

Beyond Schools and Libraries: Trump Administration Information Policies in Archives, Museums, and Galleries

PAUL T. JAEGER, JASON R. BARON, AND DIANA MARSH

ABSTRACT

This article presents reflections, in a discussion format, on the information policy issues currently impacting cultural heritage, education, memory, and knowledge institutions. While librarians have naturally focused primarily on the most widespread impacts of the second Trump administration's information policies, which have targeted libraries and schools, the types of institutions being affected are much broader. Placing an emphasis on archives, museums, and galleries, this dialogue illuminates the unique challenges to these institutions, as well as the parallel challenges faced by other institutions, such as libraries. Professional education, advocacy, and communication with the public are explored as core strategies that can be used by archives and museums in response to the current political climate.

Paul Jaeger

Steve Bannon, one of Donald Trump's key advisers earlier in his political career, has been a longtime advocate for a strategy he calls "flooding the zone" (Jaeger 2026). By this, he is employing a sports metaphor to indicate the political value of saying and doing so many things that your opponents are unable to coherently respond to your activities, or perhaps even be able to intuit the large-scale goals behind them. You keep your political opponents perpetually distracted and belatedly responding to only a portion of government actions.

The second Trump administration has thus far employed this strategy with great impact on cultural heritage, memory, knowledge, and educational institutions (Jaeger 2025a). These activities have included the defunding of independent public media, the encouragement of book bans in libraries and schools, the removal of an untold number of government web pages and online resources, the closure of government agencies that supported information institutions, the dictation of school curricula and museum exhibition content, the firing of government watchdogs, the elimination of research into areas that the administration devalues, the assertion of control over independent arts organizations, and the elimination of many federal library positions and other jobs related to the collection, oversight, analysis, and accuracy of information, among much else. In each case, the effects of government actions have dramatic consequences, and yet, the sheer number of these actions tends to obscure more far-reaching and impactful ones.

One way of understanding the goals underlying these actions is rooted in raw power—gaining control of infrastructures of knowledge, memory, education, and cultural heritage to keep certain types of information out of the discourse (Jaeger et al. 2023). Throughout history, a great many states have taken this approach to limit information about different religious or political systems or about populations the government wishes to oppress. Whether described as capture, corruption, or colonization of these infrastructures, this kind of control is prevalent throughout human history and is a core feature of the information policies of the second Trump administration in the US.

However, there is a much more significant way to view the major goals underlying these actions—the ways in which the control of the infrastructures can be deployed to remodel society to meet the objectives of the government (Jaeger 2025b). Many of the historical states that have invested in bulk suppression and censorship have never sought to utilize this second approach, having been content to just be rid of information they did not like. However, other states have taken control of cultural heritage, memory, knowledge, and educational infrastructures to simultaneously suppress information they do not want in discourse and replace that with disinformation to accomplish state objectives.

Russia's Vladimir Putin has, perhaps better than any other contemporary state leader, mastered the corruption of cultural heritage, memory, knowledge, and educational infrastructures to achieve state ends (Jaeger 2026). Prior to his invasion of Ukraine to try to forcibly fold that independent nation-state into Russia, Putin utilized state control over information infrastructures to block Ukrainian information sources and perspectives; promulgate detailed false narratives about the Ukrainian government, people, and elected officials; and alter educational curricula to make Ukraine a lost part of Russia. As Putin has stated repeatedly, "Wars are won by teachers" (Ilyushina 2024).

While the world is currently awash in nationalist governments that have grasped varying degrees of control over cultural heritage, memory, knowledge, and educational infrastructures, the Trump administration has been especially active in trying to both assert control over these infrastructures and utilize the infrastructures to accomplish major political goals (Jaeger 2025b, 2026). When the relationships between the separate policies are examined, these goals can become more evident.

Upon taking the job of the Director of the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) in 2025, Keith Sonderling stated, "We will revitalize IMLS and restore focus on patriotism, ensuring we preserve our country's core values, promote American exceptionalism, and cultivate love of country in future generations" (Institute of Museum and Library Services 2025a). None of these goals match the statutory obligations of IMLS as it was created by Congress,¹ but they aptly summarize the desire of the Trump administration to create a new narrative of American history focused on "patriotism," "exceptionalism," and "love of country." These terms also convey undertones of who is welcome in the country.

Consider how the following actions taken by the Trump administration simultaneously impact separate entities and work toward this much larger purpose of recrafting the history

¹ The language in the statutes establishing and funding IMLS, including the Library Services and Technology Act (Pub. L. 104–208, 1996), enumerates responsibilities such as promoting improvements, facilitating access, encouraging resource sharing, supporting public service and educational roles, encouraging leadership and innovation, conserving America's heritage, serving the public, and analyzing the impact of museum and library services. Demonstrating patriotism, exceptionalism, and love of country are not among these myriad responsibilities.

of the United States to match the preferred vision of the administration and indicate who is welcome in the US by the administration (Jaeger 2026):

