

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Texas State Library and Archives Commission

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Full Report Here
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The Texas State Library and Archives Commission (TSLAC) zealously performs its mission to provide Texans with the information needed to lead informed, productive, and fulfilled lives. The agency's professional and dedicated staff support libraries throughout the state, manage the state archives, help government agencies properly manage records, and directly circulate audiobooks to thousands of Texans with disabilities. Overall, Sunset staff found Texas benefits from these programs, identified no benefit from organizational change, and recommend continuing the agency for the standard 12-year period.

Since the previous Sunset review in 2006, the agency's library support role has shifted as a result of budget changes. With less direct state funding for libraries available, TSLAC now primarily provides federally funded library grants and training and lowers public library costs by aiding interlibrary loans and group purchasing of expensive electronic databases. With libraries generally reporting satisfaction with TSLAC's services, the Sunset review identified only minor improvements needed for the library grant programs. The review instead shifted focus to the agency's role managing the state archives and promoting sound records management practices for both state and local government entities. These mundane-sounding tasks form the backbone of government transparency and openness, as public information laws would otherwise be of little use.

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In the state archives, TSLAC preserves and provides access to the state's rich history, from the early days of the Texas Declaration of Independence and Travis' Alamo letter to electronic reports and correspondence showing the inner workings of every branch of state government. The agency has a daunting task to manage the existing archives while constantly taking in new records in different formats and spending significant effort responding to requests for information, all with limited staff and resources. Overall, the Sunset review found the agency has struggled to manage the influx of records in recent years, leading to a growing backlog of unprocessed archival material, thwarting easy public access. The agency also faces unique challenges responding to a rising number of Public Information Act requests, which further taxes its ability to make progress on the backlog. A more strategic approach to reducing the backlog and categorizing research requests would help the agency better manage its workload while improving public access.

The review also identified opportunities to improve several aspects of TSLAC's records management program. In particular, the agency struggles with managing one class of records with unique confidentiality protections, those of state legislators. TSLAC lacks a well-documented, formal system for tracking whether members of the Legislature choose to keep their confidential correspondence closed or open to the public upon leaving office. TSLAC also makes inconsistent decisions on members' requests to store their records in universities or museums outside the state archives. Clarifying procedures for legislative records and working more collaboratively with legislative staff would help the agency provide a better framework for these unique records.

Finally, the agency would benefit from streamlining its responsibilities relating to local government records, for example, by removing a requirement to approve more than 10,000 local government entities' retention schedules. Adjusting these duties would help the agency better focus on its core records management duties, such as providing more updated and useful guidance for state and local entities to follow.

The following material summarizes Sunset staff's recommendations for TSLAC.

Issues and Recommendations

Issue 1

TSLAC Does Not Strategically Manage the State Archives to Maximize Access to Texas' History.

TSLAC manages the state archives, a collection of permanently valuable records and other materials documenting Texas' history, and makes the archives available to the public for research and public information requests. The archives include a significant backlog of records that are not fully processed, almost 41 percent of the total 80,000 cubic feet stored. The backlog limits public access to the archives and creates numerous management inefficiencies. However, TSLAC has not adequately planned to reduce the backlog by clearly defining the problem, establishing prioritized goals, maximizing limited staff resources, or leveraging partnerships with outside entities. In addition, state law limits TSLAC's ability to make common sense decisions when handling frequent and large Public Information Act requests, further straining limited staff capacity and disrupting other archives projects.

Key Recommendations

- Require TSLAC to develop a strategic plan for managing the state archives, with targets for addressing the backlog and regular reporting on progress.
- Authorize TSLAC to distinguish between different types of information requests to better manage archives workload.
- Direct TSLAC to adopt a fee schedule for Public Information Act requests.

Issue 2

TSLAC's Records Management Program Needs Refocusing to Ensure Effective Handling of State and Local Documents.

The agency supports government records management in Texas, a critical component of open government and risk management, but TSLAC lacks an effective approach for some records and also faces unnecessary statutory requirements that strain staff resources. The agency lacks clear procedures for managing legislator records, risking inappropriate release of documents with statutory confidentiality requirements. Additionally, TSLAC does not coordinate effectively with other legislative entities that play key roles in managing legislators' records. The agency also assists state entities and local governments with records management through training and developing model records retention schedules, but the state retention schedule is outdated and lacks the guidance agencies need to manage records properly. Finally, statutory requirements for TSLAC's role in local government records management unnecessarily stretch both the agency and local entities by requiring TSLAC to approve thousands of local government retention schedules and placing control of local records stored in local depositories with TSLAC.

Key Recommendations

- Clarify the processes for waiving confidentiality protections on legislative records and for approving institutions outside the state archives to store legislator records.
- Remove the requirement for TSLAC to approve local government retention schedules.
- Authorize the agency to transfer custody of certain local records to local institutions.

Issue 3

TSLAC's Grant Program Needs Improvements to Increase Transparency and Fairness.

TSLAC awards grants to public and academic libraries through six primarily federally funded grant programs. Sunset staff found lacking best practices in how the agency uses peer reviewers that could impact the fairness and transparency of grant evaluations and awards. The agency selects librarians without an application process and peer reviewers are able to apply for the same grant program they score. In addition, TSLAC tends to award grants to the same small pool of libraries, limiting the diversity of recipients and the statewide impact of federal funding for libraries.

Key Recommendations

- Direct TSLAC to prohibit grant reviewers from applying for grants in the same categories they score.
- Direct TSLAC to openly solicit peer grant reviewers.
- Direct TSLAC to adjust grant award criteria and scoring to better disperse grant funding to a wider pool of libraries.

Issue 4

The State Has a Continuing Need for the Texas State Library and Archives Commission.

Texas benefits from a state agency to support library services and preserve and provide access to historic documents and government records. In addition, Texas receives nearly \$11 million in federal funds annually to support libraries throughout the state. Overall, Sunset staff concluded TSLAC serves a unique role in state government and little benefit would result from organizational change.

Key Recommendation

- Continue the Texas State Library and Archives Commission for 12 years.

Fiscal Implication Summary

Overall, the recommendations in this report would not have a fiscal impact to the state and can be achieved with existing agency resources. Many recommendations are designed to improve internal operations and efficiency at the agency in ways that have minimal impact on resources.