

PREFERRED PRACTICES FOR HISTORICAL REPOSITORIES

A RESOURCE MANUAL AND SELF-ASSESSMENT

STATE HISTORICAL RECORDS ADVISORY BOARD (SHRAB)

Oregon State Archives

Office of Oregon Secretary of State

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INTRODUCTION

DEFINITIONS

For the purposes of this resource manual, the term “repository” is used to mean a library, historical society, archives, or similar organization. It is any organization that houses and cares for historical records. “Archival program” is used to refer to the work of the organization – preserving and providing access to historical materials.

PURPOSE OF THE SELF-ASSESSMENT

The self-assessment form following each description of preferred practice is designed to assist all governing boards, directors, and staff members (paid and volunteer) in strengthening their organization and its work in preserving Oregon’s documentary heritage.

The State Historical Records Advisory Board (SHRAB) is aware of the importance of historical records to individuals and society and the need for able stewards to care for these records. SHRAB also recognizes that all organizations can benefit from additional planning and training. To encourage these beneficial activities, the Board developed a self- assessment tool.

Completing the self-assessment form will allow your staff, volunteers, and governing boards to identify your organization’s areas of strength and areas that need additional attention and development. With this knowledge, your repository can establish reasonable goals for improvement and develop short term and long range plans. Identification of needs is also the first step in seeking assistance in the form of training or funding.

HOW TO THE USE THE SELF-ASSESSMENT

Following each element of preferred practice is a brief self-assessment, with a summary assessment tally at the end of the document. Please read carefully and answer each question as appropriate. Please answer to the best of your knowledge. Do not worry if the answer is “No” or “I don’t know”. After you have answered the questions for each element, complete the summary sheet at the end. The summary will allow you to identify areas that need improvement and to establish priorities. You will also find a collection survey form to help you establish the size of your collection.

REPOSITORY INFORMATION

REPOSITORY NAME: _____

ADDRESS: _____

TELEPHONE: _____

FAX: _____

E-MAIL: _____

ASSESSMENT PARTICIPANTS (name & title):

CONTACT PERSON:

Name

Title

DATE ASSESSMENT COMPLETED: _____

1. LEGAL AUTHORITY

What is legal authority?

Legal authority is written authorization for the repository to collect, preserve, and make available historical records. This authorization may take many forms including articles of incorporation, enabling legislation, city or county ordinances, or a statement of authorization from a parent organization such as a college or university.

By-laws, constitutions, or institutional policies may supplement a repository's legal authority. The organization may be governed or directed by a government official, board of trustees, or university president or provost.

Why is legal authority important?

- It provides the legal basis for the repository's operation.
- It makes it possible for the organization to participate in fund-raising and related activities.
- It inspires donor confidence.
- It implies a long-term commitment on the part of an organization.

Self-Assessment Questions	Yes	No	N/A	Comments
Does your repository have a written statement that authorizes its establishment and continued existence? <i>(If no, proceed to the next section)</i>				
In the case of a parent organization, does the statement of authority clearly outline the repository's relationship to the parent organization and the repository's placement in the organizational structure?				
Do you have written documentation (bylaws, policies and procedures, etc.) that clearly states the position(s) with authority to make commitments on behalf of the repository?				
Is your organization in compliance with local, state, and federal regulations regarding its operation and fund-raising?				

2. MISSION AND STRATEGIC PLANNING

What is a mission statement?

A mission statement is a definition of the repository – what the repository is and what it does. It should be a brief statement, usually no more than a short paragraph in length, which explains:

- Why the repository exists – what are its overall aims and objectives? (e.g., collecting, preserving, and making its collections available to users.)
- What the repository collects – what groups, events, locations, activities, and/or experiences the repository documents.
- What groups or interests the repository serves, and how it plans to serve that audience.

What is strategic planning and why is it important?

A strategic plan helps a repository fulfill its mission by setting goals for the future in the context of the current environment and the resources available to the repository. It should set out specific goals, and it should list concrete action steps and resources that will be needed to accomplish them. It will provide a “road map” for the next several years of institutional activities.

Self-Assessment Questions	Yes	No	N/A	Comments
Does your archival repository have a written mission statement? <i>(If yes, proceed to question 4)</i>				
Does your parent organization have a written mission statement? <i>(If no, proceed to the next section).</i>				
Is the parent organization’s mission statement detailed enough to direct the work of the archival repository?				
Has your mission statement been reviewed within the past 5 years by the repository’s governing body?				
Have changes occurred which suggest that your current mission statement may need to be revised?				
Does your mission statement clearly reflect the repository’s current functions and collecting focus?				
Is your mission statement realistic in terms of the physical and financial capacity of the repository?				
Does your repository have a strategic plan listing specific goals and activities?				

