



PRESERVATION PLANNING

Collections management and preservation must be considered in all institutional decisions, from building maintenance to security to staffing. Only when the infrastructure of collections care and management is in place and is constantly and consistently supported can an institution safely design and install exhibitions, plan public programming, and provide researcher access. The public entrusts cultural institutions with the task of properly caring for collection materials, and the institution has an ethical obligation to do this to the best of its ability.

A written preservation plan is a document that “defines and charts a course of action to meet an institution’s overall preservation needs for its collections... It provides the framework or context for carrying out established goals and priorities in a logical, efficient, and effective manner; it is a working tool for achieving agreed-upon priorities over a set period of time.”¹

PREPARING FOR THE PLANNING PROCESS

A good starting point for preservation planning is to carry out a preservation needs assessment. The assessment report can serve as a guide for creating a preservation plan, generating a list of preservation priorities, and assessing other preservation needs. The report will help to evaluate preservation issues and provide greater awareness of the conditions of an institution’s collections. Recommendations highlighted in the report will address the collections’ preservation needs and concerns in the areas of policies, staffing, building and maintenance, environment, security, emergency preparedness, collections care, and preservation planning.

It is valuable to have an outside consultant carry out the needs assessment because outsiders are often able to more objectively evaluate the preservation needs than individuals affiliated with the institution.

THE PLANNING TEAM

Once an institution decides to implement a formal preservation program with a written preservation plan, it is necessary to identify and agree upon where the responsibility and authority for the preservation program lies. It is also necessary to identify who will be responsible for writing the preservation plan. Support for a preservation program and preservation plan should exist throughout the institution. Development of a preservation plan should include collections staff, administrators, and board members because the successful implementation of the plan requires input and buy-in from all areas of the institution.

¹ Definition from *Preservation Planning: Guidelines for Writing a Long-Range Plan* by Shereilyn Ogden, 1997.

IDENTIFYING NEEDS & PRIORITIES

Study the recommendations from the needs assessment and from any other surveys the institution has had conducted. Note the preservation needs and the recommended actions.

Other documents to review might include the following:

- the institution's mission statement
- strategic, long-range plan
- collections policies
- emergency preparedness and response plan
- appraisals
- grant proposals

Prioritize the recommendations. Some questions that can be used to evaluate the recommendations include the following:

- What actions will benefit the largest portion of the collections?
- What collections or collections items are an institutional priority?
- What are the institution's most immediate and pressing needs?
- Which of the recommendations are feasible in the next five years and which require long-term planning/investment?

WRITING THE PLAN

Using the prioritized recommendations, outline the institution's preservation goals, both short-term and long-term. The goals for each institution will vary, but the majority will fall into the following categories:

- mission and collections management policies
- environmental conditions
- facilities
- security and emergency preparedness
- space and storage
- exhibitions
- overall collections care
- individual collections
- resources

Example: *Goal III:*

To maintain environmental conditions that meet conservation standards for the long-term preservation of the collections in all areas with collections materials.

Further outline the strategies necessary to meet each goal in a series of objectives. These objectives will be self-contained and will form the foundation of the course of action outlined by the preservation plan.

Example: *Objectives needed to reach Goal III:*

1. Establish an ongoing environmental control program.
2. Limit the UV and visible light exposure of collection items.
3. Maintain an integrated pest management program.

Each objective can be further broken down into more easily accomplished activities.

Example: *Activities needed to reach Objective 1:*

1. Develop a comprehensive environmental monitoring program for all collection storage and exhibition areas.
2. Purchase environmental dataloggers for exhibition and collections storage areas.

3. Monitor and document the temperature and relative humidity of collections exhibition and storage areas with datalogger.
4. Provide training for staff members (collection staff and facilities committee staff) on interpreting the results of the environmental monitoring.
5. Establish protocol for adjusting or servicing the HVAC systems when data shows that it is necessary.

After listing the activities, designate responsibility for each activity and establish a timeline for completion. Determining the schedule for completion, who will carry out the activity, and who will be responsible for ensuring that it is completed on schedule are key for successful implementation of the preservation plan. Identify what resources are required to carry out each activity so that those resources can be factored into the institutional budget. Resources can include staff, space, time, supplies, finances, and outside expertise. Create a schedule for completion of each activity. Be sure to keep time schedules realistic.

For ease of reading and recording progress, it may be helpful to create tables listing the activity, the staff responsible, the necessary resources, and the time table. Preservation plans are complex documents that will need to be read and interpreted by multiple audiences within an institution. Aim for clarity in the written text.

AN EVOLVING DOCUMENT

Once the written preservation plan is complete, it must be implemented. A staff member should be appointed to spearhead the project, but the day-to-day implementation work will include all staff, administrators, and board members. Provide ongoing staff training, and develop tools and procedures to monitor the preservation program and to evaluate progress.

Remember that a preservation plan is an evolving document. Priorities change over time. A new goal or objective could develop; an activity could move from implementation to continuation to re-evaluation and then back to implementation. Be prepared to review the plan at least annually and make necessary updates, adjustments, and/or changes.