- Asserting White House control over the curriculum of schools run by the federal government, removing negative aspects of American history
- Requiring federal government museums to get White House approval of exhibition content and plans for future exhibitions, for the same reasons
- Creating banned books lists for federal government libraries, eliminating works depicting the perspectives of marginalized populations
- Encouraging groups of citizens to seek bans on books in local schools and libraries, further eliminating works depicting the perspectives of marginalized populations
- Firing many federal government librarians and other employees with specific areas of expertise and in positions related to information access, accuracy, collection, oversight, and analysis, reducing the ability to internally monitor the information created and disseminated by the government
- Ending federal government funding for public media, which historically has acted as a watchdog over government activities
- Canceling funding and positions related to increasing the inclusiveness of American society and institutions

Many of these policies are simultaneously creating a government-approved version of American history while also further marginalizing many already marginalized populations (Curliss et al. 2025; Padrón et al. 2025; Ryan et al. 2026). The second Trump administration is vigorously using control of these infrastructures to try to remodel American society.

Jason Baron

I agree with everything you say, Paul. If we turn specifically to the archival domain, the troubling pattern and practice you have noted applies in spades. The concerted attempt by the second Trump administration to weaken the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) and disrespect records laws is not incidental; I view it as central to the broader project of the present administration in attempting to reshape and distort public memory while limiting government accountability.

The removal of Dr. Colleen Shogan as archivist of the United States is a critical example. US archivists by statute are to be appointed on a nonpartisan basis, based on their professional qualifications relevant to serving in the position.² Dr. Shogan more than fulfilled those requirements, but, from all appearances, was summarily removed three weeks into President Trump's second term due to his personal animus toward NARA's actions in formally requesting the return of all presidential records from his residence in Mar-a-Lago to the legal custody of the archivist (Baron 2025). The special irony here is that Dr. Shogan played no part in the above events—she was appointed by President Biden well after NARA's retrieval of those records. Her firing, coupled with the appointment of Secretary of State Marco Rubio to be acting archivist, essentially in his spare time, signaled a contemptuous shift toward political control over what has historically been an independent steward of the nation's history. Those

² The Federal Records Act states that “The Archivist shall be appointed without regard to political affiliations and solely on the basis of professional qualifications required to perform the duties and responsibilities of the office of Archivist.” 44 U.S.C. § 2103(a).

combined actions arguably sent a chilling message to the nonpartisan NARA career staff about the risks of adhering to professional and legal standards when they conflict with political priorities.

Leadership instability at NARA directly affects the enforcement of the Federal Records Act. Indeed, Acting Archivist Rubio, along with numerous other high-level officials at the White House, the Department of Defense, and elsewhere, were all participants in “Signalgate,” the use of the Signal ephemeral messaging platform to discuss real-time matters of war with a journalist mistakenly included in the communication channel (Goldberg 2025). Not unexpectedly, given who was involved, there is no public record of NARA opening any type of investigation of how Signal communications are preserved as federal records at the State Department or elsewhere, which NARA normally would have undertaken in past administrations in accordance with its own internal policies. Nor, for that matter, is there any indication that the leadership of NARA has directed staff to follow up on the reported destruction of classified records at the US Agency for International Development (Wong 2025). When the archivist’s authority to undertake this type of oversight ends up being unused and undermined, agencies have less incentive to comply with records retention and preservation mandates. The result is the potential for gaps in the historical record.

So too, as Paul alluded to, during the past year we have seen an administration systematically taking actions that serve to cripple the public’s right to know what our government is up to through requests filed under the Freedom of Information Act. The firing of experienced FOIA personnel—including the head of the Justice Department’s Office of Information Policy, responsible for FOIA guidance to all federal agencies—as well as the downsizing and consolidation of FOIA offices across agencies, have only served to exacerbate systemic bottlenecks in agency processing of FOIA requests. FOIA processing depends on institutional knowledge—knowing where records reside, how they are organized, and what exemptions apply. When you remove that expertise and decrease agency FOIA budgets, you weaken the public’s right to hold the government accountable.

As stated so well by Chioma Chukwu, executive director of the nonpartisan public interest group American Oversight, this administration’s “ongoing efforts to undermine FOIA isn’t just about evading oversight—it’s a deliberate effort to dismantle the very systems that uphold public accountability” (Lupkin 2025; Newhouse 2025).

Last, but certainly not least, is an April 2026 legal opinion emanating from the Trump Justice Department’s Office of Legal Counsel (OLC), which found the Presidential Records Act (PRA) to be “unconstitutional” (US Department of Justice, Office of Legal Counsel 2026). In OLC’s view, in enacting the PRA in 1978, Congress failed to pay heed to principles of separation of powers by encroaching on a president’s sole authority to determine how his records should be managed and preserved. The PRA, enacted in the wake of Watergate, has resulted in billions of pages of White House records from the Reagan administration to the current day being owned by the American people, rather than being the personal property of a former president. In taking this position, DOJ has retroactively blessed the prior transfer of records to Mar-A-Lago; the memo also foreshadows a much greater outrage at the end of this administration when President Trump inevitably decides to transfer some or all White House records into his personal custody, rather than turning them over to the legal custody of the archivist of the US, as the PRA requires. The matter is currently in litigation, but my crystal ball is a bit cloudy on the ultimate fate of the PRA in the courts. Let’s hope that government transparency and accountability win the day.

