

Advocating for SHPOs

A Guide for State-Level Advocacy



INTRODUCTION

State Historic Preservation Offices (SHPOs) play a critical role in supporting the work of CRM firms and advancing good preservation in every state.

But due to budget challenges at the state level, few SHPOs receive all the financial and staffing support they need in order to fulfill their responsibilities. And as the demands on SHPOs continue to increase, this lack of investment can result in delayed Section 106 reviews, fewer National Register listings, and missed opportunities for preserving and celebrating our nation's heritage.

At the national level, ACRA lobbies for federal funding for SHPOs, primarily through the federal Historic Preservation Fund (HPF). But the HPF provides only a portion of SHPO funding; the rest comes from the state government. Underfunding means that SHPOs may be short-staffed, or unable to attract top talent. It means they may lack the most up-to-date tools and technology to facilitate Section 106 reviews. And it sends a negative signal about the importance your state places on its historic and cultural heritage.

Although ACRA does not lobby at the state level, there are plenty of opportunities for CRM firms and their staff to engage with their state legislators to make the case for more investments in their SHPOs. While each state is different, this Guide will help you identify the best ways to speak up for your SHPO.

There are many benefits to CRM firms from advocating for SHPOs:

- Many SHPOs cannot directly lobby their state government for more funding; CRM firms, as private companies, are freer to engage in direct advocacy with their elected officials.
- Working with a SHPO to support more resources helps build stronger ties between you and the SHPO.
- Advocating for preservation at the state level gives you and your firm experience in advocacy, which can also be used at the local and federal levels.
- Working with statewide preservation organizations to advocate for SHPOs helps build relationships and connections with other local preservation leaders.
- Most importantly, your advocacy can make a difference!

SHPO BASICS

Every State and U.S. Territory has a State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO) who, under federal law, is responsible for:

- Conducting a comprehensive survey and maintaining an inventory of historic properties
- Administering state programs of Federal assistance
- Identifying and nominating eligible properties to the National Historic Register
- Advising and assisting Federal, State and local governments
- Preparing and implementing a statewide historic preservation plan
- Providing public information, education, training and technical assistance
- Working with local governments in the development of local historic preservation programs and help them become “certified local governments”
- Provide consultation for Federal undertakings under the Section 106 provision of the National Historic Preservation Act

In addition to their federally assigned roles, SHPOs also have important functions within state government, including:

- Promoting historic preservation efforts within state government
- Coordinating with tribal governments on historic preservation matters
- Maintaining and managing historic house museums and historic sites
- Coordinating state heritage tourism efforts
- Holding and enforcing historic preservation easements
- Managing State Rehabilitation Tax Credit programs
- Maintaining state granting programs
- Supporting Main Street communities and revitalization efforts
- Providing consultation for State undertakings, similar to Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act



FOUR STEPS TO SUCCESSFUL ADVOCACY

Successful advocacy on behalf of SHPOs takes a few steps:

1. RESEARCH

Before advocating for your state historic preservation office, it is important for you to know two things: how is your SHPO organized, and what are their specific needs?

Although each state in the Union has a SHPO, their structure and place in the state government may differ. Some SHPOs are independent agencies, while others are housed within a state agency.

This matters, because where the SHPO sits may impact who decides its funding and staffing levels. Does its annual budget come directly from the state legislature? Or does it have a parent agency, which decides the level of resources the SHPO receives? Understanding who controls the levers is essential to knowing where you need to advocate.

Likewise, each SHPO has somewhat different needs. In some cases, a SHPO may not be receiving enough annual operating funding from the state to conduct its tasks or procure materials and equipment. In other cases, they might have the funding they need, but lack staff to carry out their duties. In some states, decisions over operating funds and number of staff (full-time equivalents, or FTEs) may be made independent of one another.

For other SHPOs, the problem may be how the state classifies specific jobs in the SHPO, which affects pay. If staff archaeologists, for example, are classified too low, the SHPO may have the authority to hire enough people but find it hard to recruit and retain staff.

Each of these challenges – operating funds, staff slots, pay levels – may require addressing different audiences if they are controlled by different entities within the state government.



2. CONNECT

The best way to understand your SHPO's structure and needs is to speak with them directly. Below are some tips on how to approach your SHPO and questions to ask.

It's important to note that every SHPO takes a different approach to their own advocacy; some are freer to openly advocate themselves for funding and support, while others need to take a more circumspect approach. The appendix includes a sample email you can send to your SHPO.

