

Final Report

Sustainable Institutional Preservation Programs Work Group

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Sustainable Institutional Preservation Programs Working Group Members:

Chris Bee, Mary Bowlby, Tamara Georgick (writer), Loretta Greene, Joseph Kalama, Stephanie Lamson (chair), Barbara Minard, Ann Nez, Megon Noble, Kirsten Schober, Erin Whitesel-Jones, and Alicia Woods.

Introduction

All archives, historical societies, libraries, museums, and cultural heritage organizations of all sizes share the responsibility of preserving their collections to educate and inspire future generations. The components of a successful and sustainable institutional preservation program may vary depending on the size and nature of the institution but the development of a program is feasible for any institution committed to the stewardship of its collections. At its broadest and most effective, preservation encompasses all actions and policies designed to prolong the useful life of collections.

At minimum, a preservation program consists of the following activities: preservation planning, environmental control and proper storage, staff and user education in care and handling, disaster planning, conservation, reformatting, and security. In addition, an institution must provide stable funding and assign a staff member responsibility for preservation.

For example, a model small public library preservation program might consist of all of these activities with a focus on funding for commercial binding and dust jacket protectors, in-house book repair, and occasional reformatting to create surrogates for rare and fragile materials. A portion of one staff member's time might be devoted to coordinating and monitoring these efforts.

A model large academic library might consist of the same core activities but be staffed with a full-time preservation librarian responsible for coordinating the efforts of a binding supervisor, conservator, reformatting librarian, and additional library technicians. Funding might focus on commercial binding, conservation, preservation replacement, and reformatting. Reformatting might include dedicated funds for microfilming local newspapers and other high-use and/or rare and fragile materials as well as for reformatting of audio, moving image, and photographic materials. Digitization and digital preservation, shelf preparation, and mass deacidification might also be components of a strong academic library preservation program.

Although both the small public library and large academic library programs are potentially very different in size and scope, they both address the basic preservation needs of their collections. Similarly, archives, museums, historical societies, and other cultural heritage institutions will also have preservation programs of different sizes and scopes but they will include the same core activities although perhaps with different emphases. For example, a museum might emphasize conservation over reformatting because of the nature of its collection.

Many institutions see preservation as a set of specific activities or a drain on resources rather than a collection of integrated policies and activities that promote the fiscally responsible management of collections. Yet preservation activities can be integrated into current workflows with little or no cost and considerable economic benefit. For example, proper handling of materials during cataloging or careful shipping of materials on loan both decrease the risk of damage with little or no additional cost to the institution. A preservation program is within the reach of any cultural heritage institution, whatever its size or type, provided that there is a long-term institutional commitment.

Support for Institutional Preservation Programs: Five Components

The working group identified five components that a statewide plan could provide to support institutional preservation programs: **assess, train, model, fund, and inform**. The group as a whole felt that the Washington Preservation Initiative (WPI) was quite successful in its support and development of institutional preservation programs and would like to see a similar effort continued and marketed more widely. When possible, the working group provided multiple options within each category depending upon the level of financial support that a statewide plan could commit.

1. Assess: Preservation Surveys and Assessment

Effective preservation planning and program development requires a preservation assessment to establish preservation needs and priorities. A successful preservation survey often identifies several problems that can be solved quickly with current staffing and resources while also identifying other short-term and long-term goals. Whether or not an institution drafts a formal preservation plan following a survey, the majority of institutions (77.6%) implement some preservation survey recommendations within six months (Brown 2006, 60).

The Washington Preservation Initiative (WPI) funded approximately 15 general and/or collection specific preservation assessments between 2003 and 2005 for a wide range of cultural heritage organizations from public, community college, and university libraries to ethnomusicology archives and tribal collections. Awareness of the WPI grants spurred at least two additional libraries to contract for preservation surveys using other funds (Clareson 2006, 2) and several libraries reported that these assessments were of great benefit, offering a blueprint for future preservation activities. In some cases, the surveys enabled institutions to successfully lobby for additional funding from their administrations and to secure federal preservation grants (Clareson 2006, 3).