Self-Assessment Questions	Yes	No	N/A	Comments
Does the strategic plan include input from all important stakeholders (e.g., board members, key staff, representatives of those groups that are served by the organization)?				
Is the strategic plan revised at least every 3-5 years?				

3. FUNDING SOURCES

What types of funds are available?

A historical repository may rely upon a number of sources for operating funds. Public taxes, grants, membership fees, donations, sales, rentals and fund-raising events may contribute to the operating budget. The historical repository's leadership is responsible for determining funding priorities (in accordance with the repository's mission and strategic plan) and deciding where and how to obtain the money to support these priorities. In fundraising, the governing board and key staff members play important roles. Staff members provide information about the organization and its needs. The governing board identifies sources and methods of obtaining support.

Why is grant funding important?

- Grant funding can provide support for special projects, allowing a repository to accomplish goals that would otherwise be out of reach.
- In some cases, grant funding may be available to start a repository or establish a program in a particular subject area.
- Grant proposals in which multiple repositories collaborate on a project can save on costs, build local relationships, and may have more long-term impact than individual projects. For this reason, funders often look favorably on them.
- Successful grant projects provide evidence that the repository is capable of administering special projects and sustaining them over time. This can help in planning and carrying out additional larger grant projects in future.

Self-Assessment Questions	Yes	No	N/A	Comments
Does your repository have a stable source of income for general operating funds? <i>(If no, proceed to the next section)</i>				
Has your repository's leadership determined funding priorities in accordance with the repository's strategic plan?				
Has your repository investigated possible grants (including federal, state, and local sources)?				
Has your repository received grant funding?				
Has your repository explored other fundraising options (e.g., capital campaign, membership drive, rentals)?				

4. FINANCIAL RECORDKEEPING

What is an adequate financial record keeping system?

An “adequate financial record-keeping system” is one that allows the repository to accurately track income and expenditures, prepare budgets and reports on the repository's finances. “Adequate finances” implies resources sufficient to ensure at least the basic arrangement, description, and physical preservation of and access to the repository’s historical records. Keeping track of the repository’s financial status ensures that resources are available and used appropriately. Provisions should be made for an annual audit or review of the financial records. Designation of an individual(s) authorized to sign checks, accept gifts, and enter into contracts is essential.

Why is a financial record-keeping system important?

- A careful accounting of finances enables a repository to set priorities and plan its activities, including acquisitions, preservation activities, processing, and public programming.
- Grant funding, often administered by state and federal agencies, is awarded to financially stable organizations with reliable record keeping systems.
- Usually repositories rely upon a number of sources for operating funds. Public taxes, grants, membership fees, donations, sales, rentals and money-raising events may contribute to the operating budget. It is essential that a proper record keeping system exist to cope efficiently with these sources of income and to ensure compliance with state and federal laws.

Self-Assessment Questions	Yes	No	N/A	Comments
Does your repository have its own budget?				
Does your repository have specific funds allocated for its operation? <i>(If no, proceed to the next section)</i>				
Is your repository able to prepare financial reports on a regular basis?				
Are the financial records of the repository audited or examined as appropriate by an independent firm on a regular basis?				
Is there a clear distinction between basic, ongoing responsibilities that need to be supported by the repository’s regular operating budget and special projects that might be appropriate for outside funding?				
Does your repository have a budget for capital expenditures in addition to regular operating expenses?				

5. TRAINED STAFF

What is a trained staff?

A trained staff includes at least one person who possesses, through training and experience, professional competence in basic archival principles and procedures. Although this is normally a paid employee, it may also be a volunteer. This person should guide the repository's functions of appraisal, arrangement and description, preservation, and reference service. The repository should also have sufficient staff to supply services appropriate for its holdings and the needs of its researchers.

Why is a trained staff important?

- Awareness and implementation of appropriate practices and procedures enhance the care of historical records.
- A qualified archivist can provide basic training for volunteers and others.
- Professional staffing improves the repository's credibility and image in the community.
- Trained staff increases the chance of receiving grant funding, since many grant awards require that a repository have at least one professional staff member.

