

21 JAN 2026

Sarah Weicksel, Executive Director
AHA Council
American Historical Association
400 A Street, SE
Washington, DC 20003

Dear Dr. Weicksel and Members of the American Historical Association Council:

Thorn Run Partners (TRP) is pleased to present this report of our 2025 federal relations and advocacy activities and our outlook for the American Historical Association's (AHA) 2026 Government Relations strategy.

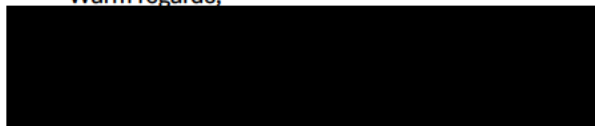
As the Association's primary representative in Washington, TRP has focused on mitigating unprecedented political risks while proactively positioning the AHA as a nonpartisan authority on historical integrity. This has been a year of transition from theoretical risks to realized consequences. Our work together is now defined by a state of principled survival within an active minefield of administrative and legislative oversight. Our planned 2026 advocacy campaign for AHA goes beyond simply opening doors; rather we aim to create the atmosphere for success through clear and compelling messaging, third-party validation, smart sequencing, and the credibility that makes policymakers comfortable leaning into AHA's positions.

Before detailing our 2025 and 2026 workplans, I want to address the unique nature of our partnership. Our progress is inextricably linked to the talent and agility of the AHA in-house team: specifically, Sarah Weicksel, Alex Levy, and Ben Rosenbaum (as well as the staff, interns, and leads behind the scenes). They have been outstanding at sharing deep analyses and responding to our research requests with immediate precision. This synergy is a force multiplier for the Association. Because the current retainer level limits our firm's staff hours, this teaming model ensures that TRP provides the highest-level strategic air cover while AHA staff provides the ground cover that makes our advocacy credible.

We must also recognize the success narrative established by Executive Director Sarah Weicksel. Her leadership has provided a proven path to safety. Her quotes in the New York Times, Wall Street Journal, and CNN regarding the integrity of scholarship have struck a positive chord with the public and provide a nonpartisan buffer against charges of ideological capture. Her quotes in the New York Times, Wall Street Journal, and CNN regarding the integrity of scholarship have struck a positive chord with the public and provide a nonpartisan buffer against charges of ideological capture. This is the exact type of proactive messaging that allows us to move from a defensive crouch to a position of institutional strength.

As always, please do not hesitate to contact us anytime if you have any questions or concerns. Thank you for the opportunity to serve the American Historical Association, and for your continued trust in our partnership.

Warm regards,



Jessica Venable, PhD
Partner, Thorn Run Partners
Email: jvenable@thornrun.com



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Purpose. This quarterly report documents Thorn Run Partners' federal relations activities on behalf of the American Historical Association during Q4 2025 and presents our strategic outlook for 2026. The period under review marks a fundamental transition: the theoretical risks identified in our March 2025 analysis have become realized consequences requiring active navigation rather than anticipatory defense.

Key Findings. The risk landscape has consolidated into three major categories. *Realized Administrative Lawfare* encompasses the active termination of federal grants under the August 2025 Executive Order on Federal Grantmaking, the reinstatement of Schedule Policy/Career classifications threatening federal historian positions, and an expanding regime of ideological vetting that screens grant applications for prohibited terminology. *Governance and Statutory Vulnerabilities* include the weaponization of Title 36 Congressional Charters to justify invasive oversight of professional societies and the ongoing reputational risks stemming from internal governance debates over mission-adjacent advocacy. *Persistent Sector-Wide Pressures* continue through visa restrictions affecting international scholars, the institutional realignment of higher education under the Compact for Academic Excellence, and expanded nonprofit oversight mechanisms.

Q4 Activities. Our work this quarter centered on strategic defense during a period of significant upheaval, including the 43-day federal shutdown. We delivered technical intelligence on the Federal Grantmaking Executive Order, provided daily monitoring and real-time analysis of shutdown impacts, conducted targeted Hill engagement on threats to National Park units, and supported the AHA's amicus brief filing with CREW in defense of international scholarly exchange. Critically, we continued the professionalization of AHA membership as an advocacy force through the "Historian as Advocate" seminar series and the development of tactical mobilization protocols.

Strategic Direction. Our 2026 implementation plan is organized around three pillars: *Quantify and Demonstrate Value* through the Veterans' Narrative and Whitewashing Tracker initiatives; *Build Strategic Relationships* via a March Hill advocacy surge coordinated with the Society for Military History; and *Enable Rapid Response* by institutionalizing governance protocols, launching a Strategic Communications Guide, and deploying vetted terminology templates. This framework is designed to decouple the Association from partisan volatility by anchoring its value in the language of civic utility, national security, and workforce readiness.

