

# NEH National Collections Care Capacity Building Program Guide

Organizations applying to the National Collections Care Capacity Building Program may propose one of two project types: a **consulting project**, which includes assessments, planning, and/or relevant training within a focused topic area, or a **training project**, consisting of one or two staff training workshops. The sections below provide additional details to help you determine which approach and services best fit your organization's needs.

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## CONSULTING PROJECTS

Consulting projects pair your organization with a CCAHA preservation specialist to complete a customized collections care project tailored to your institution's needs.

Projects may include one or two service components within a single topic area (track) and are designed so that selected services build on one another to address your most important preservation priorities.

### Choosing Your Service Components

Applicants may request one or two of the following service types:

#### ASSESSMENTS

Assessments provide a comprehensive evaluation of current conditions, practices, and risks related to an organization's collections and their care. Through this process, organizations gain a clearer understanding of existing strengths and vulnerabilities, along with a prioritized framework for addressing preservation needs. Assessments are particularly well suited for organizations that have not recently undertaken a formal evaluation, are uncertain where to begin, and/or would benefit from an objective, big-picture perspective on their collections care and management needs.

#### POLICY/PLAN

Plans and policies build on assessment findings or existing institutional knowledge to offer structured, actionable guidance. These deliverables typically include prioritized recommendations, strategic direction, and tools that support decision-making, implementation, and internal advocacy. This type of work is best suited for organizations that have already identified key preservation concerns—whether through a recent assessment or prior experience—and are prepared to move toward more formalized planning and documentation.

#### TRAINING

Training programs provide targeted, practical, instruction tailored to an organization's collections, staff, and institutional context. These in-person engagements focus on building knowledge, strengthening skills, and supporting the implementation of best practices. Training is particularly valuable for organizations seeking to increase staff capacity, reinforce new or existing procedures, or respond to known preservation challenges through hands-on, skills-based learning. When multiple components are selected, they are typically designed to build logically on one another—for example, pairing an assessment with a plan or training program—so that the project is both strategically grounded and practically useful.

# Choosing a Topic Track

Applicants proposing a consulting project will select from the following topic tracks to help guide the development of a cohesive project. Tracks group related services and help ensure that selected components work together to address your organization's most important needs.

Within each track, available service options are outlined below, including assessments, plans or policies, and training programs. Organizations may request one or two service components, typically combining an assessment with a plan or training, or a plan with training if a related assessment has been completed within the past one to five years.

## Foundational Planning

The Foundational Planning track focuses on the policies and frameworks that guide responsible collections stewardship at an institutional level. Work in this area addresses the development or refinement of core documents and policies as well as broader questions about how collections are used and cared for within an organization. This track is a strong fit for organizations that are working to formalize or update their approach to collections management, establish clearer internal procedures, or strengthen alignment across staff and leadership.

ASSESSMENT	PLAN	TRAINING
<b>Foundational Planning Assistance</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Collections Management Policy</li><li>• Collections Development Policy</li><li>• Exhibition Policy</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Essential Policies &amp; Procedures for Cultural Institutions</li><li>• Internal Advocacy for Collections Care</li><li>• Preservation Best Practices for Optimal Collections Care</li><li>• Mold: Prevention, Detection, and Response</li><li>• Basic Handling Techniques for Collections</li><li>• Building Basic Enclosures for Collections</li><li>• Preparing and Handling Documents for Digitization</li><li>• Housekeeping</li></ul>

