

Common Collection Assessment for Preservation (CAP) Recommendations

Ford Conservation Center

Collection Assessment for Preservation



“The **Collections Assessment for Preservation (CAP)** program provides small and mid-sized museums with partial funding toward a general conservation assessment. The assessment is a study of all of the institution's collections, buildings, and building systems, as well as its policies and procedures relating to collections care. Participants who complete the program receive an assessment report with prioritized recommendations to improve collections care. CAP is often a first step for small institutions that wish to improve the

condition of their collections. “ - American Institute for Conservation <http://www.conservation-us.org/grants/cap>

Having done a number of CAP Assessments over the years, the Ford Center staff has put together this guide which details solutions to common problems seen in museums. For additional information on environmental controls, lighting, and Integrated Pest Management, visit our Resources page at www.history.nebraska.gov/conservation-center/resources.

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Collections Shelving and Storage

To the extent required, storage rooms should be filled with standard size shelving for the storage of moderately sized and larger artifacts. Purchase enough additional interior shelves to maximize the density of storage, opti-

mally with no box stacking. If stacking is necessary, do not go more than two boxes high. Without enough shelves, objects in boxes are subjected to heavy levels of stacking, making retrieval difficult, and increasing the risk of collapse of the box on the bot-



tom of any given stack. Un-stacking and re-stacking boxes to reach the bottom box wastes precious time and could result in personal injury or artifact damage.

All of the shelving units should be labeled with permanent location numbers. A common location scheme is to label each row of shelves, followed by each unit or range, in the row, followed by each shelf in the unit. This creates a six digit location number with slash marks or hyphens, for example, 12/05/02, meaning row 12, unit 5, and shelf 2. When designating locations, continue the row, range, and shelf (or drawer) numbers across the storage rooms rather than starting over in each room. This will ensure that all locations will have unique designations.

Because they function as protective structures, shelving units should not have anything stored on their tops. To provide leak and dust protection to open shelving units, the tops and faces can be covered with heavy food-grade

polyethylene sheeting. On steel shelving, covers can be held in place with magnets. Artifacts moved to storage should either be placed in acid-free boxes or protected with covers.

To the extent possible, standardize box sizes in multiples that fill the shelving should be used. For example, with 24 x 48 inch shelving, use 18 x 40 inch textile boxes or pairs of 20 x 24 inch boxes, etc. to maximize the density of storage on the shelves. Store small artifacts in boxes designed to hold stacks of shallow internal trays. Artifacts too heavy to store in boxes may be stored on the shelves with Tyvek® or polyethylene sheeting covers over them. Items that are too large or heavy to store on the shelves should be placed on pedestals fitted with wheels so they can be moved safely.

To maximize the efficiency of the storage, artifacts should be grouped by type, leaving some space in each shelving unit for future acquisitions if possible. Do not make the mistake of organizing artifacts by city or donor or historical divisions, as this will seriously reduce space efficiency. Use collections management software to track the location of each artifact, updating the records with the new shelf location each time it is moved. As these activities progress, it will become easier to carry out spot-check inventories and change exhibits.

Seek out opportunities for training in current best practices for preserva-

tion activities. There are good classes available at the International Preservation Studies Center in Freeport, IL, or a conservator could be hired to provide training using in-house collections. There are also many web-based sources of information, including the Ford Center's Resources page at www.historynebraska.gov/conservation-center/resources.

To accomplish all the tasks needed to create or improve the storage areas, break the work into manageable chunks and develop discreet rehousing projects for different sections of the collection. Document-

ing, organizing, and developing budgets for these projects would help provide the information needed to advocate for the addition of a full or part time staff member professionally trained in museum studies, particularly in collections management. In the meantime, I encourage the staff and board members to consider listing and organizing the projects noted in this report so that preliminary budgets and schedules can be developed for their future activities. These lists will also be useful to help guide and organize potential group volunteer projects.

Artifact Preparation Room

Every museum needs a secure, lockable workroom in which to prepare artifacts for exhibit, clean and house them for storage, or examine and document them for the database. Such a space should not be used to store artifacts, holiday decorations, museum shop items, or brochures; and it should never be located in the artifact storage area.

Once an appropriate space has been chosen, it should be cleaned out, painted, and fitted with a locking door. Install open steel shelving or closed cabinets to hold supplies and small equipment. Stock the shelves with cotton and latex gloves, vacuum cleaner components and spare bags, measuring tapes, acid free boxes and tissue, clean white sheets for work surfac-



es, moving blankets to pad the tables, etc. As needed, roll racks can be added to one wall for efficient storage of Tyvek, polyethylene sheet, and acid free tissue on rolls.