Taken together—the weakening of NARA leadership, the uninvestigated destruction of agency records, the erosion of FOIA capacity, and the assault on presidential recordkeeping—we are witnessing a sustained, systemic attack on the federal recordkeeping infrastructure. That breakdown has cascading effects. Without reliable records, accountability mechanisms falter. Congressional oversight, judicial review, investigative journalism, and our rights as members of civil society all depend on the existence and accessibility of the government's records. When agency records are incomplete, inaccessible, or untrustworthy, those mechanisms cannot function effectively.

The recent nomination of Bradford Wilson to be the next archivist provides an opportunity for public advocacy in the form of reminding senior officials in this administration of the importance of adhering to the government's recordkeeping and access laws. Most prominently, the next archivist of the United States should have as their highest priority the reinforcement of NARA's institutional independence. The next presidential transition will take place soon enough—on January 20, 2029. We should all do everything we can to ensure our voices are heard in lobbying the archivist to stay actively involved in ensuring that White House records of the second Trump administration are properly preserved, either under the PRA (as the courts decide) or by other means. This will, no doubt, prove to be a supreme test of leadership, and we all should remain vigilant in watching, organizing, and speaking out.

Diana Marsh

I want to echo Jason's point about the importance of archival institutions (and one might read further, many other keepers of American memory) being nonpartisan, and want to take a slightly different angle on the crisis of the current environment for the GLAM community (galleries, libraries, archives, and museums) and a range of related cultural heritage fields.

As Paul notes, the last year and a half has seen unprecedented changes in the landscape for information, public memory, and heritage institutions. And the crisis I see has as much to do with public awareness of these fields and their importance as the changes themselves. For the field, this moment has exposed a major failure in communication—in explaining why the public should care about these institutions—amid the noise of a flooded zone or an overloaded information landscape. So I want to look at each of their core functions, considering the following three definitions and noting perhaps why everyone should care. I then reflect on what action our fields ought to take to correct our own record.

"A library is a collection of resources in a variety of formats that is (1) organized by information professionals or other experts who (2) provide convenient physical, digital, bibliographic, or intellectual access and (3) offer targeted services and programs (4) with the mission of educating, informing, or entertaining a variety of audiences (5) and the goal of stimulating individual learning and advancing society as a whole." - ALA Resource Guide, definition of a library (American Library Association 2025)

"A museum is a not-for-profit, permanent institution in the service of society that researches, collects, conserves, interprets, and exhibits tangible and intangible heritage. Open to the public, accessible, and inclusive, museums foster diversity and sustainability. They operate and communicate ethically, professionally, and with the participation of communities, offering varied experi-

ences for education, enjoyment, reflection, and knowledge sharing.” - ICOM definition of a museum, 2022 (International Council of Museums 2022)

“Archives record decisions, actions, and memories. Archives are a unique and irreplaceable heritage passed from one generation to another. Archives are managed from creation to preserve their value and meaning. They are authoritative sources of information underpinning accountable and transparent administrative actions. They play an essential role in the development of societies by safeguarding and contributing to individual and community memory. Open access to archives enriches our knowledge of human society, promotes democracy, protects citizens' rights, and enhances the quality of life.” - Universal Declaration on Archives (International Council on Archives n.d.)

Collection and preservation: Institutions like the Smithsonian have worked hard to combat the stereotype of collecting as either a wealthy gentleman's pastime or an exercise in national hoarding. To be sure, collections storage facilities have their aura—whether in *The Night at the Museum* franchise, *The Da Vinci Code*, or *National Treasure*.³ But I think it is hard to describe to a broad public that collecting—across some 125,000 libraries (American Library Association 2026), 25,000 archives (Repository Data 2018), 30,000 museums (Institute of Museum and Library Services 2025b)—dictates what we as a nation keep and preserve. The totality of what is collected, say, in a given year across all of those institutions, is the sliver (Harris 2002) of available information that will exist for future human inquiry. On shorter time horizons, as Jason notes, that sliver is what the American people can leverage in service of democratic processes and government accountability. On longer time horizons, whether you are a future historian, or say, a future entomologist, what is collected and documented (in objects or artifacts, photographs, audiovisual recordings, and digital and physical documents) and then preserved and kept actively is likely to be *it*. These institutions often aspire to permanence, or keeping collections in perpetuity, and that commitment is vital. As many hundreds of years of human history have shown, what is not carefully kept deteriorates, gets lost, and is discarded. Anyone who has tried to open an old hard drive lately will know that digital documents exacerbate these risks. And, in the AI era, the “real thing” may become more important as evidence than ever before.