Self-Assessment Questions	Yes	No	N/A	Comments
Does your repository employ, or have as a volunteer, an archivist with professional training and experience?				
If your repository does not have a qualified archivist, is it making plans to hire an archivist or recruit a qualified volunteer?				
Are staff members familiar with the archival code of ethics endorsed by the Society of American Archivists?				
Are staff members able to attend conferences, workshops, and other training opportunities?				

6. VOLUNTEERS

What is a volunteer program?

Like other non-profit organizations, many historical repositories rely heavily on volunteer staff to carry out a variety of tasks. An experienced, well-trained, motivated volunteer is hard to replace. Volunteers can be a major asset to a repository, but it is also true that frequent turnover of volunteers and/or failure to match volunteers with appropriate work can lead to difficulties. A well-managed volunteer program requires a significant investment of time and effort, but is crucial to using volunteers successfully.

Why are volunteers important?

- In times of limited budgets and cutbacks in paid staff, volunteer help can allow a repository to undertake activities that might not otherwise be possible. Activities volunteers might assist with include clerical work, collections processing, editing/writing, event planning, and tours.
- Volunteers that have been associated with a repository for a long time may have important knowledge and information that helps maintain an “institutional memory.” For example, volunteers may be able to help identify people or events represented in collections.
- Volunteers are often very involved in the life of the local community. If they feel that the time they spend at your repository is productive and rewarding, they can generate valuable support for the repository in the wider community. Current volunteers are also great sources for new volunteers.

Self-Assessment Questions	Yes	No	N/A	Comments
Does your repository utilize volunteer workers?				
Are there enough experienced staff members to train and supervise volunteers?				
Does your repository have a planned training program for volunteers?				

7. CONSULTANTS

What is a consultant?

An archival consultant is an individual with specialized training and experience in the theoretical and practical aspects of archival work. Archival consultants can be very helpful in providing guidance and specific services for your repository.

For smaller organizations with limited staff, a consultant can be hired to provide services such as arranging and describing records, training volunteers, helping establish professional standards, developing policies and procedures, or evaluating the facility. The consultant may provide advice and assistance in developing a plan of action to address identified needs. Consultants may also be hired to discuss the feasibility of starting an archive within an established organization.

Why are archival consultants important?

- They can provide professional expertise to a repository with limited, untrained, or volunteer staff.
- They can help steer a repository on the right path by helping develop a coherent plan of action.
- They can serve as a long-term source of current information (particularly with regard to technology) when an on-going relationship is established.
- They can save personnel costs by providing skills that are only required for a brief period.

Self-Assessment Questions	Yes	No	N/A	Comments
Do you know how to locate a qualified archival consultant?				
Has your repository ever hired an archival consultant? <i>(If no, proceed to the next section)</i>				
Did your repository check your consultant's references?				
Was there a written contract that clearly stated the repository's expectations of the consultant?				
Was a follow-up visit provided or on-going relationship established with the consultant?				
Did the consultant provide a final written report?				

8. ACQUISITION/COLLECTION DEVELOPMENT POLICY

What is an acquisition or collection development policy?

A written acquisition policy is a formal statement that guides the repository's selection of materials to be added to its collections. The resources of any repository are limited, and the repository cannot collect all materials. Only materials that are relevant and valuable to the mission of the repository should be acquired, and a written policy is essential in achieving this goal. The policy also provides a basis for cooperation with other repositories thus avoiding duplication of efforts.

Why do you need a written acquisition policy?

- It helps the repository manage its resources more productively by adhering to its mission.
- It allows the repository to focus on those materials it is committed to preserving and prevents acquiring materials it has no need for, no room for, and no staff time/ funds to process and maintain.
- It provides a clear definition of desired materials thus encouraging donations.
- It provides a firm reason not to accept inappropriate materials offered by donors and reserves space for additional appropriate collections.

Self-Assessment Questions	Yes	No	N/A	Comments
Does your repository have a written acquisition policy? <i>(If no, proceed to the next section)</i>				
Has the policy been reviewed in the last 5 years?				
Is the policy consistent with the mission of the repository?				
Is the policy realistic in terms of the repository's ability to care for the materials it acquires?				
Does the policy contain statements regarding:				
• its purpose?				
• the types of activities supported by the collection (research exhibits, outreach, publications, etc.)?				
• the clientele served by the collection (scholars, students, genealogists, etc.)?				
• the priorities of the collection (i.e. strengths and weaknesses, geographic and subject areas collected)?				

