

COLLECTIONS PRESERVATION MATRIX USER GUIDELINES

This matrix is a very basic tool to use in the selection of preservation steps for non-profit small museums, historical societies, libraries and archives with special collections. The condition of the collection is usually the key factor that determines how an item is preserved: how it is handled, cared for, stored, and used within the context of the institution.

In-Coming Collection Item	Handling of Object	Inspection and Isolation
Cataloging or Registration	Condition Survey	Storage Model for Collections
Preventive Care or Treatment	Display and Use	Disaster Abatement and Recovery Plan

This simple Preservation Matrix can be used from left to right, or up and down each column to help establish preservation steps as the institution makes progress establishing preservation goals.

In-Coming Collection Item: Items should be received with a plan in mind. Knowing where the collection has been recently stored is helpful in preparing for receipt. Collections that come from a home, office building, and factory or out-buildings all have differing environments that may dictate aspects of condition and handling.

Handling of Object: All objects are made of materials that have specific tolerances to handling and should be approached and handled with care. Use cotton gloves to handle most objects to avoid depositing hand oils. Support items fully to avoid damage where items may be weak. Look at surfaces to see if paint or photo emulsion layers are lifting. Do not pick up items with handles by the handle but by the body of the piece. Move furniture by carefully supporting the entire structure from below. To lift paintings support two sides of the frame: lower and side. Use vinyl gloves to pick up glass so they do not slip.

Inspection and Isolation: All in-coming collections should be isolated for a period of inspection. Pests or mold and mildew are to be avoided, but where found and anticipated, many items can be treated by wrapping, freezing and vacuuming.

Cataloging: All collections need to have donor agreements signed, accession numbers assigned, and provided an internal record that documents the item(s) in the collection. Commercial software for small museums such as Past Perfect greatly accommodates this process. Base-line care of vacuuming, and housings are addressed at this stage of collections care.

Condition Survey: As collections are cataloged, the condition of the collection should be noted. Specific damage that prevents the item from being reasonably accessed for use and a priority rating for addressing preservation issues in the future is standard museum practice. Survey information provides useful information relative to use, consulting with conservators, volunteer assistance, broad efforts for housings, grant support.

Storage Model for Collections: Providing a consistent way to store materials within the storage environment is key to an organized system that will prevent damage to collections and assist access. Establish sizes that will accommodate like items while providing support. Use acid-free enclosures and sleeves of chemically inert films, not plastics (polyethylene, Mylar). Placing objects in boxes will help buffer changes in temperature and humidity year round; monitor the changes in T and RH. Seal wood casework in the storage environment to remove acetic acid and formaldehyde out-gassing that can damage items.

Preventive Care or Treatment: Using condition survey information, collection managers can engage in preventive care practices that address condition issues by seeking advice from other museum professionals and conservators. Training in specific aspects of collection care and active preservation and treatments can take place depending upon the degree of difficulty, by employing the use of staff, volunteers or trained conservators.

Display and Use: Exhibit objects for limited amounts of time to avoid damage from permanent display which can cause accumulations of dust, fading, flaking of paint and emulsion layers, drying of glues and split wood and veneer. Use cases to protect fragile surfaces while on display that do not off gas harmful vapors. Lighting should be adjusted to the need and safety of the objects in the display, and ultra-violet light blocked where found.

Disaster Abatement and Recovery Plan: Plans should be conceived and written in advance of an emergency situation that will place your collection in harm's way. **Refer to dPlan** at www.dplan.org, an on-line disaster planning tool for museums developed by the Northeast Document Conservation Center.