FEDERAL RELATIONS CONSULTING ACTIVITIES, Q4 2025

Our work this quarter was defined by strategic defense and the stabilization of the AHA's federal presence during a period of significant legislative and administrative upheaval. We worked to monitor and shape the landscape through direct engagement and technical expertise.

Technical Intelligence:

- We delivered a comprehensive Memorandum on the [Federal Grantmaking Executive Order](#).
- This analysis identified the new Termination for Convenience risks and prepared the AHA to navigate the administration's impoundment tactics before they could disrupt mid-cycle awards.
- TRP staff monitored and reported on critical Senate subcommittee hearings regarding the Section 106 consultation process under the National Historic Preservation Act. This ensured the AHA remained the technical expert in the room even while the federal workforce was sidelined during the 43-day shutdown.
- The firm has provided a daily Tip Sheet and bi-weekly Federal Pulse reports to deliver up-to-date news, reports, and analyses on topics of interest to the AHA.
- TRP has served as a federal relations lens for all AHA public-facing documents, vetting statements for red flag terminology to ensure they do not trigger federal research or funding denials.

Navigating the Federal Shutdown: The federal government shutdown that began in October created an immediate threat to history-related grants and federal historians. We tracked the shutdown's impacts in real-time, specifically monitoring disruptions to NEH and IMLS peer review panels. TRP also covered critical Senate hearings, such as the Section 106 consultation process under the National Historic Preservation Act, to ensure the AHA remained informed while the federal workforce was sidelined.

Direct Hill Engagement: In December, Kyle Sanders conducted targeted outreach to Senator Mike Lee's (R-UT) office. Our goal was to assess and oppose a burgeoning Senate amendment encouraging the sell-off or transfer of National Park units. This is a direct threat to the historical sites that form the backbone of the AHA's public record mission.

Legislative Stewardship: We provided detailed strategic guidance on a Senate Amendment targeting International and Foreign Language Education (IAAs) and Department of Education programs. We identified and mobilized Republican park allies to protect the funding streams essential for global historical studies.

Legal Advocacy and Amicus Support: TRP supported the AHA in utilizing the courts to defend the historical profession against arbitrary administrative actions. We assisted in the final review and strategic signatory vetting for a pre-Christmas amicus brief filing. TRP specifically advised on excluding organizations with BDS policies to ensure the AHA's legal stance remained focused on scholarly integrity rather than becoming a target for political retribution. As a result, the AHA successfully joined a partnership with Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington (CREW) to file a brief in support of foreign scholars, emphasizing that international scholarly exchange is a national asset.

Bipartisan Champion Development: TRP is successfully leveraging the unique value of historians in federal service to engage Republican leaders who may otherwise be skeptical of professional societies. By quantifying the role of historians in maintaining government continuity and supporting benefits claims, we are building a narrative of historical infrastructure as a national asset.

The Whitewashing Tracker: In December, TRP and AHA leadership shifted to a more proactive strategy to counter the systematic whitewashing of African American history across federal agencies. We identified this as a systematic trend across the DOD, NPS, and NEH and initiated a plan for briefings with the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) and key Republican leaders. We are currently helping to expand the AHA's tracking mechanism to focus specifically on federal censorship of non-white historical narratives, transforming a reactive position into a tool for legislative oversight.

Professionalizing the Membership: While TRP serves as the Association's strategic lead in Washington, our most enduring contribution in 2025 has been the professionalization of the AHA membership as a permanent advocacy force. We have moved beyond traditional, reactive calls to action to equip individual historians with a sophisticated toolkit for long-term influence. This effort has been centered on the following training pillars:

- **Messaging and Re-Framing:** A critical component of this member-level training is the shift toward pedagogy over partisanship. We have provided members with concrete resources, including the Congressional Meetings 101 Primer and the One-Page Brief Template, which instruct them to frame the study of history as a skills-based necessity for workforce readiness and national security.
- **Tactical Mobilization:** We introduced a new protocol that organizes members into three-person “Action Pods” (Researcher, Constituent, and Coordinator). This system ensures that when a legislative crisis occurs, such as a full-year CR threat, the Association can deliver data-backed, locally relevant testimony to target staff within a 24-hour window.
- **NCSS Hill Day and Leadership Training (July and December 2025):** We provided the foundational training for the NCSS 2025 Hill Day, reaching educators across 24 states. This included a Social Studies Policy Briefing and a podcast-style prep session that taught members how to “Model the Bipartisanship You Want to See” by attending meetings with colleagues from different political backgrounds.
- **“The Historian as Advocate” Seminar (January 2026):** At this year’s Annual Meeting, we delivered a 90-minute intensive seminar designed to move participants from “petitioners” to “partners” in the policy cycle. This training introduced the Translation Framework, which teaches historians to pivot from historiography to Diagnostic History: the practice of using past trajectories to predict current policy outcomes for legislators.