Several websites offer excellent introductions to preservation surveys (California Preservation Program Preservation Needs Assessment, <http://calpreservation.org/management/needs-assessment.html> and NEDCC's Preservation Education Curriculum on surveys and assessments, <http://www.nedcc.org/curriculum/lesson.class7.overview.php>). Funding specifically for preservation assessments is also available from the Institute of Museum and Library Services and Heritage Preservation Conservation Assessment Program (CAP) and the National Endowment for the Humanities Preservation Assistance Grant (PAG) program.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Support the development of institutional preservation programs and the preservation of cultural heritage collections by providing competitive grant funding for preservation assessments similar to the WPI Assessment or Competitive Preservation Grants. Additional resources, such as environmental monitoring equipment, could be made available to support assessment (or re-assessment) of collection storage conditions. [high impact, high cost]
- At minimum, provide a list of resources for undertaking preservation assessments on a website. Resources might include: general survey information, survey tools, potential consultants (like Regional Alliance for Preservation Centers), grant opportunities, and a list of local institutions that have completed preservation assessments. Many in the work group pointed out that the perspective of an experienced outside consultant can be very useful and more persuasive to administrators. [medium/high impact, low cost]

2. Train: Preservation Training

Significant damage can occur when staff and users are not fully aware of how to care for collections. The Heritage Health Index reports that “70% of institutions need additional training and expertise for staff caring for their collections” (Heritage Preservation 2005, 8). Within Washington State, 45% of those surveyed said that statewide preservation services needed to include ongoing subsidies for preservation workshops; travel and registration costs were considered significant barriers to attendance (Clareson 2004, 13).

From 2003 to 2006, WPI offered thirty-six free preservation workshops. The *WPI Final Report* noted that several respondents found the workshops to be very successful and that “No other continuing education program has had this great of a reception in the past ten years.” Other respondents noted that repeating workshop offerings in the future would be useful as well as more in-depth or advanced workshops (Clareson 2006, 5).

While there are many sources for preservation workshops (like those offered by the Regional Alliance for Preservation Centers and other national organizations or the currently funded WESTPAS workshops on disaster planning), the lack of a RAP Center in the Pacific Northwest has made continued preservation education more challenging. Distance learning might help somewhat but some preservation training is best done with a hands-on component.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Continue to offer free or heavily subsidized preservation workshops throughout the state. Repetition of some very popular, hands-on workshops like basic book repair (Clareson 2006, 5) would be useful as well as creating a sequence of workshops that build upon one another to provide institutional preservation staff with knowledge of both core activities and the preservation needs of a range of formats (from architectural drawings to archaeological objects to audio). [medium/high impact, medium/high cost]
- At minimum, notify individuals of available preservation workshops available locally or via distant education by a listserv (such as PreserveNW) and/or website and provide a list of local individuals and institutions with preservation expertise willing to provide some training opportunities. Training opportunities offered in concert with local conferences might increase the attendance of those living in more remote locations. [medium/high impact, low cost]

3. Model: Model Programs and Policies

A key area of concern identified in the *WPI Final Report* was the “development of workflow, staff time, and staff funding to do preservation work at individual institutions” (Clareson 2006, 6). Respondents were particularly interested in preservation staffing scenarios for smaller institutions.

In *The State of Preservation Programs in American College and Research Libraries*, a survey of these institutions also found a “hunger for practical advice and assistance based on proven approaches.” The study recommended focusing attention on pragmatic approaches and tailoring preservation knowledge and techniques to targeted audiences including “assembling profiles of institutional practices and success stories at peer institutions” as well as “identifying preservation benchmarks appropriate to a particular group of institutions” (Kenney and Stam 2002, 8-9).

