A Proposal:  
U.S.-Mexico Border Archive & Special Collections

The New Mexico State University Library requests funding for acquiring, preserving, and providing access to unique materials documenting U.S.-Mexico border history, culture, and social reality in all formats, including, but not limited to, manuscript collections, published primary sources such as newspapers and other local media, visual records (photography and video), oral histories, and other materials that might be produced in digital or other formats.

Relevance/Justification

New Mexico State University (NMSU) is located in southern New Mexico fifty miles from Ciudad Juárez, Mexico. As the only land grant university that is classified as a Carnegie High Research Institution, a Minority-serving institution, and a Hispanic-serving institution, NMSU is in a unique position to collect, preserve, and provide access to unique research materials in all formats documenting U.S.-Mexico border history, culture and social reality. These historical materials are much in demand from the NMSU Library by students, faculty, the community, and national and international scholars.

The NMSU Library’s Archives and Special Collections Department has collected materials on the history and heritage of the border region since 1972. These collections include the papers of the prominent local Amador and Armijo families, as well as records from the archbishopric of Durango, Mexico, and the town of Sombrerete, Mexico. A recent acquisition, the Esther Chávez Cano Collection, 1990-2006, documents more than fifteen years of social reality in Juárez and Chihuahua, Mexico. Esther Chávez Cano was a noted human rights activist and the founder of Casa Amiga, the first domestic violence shelter in Cuidad Juarez. Her work there has become a model, both nationally and internationally, and since the shelter opened in February 1999, more than 80,000 women, children and men have been served it. (More information about her life, work, and archives can be found at http://lib.nmsu.edu/aboutlib/libnews/EstherAwards.shtml.) In its brief residence in the Library, the Chávez Cano collection has already attracted extraordinary interest, bringing researchers from as far away as Yale University. Collecting similar materials is a matter of the utmost urgency.

The U.S.-Mexico border is the most extreme instance in the world today of a wealthy industrial society grating against a poor third world economy. The varied experiences of life and death on this border today are being erased faster than they can become known, studied, and understood. The border is (and has been for generations) part of the experience of millions of Americans and their descendants, many of whom cross without documentation and thus leave no official record of their journey. Knowledge of the physical landscape of the border remains so inadequate that political leaders mandate the construction of barriers with little or no knowledge of what building a wall on such terrain entails, how easily such barriers can be destroyed, or the damage that such activities can cause to natural and human communities along the border. The international drug trade—one of the world’s largest industries according to the United Nations—generates huge profits as well as unprecedented violence in border communities; yet because it is illicit and clandestine, it remains all but invisible except for the nota roja—the “red pages” of local newspapers and also in records created by individuals and social organizations working on the ground to ameliorate the effects of resulting crime and violence. The U.S.-Mexico Border
Archive and Special Collections project will reclaim and preserve memories, experiences and documents of individuals and groups on both sides of the international border and will be a repository for the history and history-in-the-making of this unique region. Support for such an effort at this juncture is crucial if we are to understand the causes behind the rising tide of violence across Mexico, and, more important, preserve records that detail the human cost and the abuses taking place on the ground. If this history is not to be buried, steps must be taken to document it as it is unfolding. This is the goal of the proposed U.S-Mexico Border Archive at NMSU.

Project Description
The aim of the U.S.-Mexico Border Archive and Special Collections project is to acquire additional primary source materials to document the history, culture and social reality of the border region. The project includes three components:

1. **Acquisition**
   Faculty and trained graduate students from the NMSU Library and the Center for Latin American and Border Studies will travel within the border region to identify individuals and organizations as sources for materials and collections documenting U.S.-Mexico border history, culture and social issues in various formats.

2. **Processing and preservation**
   The Library will contract a professional archivist with needed Spanish language skills and other relevant experience to facilitate the acquisition, preservation and organization of materials and prepare finding aids for the records according to standard archival practices. Records acquired for the U.S-Mexico Border Archive and Special Collections will be housed in the Library. In future years, we may seek the funding necessary to accommodate the space requirements as the collections grow.

3. **Dissemination**
   The Library will work with the NMSU Center for Latin American and Border Studies to publicize the collection nationally and internationally through conferences, workshops, journal articles, news coverage and web pages. The Center's existing outreach programs, which include the online news source Frontera NorteSur, [www.nmsu.edu/~frontera](http://www.nmsu.edu/~frontera), will guarantee wide dissemination among scholars, students, K-12 educators, policy makers, the media, business and non-profit agencies.