By training members to offer technical help rather than just an ask, we are transforming the historical community into a trusted, honest broker of information for congressional offices. This ensures that even when TRP is not in the room, the AHA's professional standards are being defended by credible, constituent voices who understand how to translate their expertise into the language of national priority.

RISK ASSESSMENT UPDATE

The following assessment identifies the critical risks facing the American Historical Association (AHA) and its members as of January 2026. The landscape has shifted from a state of emerging threats to one of realized consequences, which may be grouped into 3 major categories: **Realized Administrative Lawfare** (immediate crises), **Governance and Statutory Vulnerabilities** (institutional survival), and **Persistent Sector-Wide Pressures** (long-term structural threats).

TABLE 1: AHA FEDERAL RELATIONS RISK ASSESSMENT, UPDATED JAN 2026

Category	Risk	2025 Origin	2026 Status	Priority
Administrative Lawfare	Grant Terminations	Scrutiny of Grantmaking (#2)	Realized	Critical
	Reinstatement of Schedule F	Sector-Wide Actions (#8)	Realized	Critical
	Vetting/Banned Terms	Interpretation Mandates (#5)	Realized	High
Governance and Statutory Vulnerabilities	Charter Weaponization	Targeted Oversight (#7)	Escalated	High
	Governance and Fiduciary	Gaza Resolution (#6)	Mitigated/Ongoing	High
Persistent Sector-Wide Pressures	Institutional Realignment	Sector-Wide Actions (#8)	Ongoing	Moderate
	Visa/Scholar Restrictions	Visa Policy (#3)	Ongoing	Moderate
	Nonprofit/Debanking	Nonprofit Oversight (#4)	Emerging	Moderate

CATEGORY A. REALIZED ADMINISTRATIVE LAWFARE

RISK #1. FEDERAL GRANT TERMINATION

Key Risk Factors: The landscape of federal funding moved from heightened scrutiny to active termination in the final quarter of 2025. This risk has escalated from scrutiny to the active cancellation of grants. The Department of Education realized these threats by canceling close to 20 American history projects under the premise that they are inconsistent with the best interests of the federal government. This stems (in large part) from the August 7, 2025, Executive Order: Improving Oversight of Federal Grantmaking. The EO specifically prohibits funding for research deemed to promote anti-American values or that uses race as a selection criterion, and it directs agencies to designate a senior appointee to ensure all discretionary funding aligns with national interest priorities. The Administration now uses the False Claims Act as a tool for political conditionality, targeting nonprofits that certify compliance with anti-DEI mandates.

Beyond cancellations, the administration has introduced termination for convenience language into new grant terms and conditions. As noted in the TRP Memorandum on the Grantmaking EO, this addition makes it significantly more difficult for grantees to pursue legal action against wrongful terminations. Furthermore, the administration has signaled a move toward using the False Claims Act to target nonprofits that certify compliance with federal non-discrimination laws while maintaining diversity, equity, and inclusion programs. This creates a cycle of political conditionality where funding is no longer tied to scholarly merit but to perceived ideological alignment.

Implications for AHA

- **Financial Instability:** Multi-year projects face sudden funding withdrawals under the termination for convenience clause, jeopardizing long-term research.
- **Legal Liability:** Increased costs to ensure that all federal grant reporting and certifications withstand the scrutiny of False Claims Act investigations.
- **Weakening of Peer Review:** Expert review panels remain advisory only; funding decisions now frequently deviate from peer recommendations based on political sign-off.

RISK #2. REINSTATEMENT OF SCHEDULE F (SCHEDULE POLICY/CAREER)

Evolution of Oct 2025 Risk #2

Key Risk Factors: On January 20, 2025, President Trump signed Executive Order 14171, effectively reinstating the 2020 Schedule F policy under the new designation of Schedule Policy/Career. On November 21, 2025, OPM finalized regulations that strip civil service protections from positions of a confidential, policy-determining, or policy-advocating character, reclassifying these professionals as at-will employees who can be terminated for resistance to policy or subversion of presidential directives.

