

Oklahoma Senate Committee on Appropriations

2014-2015 Performance Report

Oklahoma Historical Society

Agency Mission Statement:

The Oklahoma Historical Society is a state agency/private membership organization dedicated to collecting, preserving, and sharing the history of Oklahoma and its people.

This mission statement was adopted by the OHS Board of Directors in 1989 and is reviewed each year as part of the planning process.

Lead Administrator:

Dr. Bob L. Blackburn is the executive director and the appointing authority for the OHS. Dr. Blackburn was named deputy director for operations in 1989 and executive director in 1999.

Governance:

As authorized in Title 53 of the Oklahoma Statutes, the OHS Board of Directors consists of twenty-five members. Thirteen of those members are elected by OHS members; twelve are appointed by the Governor. The three-year terms are staggered and apportioned by districts to ensure geographical balance.

The current elected members are: Jack Baker, OKC; William Corbett, Tahlequah; Betty Crow, Altus; Deena Fisher, Woodward; Billie Fogarty, OKC; Leonard Logan, Vinita; Guy Logsdon, Tulsa; Patricia Loughlin, Stillwater; Sandra Olson, Waynoka; Kenneth Sivard, Idabel; Donna Sharpe, Checotah; Lewis Stiles, Broken Bow; and Barbara Thompson, OKC.

The current appointed members are: Sherry Beasley, OKC; Mickey Clagg, Norman; Frederick Drummond, Pawhuska; Cheryl Evans, Tonkawa; Karen Keith, Tulsa; Martha Lippert, Edmond; John Mabrey, Bixby; Sherry Muchmore, Ponca City; Shirley Nero, Clearview; Bill Settle, Muskogee; Charles Tate, Ardmore; and James Waldo, OKC.

The president of the board appoints members to the following advisory committees: Executive; Museums and Sites; State Museum; Research; Collections; Indian Heritage; Historic Preservation; Annual Meeting; Nominating; Black Heritage; Publications; and Development/Endowment/Membership. The full board meets quarterly.

Governance Accountability:

Attached are the minutes of the OHS Quarterly Board Meetings since July 24, 2013. The OHS Constitution and Bylaws stipulate that three consecutive unexcused absences will result in removal from the board of directors. This policy is followed.

Modernization Efforts:

The great leap forward in efforts to collect, preserve, and share Oklahoma history is currently the digital revolution. Although the roots of digitization started a decade ago, the OHS is at a point where the equipment, the skills, and the partnerships are opening new doors of opportunity. For example, a grant from the Chickasaw Nation paid for a high-speed scanner that converts 35 mm microfilm to digital images. In return, the OHS is sharing those scanned images at the Chickasaw Cultural Center in Sulfur. Another example is the photograph collection of the Oklahoma Publishing Company. With a nationally recognized combination of equipment and staff skills, the OHS received 1.4 million historic photographs from OPUBCO with grant funds to digitize and post the images for public access. One last example is the digitization of all Oklahoma newspapers from 1923 back to 1844. By the end of 2016, with grant funds alone, the digital collection of more than 5 million pages will be online and searchable.

Core Mission:

The OHS planning process throughout the year, offers recurring opportunities to evaluate adherence to the core mission of “collecting, preserving, and sharing Oklahoma history.” If a project does not meet the simple test of accomplishing at least one of those goals, it is eliminated at any stage of the planning process. If a project meets all three criteria, it moves up in terms of priority.

Private Alternatives:

There is no private industrial or service sector that duplicates the services of the OHS to collect, preserve, and share Oklahoma history. There are, however, partners who share that mission. It is a high priority to find those partners who will share their resources in delivering the services that Oklahomans have come to expect. Some are non-profits, such as universities and local museums, while others are for-profit, such as companies and associations. One example is a partnership with Ancestry.com to create a website with archival resources for research into American Indian heritage. Another example is a partnership with the State Regents for Higher Education to collect oral histories with the pioneers at Oklahoma colleges and universities. The potential of this business strategy will be greatly enhanced with a grants-in-aid program to provide a trickle of funding to grassroots communities where those resources can be leveraged into greater efforts to collect, preserve, and share history.