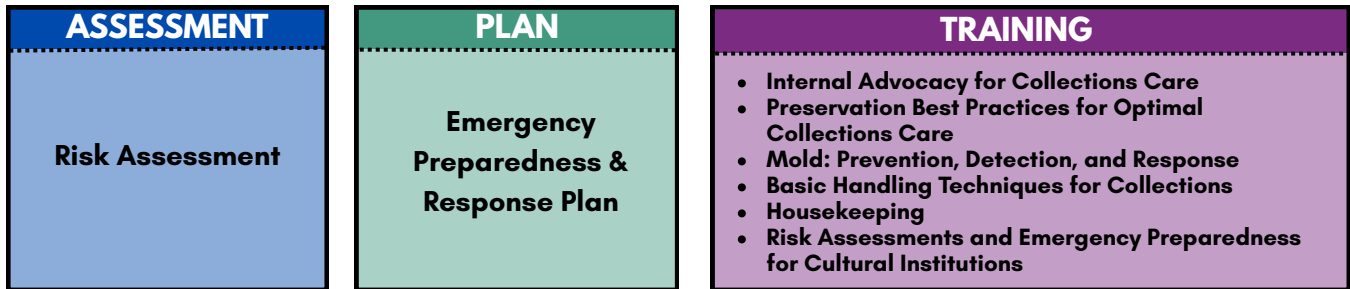
## Preservation Overview

The Preservation Overview track provides a comprehensive, big-picture evaluation of an organization's current collections care practices and overall preservation needs. Projects in this area examine a range of factors, including the general condition of collections, storage and handling practices, environmental considerations, and existing preservation efforts, resulting in a prioritized set of recommendations for future action. This track is well suited for organizations that have not recently undertaken a formal preservation assessment, are unsure where to begin, or would benefit from an objective, system-wide understanding of their collections care program. It is often a valuable starting point for identifying and prioritizing next steps.

ASSESSMENT	PLAN	TRAINING
<b>Preservation Needs Assessment</b>	<b>Preservation Plan</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Essential Policies &amp; Procedures for Cultural Institutions</li><li>• Internal Advocacy for Collections Care</li><li>• Preservation Best Practices for Optimal Collections Care</li><li>• Mold: Prevention, Detection, and Response</li><li>• Basic Handling Techniques for Collections</li><li>• Building Basic Enclosures for Collections</li><li>• Red Flag! Identifying Preservation Needs While Processing Collections</li><li>• Housekeeping</li><li>• Risk Assessments and Emergency Preparedness for Cultural Institutions</li></ul>

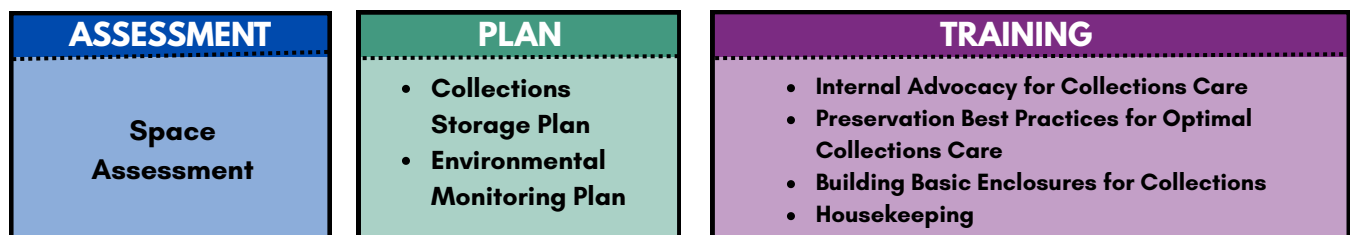
## Emergency Preparedness

The Emergency Preparedness track focuses on helping organizations identify risks to their collections and develop strategies to prepare for, respond to, and recover from emergencies. Work in this area may include risk assessments, evaluation of existing emergency procedures, and the development or refinement of emergency preparedness and response plans. This track is a good fit for organizations that want to better understand potential threats to their collections, strengthen their ability to respond to disasters, or ensure that staff are prepared to act effectively in emergency situations. It is particularly relevant for institutions that have experienced past incidents, face known environmental or building-related risks, or lack a current, actionable emergency plan.



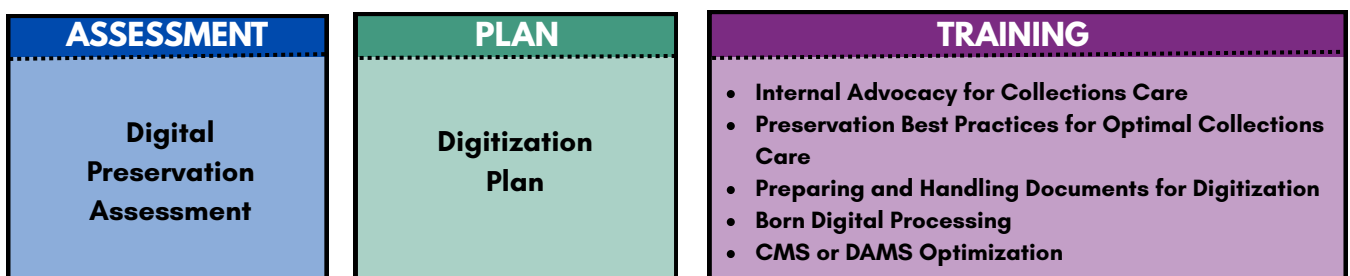
## Collections Storage & Space Management

The Collections Storage and Space Management track addresses how collections are physically stored, organized, and supported. Projects in this area consider factors such as storage layouts, space utilization, environmental conditions, and the adequacy of housing and enclosures, with the goal of improving access, preservation, and space efficiency. This track is especially well suited for organizations that are experiencing space constraints, planning a move, renovation, or reorganization, or seeking to improve storage conditions for their collections. It can also benefit institutions that want to make more effective use of existing space while reducing risks to collections.