This reclassification represents an existential threat to AHA members within the federal workforce. OPM is currently reviewing agency head-count plans to identify the estimated 50,000 employees to be moved into this category. Federal historians at the Department of Defense, National Park Service, and the State Department are primary targets. We already see the realized impact of this shift: the administration has initiated content reviews at the Smithsonian and the NPS to remove historical narratives deemed ideologically driven, signaling that federal historians who do not align with patriotic education mandates now face immediate professional liability.

Implications for AHA

- **Loss of Institutional Memory:** The mass reclassification of archivists and historians at NARA and the DOD threatens to dismantle the objective management of federal records.
- **Scholarly Self-Censorship:** Federal researchers may be forced to suppress findings that contradict administration narratives to avoid termination under at-will status.
- **Marginalization of Expertise:** The role of the professional historian is being shifted from an independent technical advisor to a political functionary subject to administrative purges.

Recommended Response

- **The Veterans' Narrative:** Frame the protection of federal history offices as an essential support for veterans' benefits and national security infrastructure.
- **Targeted Hill Advocacy:** Focus Q1 engagement on the Armed Services and Veterans' Affairs committees to highlight that 30 percent of federal historian staff are veterans or military spouses.
- **Technical Advisor Role:** Position the AHA as a technical resource for the government, demonstrating that historical expertise is a nonpartisan asset for government continuity.

RISK #3. VETTING AND BANNED TERMINOLOGY

Evolution of Oct 2025 Risk #1 & #8

Key Risk Factors: A new regime of extreme vetting has emerged, where federal research grants and program reports are screened for red flag terminology. Agency memos from the Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) and the Office of Management and Budget have established review mechanisms that flag concepts such as academic freedom, systemic racism, or diversity. This screening has already impacted the National Endowment for the Humanities and the Department of Education, where program cycles have been delayed to allow for interagency review of grantmaking strategies.

This environment has created a naming stalemate for AHA committees and publications. As noted in recent advocacy reports, finding mission-aligned alternatives such as integrity of scholarship or viewpoint diversity has become a defensive necessity to avoid immediate funding denials. The August 7 Executive Order formalizes this by making expert review panels merely advisory, allowing funding decisions to deviate from peer recommendations based on the presence of flagged language. This shift replaces professional autonomy with a system of political vetting that targets the foundational language of the discipline.

Implications for AHA

- **Grant Renewal Delays:** Award announcements are delayed as interagency reviewers screen applications for prohibited concepts.
- **Application Complexity:** The need for constant revision of public-facing materials to navigate vetting filters increases the administrative burden on staff and project leads.
- **Erosion of Peer Review:** Political appointees gain final authority over awards, rendering the expert peer review process secondary to ideological alignment.

Recommended Response

- **Develop Compliance Protocols:** Create an internal protocol for vetting grant application language against current agency red flags.
- **Translation Training:** Use the Historian as Advocate seminars to train members in translating scholarly expertise into policy-aligned terminology.
- **Monitor Flagged Terms:** Maintain a real-time list of red flag terms and provide updates to project leads to ensure grant viability.

CATEGORY B. GOVERNANCE AND STATUTORY VULNERABILITIES

RISK #4. STATUTORY WEAPONIZATION OF THE TITLE 36 CHARTER

Evolution of Oct 2025 Risk #7

Key Risk Factors: During the final quarter of 2025, the administration and key House committees transitioned from general oversight to a targeted weaponization of the AHA 1889 Congressional Charter [36 U.S.C. § 21301]. This shift was codified on December 12, 2025, when the House Education and the Workforce Committee launched a formal investigation into the American Psychological Association (APA). The committee is utilizing the APA official standing as a national society to justify a detailed inquiry into internal communications and listserv records to determine if the organization has violated its nonpartisan mission.

For the AHA, this creates a statutory hook for similar intervention. Opponents are now framing professional resolutions on international military conflicts not as protected speech, but as a violation of the Association statutory mandate to focus exclusively on the promotion of historical studies and preservation of historical manuscripts. Because the AHA is required to report annually to the Secretary of the Smithsonian, who then communicates with Congress, the Association is under a state of permanent investigatory visibility that treats ideological deviation as a potential breach of federal law.

Implications for AHA

- **Invasive Oversight:** Internal listservs and business meeting transcripts could be subpoenaed under the guise of investigating charter compliance.
- **Legislative Rescission:** Hostile members of Congress may introduce amendments to revoke the AHA charter entirely if it is deemed ideologically captured.
- **Reputational Marginalization:** The AHA status as a professional authority is being replaced in the eyes of Congress with that of a partisan interest group.