While preservation assessments and training can provide practical advice, often comparing preservation programs at institutions with similar preservation needs can be very useful in determining strengths and weaknesses. Sharing this information can simplify the development and refinement of preservation programs, policies, and workflows. Some potential model institutions identified by the work group were the Wing Luke Asian Museum, Nordic Heritage Museum, Center for Pacific Northwest Studies at Western Washington University, Everett Public Library, Washington State Library, and University of Washington Libraries, although there are many others.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Identify a few institutions of varying types and sizes with established preservation programs to provide examples of how preservation can be integrated into an organization and make these available on a website. Provide practical information about policies, staffing, and workflow. [medium impact, low cost]
- Provide a list of resources that discuss adapting preservation programs to a wide range of institution types and not simply large institutions with conservators or other full-time preservation professionals on staff (for example, resources like *The Preservation Program Blueprint* and *Preservation Strategies for Small Academic and Public Libraries*). [medium impact, low cost]

4. Fund: Cooperative Disaster Planning & Grants for Collection Preservation Projects

The Heritage Health Index Report found that 77% of institutions did not specifically allocate funds for preservation in their budgets (Heritage Preservation 2005, 12). The *WPI 2004 Preservation Planning Survey* found that approximately 30% have no funding for preservation and 77% indicated that only 1% or less of the library's budget was allocated for preservation. When asked the dollar amount, 43% said the amount was zero (Clareson 2004, 4). The survey also found that 46% believed statewide services needed to include both support for preservation grants and disaster planning and recovery assistance (Clareson 2004, 13).

WPI awarded 31 competitive grants for specific preservation projects from 2003 to 2006 for a total of \$444,821. A wide range of preservation projects were funded, including: the preservation of documents from the Nipo Strongheart, Bob Pace, and Helen Schuster special collections at the Yakama Nation Library; the installation of UV-filtering film to reduce light damage to murals and collections at the Centralia College Kirk Library; and preservation of moving image materials by eleven institutions in the collaborative Washington Film Preservation Project.

Respondents to the WPI Program Impact Survey indicated that the availability of actual funding for preservation projects gave Washington's cultural heritage institutions an "unprecedented opportunity" to advance preservation (Clareson 2006, 3). National funding can be highly competitive and the Pacific Northwest is lacking in infrastructure (such as a local RAP Center and experienced vendors) that helps make other areas of the U.S. more successful in securing grants. Some small institutions are not even eligible for federal grants since they do not have the required staffing.

The working group and the two WPI reports also stressed the importance of cooperative disaster planning to institutional programs. The *WPI 2004 Preservation Planning Survey* found that 30% of respondents had experienced a disaster that damaged materials in the past five years and 67% had no written disaster plan. Assistance with disaster planning and recovery was one of three services of interest to nearly half of the survey respondents (Clareson 2004, 11-12).

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Support the development of institutional preservation disaster planning and reduce the risk of damage to collections by funding collaborative disaster planning (see the work of the Collaborative Disaster Planning Work Group). [high impact, high cost]
- Provide competitive grant funding similar to the WPI Assessment and Competitive Preservation Grants to support the development of institutional preservation programs and the preservation of cultural heritage collections. [high impact, high cost]

5. Inform

One theme mentioned within the first four components was the need for preservation information. The *WPI 2004 Preservation Planning Survey* found that 59% of respondents want a place to contact for preservation information (Clareson 2004, 12).

The *WPI Final Report* reinforced this need. It was noted that most institutions do not have preservation experts on staff and that more information could be put “on the PreserveNW listserv and provide deeper information on a Web Page, such as information on vendors and copies of existing disaster plans, that would be helpful to all constituents” (Clareson 2006, 7). The work group felt that the website should be linked from the Washington State Library (<https://www.secstate.wa.gov/library/libraries/>), Washington Museum Association (<http://washingtonstatemuseums.org/>), and the Department of Archaeology and Historic Preservation (<http://www.dahp.wa.gov/>) to best share information with a range of cultural heritage institutions.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Provide a website and use the PreserveNW listserv as an information clearinghouse for preservation information. [high impact, low cost]
- Publicize the existence of both the website and listserv widely; 26% of respondents in the *WPI 2004 Preservation Planning Survey* were not aware of the PreserveNW listserv. [high impact, low cost]

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