## Digital Collections

The Digital Collections track focuses on the preservation and management of digital and digitized materials. Work in this area may address topics such as digital preservation practices, digitization planning, workflows for managing digital assets, and strategies for handling born-digital materials, as well as broader questions related to systems and infrastructure. This track is a strong fit for organizations that are beginning or expanding digital initiatives, need guidance on managing and preserving digital files, or are seeking to establish more sustainable and consistent approaches to digital collections care. It is particularly useful for institutions navigating the challenges of long-term access to digital content.



# TRAINING PROJECTS

Organizations may choose to apply for a training project consisting of one or two staff training programs, designed to build knowledge, strengthen skills, and support the implementation of collections care best practices. Training projects are tailored to your organization's collections and institutional context and may combine programs from different topic areas.

All training programs are designed as half-day sessions (approximately 3.5 hours). CCAHA will work with selected organizations to schedule each training at a mutually convenient date and time.

The full list of available training programs is provided below, along with brief descriptions to help your organization identify the options that best align with your needs and priorities.

All training services are provided free of charge; however, organizations may be responsible for up to \$250 in supply costs for applicable programs, noted with an \* below.



## Basic Handling Techniques for Collections

This workshop will address the safe handling and soft packing of flat and three-dimensional objects. Attendees will learn how to prepare work areas, best practices for moving various types of artifacts, and identifying potential conservation concerns before handling. Additionally, participants will be introduced to materials useful for day-to-day art handling and get hands-on experience packing items for short-term transport.

## Born Digital Processing

One of the modern challenges in collections management is working with born-digital materials, or files created in digital form, such as word processing documents and spreadsheets, rather than digitized from physical originals. They often arrive with little structure, making them difficult to manage, access, or preserve over time. This program introduces foundational approaches to accessioning, organizing, and maintaining digital collections in a sustainable way.

Topics include common formats and challenges; basic workflows for organizing and documenting files; and file management practices such as naming conventions, folder structures, and version control. Considerations for metadata, storage, backup, and digital preservation are also addressed, including approaches to risk management and redundancy to support long-term access.

## Building Basic Enclosures for Collections\*

In this hands-on workshop, participants will learn how to make enclosures for paper artifacts including four-flap enclosures. Additionally, we discuss when to use folders, boxes, and/or options for rolled storage. A selection of commercial storage materials will be reviewed along with the decision-making process for choosing the appropriate enclosures for a variety of artifacts.

## **CMS or DAMS Optimization**

Many organizations rely on collections management systems to organize and provide access to their holdings, but inconsistent data and workflows can limit their effectiveness over time. This program focuses on improving the quality, consistency, and usability of these systems.

Topics include best practices for structuring collections data; establishing data entry standards and controlled vocabularies; and improving metadata to support discovery, access, and reporting. Additional areas of focus include managing digital assets alongside collection records, identifying underutilized features, and refining workflows to better align with organizational goals.

## **Essential Policies & Procedures for Cultural Institutions**

An institution's collections care and business practices are defined by its written policies and procedures.

Institutional memory is often lost through staff changes, but best practices are encoded in these important documents. This workshop will provide you with an overview of policy and planning documents that are essential for collections care, such as collections management policies, handling guidelines, and maintenance policies. You will learn the critical components of these documents and discuss tangible examples of how to adapt them to different institutions. You will also gain knowledge in policy development, approval, and implementation responsibilities of staff, volunteer, and board members.

## **Housekeeping**

This workshop will introduce participants to the agents of deterioration that threaten collections daily and over time, establish priorities for cleaning and safe handling, and discuss approved supplies and good practices, so that housekeeping is not a chore, but a commitment.

## **Internal Advocacy for Collections Care**

Advocacy is not only external – it is crucial for staff at institutions to be able to advocate internally as well, to board and administration, in order to assure that resources are best allocated. In this workshop, attendees will explore routes for internal advocacy with a focus on collections care, and securing time and funding for preservation initiatives and conservation treatment. The instructor and attendees will discuss opportunities for incorporating information about preservation into all institutional advocacy efforts.

This program will also include practical tips and examples of initiatives that have successfully incorporated both collections care and advocacy efforts at museums, libraries, and archives.