RISK #5. GOVERNANCE AND FIDUCIARY RISK

Evolution of Oct 2025 Risk #6

Key Risk Factors: Throughout 2025, AHA faced significant reputational and operational risks stemming from internal debates over controversial international resolutions. The January 2026 Annual Meeting served as a critical test of the Association governance and its resilience against external oversight. While the membership successfully voted to place controversial resolutions on the Council agenda, the subsequent Council veto to prevent these measures from advancing to a full membership vote was a decisive act of mission defense. By exercising its fiduciary authority, the Council averted the immediate statutory hook that House investigators have utilized to target peer organizations like the American Psychological Association. This action prevented the Association from entering a state of realized politicization that would have likely triggered formal records requests or challenges to its tax-exempt status.

The events of January 2026 confirm that the Association remains vulnerable to a recurring reactivity trap, which functions as an operational tax, depleting the staff bandwidth required for high-stakes federal defense. Furthermore, any failure to maintain strict mission boundaries provides a statutory hook for external oversight, as evidenced by the ongoing House investigation into the APA for perceived ideological capture. The ease with which sub-groups can mobilize the membership to force a mission-adjacent vote creates a state of permanent operational fragility. Even when resolutions are successfully vetoed, the public nature of the debate provides critics with the ammunition necessary to frame the AHA as an ideologically captured institution. In an environment where the administrative state is being systematically aligned with patriotic education mandates, any future attempts to wade into international military or political conflicts will be interpreted by federal appropriators as a violation of the 1889 Charter mandate.

Implications for AHA

- **Statutory Vulnerability:** Repetitive, out-of-scope debates invite federal investigators to question the Association's adherence to its congressional mandate.
- **Fiduciary Drain:** The continuous diversion of resources to manage sub-group mobilization is a misallocation of the Association's professional and financial assets.
- **Operational Fragility:** The "death spiral of reactivity" prevents the execution of proactive strategic goals, such as the Veterans' Narrative and the Whitewashing Tracker.

Recommended Response

- **Codify the Mission Filter:** Establish a formal, non-recursive criteria for all future requests for public statements, ensuring they are strictly vetted against the 1889 Charter.
- **Align Governance:** Utilize the January 2026 veto as a safe harbor precedent to prevent future mission-creep and preserve the Association's nonpartisan standing in Washington.
- **Institutionalize Humanitarian Support:** Channel all member concerns regarding conflict zones into the standing International Historical Activities Committee, decoupling humanitarian work from high-risk political resolutions.
- **Institutionalize Humanitarian Engagement:** Route all concerns regarding historians in conflict zones through the standing International Historical Activities Committee to ensure they are handled within an established professional framework.
- **Reinforce Bipartisan Narrative:** Immediately pivot the Association public messaging toward the veterans narrative and civic utility to overwrite the temporary reputational damage caused by the annual meeting debates.
- **Educate Membership on Governance Risks:** Use the Historian as Advocate seminars to educate the membership on the federal risks associated with out-of-scope advocacy, framing the veto as a necessary act of institutional survival.

CATEGORY C. PERSISTENT SECTOR-WIDE PRESSURES

RISK #6. SECTOR-WIDE INSTITUTIONAL REALIGNMENT

Evolution of Oct 2025 Risk #8

Key Risk Factors: The ideological scrutiny of higher education has matured from rhetoric into a coordinated effort to mandate institutional realignment through federal financial leverage. Central to this is the implementation of the Compact for Academic Excellence in Higher Education, which encourages universities to certify that their curricula and administrative units align with national heritage and workforce readiness priorities as a condition for favorable federal standing. As of January 2026, the administration has signaled that Title IV student aid eligibility may eventually be linked to institutional compliance with these standards, creating existential financial pressure on university leadership. This realignment frequently prioritizes technical and vocational training at the expense of the humanities. We are seeing a systemic marginalization of history departments as university administrators preemptively reduce faculty lines in programs deemed ideologically out of step with the new federal Compact. This environment is further complicated by the systematic exclusion of professional societies from federal advisory councils, where scholarly expertise is being replaced by political appointees committed to "patriotic education" mandates.

Mitigation Targets and Strategic Response

- **Address Secondary Funding Erosion:** As university partners face federal funding rescissions or private donor withdrawal due to perceived non-compliance with the Compact, the AHA will emphasize its role in developing transferable skills—such as data synthesis and critical analysis—that are essential for the modern workforce.
- **Defend Professional Standards:** In response to the exclusion of scholarly societies from federal policy discussions, the AHA will protect its **Technical Advisor Status** by highlighting its longstanding service as a nonpartisan resource for U.S. historical literacy and government continuity.
- **Combat Career Precarity:** The downsizing of history departments reduces the core constituency of the Association. AHA will deepen its federated response with adjacent professional associations to coordinate the defense of academic autonomy.