Self-Assessment Questions	Yes	No	N/A	Comments
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the limitations of the collection (what you do not collect)? 				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> cooperative agreements with other archival repositories regarding collecting? 				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> resource sharing? 				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> your deaccessioning policy? 				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> procedures for monitoring the progress and reviewing the policy? 				
Is the policy known and understood by staff (paid and volunteer)?				
Is the policy known and understood by:				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the repository's membership? 				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the repository's governing body? 				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the general public? 				

9. COLLECTION ASSESSMENT/ ARCHIVAL APPRAISAL

What is collection assessment?

A general assessment of any collection proposed for donation to a historical repository is a vital first step in collection management. Commonly, a potential donor may call, write or visit to ascertain whether or not a repository is interested in receiving a collection. There are numerous questions that must be asked and issues that must be considered before the decision is made to acquire a collection, both in terms of the collection itself and the repository's ability to care for it.

Assessment/appraisal should take into account the current condition of the materials and the availability of expertise and funding to address any preservation problems. The initial assessment provides an overview and focuses on whether the collection as a whole is appropriate for the repository, while appraisal during processing focuses on whether or not specific parts of collection (or even particular items) are of long-term value and should be retained.

What is archival appraisal?

Appraisal is the specific technique used by archivists to analyze the historical, legal, administrative, fiscal, and intrinsic value of records and deciding whether to retain and preserve them. (This is different from a monetary appraisal for tax purposes, which must be carried out by a qualified individual other than the archivist or the donor.) Archivists generally weigh the value of records by evaluating the possible present and future uses of the information found in the records. Appraisals should be consistent with the repository's acquisitions policy.

Why are collection assessment and archival appraisal important?

- Processing collections and providing archival storage space is costly. Assessment and appraisal help a repository to allocate resources effectively.
- Using good assessment/appraisal techniques allows the repository to save the most important archival records and other collections.
- Records of limited value should not be permanently retained in a historical repository.

Self-Assessment Questions	Yes	No	N/A	Comments
Does your repository have a written set of assessment/appraisal guidelines? (<i>If no, proceed to question 4</i>)				
Are your guidelines based on generally accepted records appraisal guidelines?				
Are your assessment/appraisal guidelines consistent with your acquisition/collection development policy?				

Self-Assessment Questions	Yes	No	N/A	Comments
Does your repository have a staff person with experience in archival appraisal?				
Does your repository ever use outside appraisal consultants to evaluate questionable materials?				
When materials are determined not to be appropriate for your repository, do you refer the materials to other repositories that may collect in that area?				

10. DOCUMENTING ACQUISITIONS – Deed of Gift/Deposit Agreement

What is a deed of gift?

A deed of gift is a legal instrument that documents the formal act of donation of material to a repository. Specifically, it transfers the legal title of ownership of an item(s) from the donor to the repository. This title transfer should include both the physical and intellectual property rights.

Why is a deed of gift important?

- It secures the legal title of physical and intellectual property rights.
- It informs the repository of any legality regarding the administration or use of donated materials.
- It protects the repository and its staff from legal problems that may arise regarding ownership and rights to historical records, including access, publication, and possible deaccession.

What is a deposit agreement?

A deposit agreement is a legal document that places material in the custody of a repository without transferring the legal title to the materials. There are many reasons to accept or not to accept deposits and a policy should be established after careful review of all these reasons. If the repository does accept material deposited for safekeeping, a written agreement should document the status of the materials. Bear in mind that government agencies retain title to government records. Agencies cannot “deed” over the title to a private entity, but the records may be deposited upon permission of the State Archivist. The deposit agreement should address the retention schedule, procedures for handling public records requests, and removal from the repository. (Note: Deposit agreements are used for materials that are placed within a repository for safekeeping and access. Loans of materials for exhibit purposes are discussed under Cooperative Programs.)

Why is a deposit agreement important?

- It informs the repository of any legality regarding the administration or use of donated materials.
- It protects the repository and its staff from legal problems which may arise regarding ownership and rights to historical records, including care, access, publication, and use.
- It provides a basis for recovering costs associated with caring for the collection.

Self-Assessment Questions Deed of Gift	Yes	No	N/A	Comments
Does your repository currently use a deed of gift form? <i>(If no, proceed to the next section)</i>				
Has this form been reviewed within the past five years?				
Has this form been reviewed by legal counsel?				
Does the form contain: donor’s name, address, and signature?				
Does the form contain: repository’s name, address, and representative’s signature?				

