



How to Protect Preservation Programs in Your State Budget

by Leslie Tucker

Given the serious budget shortfalls in most states, many historic preservation programs are in jeopardy. The National Trust's Department of Public Policy offers the following tips for protecting the programs in your state.

Communicate. Establish a regularly scheduled call or meeting with representatives from the state historic preservation office, statewide nonprofit, National Trust Regional Office, National Trust Advisors, and state Main Street coordinator to discuss budget issues and potential impact on preservation.

Anticipate the Problem. Make the case for preservation now—before a crisis occurs. Commission studies on the economic benefits of historic preservation efforts in your state. Compile statistics on jobs created, investment spurred, buildings saved, etc. Outline the specific benefits of programs administered by state historic preservation offices such as Section 106 reviews, the review of historic properties nominated to the National Register, technical assistance to local governments, and administration of federally mandated grants-in-aid program.

Monitor the State Budget. Identify an individual familiar with the legislature—such as a state official, lobbyist, or representative of the statewide nonprofit—as the budget point person, and meet regularly with this individual. Understand all of the state-funded preservation programs within your state, including the funding source, funding level, and specific beneficiaries of the program.

Form Alliances. Look beyond natural allies for organizations with related policy goals. Attend the meetings of these organizations to see how your issues might overlap.

Gather Grassroots Support. Organize a statewide network of grassroots preservationists who can mobilize on short notice. Work with local preservation organizations to share membership lists and e-mail addresses. Educate activists on your state's structure of government, including the legislative process and governor's authority, and rules for lobbying by professionals, volunteers, or state officials.

Develop Relationships with State Legislators. Identify legislators who are sympathetic to preservation or who might be recruited. Establish a program of year-round contact with elected officials through special events such as a legislators' breakfast or by inviting them to local meetings, conferences, and events. Thank the legislators and supporters who have been friends of preservation in the past.

Develop a Clear, Effective Message. Gather real success stories. Generate letters to the editor promoting preservation programs within your state. Collect visual images of important buildings, representative of the state's heritage, and show how preservation programs played a role in their rehabilitation/revitalization. Host field trips to these buildings.

Create an On-Line Advocacy Network. Advocacy websites can expand your reach, give direct contact to state legislators via e-mail links, allow for quick dissemination of information, and be easily updated to reflect late-breaking developments.

Develop Good Relationships with the Media and Use Them. Designate effective spokespersons to speak with reporters and editors. Get your views in print early enough to influence debates—before key decisions are locked in. Develop compelling, concise fact sheets and position papers that can be left with reporters (and legislators) following meetings with them.

Know your priorities and be willing to compromise.

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