## **Mold: Prevention, Detection, and Response\***

Mold spores are always present, even in the cleanest of spaces. When too much moisture is present, due to a water leak or a poorly functioning HVAC system, mold outbreaks can occur. As it grows, mold attacks and weakens leather, cloth, and paper, and often causes permanent staining. Some molds also make people sick. How can you stop mold from growing? And what should you do when they find it? This workshop will answer these questions by explaining the environmental factors that allow mold to grow. The instructor will discuss how to identify mold, how to protect people from health hazards associated with mold, and how to stop mold from spreading within a collection. Participants will learn how to clean moldy books and papers using chalk dust to simulate inactive mold, and when to call a conservator or a professional cleaning company.

## **Preparing and Handling Documents for Digitization**

Digitization can improve access to collections while reducing handling of original materials, but it also introduces risks if items are not properly prepared. This program emphasizes practical, hands-on approaches to safely handling and preparing documents for digitization, balancing preservation needs with project goals.

Topics include safe handling practices for paper-based and fragile materials; preparing, organizing, and staging materials for capture; and using supports, weights, and other tools to minimize strain during imaging. Additional discussion addresses identifying risks such as fasteners, folds, or brittle media, along with basic cleaning and flattening approaches, and guidance on when to consult a conservator.

## **Preservation Fundamentals**

Archivists, collections managers, librarians, curators, and other staff members involved in collections care must manage a variety of tasks, including implementation of collections management plans and policies, management of environmental control and storage conditions, and provision for safe use and exhibition of collections. This program will provide attendees with an overview of the preservation standards for the many aspects of collections care.

## **Red Flag! Identifying Preservation Needs While Processing Collections**

Gaining intellectual control over collections is just one aspect of processing and cataloging. This workshop will focus on developing a system for identifying and prioritizing the collections care needs of items (objects, books, artworks, archival materials, etc.) during the accessioning, processing, and cataloging phases. The instructor will discuss common degradation issues encountered in collections and provide methods for assessing condition. Attendees will learn procedures for assigning conservation and housing priorities, and will have the opportunity to assess the condition of items in a study collection and assign conservation and housing priorities to each item using the procedures presented in the workshop.

## **Risk Assessments and Emergency Preparedness for Cultural Institutions**

One of the most important steps any cultural institution can take to safeguard collections is to be prepared in the event of an emergency or disaster. This workshop will provide attendees with a “big picture” overview of emergency planning and preparedness. Participants will learn the terminology of emergency planning, the basic components of an emergency preparedness and response plan, and the importance of risk assessment.

# EXAMPLE PROJECTS

The following examples illustrate how organizations might structure projects based on their current collections care needs, priorities, and level of experience. Each scenario demonstrates how a project can be shaped by selecting service components that build logically on one another and/or respond to specific goals.

These examples are intended as a guide rather than a template. Applicants are not expected to match these scenarios exactly, but may find them helpful in thinking through which project type, topic area, and service components best align with their organization's current needs and capacity.

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## Consulting Project: Assessment + Plan

Institution A is a small historical society that has never completed a formal preservation assessment. Collections are stored in multiple rooms with inconsistent conditions, and staff are unsure how to prioritize improvements.

To better understand their overall preservation needs and develop a roadmap for action, the organization applies under the Preservation Overview track, requesting a Preservation Needs Assessment followed by a Preservation Plan. This combination allows them to first identify key risks and then translate those findings into a structured, prioritized plan for improving collections care.

## Consulting Project: Assessment + Training

Institution B manages a community archive with a largely volunteer staff. While they are aware of potential risks to their collections—particularly related to emergencies—they do not have a clear understanding of their vulnerabilities or how to respond in a crisis.

They apply under the Emergency Preparedness track, requesting a Risk Assessment along with a *Risk Assessments and Emergency Preparedness for Cultural Institutions* training. This approach allows the organization to better understand its specific risks while also equipping staff with an understanding of the practical skills needed to respond effectively.

## Consulting Project: Plan + Training

Institution C completed a Space Assessment two years ago and has a general understanding of storage challenges, including overcrowding and inadequate housing. However, they have not yet developed a formal plan or trained staff in improved handling and rehousing practices.

Building on this previous work, they apply under the Collections Storage & Space Management track, requesting a Collections Storage Plan along with a Basic Handling Techniques training. This combination allows them to translate earlier assessment findings into a clear plan while also building staff capacity to implement improved practices.

## Training Project

Institution D has a basic understanding of its preservation needs but is looking to strengthen staff capacity across multiple areas. They are not currently seeking a formal assessment or planning document, but want practical, skills-based training for their team.

They apply for a training project, selecting *Mold: Prevention, Detection, and Response* and *Preparing Materials for Digitization*. This approach allows them to address immediate concerns while building knowledge that can inform future preservation efforts.