

THE SHELBY WHITE AND LEON LEVY PROGRAM
FOR
ARCHAEOLOGICAL PUBLICATIONS

The Shelby White and Leon Levy Program for Archaeological Publications (hereafter WLP) has funded 225 projects over the past 16 years, predominately in Israel, Greece, and the Near East along with some in other parts of the Mediterranean Basin and Eurasia. In order to review the program's successes and shortcomings, and impact on the archaeology of the Near East and neighboring areas, the WLP asked that a Review Committee prepare an External Review Report. The Review Committee was comprised of Dr. Gil J. Stein (Chair and Professor of Near Eastern Archaeology and Director of the Oriental Institute, University of Chicago); Dr. Manfred Bietak (Professor of Egyptology, University of Vienna, and Director of the Austrian Archaeological Institute in Cairo); and Dr. Eric Kansa (Director of Open Context, School of Information, University of California at Berkley).

The program also conducted a survey for past and current grantees, to collect information about their experiences with the WLP. The responses to the survey and other comments were considered and greatly appreciated by the Review Committee as it prepared its External Review Report, which we highlight in the remarks to follow:

During the past decade and a half the WLP has awarded more than 13 million dollars in support of researching and publishing "dormant digs", languishing in wait of funding and archeologists ready and willing to tackle these projects. In the words of the Review Committee,

The White-Levy Program is unique in its primary goal of serving as a catalyst for publication; 16 years after the program's inauguration, it remains true that no other funding source fills this niche and addresses this critical need...The White-Levy Program has been directly responsible for the production of...82 publications [final reports], with an additional 44 in the final stages of publication, and another 95 in process, a record...unmatched by any other funding source dedicated to archaeological research.

The Review Committee concluded that WLP grants are

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highly competitive, are awarded to applicants from the highest quality universities and research institutions, support publication of a broad range of key archaeological sites...and have a significant scholarly impact through the wide distribution and citation of WLP funded publications...making significant contributions to international archaeological research.

The Board has gradually expanded its purview to include partially funding the publication of completed archaeological excavations (at least five or more years old) in Egypt, Nubia, China, and Central Asia. Grant applications for areas not covered by the expertise of the current Board will require outside reviewers.

The gestation period for archaeological publications supported by WLP is about 10 years. Without WLP support, these projects would still lie dormant or take much longer to complete. When this decade long period is taken into account the publication rate is very high, ranging from 60% - 90% over the years, but the gestation period must be reduced considerably, perhaps to as few as five years.

To expedite final publication the Review Committee has recommended that the Board implement more rigorous guidelines and reviews of each grant at the end of the first year of funding, so that all grantees may be reminded to “create digital versions of their data – images, field records, and quantitative data.” This will greatly shorten publication time, facilitate sharing among specialists writing for the jointly authored volume, and expedite analysis and write-up. In addition such initial digitization and computer aided management will go far toward meeting professional obligations for the “curation, preservation and dissemination of the original field data as well as provide data sets to the host countries where the digs took place.”

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The Review Committee then recommends that the WLP

Expand its definition of acceptable publications beyond book formats to allow for electronic, digital publication and potentially web based data archives as acceptable ways to meet the grant's publication requirement.

All of these recommendations are under consideration by the Board and will be implemented in the near future.

In its conclusions the Review Committee gave this assessment of the Shelby White and Leon Levy Archaeological Publications Program. The WLP is

Fundamentally strong...and has a clear vision of its goals, and is performing at an extremely high level of quality and productivity. WLP remains the only program of its kind to support the critically important need for the analysis and publication of completed excavations in the Near East and eastern Mediterranean. The publication rates are high and fully justify the focus of the program. WLP funded publications have high visibility, broad dissemination, and scholarly impact.

The Review Committee has provided a path forward to the Board to improve on its "already successful, organized model" by "adapting to the changing landscape of publication media, costs, and emerging research opportunities and needs" during the next decade. We thank those of you that participated in the survey for your invaluable experience and advice, and we look forward to implementing the changes suggested by the Review Committee to help the WLP continue to flourish.