Don't know how to contact your SHPO? Look here <https://ncshpo.org/directory/>

Sample Questions for SHPOs/State Archaeologists

When you speak with your SHPO, here are some questions you could ask:

1. Overall, what are some of the biggest challenges your office faces?
2. Do you believe you have adequate funding to carry out your duties?
3. Do you believe your staffing levels are adequate to carry out your responsibilities?
4. Are you having any difficulty recruiting or retaining staff? If so, why?
5. Do you feel that the job classification system in the state adequately classifies your staff?
6. Have there been any lingering impacts of the pandemic on your operations?
7. If you have budgetary or staffing issues, how have they impacted your operations?
8. Have these issues impacted your ability to review and comment on 106 undertakings? Are reviews taking more time or less?
9. Have these issues impacted your ability to review and comment on programmatic agreements?
10. Have these issues impacted your ability to communicate with federal agencies and the ACHP?
11. Are there specific projects (like digitization, additional community outreach, etc.) that you would like to undertake but for which you lack the resources (budget, staff)?
12. Are there particular statistics or case studies/examples you can share that show the benefits of your work?
13. How can the CRM community help?

In addition to connecting with your SHPO, it also may be helpful to engage with your statewide preservation organization(s). They already may be advocating for SHPO resources, which means you can join in the effort with them. Even if they aren't, they may have resources to help you make the case as well as potential allies who can join with you.

Here is a list of statewide preservation organizations:

<https://www.npi.org/advocacy-national-international-and-statewide-preservation-organizations>

Lastly, if there are other CRM firms active in your state, it can be helpful to check in with them and see if they are willing and able to work with you on advocacy. The more voices in your effort, the more likely it is you will have success.



3. PREPARE

Once you have gained an understanding of the issues facing your SHPO, it's time to prepare to make your case for them before the state government. If there is already a statewide advocacy effort to support the SHPO being run by a state preservation organization, it's best to coordinate with them to make sure that everyone is on the same page and providing the same messages. But if there is no concerted campaign, here are some tips on how to make the case yourself.

A. *Understand Who You Need to Reach*

A key part of advocacy is knowing who makes the policies that you want to see changed. Depending on the specific issues your SHPO faces and how they are funded and staffed, that might be the state legislature or a state executive branch agency.

For example, if the SHPO's biggest need is more annual funding, that may be decided by the state legislature. On the other hand, if their biggest roadblock is how their staff are classified for the purposes of funding levels, that may be under the jurisdiction of an executive agency.

Lobbying legislatures is easier than executive agencies, for a simple reason: the legislators are your direct representatives, and they have to face the voters once every two years. Executive agencies, on the other hand, are normally run by political appointees named by the governor (who is less accessible to the public) or by civil servants, who administer the law and tend not to be political.

The good news is that, even if the decisionmakers are in the executive branch, speaking with your legislators makes a difference, since the legislature can pressure the executive branch to make policy changes. Your legislative representatives also can help you identify which agency officials you need to reach to make a change. Therefore, it's always best to start with your legislature. (Not sure who your state reps are? Google "Find your [STATE NAME] state representatives".)

B. *Know Your Audience*

Before figuring out the arguments you are going to make to your state officials, it's important to understand their perspectives and interests. Will they be swayed by an argument that preservation is good for community development, or for the environment? Or are they more focused on creating a strong business climate in the state, meaning that the economic argument may carry more weight?

You might not know everything about their views, but a little research can go a long way in helping you understand what motivates them. Google them and find out what issues they work on. (Visiting their campaign websites is a good way to find out generally what their positions are.)

C. *Build Your Case*

Before contacting your representatives, you should decide what you are going to say (or write). Every good advocacy pitch has four basic parts:

- Who You Are. Establish your credibility by stating that you are a member of their community, who has an interest in, and knowledge/experience about, the issue you are raising.
- Why the Problem Matters. Explain why the issue is important, not just to you, but to the community, and why the representative should care.
- How to Fix It. Offer a solution to address the problem (in the case of SHPOs, that's most likely to increase funding or staff).
- The Ask. Last but not least, make sure you explicitly ask the representative to take action, namely by supporting the solution you outlined. Although they might not agree with you right away (or even at all), an effective advocacy pitch always leads to a clear request.

The Appendix includes some sample talking points to use in developing your pitch.