Self-Assessment Questions Deed of Gift	Yes	No	N/A	Comments
• Date of the transfer of title?				
• Description of the material transferred by the deed?				
• Designation of copyright ownership?				
• Any restrictions regarding use and names of those who can impose/lift such restrictions?				
• Names of those authorized to dispose of unwanted materials?				

Self-Assessment Questions Deposit Agreement	Yes	No	N/A	Comments
Does your repository accept deposits? <i>(If no, proceed to the next section.)</i>				
Does your repository currently use a deposit agreement form? <i>(If no, proceed to the next section)</i>				
Has this form been reviewed within the past 5 years?				
Has this form been reviewed by legal counsel?				
Does the form contain:				
• the depositor's name, address, and signature?				
• repository's name, address, and representative's signature?				
• the date of the deposit and the time span for deposit?				
• a description of the material deposited?				
• a description of any restrictions regarding use?				
• description of repository's responsibility for processing?				
• a statement regarding the repository's responsibility in case of loss or damage?				

Self-Assessment Questions Deposit Agreement	Yes	No	N/A	Comments
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the name(s) of depositor's representative(s) with authority to make decisions regarding its disposition? 				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a procedure for withdrawal of materials by the depositor? 				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a procedure for return of materials by the repository? 				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Are any costs to the depositor clearly identified? 				

11. ACCESSIONING/ DEACCESSIONING

What are accession records?

Accession records are documents that record information about each new acquisition. These records are the basic documents for all subsequent control. The records usually consist of an accession register, which records the accession in chronological order and assigns the accession number, and accession forms, which record basic information about the materials. The accession number is a unique number that permanently identifies the materials.

Self-Assessment Questions	Yes	No	N/A	Comments
Does the repository have written accession procedures for historical records deposits, donations, and purchases?				
Does the repository maintain an accession register or log?				
Does the repository use accession forms?				
Are the accession forms adequate to record the following:				
• accession number?				
• date received?				
• statement of provenance (origin)?				
• description of material?				
• date range of material?				
• quantity/size of collection?				
• condition of material?				
• location within repository?				
• notation of any restrictions?				
• status of accession, i.e. gift, deposit, purchase, etc.?				
• donor/depositor information?				
• copyright owner?				
• relationship to previously accessioned materials?				
• Is a record of accessions maintained on a permanent basis?				

12. ARRANGEMENT

What is arrangement?

Arrangement is the process of putting materials into order following accepted archival principles, particularly those of provenance and original order. The principle of provenance deems that records of different creators or donors should not be intermingled. The “creator” is an organization or individual who created, accumulated, and/or maintained and used the records in the conduct of business or personal life. Records are best understood when the original order of the materials is maintained.

The process of arrangement usually includes identifying, foldering, organizing, boxing, and shelving the materials. The primary intent is to achieve physical control over your holdings. There are five basic levels of arrangement -- repository, record group/collection, series (subseries), file unit (folder, volume, reel, etc.), and item.

Why is arrangement important?

- Maintaining original order provides valuable information on how and why the records were originally created.
- It provides staff and users with a way to locate materials within the collection or record group.
- It ensures that information needed for the preparation of collection descriptions is available.

Self-Assessment Questions	Yes	No	N/A	Comments
Does your repository have a written procedure for arranging materials?				
Does your repository take into consideration the principles of provenance and original order when arranging its materials?				
When transferring materials to your repository, do you try to maintain their original order?				
When processing, if the original order has been lost and you must reconstruct it or impose a new order, do you document that it was lost?				
If nontextual or oversized records must be removed from the collection, do you make note of where they can be found?				

13. DESCRIPTION

What is description?

Description is the process of analyzing and recording information about the materials. A collection description includes a biographical sketch or a history of the organization that created the records, information about their contents, physical characteristics, the reason they were created, relationship to other records, and ways in which they can be found and used. The description provides the basic level of access for potential users.

Why is description important?

- It shows the researcher what types of documents and subjects are contained in a collection, saving time and unnecessary handling of materials.
- It gives a sense of how the collection can best be used.
- It provides a history of and a context for the collection.