Organization, digitization, and access: There is a genuine debate about whether one can ever really “discover” something in an archive, museum, or rare book library (Fischer 2012; Papaioannou 2012). That's because when an object (or 1,000 boxes of papers, or millions of e-records) comes into a collection, professionals in collections management, registration, records management, informatics, archival processing, and a range of other roles, depending on the organization, work hard to not just put it into safe, UV-free, temperature- and humidity-controlled storage (in an acid-free box, a foam-lined drawer, or a cloth-covered shelf), but give the collection an identifier so both staff and the public can locate and access it. This process, broadly called cataloging across the GLAM and heritage sectors, allows documents, objects, and even monuments and historical markers to be found by both people and computers. There is increasing pressure for libraries and other GLAM organizations, in fact,

³ For more on other archival imaginings, see Buckley 2008.

to hand over this “good,” “structured,” data to AI developers, as the race to find more and better training data for models accelerates. In museums, archives, and other collections of unique or rare items, this process aims to make collections findable to a broad public, not just to the Indiana Joneses who happen to gain access to the vault. In libraries, particularly public libraries, where each published item may be one of thousands or millions of copies, both back-end and front-end systems have been designed for anyone to be able to find and check out an item. That is all made possible by unified cataloging standards so that the same book may be tracked across thousands of libraries. But in the “Amazoogle” world, users expect not just catalog records, but fully digitized surrogate items, to be available, and especially in museums and archives, only a tiny portion of collections are imaged (as of today only 3.78% of estimated 12,247,035,237 of our national records are online, National Archives and Records Administration, 2026).

Research and public education: The collection of primary sources and information resources, and their subsequent access for users, facilitates all kinds of inquiry. Some GLAM institutions are themselves research institutions, and expert staff within them have the research enterprise—gaining truly new knowledge about the world—in their job descriptions. But most make secondary research (drawing on secondary, published sources to gain a broad understanding of a topic) or primary research (drawing on primary sources, asking new questions, and gaining new knowledge) possible. GLAM institutions also have a mission to interpret or communicate with the public, most obviously through exhibitions and websites, but also through school programs, public talks, tours, social media accounts, catalog and book publications, and even formal instruction—all with the goal of gaining and sharing knowledge in a way that is vetted and expert-driven. Museums, in particular, are among *the* most trusted information institutions. The most recent study on trust and museums showed that museums are second only to friends and family as trusted sources of information. In the top two reasons as to why they are so trusted, the study shows that it’s because a) they are considered “fact-based” and b) because they are thought to hold original or “authentic objects” (American Alliance of Museums 2021).

As I’ve argued elsewhere (Marsh 2019), amid the accelerating pace of information, GLAM institutions bring together the world’s experts—not just on a given topic, but on education, informal learning, and public writing—to convey information in exhibit texts, websites, online catalog records, and an array of other outlets. That process is essentially one of compromise—and that slow process can be crucial to maintaining public trust.

As I discussed with Colleen Shogan in a recent public dialogue (2026), these institutions and the collections they hold cannot be “neutral” (Jimerson, 2006)—they are the result of particular contexts and power dynamics of their time. But they can rise above the whims of any particular partisan political environment. And we as professionals have a responsibility to convey the centrality of core principles—collecting and preserving the historical record, providing access to information, and fostering democratic education—to the public and to our government officials.

Thus far, many of these core values, and much of the work in GLAMs, are invisible to the public. Worse, despite increased literature on the “convergence” of heritage organizations (See Given and McTavish 2010; Lesk 2016), GLAM and heritage fields are often talking in siloed circles and, in fact, emphasizing their uniqueness rather than their shared qualities and goals.

Among them, libraries and museums seem to have the greatest traction in public discourse, by virtue of their public and very visible roles. Archives, only recently having made

moves to invite wider publics into reading rooms and with few public exhibit spaces, lag furthest behind. Moreover, not many heritage professionals are proactive in public awareness, and neither are new professionals coming up in these fields gaining any training in how to be engaged professionals. So what should we do about that?

First, I hope that the various GLAM and heritage fields can come together more coherently to tackle problems of visibility—or new policy—collectively. We also need to be smarter about GLAM advocacy, understanding what actual levers can be pulled or pushed in Congress and with the wider public to improve the resource environment. Second, being in a large program that trains information professionals, we need to make a concerted effort to educate our students in public awareness and advocacy. We also need to train them in existing law and policy, and in their history, so they understand the ramifications of the proposed change and which battles are worth fighting.

Jason Baron

Diana, you (and many of us) are asking, almost on a daily basis now: “What should we do about [fill in the blank for the latest attack on GLAM institutions]?” The part of your answer that most strongly resonates with me is being “smarter about GLAM advocacy.” This isn’t too surprising, given that I spent forty years as a practicing lawyer before becoming a full-time academic.

Take the matter of disappearing government web pages and datasets. Starting from the beginning of the second Trump administration, thousands of federal web pages and datasets have been taken down (Singer 2025). Many of these deletions have been pursuant to a series of executive orders rejecting any mention of DEI (diversity, equity, and inclusion) programs (See, e.g., Environmental Data and Governance Initiative 2025b). But in addition, large quantities of pages containing information on health, climate change, environmental justice, and other forms of government statistics simply no longer exist on government websites (See, e.g., Environmental Data and Governance Initiative 2025a; National Security Archive 2025; Qin 2026).