4. MAKE CONTACT

Once you've determined who your audience is, what messages they are most likely to hear and how to make the argument, it's time to make contact. You can do so in any number of ways:

1. An email or phone call to the representative's office asking to meet with them.
2. Researching where and when the representative has a community forum, town hall meeting or open office hours, and attending then.
3. If you know someone who knows the representative, you can ask them to broker an introduction.

You also can make the ask of your representative in a letter or email, avoiding the need for a meeting. But keep in mind that making an ask in person is always more effective than an email.

If you do meet with your representative, the next section includes some practical tips on making that meeting a success.

LOBBYING TIPS

Your representative has agreed to meet with you. Now what?

Meeting with your elected representative can seem intimidating, particularly if you've never done it before. But in reality, these meetings are no different than any other business meeting.

A big part of their job is to meet with constituents like you, and they expect that you will ask them to take positions on issues that matter to you. And don't forget you are their boss, and pay their salary. If anything, they should be intimidated by you!

Below are some tips about meeting with your elected representatives.

A TYPICAL LEGISLATOR MEETING

Every meeting is a little different, but most follow this basic order:

- **OPENING:** Introduce yourself, where you are from; thank them for meeting with you
- **CULTURAL RESOURCES MANAGEMENT:** Tell your story: what you do, why it matters
- **THE ISSUES:** Discuss why the SHPO is important, the challenges they face, and why you want the legislator to support your solution
- **DISCUSSION:** Answer any questions they have
- **FOLLOW-UP:** Send thank you email the next day (a sample email is in the Appendix).



WHAT TO EXPECT WHEN YOU'RE MEETING WITH YOUR REPRESENTATIVES

Some meetings will take place at the State Capitol, while others will happen in a representative's local office, or some other location. In general, when representatives are at the Capitol they are more pressed for time, whereas they will be a little more flexible on time back home.

- Meetings aren't long (anywhere from 15-30 minutes).
- Speaking with staff is just as useful as with the legislators themselves – sometimes more so!
- Representatives might run late or need to change the meeting time or venue at the last minute – flexibility is key.
- State Capitol buildings can be cramped and hectic. Don't be put off if you meet in a tight space, or even in a hallway.
- Representatives might not know a lot about preservation or the SHPO – this is your chance to educate them!
- Dress professionally but comfortably; business casual is perfectly acceptable.
- NEVER discuss political contributions while in government buildings, or suggest that your vote is tied to what positions your representative takes.

TIPS FOR A SUCCESSFUL MEETING

- Be prepared, accurate and sincere.
- Make it local.
- Don't use jargon.
- Don't talk politics (i.e., elections and campaigns, or who you voted for).
- Be polite and friendly, even if they don't support our issues.
- Remember to follow up with a thank you.
- Remember: You are building a long-term relationship; don't expect instant results.

NEXT STEPS

Remember that advocacy takes some time and persistence. You are more likely to have success when you continue to engage on the issues and with your representatives over time. That doesn't mean you should bombard them with messages and requests every day or week. But keeping in touch over time helps to build trust and credibility.

Here are some opportunities for further engagement:

1. If the SHPO needs additional funding as part of the annual budget process, it's helpful to call/email your representative again as the budget is being developed to remind them of the importance of SHPO funding.
2. If the representative has town halls or other meetings, it's always a good opportunity to drop by.
3. Keep in touch with the SHPO to find out how the issues they raised are developing.
4. Encourage your fellow CRM professionals to engage with their representatives as well. Share with them your experiences and what makes for a successful engagement,
5. If you found engaging with your state representatives useful, consider joining with your fellow ACRA members to engage your federal elected officials in the U.S. Congress on federal preservation issues. (Email us at info@acra-crm.org to learn how you can get involved).



APPENDIX

CONTACTING A STATE SHPO

Below is a sample letter/email you can send to your SHPO to request a meeting to discuss their needs.

Dear [NAME]:

As a cultural resource management practitioner in [STATE], I am writing to request a meeting with you to discuss how I can help with any state budget concerns facing your office.

[PERSONALIZE HERE: INTRODUCE YOURSELF, YOUR FIRM AND SUMMARIZE WORK IN THE STATE.]

Many states across the country are facing drastic cuts to their budgets, and historic preservation initiatives are often among the programs facing the biggest cuts. Before I speak with my state elected officials about my concerns, I would like to meet with you to hear your thoughts about the greatest challenges facing your office.

Please let me know about a specific meeting date and time that works for your schedule. Thank you in advance for the opportunity to meet with you.