Self-Assessment Questions	Yes	No	N/A	Comments
Does your repository create collection descriptions to aid researchers?				
Do your descriptions follow a consistent format?				
Do your descriptions contain the following information:				
• creator?				
• title statement?				
• date span?				
• physical description/volume?				
• historical or biographical note?				
• scope and content note?				
• restrictions?				
Are the elements in your descriptions consistent with the descriptive elements found in the MARC format?				
Have any of your descriptions been entered into an in-house OPAC (online public access catalog)?				
Does your repository post collection information on a web site?				

Self-Assessment Questions	Yes	No	N/A	Comments
Do finding aids posted on the web conform to the Encoded Archival Description (EAD) standard?				
Are any descriptions of your records available in OCLC WorldCat?				

14. ENVIRONMENTAL CONTROL

What is environmental control?

Records exposed to high levels of heat, relative humidity, light, and pollutants degrade more quickly than records stored in conditions that are cool, dry, dark, and clean. Monitoring and controlling temperature and relative humidity (RH) levels, protecting collections from light exposure, and minimizing exposure to pollutants are among the most important activities a repository can undertake to preserve and protect its collections.

Why is environmental control important?

- High humidity (moisture in the air) provides water to fuel the chemical reactions that cause deterioration, and at very high levels can contribute to mold growth on collections. High temperatures increase the speed of the chemical reactions that drive paper deterioration. Fluctuating conditions can also cause significant damage.
- Light exposure causes paper-based collections to fade, yellow, or discolor. While all light is damaging, ultraviolet light (UV) is the most damaging. Light damage is cumulative and irreversible.
- Particulate and gaseous pollutants react chemically with collections to increase the rate of deterioration.

Self-Assessment Questions	Yes	No	N/A	Comments
Does your repository have temperature controls that allow it to maintain a consistent temperature of 70°F or lower in collection storage areas?				
Does your repository have relative humidity controls that allow it to maintain a consistent RH at a stable point between 30% and 50% in collection storage areas?				
If your building has an HVAC system, does it operate 24 hours a day?				
Does your repository routinely monitor temperature and RH in collection storage areas?				
Has your repository taken steps to minimize environmental extremes (e.g., relocating collections, sealing the building)?				
Has your repository ever had mold growth in collection areas?				
Has your repository taken steps to protect collections from damage caused by visible light (e.g., use of shades, boxing)?				

Self-Assessment Questions	Yes	No	N/A	Comments
Has your repository taken steps to protect collections from damage caused by UV light (e.g., use of UV filters)?				
Does your repository have particulate filtration?				

15. EMERGENCY PLANNING

What is an emergency preparedness plan?

An emergency preparedness plan is a written document, updated on a regular basis, which helps a repository protect its holdings in case of natural or man-made disasters. Emergencies may range from a fire or flood to a leaking water pipe. The plan describes procedures, responsibilities, and appropriate responses for specific problems.

Why is an emergency preparedness plan important?

- A plan helps the repository identify potential hazards that can be corrected, and prevent or minimize damage from natural disasters that cannot be avoided.
- It enables the repository to respond quickly and appropriately to emergency situations.
- Planning increases awareness by staff, volunteers, and governing board members of good maintenance practices that may prevent emergencies.
- Coordinating planning with fire, police, and local emergency management personnel helps ensure appropriate responses to the special concerns of a historical repository.

Self-Assessment Questions	Yes	No	N/A	Comments
Does your repository have a written emergency plan? <i>(If no, proceed to the next section)</i>				
Is your plan up-to-date and reviewed on a regular basis?				
Are staff members required to read and be familiar with your emergency plan?				
Have all staff members been trained in emergency procedures such as the use of fire extinguishers, first aid, etc.?				
Are copies of your plan maintained off-site and readily available in case of emergencies?				
Are your volunteers and governing board members familiar with your plan?				
Are your local police and fire departments and your local emergency management agency aware of your particular needs in case of emergency?				
Does your plan include a list of priority collections to be saved first?				
Are emergency supplies available in-house as identified in your plan?				

16. FIRE PROTECTION AND SECURITY

What is fire protection and security?

Protecting collections from fire damage has three elements: general prevention, fire detection systems, and fire suppression systems. Good security consists of rules, policies, and procedures that balance the needs of the collections with the needs of researchers and staff. It is crucial for the safety of your collections to enforce all security policies and procedures consistently and without exception.

Why is fire protection important?