Lawsuits have been one means of fighting back. For example, in litigation brought against Robert F. Kennedy Jr.’s Department of Health and Human Services by the Washington State Nurses Association and other health associations, plaintiffs demanded the restoration of deleted public health information databases related to “LGBTQ health, gender and reproductive health, vaccine guidance, mpox treatment, pregnancy risk, opioid use disorder, HIV/AIDS research and the NIH HIV Risk Reduction Tool, and data from clinical trials and more” (Alder 2025). HHS ended up agreeing to a settlement, restoring specific databases identified by plaintiffs at the outset of the litigation (Washington State Medical Association 2025)—albeit on the condition that a disclaimer be displayed stating, “This page does not reflect reality and therefore this Administration and this Department reject it” (Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services, n.d.).

Another way of supporting memory institutions is to proactively ensure that records and data do not disappear. In the face of the threat of datasets being taken down by the incoming second Trump administration, heroic archival efforts to preserve data were made (and are still being made) by coalitions of librarians, open-data activists, climate researchers, public health researchers, software volunteers, and digital historians. One such group, known as the Data Rescue Project, is a grassroots volunteer community dedicated to “rapid response efforts for at-risk public data” (2025). Numerous additional efforts have sprouted up, including by the

National Security Archive (2025), the Harvard Law School Library Innovation Lab (2025), and many other organizations and self-forming groups.

Randall Jimerson (2009), longtime advocate for archivists being activists, would certainly approve of all of these concerted efforts. Each of us has a role to play in helping to preserve the documentary record of past and present government decisions and actions. I urge readers to enter into their own conversations with colleagues, with the intent to become more active both inside their own organizations and in external collaborations with interested parties in an effort to ensure greater government accountability and transparency. That, in my mind, is “what we should do.”

Paul Jaeger

As Diana has so aptly explained, cultural heritage, memory, knowledge, and educational institutions—along with the related professions and professional organizations—have failed to sufficiently educate the public about the importance of these issues. As a result, as both Diana and Jason have made reference to, most members of the public may not completely understand the full implications of destroying physical government records, removing public information from government websites, rewriting official historical narratives, altering museum displays, or eliminating government oversight positions. There are also, as noted earlier, so many changes to governance happening that it can be hard even for politically savvy members of the public to keep up with them all, which reiterates the need for institutions, professionals, and professional organizations to be more committed to public education.

Unfortunately, no small part of the problem is that the archivists, museum professionals, librarians, and other information professionals who work at these institutions and comprise these professional organizations have overwhelmingly not been prepared by their own educational programs with the advocacy, education, law, and policy knowledge so necessary now. Sonia Durney (2023; 2025) has introduced the idea of a library advocacy gap (LAG). In identifying the scope of this LAG, Durney has found that only six of the graduate programs educating future archivists, museum professionals, and librarians regularly offer policy and law courses, while only two regularly offer advocacy courses. These courses are not required, just simply available.

The accreditation standards for programs that educate archivists, museum professionals, and librarians nod to the importance of these areas of knowledge, yet have no specific requirements for specific content or number of course hours to be devoted to the topics. In many cases, the entire exposure of a student to any of these topics might be limited to a lecture or discussion in one meeting of an introductory course. As a result, many students who want to become experts in these topics will be thwarted by their own graduate programs (Jaeger et al. 2015). Continuing education programs in the field have thus far been unable to fill in these perilous educational gaps.

Even in times of political stability, these educational gaps have significant negative impacts on archivists, museum professionals, and librarians, as well as the cultural heritage, memory, knowledge, and educational institutions in which they work. These professions and institutions have a long history of being ill-prepared to explain their contributions, and as a result, advocacy efforts reflexively revert to value assertion rather than value demonstration (Jaeger et al. 2011; Jaeger et al. 2013). Simply put, they do not have the preparation to explain to members of the public what the institutions contribute and why these contributions are important. They have also not been effectively prepared to engage in political and policy

processes impacting the institutions, often lacking even an introductory grounding in the language and mechanics of policy and politics (Jaeger and Sarin 2016). This failing has been noted with alarm by a small number of authors for decades, seemingly about once a generation (Jaeger et al. 2014). The inadequate preparation for engaging with regular political environments and policy problems becomes staggeringly detrimental in an environment when the policy and political processes turn hostile to cultural heritage, memory, knowledge, and educational institutions. Times like now. The ongoing examples Jason has raised demonstrate the massive impact of these educational gaps.

On top of these gaps in vital knowledge due to holes in education programs, these professions have also been saddled with the self-defeating concept of professional neutrality preached by professional organizations (Jaeger 2025c; Jaeger and Jennings-Roche 2025). This notion of neutrality is based on the principle that cultural heritage, memory, knowledge, and educational institutions, as they are there to serve entire communities, should not be tied to a particular viewpoint in the collections or supporting of a particular politician. Unfortunately, this has spiraled into a belief among many archivists, museum professionals, and librarians that they should not advocate on behalf of their institutions or openly defend their institutions from attacks.

Neutrality is impossible in a practical sense. No person, institution, text, or program is neutral. Attempts at neutrality serve only to reinforce existing power structures and suppress the voices of the already marginalized, as can be seen in the current tidal wave of book bans (Jaeger et al. 2023). Unfortunately, this self-defeating but widely held view of neutrality has matured into acquiescence in many places to the political capture of the institutions by a vast, well-financed, and closely coordinated national censorship movement (Jaeger 2026).