Sincerely,

[YOUR NAME, FIRM NAME, MAILING ADDRESS, AND TELEPHONE NUMBER]

CONTACTING A STATE REPRESENTATIVE

Below is a sample email you can send to your representatives to request a meeting to discuss the SHPO's needs.

Dear [NAME]:

As a cultural resource management practitioner and a constituent of yours, I am writing to request a meeting with you to discuss how we can support historic preservation in [STATE].

[PERSONALIZE HERE: BRIEFLY INTRODUCE YOURSELF, YOUR FIRM AND SUMMARIZE WORK IN THE STATE.]

I would like to discuss the challenges that our State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) faces in supporting important historic preservation initiatives in [STATE]. The SHPO is instrumental in maintaining an inventory of historic properties in our state, identifying and nominating eligible properties to the National Historic Register, and many other tasks that not only help us preserve our heritage, but help support economic development and jobs.

Please let me know about a specific meeting date and time that works for your schedule. Thank you in advance for the opportunity to meet with you.

Sincerely,

[YOUR NAME, FIRM NAME, MAILING ADDRESS, AND TELEPHONE NUMBER]

TALKING POINTS FOR MEETING WITH REPRESENTATIVES

Talking points are intended as a guide to help remind you of the main points you want to raise. It's always best to express yourself in ways that feel most comfortable; this should ideally be a conversation. Therefore, while it's a good idea to familiarize yourself with these talking points (or other points you develop on your own), you shouldn't read from them in the meeting.

Introduction

- Thank you for taking time to speak with me/us today about historic preservation in [STATE].
- CRM firms like mine undertake much of the cultural resource studies and investigations mandated by sections 106 and 110 of the National Historic Preservation Act.
- We employ thousands of CRM professionals, including archaeologists, architectural historians, historians, ethnographers, and an increasingly diverse group of related specialists. Using free market business practices, CRM firms facilitate the development and construction of infrastructure projects of all sizes, while making sure that we consider the impact on cultural and historical resources.
- [CITE EXAMPLES OF WHAT YOUR FIRM DOES, INCLUDING LOCAL PROJECTS.]

SHPO Issues

- I am here today to speak with you about our State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO).
- Our SHPO does important work to promote historic preservation in our state. It:
 - Identifies and nominates eligible properties to the National Historic Register
 - Provides public information, education, training and technical assistance
 - Coordinates with tribal governments on historic preservation matters
 - Coordinates state heritage tourism efforts
 - Manages state grant programs
 - And much, much more.
- [SHARE STATE-SPECIFIC EXAMPLES OF THE WORK YOUR SHPO DOES.]
- Historic preservation provides many benefits for our state. It not only helps us celebrate and understand our heritage, but it also brings in economic

development through tourism and the rehabilitation of historic buildings for new uses. [ADD IN ANY STATE-SPECIFIC EXAMPLES.]

- However, our SHPO is facing serious resource constraints that hurt its ability to administer preservation programs.
- [PROVIDE DETAILS ABOUT THE ISSUES – SUCH AS LACK OF FUNDING, LACK OF STAFF, LOW RETENTION, ET AL – AND THE RAMIFICATIONS OF THESE PROBLEMS.]
- [DISCUSS HOW THESE PROBLEMS AFFECT YOU AND YOUR FIRM. FOR EXAMPLE, A LACK OF STAFF MEANS DELAYS IN 106 REVIEWS OR A LACK OF DIGITIZATION MAKES IT HARDER FOR YOU TO COMPLETE REVIEWS.]
- Therefore, I would like to ask your support for [YOUR ASK]

Conclusion

- I hope that you will look to me as a resource as the legislature addresses preservation and conservation issues.
- Lastly, I would be more than happy to set up a time when you can observe our work in the field, so you can see what CRM is all about first-hand.
- Thank you for your time.

THANK-YOU EMAIL

It's always a good idea to send a thank-you email to the representatives with whom you met a day or two after the meeting to reinforce the messages you provided and the ask you made.

Here is a sample email note:

Dear [REPRESENTATIVE],

Thank you again for taking the time to speak with me about cultural resources management and our State Historic Preservation Office.

As we discussed, I would welcome your support for the SHPO, which plays such an instrumental role in preserving our state's historic heritage, by [REITERATE THE ASK].

Also I would welcome the chance to give you a tour of one of our worksites to show how the cultural resources management industry helps our state grow while ensuring the preservation of our cultural heritage.

Sincerely,

[YOUR NAME, FIRM NAME, MAILING ADDRESS, AND TELEPHONE NUMBER]