*The acquisition of new materials and preservation of existing materials are immediate priorities.* Library staff is working to acquire numerous materials in addition to archival documents already housed at NMSU. These include:

1. **The photographic materials of French photographer, Maurice Sherif.** Sherif is involved in a long term project to document in photographs and texts the construction of the border wall. It is an amazing project and you can get an idea of the extraordinary nature of his work here: [http://www.mauricesherif.com](http://www.mauricesherif.com). Sherif has decided that he would like to deposit many of the negatives and the raw materials of this project with the NMSU Library Archives and Special Collections.
2. **Other collections of photographers working currently on the border (Julian Cardona, etc.).** The library is in conversations with many of the leading documentary photographers and photo-journalists working documenting the changing human and natural environments in communities on both sides of the line. *A majority of these have expressed interest in donating their work to the NMSU Border Archive Project.*

3. **The papers of Casa Tabor, a religious community based in Juarez.** Casa Tabor has documented the activities of religious and secular human rights workers in Latin America since the early 1980s. Library staff has made several visits to Casa Tabor and spoken extensively with Father Peter Hinde and Sister Betty Campbell of Tabor House. They have also visited the NMSU Archives twice and are in the process of organizing their materials for the Library to pick up.

4. **Digitilizing and preserving materials collected as part of the Frontera Listserv curated by Professor Molly Molloy.** NMSU library staff are currently in discussion with an ICT analyst about the process of microfilming and/or digitalizing articles from newspapers from Ciudad Juarez and Chihuahua and other parts of Mexico as well as other records assembled for the listserv in a database. This will enable researchers to learn more about the nature of these crimes and the victims.

The above represent acquisition and/or preservation and archiving projects already underway. However, the Border Archive once established could potentially house many more such collections and materials. While we envision, the collection being somewhat eclectic, we feel that a broad range of materials is necessary to prove full accurate documentation of the disparate events and elements (migration, globalization, the drug industry, the violence) that make up the current context of the border. Among other efforts to gain funding, NMSU is currently working on a Federal Initiative to be submitted through the Vice-President for Research at the University.

The urgent need for such an archive is documented in the attached letter of support for the project by Charles Bowden, one of the most famous journalists and authors writing about this region of the U.S.-Mexico Border. We would be happy to discuss the project further and to look at different methods by which this effort could be supported. Present needs include monies for the digitalization and preservation of existing materials, money to support new acquisition, and stipend stipends to support archive training and ongoing development of accessible databases, and outreach and education. Some of these costs are outlined in more detail in the attached Project Costs sheet.

Thank you for your consideration. We look forward to speaking with you further about this important project.

**Project Partners**
New Mexico State University Library
New Mexico State University Center for Latin American and Border Studies
U.S.-Mexico Border Archive & Special Collections  
Project Costs  

Funding Requested  
The funds listed here will enable the initiation and continuation of different aspects of this project.

$ 100,000 (annually): **Coordination and Project Management.** These costs will cover Project Director/Archivist in the University Library, Department of Archives and Special Collections. This funding may be applied to one person who could perform both roles, or it could be applied to two different Library faculty assigned for part of their time to different aspects of the project. *It is envisioned that the Project Director role will include acquisition of collections, outreach to potential donors and programming. The Archivist role will include processing collections, training and supervising graduate students and maintenance of established archival practices in the development of the Border Archive and Special Collections.*

$ 20,000 (annually): **Technology and Archive Preservation.** The main cost under this category is for the microfilming and/or digitizing of newspapers from Ciudad Juarez, Chihuahua and other border communities. This figure is based on an initial estimate of the cost to microfilm the major daily newspaper, *Diario de Juarez* ($7,000). The other funding would allow the Library to begin collecting other border newspapers including the tabloid press. *This funding could also be applied to digitizing these materials in order to make the information accessible to more researchers, through electronic media which would allow for much greater access.*

$ 32,000 (annually): **Training and Professional Development and Support.** The main line item here would be to support graduate student research assistantships in the Archives and Special Collections Department of the Library. This would also create a body of trained young researchers, with unique experience in border reasearch. These students may be pursuing graduate study at NMSU in History, Anthropology, Languages and Linguistics, Art, Journalism, Government, Latin American Studies or other disciplines with an emphasis on the U.S.-Mexico border and/or Latin American Studies. *The students would be trained in archival practices including the acquisition, preservation and arrangement of collections, oral history interviewing, preparation of online guides and finding aids to the collections, etc.* This estimate is based on an academic year assistantship of $16,000 for two graduate students.

$ 50,000 (one-time funding): **Acquisition of Photo Documentation.** This funding would allow the Library to acquire photographic archives from working photographers and photo-journalists in the border region who are compiling a comprehensive documentation of the environmental and human story of the intersection of the U.S. and Mexico at this historical juncture.