Ignoring politics is never a wise strategy, even for institutions that strive to be nonpartisan and welcoming to as broad a range of individuals and communities as possible. Yet, the creation of a library, an archive, or a museum is inherently a very loud, very public assertion of the centrality of access, literacy, and education to democratic governance. In this current political environment, cultural heritage, education, memory, and knowledge institutions truly cannot pretend that the situation will improve without their taking initiative to better articulate their importance, demonstrate their value, and encourage support, while also taking more initiative to advocate on their own behalf. The goal of being nonpartisan means not campaigning for a particular candidate. It does not mean supine acquiescence and feigned helplessness as the institutions—and what they stand for—are undermined and eroded. For those who work in cultural heritage, education, memory, and knowledge, and for those who understand their centrality to a healthy democracy, we cannot afford to be innocent if we wish these institutions to survive as guarantors of public access, education, and accountability.

As cultural heritage, memory, knowledge, and educational institutions navigate this extremely challenging political environment, rethinking the ways of setting professional standards, the approaches to crafting messages for the public, and the core topics of education for current and future information professionals are avenues to better prepare future professionals. In the shorter term, however, there is a pressing need to greatly expand—and coordinate across the field—communication with members of the public about the immediate impacts and long-range consequences of public records and government information disappearing or being rewritten. Institutions designed to preserve, protect, and provide access to information are currently facing many negative political impacts, due in no small part to their own failures to communicate, which is an irony that cannot be permitted to continue.

References

- Alder, Steve. 2025. "HHS Agrees to Settlement Requiring the Restoration of Deleted Health Data and Websites." *The HIPAA Journal*, September 10. <https://www.hipaajournal.com/hhs-settlement-lawsuit-restore-critical-health-information-federal-websites/>.
- American Alliance of Museums. 2021. "Museums and Trust 2021." September 30. <https://www.aam-us.org/2021/09/30/museums-and-trust-2021/>.
- American Library Association. 2025. "Definition of a Library: General Definition." Last modified February 20. <https://libguides.ala.org/library-definition>.
- American Library Association. 2026. "Library Statistics and Figures: Number of Libraries in the United States." Last modified April 24. <https://libguides.ala.org/c.php?g=751692&p=9132142>.
- Baron, Jason R. 2025. "Trump Fired the Archivist of the United States." *Washington Monthly*, March 5. <https://washingtonmonthly.com/2025/03/05/trump-fired-the-archivist-of-the-united-states/>.
- Buckley, Karen. 2008. "'The Truth Is in the Red Files': An Overview of Archives in Popular Culture." *Archivaria* 66 (December): 95–123. <https://www.archivaria.ca/index.php/archivaria/article/view/13187>.
- Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services. n.d. "Data Tools." Accessed June 9, 2026. <https://www.cms.gov/data-tools>.
- Curliss, Lydia, Qadira Locke, and Paul T. Jaeger. 2025. "'Heritage Is More Than a Job': Implications of Project 2025 on the Future of Libraries, Archives, and Museums." *The Political Librarian*, Special Issue, 8 (1): 31–38. <https://doi.org/10.7936/pollib.9012>.
- Data Rescue Project. 2025. "About Data Rescue Project." Last modified February 10. <https://www.datarescueproject.org/about-data-rescue-project/>.
- Durney, Sonya M. 2023. "The Library Advocacy Gap: Increasing Librarians' Political Self-Efficacy." *The Political Librarian* 6 (1): 34–57. <https://doi.org/10.7936/pollib.8771>.
- Durney, Sonya M. 2025. "The Urgent Need for Political Literacy in LIS Education." *The Political Librarian*, Special Issue, 8 (1): 15–19. <https://doi.org/10.7936/pollib.9004>.
- Environmental Data and Governance Initiative. 2025a. "EPA Removes Information About Agency and Environmental History." December 18. <https://envirodatagov.org/epa-removes-information-about-agency-and-environmental-history/>.
- Environmental Data and Governance Initiative. 2025b. "Trump Targets DEI Pages at the EPA." February 12. <https://envirodatagov.org/trump-targets-dei-pages-at-the-epa/>.
- Fischer, Suzanne. 2012. "Nota Bene: If You 'Discover' Something in an Archive, It's Not a Discovery." *The Atlantic*, June 19. <http://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2012/06/nota-bene-if-you-discover-something-in-an-archive-its-not-a-discovery/258538/>.
- Given Lisa M., and Lianne McTavish. 2010. "What's Old Is New Again: The Reconvergence of Libraries, Archives, and Museums in the Digital Age." *The Library Quarterly* 80 (1): 7–32. <https://doi.org/10.1086/648461>.
- Goldberg, Jeffrey. 2025. "The Trump Administration Accidentally Texted Me Its War Plans." *The Atlantic*, March 24. <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2025/03/trump-administration-accidentally-texted-me-its-war-plans/682151/>.
- Harris, Verne. 2002. "The Archival Sliver: Power, Memory, and Archives in South Africa." *Archival Science*, 2: 63–86. <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF02435631>.
- Harvard Library Innovation Lab. 2025. "Preserving Public U.S. Federal Data." January 30. <https://lil.law.harvard.edu/blog/2025/01/30/preserving-public-u-s-federal-data/>.