RISK #7. VISA POLICY AND INTERNATIONAL SCHOLAR RESTRICTIONS

Persistent Oct 2025 Risk #3

Key Risk Factors: The international scholarly pipeline is facing significant disruption due to the expansion of ideological screening and enhanced social media vetting for visiting scholars. Under current State Department guidance, scholars from "countries of concern" face protracted administrative processing times that often exceed 12 months, effectively barring them from participating in U.S.-based conferences and research collaborations. Furthermore, the administration has expanded the use of the National Security Presidential Memorandum-7 (NSPM-7) framework to scrutinize international partnerships in the social sciences and humanities, not just the STEM fields. This environment creates a chilling effect on global scholarly exchange, as international historians become increasingly hesitant to participate in AHA activities due to the risk of being denied entry or facing invasive questioning at the border.

Mitigation Targets and Strategic Response

- **Prevent Annual Meeting Disruption:** The inability of international scholars to secure visas undermines the global reach of the AHA. The Association will systematically document the impact of delays on specific research projects to engage the State Department for "national interest" exemptions for scholarly travel.
- **Maintain Global Collaborations:** To combat the stalling of multi-national research projects, the AHA will continue to expand high-quality virtual participation options for international members to maintain global scholarly networks despite physical travel restrictions.
- **Frame Global Influence as National Asset:** Bipartisan engagement will frame international scholarly exchange as a tool of **National Soft Power**, arguing that the presence of international scholars in the U.S. supports the spread of American historical and democratic values.

RISK #8. NONPROFIT OVERSIGHT AND FINANCIAL "DEBANKING"

(Persistent Oct 2025 Risk #4):

Persistent Oct 2025 Risk #4

Key Risk Factors: A burgeoning risk area involves the use of financial and tax-exempt oversight to scrutinize the operations of mission-driven nonprofits. The Treasury Department has increased the use of anti-terrorist financing and anti-money laundering regulations to monitor the financial transactions of organizations engaged in international or contested domestic programming. This has led to a trend of "de-risking" by major financial institutions, where banks may freeze accounts or delay wire transfers for organizations deemed to have a "high-risk" profile.

The AHA is vulnerable here due to its involvement in international historical activities and its support for historians in conflict zones. Any perceived misalignment with federal foreign policy can trigger these financial oversight mechanisms. Furthermore, the administration has signaled a desire to grant the Treasury Department greater authority to revoke tax-exempt status for organizations deemed inconsistent with federal priorities, presenting a plausible downward risk to institutions engaged in public-facing, somewhat contested programming.

Mitigation Targets and Strategic Response

- **Minimize Operational Delays:** To prevent frozen assets from disrupting international research grants or payroll, the AHA will conduct a comprehensive audit of all international financial transactions to ensure they are fully aligned with the current administration's regulatory requirements.
- **Manage Compliance Costs:** The Association will invest in more sophisticated financial auditing to ensure all transactions withstand the scrutiny of Treasury and IRS oversight.
- **Ensure Transparency in Humanitarian Work:** All support for historians in conflict zones will be meticulously documented and clearly integrated into mission-aligned professional categories to avoid the appearance of high-risk activity.

FEDERAL RELATIONS STRATEGY & IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

As of January 20, 2026. The federal funding landscape has shifted significantly this month, transitioning from a state of total stagnation to one of rapid, late-stage resolution for the majority of the fiscal year 2026 budget. While TRP has identified volatility in the split-screen reality, several critical agencies are no longer operating under the cloud of an immediate shutdown.

On January 15, the Senate passed a significant three-bill funding package that includes the Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies bill. This legislation, which covers the National Endowment for the Humanities and the Institute of Museum and Library Services, passed with a bipartisan 82 to 15 vote and has been sent to the President for signature. This development provides full-year funding certainty for these agencies and moves them out of the January 30 Continuing Resolution window. Similarly, as of this morning, congressional leaders released the text for the final four-bill "minibus" which includes Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education. This package is currently being fast-tracked for a vote before the end of the month, though the Department of Education remains a primary target for administrative restructuring and funding redirection.¹

Despite this progress toward fiscal stability, the ideological threats to the profession have intensified. The Department of Justice is now moving from theory to practice regarding the use of the False Claims Act to target nonprofits. New reports indicate that civil investigative demands are being issued to organizations that receive federal funding while maintaining diversity, equity, and inclusion programs, framing these initiatives as potential fraud against the government. Furthermore, the implementation of the Schedule Policy/Career classification, formerly known as Schedule F, is proceeding with the Office of Personnel Management circulating final regulations. For AHA members within the federal civil service, the risk of being reclassified as at-will employees remains the most acute threat to the integrity of federal historical work.