- Protection by detection and suppression systems can greatly lessen the effects of fire caused by arson or accident.
- Damage to collections from fire is often catastrophic. Recovery from water damage, while difficult, is generally possible; wet collections are always preferable to burned collections.
- A typical sprinkler head discharges 25-72 gallons of water per minute, while fire department hoses typically deliver 100-500 gallons of water per minute. The difference in the extent of damage to collections is obvious.

Why is security important?

- Security procedures and automated security systems protect collections from damage and/or theft.
- Consistently-maintained security policies and procedures demonstrate that your repository is responsible and professional in the care of its collections.

Self-Assessment Questions	Yes	No	N/A	Comments
Are all storage areas equipped with smoke and/or heat detectors?				
Is the fire alarm system monitored by a security firm/central office on a 24 hour basis?				
Is there a fire suppression system?				
Is the fire suppression system monitored on a 24 hour basis?				
Is access to storage areas limited to staff only?				
Is the repository equipped with a security system that is monitored on a 24-hour basis?				
Is your facility insured?				
Is the collection insured?				

17. STORAGE FACILITIES

What are preservation-quality storage facilities?

Preservation-quality facilities are those which provide a clean, stable, and secure physical storage environment. Specifically, they provide environmental control (see section 14 of this manual), fire and security protection (see section 16 of this manual), and sufficient storage space and appropriate storage furniture. A preservation-quality storage facility should have a regular cleaning schedule and a regular schedule for pest inspection and control as needed. Collections should be permanently stored in containers (boxes, folders, etc.) made of chemically stable materials.

Appropriate storage furniture and archival quality products are expensive. Consider cooperating with other area repositories when ordering furniture or containers, since this may allow you to save money. Also be aware that there are grants available to help repositories assess storage need and purchase storage furniture and supplies.

Why are storage facilities important?

- Proper facilities instill donors with confidence that their gifts will receive appropriate care.
- Adequate facilities allow the repository to satisfy its mission to preserve historical collections in the best condition possible.
- Storage facilities protect collections when they are not on exhibit or being used for research.

Self-Assessment Questions	Yes	No	N/A	Comments
Is there a regular schedule for pest inspection and control in collection storage areas?				
Is there a regular cleaning schedule for collection storage areas?				
Are collections stored in appropriate storage furniture (e.g., proper size, made of non-damaging materials)?				
Are collections stored away from overhead pipes and air conditioning units?				
Are collections stored at least four inches off the floor?				
Is the size of existing storage areas adequate to accommodate all collections stored in them?				
If off-site storage is used, does it meet the same requirements as on-site storage for environmental control, fire protection, security, etc.?				

18. COLLECTIONS CARE

What is collections care?

Collections care refers to the storage and handling of records and other collections found in historical repositories. It encompasses the basic hands-on preventive measures that are taken to protect collections, such as rehousing materials, protecting unstable items, and ensuring that collections are handled carefully at all times. In the context of paper-based records, the term “holdings maintenance” is often used to refer to basic collections care activities.

Why is collections care important?

- Proper storage enclosures prevent damage by providing physical support and chemical stability.
- Proper storage and handling prolongs the useful life of collections, and may defer the need for future conservation treatment.

Self-Assessment Questions	Yes	No	N/A	Comments
Are paper and photograph collections permanently stored in appropriate supportive enclosures (e.g., boxes, folders, sleeves)?				
Are alkaline-buffered enclosures used for paper collections?				
Are alkaline-sensitive materials stored in acid-free or acid-neutral enclosures (e.g., natural science specimens, color photographic processes, blueprints, cyanotypes)?				
Do paper enclosures used for photographs pass the Photographic Activity Test?				
If plastic enclosures are used, are they chemically and dimensionally stable (e.g., polyester, polyethylene, polypropylene)?				
Are damaging fasteners and other items removed/segregated during archival processing?				
Are fragile books boxed (in individual boxes that fit the size of the book)?				
Are oversized books and paper items stored flat?				
Are film and photographic materials always handled using white cotton gloves?				

Self-Assessment Questions	Yes	No	N/A	Comments
Are similar sizes/format of photographic images housed together to provide support?				
Is identifying information written on the enclosure rather than on the back of the photographic image?				

19. DUPLICATION AND REFORMATTING

What are duplication and reformatting?

Duplication and reformatting refer to the reproduction of information in another format or medium. Sometimes, the preservation of the information in historical records is more important than preserving the material itself, or a use copy is needed to protect the original from excess handling that might cause damage. Duplicates that are stored off-site also protect against loss of information.