- Ilyushina, Mary. 2024. "To Please Putin, Universities Purge Liberals and Embrace Patriots." *The Washington Post*, May 7. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2024/05/07/russia-universities-education-putin-overhaul/>.
- Institute of Museum and Library Services. 2025a. "Keith E. Sonderling Sworn in as Acting Director of Institute of Museum and Library Services." March 20. <https://www.imls.gov/news/keith-e-sonderling-sworn-acting-director-institute-museum-and-library-services>.
- Institute of Museum and Library Services. 2025b. *Museum Data File Documentation and User Guide*. https://www.imls.gov/sites/default/files/museum_data_file_documentation_and_users_guide.pdf.
- International Council of Museums. 2022. "Museum Definition." <https://icom.museum/en/resources/standards-guidelines/museum-definition/>.
- International Council on Archives. n.d. "What Are Archives?" Accessed June 9, 2026. <https://www.ica.org/discover-archives/what-are-archives/>.
- Jaeger, Paul T. 2025a. "The Immortality of Hatred and Revenge: The Interconnections of Censorship, Disinformation, and Cultural Erasure in the Book Bans Targeting Marginalized Populations." *The Library Quarterly* 95 (1): 4–41. <https://doi.org/10.1086/733171>.
- Jaeger, Paul T. 2025b. "State-Approved Information: Nationalist Political Approaches to Controlling Knowledge Infrastructures." *Verfassungsblog*, December 19. <https://verfassungsblog.de/controlling-knowledge-infrastructures/>.
- Jaeger, Paul T. 2025c. "We Are Not Helpless: Some Lessons for Libraries, Archives, and Museums from a Lifetime of Researching Policy, Political, and Legal Processes." *The Political Librarian*, Special Issue, 8 (1): 186–94. <https://doi.org/10.7936/pollib.9040>.
- Jaeger, Paul T. 2026. *Book Bans, Disinformation, and Cultural Erasure: The Censorship Movement in Libraries, Schools, and Society*. Bloomsbury.
- Jaeger, Paul T., John Carlo Bertot, Christie M. Kodama, Sarah M. Katz, and Elizabeth J. DeCoster. 2011. "Describing and Measuring the Value of Public Libraries: The Growth of the Internet and the Evolution of Library Value." *First Monday* 16 (11). <https://firstmonday.org/ojs/index.php/fm/article/view/3765/3074>.
- Jaeger, Paul T., Ursula Gorham, John Carlo Bertot, and Lindsay C. Sarin. 2014. *Public Libraries, Public Policies, and Political Processes: Serving and Transforming Communities in Times of Economic and Political Constraint*. Rowman and Littlefield.
- Jaeger, Paul T., Ursula Gorham, Lindsay C. Sarin, and John Carlo Bertot. 2013. "Democracy, Neutrality, and Value Demonstration in the Age of Austerity." *The Library Quarterly* 83 (4): 368–82. <https://doi.org/10.1086/671910>.
- Jaeger, Paul T., Ursula Gorham, Natalie Greene Taylor, and John Carlo Bertot. 2015. "Teaching Information Policy in the Digital Age: Issues, Strategies, and Innovation." *Journal of Education for Library and Information Science* 56 (3): 175–89. <https://www.proquest.com/openview/5d2b9d278877d337ba57b8b3e8ff31e5/1?pq-origsite=gscholar&cbl=34491>.
- Jaeger, Paul T., and Allison Jennings-Roche. 2025. "Clarifying Intellectual Freedom, Neutrality, and Professional Expertise to Better Defend Libraries from Book Bans, Disinformation, and Defunding." *The Political Librarian*, Special Issue, 8 (1): 89–96. <https://doi.org/10.7936/pollib.9032>.
- Jaeger, Paul T., Allison Jennings-Roche, Natalie Greene Taylor, Ursula Gorham, Olivia J. Hodge, and Karen Kettlich. 2023. "The Urge to Censor: Raw Power, Social Control, and the Criminalization of Librarianship." *The Political Librarian* 6 (1): 1–20. <https://doi.org/10.7936/pollib.8711>.