In response to the realized administrative consequences and structural threats detailed in the preceding sections, **Thorn Run Partners recommends that the Association transition from a reactive, protection-based posture to a proactive campaign of institutional resilience.** This strategy is designed to decouple the Association from partisan volatility by anchoring its value in the language of civic utility, national security, and workforce readiness. The following three-pillar framework provides a coordinated roadmap to navigate the 2026 legislative and regulatory landscape, ensuring that the American Historical Association maintains its standing as a trusted, essential resource for the federal government. **Although our emphasis in this report is preparing for Q1,** the anticipated 2026 implementation plan is summarized in Table 2 and detailed below.

TABLE 1: FEDERAL RELATIONS STRATEGY IMPLEMENTATION PLAN, 2026

Pillar	Recommended Key Actions	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Quantify Value	Deploy Veterans' Narrative briefing materials to Hill offices	■	■		
	Launch Whitewashing Tracker for federal censorship monitoring	■			
	Highlight national security strategy integration	■	■	■	■
	Quantify the Federal Workforce		■	■	■
Build Relationships	Conduct March Hill Day with veteran-historian voices.	■	■		
	Coordinate joint action alerts with OAH and NCSS	■	■		
	Initiate targeted committee briefings	■	■	■	
	Partner on Bipartisan History Initiatives	■	■	■	■
Rapid Response	Finalize internal governance protocols for public statements	■			
	Launch Strategic Communications Guide and Member Guidance	■	■		
	Launch Member Education Program and Digital Advocacy Toolkit		■	■	
	Employ tactical mobilization surges	■	■	■	■
	Vet grant terminology against interagency red flags	■	■	■	■

¹ Given the velocity of these changes, TRP will continue to deliver periodic Legislative Updates that highlight developments of interest to AHA. The window between now and January 30 will see the final resolution of the Labor-HHS-Education and Financial Services-General Government bills, the latter of which contains the funding for NARA.

PILLAR I: QUANTIFY AND DEMONSTRATE VALUE (THE VETERANS' NARRATIVE)

Purpose and Objectives: The primary purpose of this pillar is to reframe historical expertise as a critical national utility rather than a discretionary luxury. By systematically documenting the societal and civic contributions of historians, the Association should aim to move the profession into the category of essential national infrastructure. This pillar is specifically intended to address the risks of federal grant termination (Risk 1), administrative purges under Schedule Policy/Career (Risk 2), and sector-wide institutional realignment (Risk 6).

Key Actions:

- **Deploy Veterans' Narrative Briefing Materials:** The Association should deploy specialized briefing materials to congressional staff, particularly those serving on the Veterans' Affairs committees. This narrative should emphasize the role of archivists and historians in facilitating the search for DD-214 records, which are essential for service members to access their earned benefits.
- **Launch the Whitewashing Tracker:** To focus specifically on federal censorship, the Association should launch a systematic tracker to document and categorize instances where historical narratives are being removed or rewritten within federal agencies. This data should provide the evidentiary basis for legislative oversight and public advocacy regarding the integrity of the national record.
- **Highlight National Security Strategy Integration:** The Association should highlight the role of historians in maintaining military readiness and informing strategy within Professional Military Education (PME) institutions. This action should frame historical thinking as a core component of national security rather than an elective academic pursuit.
- **Quantify the Federal Workforce:** The Association should document the percentage of veterans and military spouses currently employed in federal history and archives offices. This data should serve as a bipartisan shield for these positions against the reinstatement of Schedule Policy/Career reclassifications by demonstrating their value to a universally supported constituency.

PILLAR II: BUILD STRATEGIC RELATIONSHIPS (MARCH HILL FLY-IN)

Purpose and Objectives: This pillar focuses on cultivating long-term, trust-based relationships with congressional champions who can provide bipartisan validation for the Association mission. The objective is to create an atmosphere where policymakers are comfortable defending the AHA against ideological vetting or statutory challenges. This pillar is intended to serve as the primary defense against the weaponization of the Title 36 Charter (Risk 4), international scholar restrictions (Risk 7), and the broader erosion of institutional autonomy.