One corner of the room should be dedicated to housing a small photo set up with a digital camera on a tripod so that documentary photography can be done efficiently. Set up a computer work area so that information can be added to the artifact database. Provide a sturdy worktable, preferably at least 4 x 8 feet, and on wheels if possible so that it can easily be moved as needed. A pair of smaller tables would also work as long as they are sturdy. One benefit of a pair of tables is the ability to place them either side-by-side or end-to-end to accommodate the widest variety of artifact sizes and shapes. The size of the room will be the limiting factor. Several comfortable, ergonomic rolling task chairs and good lighting will also help maximize functionality.

It is very helpful to have a small space with a locking door adjacent to the workroom, where artifacts can be held temporarily. Such a space is useful to hold objects pulled for exhibit or waiting for cataloging and accessioning, potential donations, etc. Items like this should not be held in office spaces.



Non-Collections Storage

In addition to artifact storage, it is important to have areas dedicated to the storage of cleaning supplies, holiday decorations, maintenance equipment, and other materials needed to manage the property. These items should not be stored in

the artifact storage area. Materials like this can be inexpensively condensed using tall rolling wire kitchen shelving units. Because they are on wheels, these shelving units can be packed into storage areas and rolled out as needed to facilitate

efficient installation and de-installation of decorations during the holidays or other seasonal events.

The best way to accomplish all the tasks needed to improve the storage areas will be to break the work into manageable chunks and develop discreet rehousing projects for different sections of the collection. Documenting, organizing, and developing budgets for these

projects would help provide the information needed to advocate for the addition of a full or part time staff member professionally trained in museum studies, particularly in collections management. Consider listing and organizing the projects so that preliminary budgets and schedules can be developed. These lists will also be useful to help guide and organize potential group volunteer activities.

Organizations

Staff and interested board members are encouraged to continue pursuing information and training opportunities in topics related to collections care. Many excellent sources of information can be had through membership in local, regional, and national museum organizations including the Nebraska Museums Association (NMA), the Mountain-Plains Museums Association (MPMA), and the American Association for State and Local History (AASLH).

The NMA provides a way for Nebraska institutions to connect with other organizations in the state facing similar obstacles. The MPMA connects museums and historical societies across a larger ten-state region. AASLH has a very good self-study program called “StEPs”, which helps guide smaller historical institutions in the understanding and development of policies, procedures, and practices that meet cur-

rently accepted professional museum standards. The small cost of membership in these organizations is quickly offset by the value gained through increased access to expertise, web-based resources, and discounts on publications and products used for collections care.

Beyond membership in professional organizations, The International Preservation Studies Center in Freeport, IL, provides year-round training opportunities in a variety of preservation topics. Some very good web-based resources are available, including the National Park Service’s NPS Museum Handbook and Conserve-O-Grams, and the Canadian Conservation Institute’s Conservation Resources, including CCI Notes. The Ford Center also provides artifact care information and professional conservation services at our website:

www.historynebraska.gov/conservation-center.

Consulting a Conservator

You can contact the staff at the Ford Conservation Center to find out more about getting a CAP Assessment or about collections care and storage.

Additional Resources and References

Metrocarts and similar wire shelving can be found at : https://www.uline.com/Grp_390/Wire-Carts

International Preservation Studies Center: <http://www.preservationcenter.org/>

Is CAP a Good Fit for My Institution? : <http://www.conservation-us.org/grants/cap/apply/is-cap-right-for-my-institution>

Conservation Suppliers

Conservation Resources International

7350-A Lockport Place
Lorton, Virginia 22079
Toll free: (800) 634-6932
www.conservationresources.com
Archival housing/storage supplies, photographic supplies, general

Gaylord Archival

P. O. Box 4901
Syracuse, NY 13221-4901
Toll Free: (800) 448-6160
www.gaylord.com
General conservation supplies, housing supplies

Hollinger Metal Edge, Inc.

9401 Northeast Drive
Fredericksburg, VA 22408
Toll Free: (800) 634-0491
www.hollingermetaledge.com
Archival housing/storage supplies

Light Impressions

100 Carlson Road
Rochester, NY 14610
Toll Free: (888) 222-2054
www.lightimpressionsdirect.com
Photographic supplies, housing, matting and framing supplies

University Products

517 Main Street
P. O. Box 101
Holyoke, MA 01041
Toll Free: (800) 628-1912
www.universityproducts.com
General conservation supplies, housing and matting supplies

Talas

330 Morgan Ave
Brooklyn, NY 11211
Telephone: (212) 219-0770
www.talasonline.com
Conservation supplies, photographic supplies, general



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