- Jaeger, Paul T., and Lindsay C. Sarin. 2016. "All Librarianship Is Political: Educate Accordingly." *The Political Librarian* 2 (1): 17–27. <https://openscholarship.wustl.edu/pollib/vol2/iss1/8>.
- Jimerson, Randall C. 2006. "Embracing the power of archives." *The American Archivist* 69, no. 1: 19–32.
- Jimerson, Randall C. 2009. *Archives Power: Memory, Accountability, and Social Justice*. American Library Association.
- Lesk, Michael. 2016. "The Convergence of Curation." In *Handbook of Science and Technology Convergence*, edited by William Sims Bainbridge and Mihail C. Roco, 95–112. Springer.
- Lupkin, Sydney. 2025. "After Promising Transparency, RFK Guts Public Records Teams at HHS." NPR, April 3. <https://www.npr.org/sections/shots-health-news/2025/04/03/g-s1-57888/hhs-fda-rfk-foia-public-records>.
- Marsh, Diana E. 2019 *Extinct Monsters to Deep Time: Conflict, Compromise, and the Making of Smithsonian's Fossil Halls*. Oxford, NY: Berghahn.
- National Archives and Records Administration. 2026. "Record Group Explorer." June 2026. <https://www.archives.gov/findingaid/record-group-explorer>.
- National Security Archive. 2025. "Disappearing Data: Trump Administration Removing Climate Information from Government Websites." Briefing Book 885, February 6. <https://nsarchive.gwu.edu/briefing-book/climate-change-transparency-project-foia/2025-02-06/disappearing-data-trump>.
- Newhouse, Sean Michael. 2025. "Democratic Oversight Leader Warns Against Staff Cuts to Agency FOIA Offices." *Government Executive*, March 20. <https://www.govexec.com/oversight/2025/03/democratic-oversight-leader-warns-against-staff-cuts-agency-foia-offices/403938/>.
- Padrón, Ron, Paul T. Jaeger, Nedelina Tchangalova, et al. 2025. "Call Us Cassandra: A Marginalized Community's Absolute Displeasure at Having Been Right (Again)." *Including Disability* 5: 1–15. <https://ojs.scholarsportal.info/ontariotechu/index.php/id/article/view/339>.
- Papaioannou, Helena Iles. 2012. "Actually, Yes, It Is a Discovery If You Find Something in an Archive That No One Knew Was There." *The Atlantic*, June 21. <http://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2012/06/actually-yes-it-is-a-discovery-if-you-find-something-in-an-archive-that-no-one-knew-was-there/258812/>.
- Qin, Amy. 2026. "The Trump Administration is Deleting Government Data. From Infant Deaths to Hunger, Here Are Five Ways It's Hurting Americans." *The Guardian*, May 6. <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/ng-interactive/2026/may/07/trump-administration-deleting-data>.
- Repository Data. 2018. "Completing RePo Data." Accessed June 9, 2026. <https://repositorydata.wordpress.com/>.
- Ryan, Alyssa M., Elizabeth A. Pineo, Paul T. Jaeger, and Stephanie J. Cork. 2026. "Malice as Modernization: Twenty-First Century Eugenics, AI, Project 2025, and Disability." *First Monday* 31 (2). <https://firstmonday.org/ojs/index.php/fm/article/view/14729/12151>.
- Shogan, Colleen. 2026. "Dean's Lecture Series: A Conversation with Dr. Colleen Shogan, 11th Archivist of the United States." Lecture and interview by Diana Marsh and Victoria Van Hyning February 20. Posted February 24, 2026, by UMD INFO College. YouTube, 1:20:01. https://youtu.be/dSa5TwOiHSc?si=dgl6eJ_OdlbGrOMq.

- Singer, Ethan. 2025. “Thousands of U.S. Government Web Pages Have Been Taken Down Since Friday.” *The New York Times*, February 2. <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/02/02/upshot/trump-government-websites-missing-pages.html>.
- US Department of Justice, Office of Legal Counsel. 2026. *Constitutionality of the Presidential Records Act*. <https://www.justice.gov/olc/media/1434131/dl>.
- Washington State Medical Association. 2025. “HHS Agrees to Restore Deleted Public Health Data in Win for Washington’s Patients and Physicians.” September 5. https://www.wsma.org/Shared_Content/News/advocacy-report/2025/september-5/hhs-agrees-to-restore-deleted-public-health-data-in-win-for-washingtons-patients-and-physicians.
- Wong, Edward. 2025. “U.S.A.I.D. Official Orders Employees to Shred or Burn Classified and Personnel Records.” *The New York Times*, March 11. <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/03/11/us/politics/usaid-shred-burn-documents.html>.

About the Authors

Paul T. Jaeger, PhD, JD, MLS., MEd, is a Professor, Distinguished Scholar-Teacher, and Co-Director of the Doctor of Information Science (DInfSci) program in the College of Information at the University of Maryland. He is the author of more than 220 articles and book chapters and more than 20 books. His newest book—*Book Bans, Disinformation, and Cultural Erasure: The Censorship Movement in Libraries, Schools, and Society*—will be published in 2026 by Bloomsbury.

Jason R. Baron, JD, is a Professor of the Practice and founding member of the Center for Archival Futures in the College of Information at the University of Maryland. He previously served as a trial attorney and senior counsel at the Department of Justice, and as director of litigation at the National Archives and Records Administration. Mr. Baron is the recipient of the international Emmett Leahy Award for his career contributions in the field of records and information management.

Diana E. Marsh, PhD, is an Associate Professor of Archives and Digital Curation in the College of Information Studies and an affiliate faculty member in the Department of Anthropology at the University of Maryland. Her research asks how new technologies and decolonizing movements are changing the ways heritage institutions share information with communities and the public. Her work draws on qualitative and ethnographic methods to better understand the discovery and use of archival collections—particularly for the communities represented in them. She explores what might drive the organizational change needed to increase public and community access to collections and provide more ethical models of stewardship in colonial repositories.