Key Actions:

- **Conduct March Hill Advocacy Surge:** The Association should conduct a formal Hill Day in March 2026, coinciding with the Society for Military History conference, to bring credible veteran-historian voices to the Capitol. This should provide high-level, third-party validation that transcends traditional partisan divides.
- **Coordinate Joint Action Alerts:** The AHA has a proven track record of ad-hoc collaboration. For example, in October 2025, the AHA, OAH, and NCSS issued a Joint Action Alert regarding Patriotic Education funding priorities. While these organizations collaborate on specific crises, AHA does not appear to have a formalized, standing Joint Action Alert system or a coordinated Q1 legislative strategy. TRP recommends moving from event-based cooperation to a strategic sequencing of alerts that aligns with the January 30 appropriations deadline and the February budget request. To maximize influence during the appropriations cycle, the Association should coordinate joint action alerts with peer organizations, and these alerts should present a unified professional front to the House and Senate Appropriations Committees.
- **Initiate Targeted Committee Briefings:** The Association should initiate deep-dive briefings for staff in the House Natural Resources and Veterans' Affairs committees. These sessions should be designed to demonstrate the technical utility of historical infrastructure in park management and veterans' services.
- **Partner on Bipartisan History Initiatives:** The Association should partner with the Congressional Black Caucus and key Republican leaders to frame the study of African American history as a matter of preserving the national public record. This approach should protect sensitive historical topics by anchoring them in the universally accepted value of accurate record-keeping.

PILLAR III: ENABLE RAPID RESPONSE (DECISIVE GOVERNANCE AND STRATEGIC MESSAGING)

Purpose and Objectives: The objective of this pillar is to modernize the Association internal machinery for speed, professional discipline, and disciplined communication. By institutionalizing the governance and communications infrastructure required to respond to legislative crises, the AHA should aim to mitigate the death spiral of reactivity and the risks associated with administrative oversight. These Key Actions described below are designed to systematize and professionalize existing ad-hoc practices, directly addressing governance and fiduciary risks (Risk 5), the challenges of extreme vetting for banned terminology (Risk 3), and potential communications risks associated with public-facing statements.

Key Actions:

- **Implement Institutional Governance Protocols:** The Council should implement clear, non-recursive criteria for public statements. This should ensure that the Association responds only to issues within its statutory mandate, thereby providing a safe harbor against charges of ideological capture and charter weaponization.
- **Launch a Strategic Communications and Member Guidance Guide:** The AHA maintains an official Communications Policy (updated October 2025). This document primarily governs how staff and Council members use social media, emphasizing nonpartisanship and the requirement that they not “state or imply that they officially represent the AHA” without approval. However, there is no public-facing Strategic Communications Guide specifically designed for the broader membership to help them navigate the politicization trap. The current policy is an internal-facing compliance document for leadership; it lacks the defensive, conditional guidance proposed to help members distinguish their individual scholarship or political speech from the Association’s statutory charter, which was a need highlighted by the Gaza resolutions. To mitigate the reputational and statutory risks highlighted by the Gaza resolutions, the Association should develop a formal communications framework. This guide should provide members with clear approaches for public engagement that protect the Association name while distinguishing individual scholarship from official policy. The goal is not to police speech, but to provide the membership with the tools necessary to avoid inadvertently creating a statutory hook for federal intervention.
- **Launch Member Education and Federal Advocacy Toolkit:** The AHA website has an Advocacy section that lists statements, letters to Congress, and Action Alerts. However, efforts to develop a centralized Federal Advocacy Toolkit for members - that includes the Translation Guides (see **Vetting Templates**) or the Action Pod protocols (see **Tactical Mobilization Surges**). Currently, the AHA asks members to take action (like submitting comments), but it does not provide the technical advisor scripts and training intended to professionalize member engagement and mitigate risk to the Charter. To broaden the Association defensive network, AHA should launch a program to educate members on federal developments and institutional risks. This initiative may include semi-annual briefings, co-presented by TRP, and a digital toolkit that provides fact sheets, translation guides for policy-aligned language, and disciplined protocols for congressional engagement.
- **Employ Tactical Mobilization Surges:** The Association should employ the 24-hour surge protocol and Action Pods to deliver locally relevant, data-backed testimony to target staff during critical appropriations deadlines.
- **Utilize Administrative Vetting Templates:** The Association should utilize a library of vetted terminology developed with TRP. This should allow the Association to navigate extreme vetting procedures and avoid red flag terms that trigger grant denials while still maintaining the integrity of its scholarly mission.