this effort. The SAA's members—cultural resource management (CRM) archaeologists in particular—work every day with federal agencies under Section 106 of the NHPA and other statutes to locate, identify, and conserve historic and archaeological resources impacted by projects on federal land and for any federally sponsored undertaking. This work preserves our history and accelerates project delivery.

Today, CRM is a billion dollar a year industry that employs thousands of qualified individuals in hundreds of companies across the nation. They use increasingly advanced technology to streamline management practices and compliance. We believe that the Department of the Interior and other federal agencies can take advantage of new tools by promoting and funding technological applications to streamline resource management on federal land, along with compliance practices for any federally sponsored undertaking. One potential example is building fully functional, interoperable geographic information system platforms for cultural resources to facilitate communication and accelerate response timelines. Another is constructing file sharing programs between federal, state, and tribal systems. This work could all be done by American technology firms.

We are asking for \$28,430,000 for a new initiative to facilitate technological enhancements to expedite cultural resource reviews. The funding—routed through the NPS Cultural Resources, Partnership, and Science Directorate in conjunction with State and Tribal Historic Preservation Offices—will be used to develop databases, geographic information system platforms, and other technological efficiencies to facilitate communication and reduce response timelines. Up to \$250,000 will be made available to each SHPO, and up to \$60,000 for each Tribal Historic Preservation Office for technological enhancements and initiatives.

### **Prioritizing State and Tribal Autonomy: Historic Preservation Fund for SHPO and THPO Operating Grants—\$89 million**

The Historic Preservation Fund (HPF) provides crucial support to State Historic Preservation Offices (SHPOs) and Tribal Historic Preservation Offices (THPOs) and matching grants to nonprofits and local governments to preserve and document historic resources. The HPF (among other programs) provides funding to states, tribes, and local municipalities to identify their most important historic places so that federal agencies are aware of their presence when planning for a federal project or undertaking. SHPOs and THPOs remain the primary participants in the effort to preserve our American cultural heritage and assist local communities in promoting the rehabilitation and use of historic buildings and districts, ensuring that state and tribal rights are respected, and resulting in job creation and economic growth at the local level. They are the experts on what constitutes a significant historical resource, and they continue to face substantial workload increases. Today's SHPO and THPO funding levels are insufficient to handle the increased workload. For instance, there are now 228 THPO offices, and the average THPO only receives approximately \$100,000 per year. The SAA recommends an overall amount of \$200 million for the HPF, of which \$64 million would go to SHPOs and \$25 million to THPOs, increases of \$1.9 million and \$2 million, respectively.

### **Facilitating Tribal-Museum Cooperation: Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act Grants—\$3.5 million**

The Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) was enacted to provide for the protection and return of Native American human remains, funerary objects, sacred objects, and objects of cultural patrimony removed from federal or tribal lands, if that is the desired outcome of lineal descendants, Indian Tribes, and Native Hawaiian organizations. In order for this goal to be achieved, consultation between museums and Indian Tribes and Native

Hawaiian organizations is necessary. The NAGPRA statute encourages that dialogue, but consultation between tribes and museum and curation facilities, and the disposition of remains and cultural objects, is an intensive and often expensive process. The NAGPRA Grants Program plays an invaluable role in facilitating these activities. The SAA requests that the NAGPRA Grants Program receive \$3.5 million in FY 2026.

Cumulatively, these appropriations will ensure that critical protection and identification of American history, including archaeological sites and other cultural resources, will continue. As America approaches its 250th anniversary, no better investment can be made in the nation's future than by preserving our past. The SAA greatly appreciates your time and consideration of these important issues. Please contact us if you have any questions or concerns.