Microfilming materials or photocopying records onto alkaline paper are two common techniques for preservation and access. In recent years the emergence of digitization as a user-friendly option for providing access to collections has changed the landscape. While digitization plays an important preservation role as a surrogate for the original, the use of digitized copies as long-term preservation copies poses significant challenges.

Why is the duplication and reformatting of historical records important?

- It protects material by reducing wear and tear on original.
- It increases the availability of archival records and other collections.
- Storage of a copy in an off-site location protects against damage or loss of the original.
- Reformatting can save space in some instances, such as microfilming versus maintaining original newspapers.

Self-Assessment Questions	Yes	No	N/A	Comments
Has your repository staff compiled a list of materials that are candidates for duplication or reformatting?				
Does your repository currently photocopy materials for preservation purposes?				
Does your repository own a microfilm reader-printer?				
Has your repository had any of its materials microfilmed? <i>(If no, proceed to question 7)</i>				
Does your vendor adhere to national standards for preservation microfilming?				
Has your repository invested in duplicate copies of microfilm so the original (security) copy can be stored at an off-site location in case of disaster?				
Has your repository made provisions for the long-term preservation of original collections that have been digitized (e.g., microfilming, proper storage)?				

20. PRESERVATION PLANNING

What is preservation planning?

Preservation planning is the process of determining a repository's preservation needs, setting priorities among those needs (according to the repository's mission), deciding what preservation activities are needed and how they will be organized, identifying and allocating resources for those activities, and finally, pulling it all together into a written preservation plan.

Why is preservation planning important?

- Preservation planning supports all of the other activities in a repository (collecting, describing, planning outreach, and assisting research). To maintain these activities, the repository must ensure the long-term existence and usefulness of its collections.
- Preservation planning helps a repository to use its available resources wisely.
- Preservation planning allows the repository to measure its progress, as action steps are implemented and goals are accomplished.
- Preservation planning helps a repository take advantage of changing circumstances that may allow for preservation activities that were not previously feasible.

Self-Assessment Questions	Yes	No	N/A	Comments
Has your repository had a general preservation planning survey conducted by an outside consultant? <i>(If no, proceed to the next section)</i>				
Has your repository set preservation priorities according to the recommendations of its general preservation planning survey?				
Have preservation activities been assigned to specific staff members?				
Have preservation responsibilities been written into staff job descriptions?				
Have funds been acquired/allocated for ongoing preservation activities?				
Has your repository conducted one or more collection condition surveys using an outside consultant?				
Has your repository prepared a written preservation plan for the collections?				
Has the written preservation plan been updated in the past year?				

21. DIGITIZATION

What is digitization?

Digitization has been a widely-discussed topic in the library and archives fields for some years. The widespread availability of scanners and digital cameras and the explosion of digital information have made digitization of collections seem accessible even to small repositories. Many historical repositories have undertaken scanning projects, and many more have considered them. At face value, digitization can seem quite simple; just a matter of owning a collection of interesting old photographs and a scanner—but in fact it is a complex process that must be thought out carefully. If it is undertaken without careful planning, it can use up a great deal of staff time and other resources for very little gain.

Why is digitization important?

- Digitization is an excellent tool for providing access to collections and reducing handling of originals.
- Digitization can “add value” to collections by providing additional indexing and other features that would not be possible otherwise.
- Digitization can increase the audience for a repository’s collections.

Self-Assessment Questions	Yes	No	N/A	Comments
Has your repository digitized collections for access, or are there plans to do so in the near future? <i>(If no, proceed to the next section)</i>				
Has your repository considered the following issues with regard to the digitization project(s)?				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does the project fit into your repository’s mission and strategic plan? 				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have you decided what audience you are trying to reach, and is there sufficient demand for the materials? 				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are the materials to be digitized in good condition? 				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are they arranged and described? 				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does the repository own the copyright on the materials, or has it obtained permission to digitize? 				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is there sufficient money and staff to carry out the project? 				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is there a detailed plan for providing access to the digitized materials (e.g., web access, searching, additional description)? 				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is there a detailed plan (including funding) for maintaining the digitized materials for as long as they are needed in future? 				

22. DIGITAL DOCUMENTS AND ELECTRONIC RECORDS

What are digital documents and electronic records?

The care and preservation of digital documents and electronic records is one of the most important issues faced by historical repositories today. Many large institutions have been grappling with methods for caring for large-scale digital document collections for a number of years, and small institutions also hold many materials in digital format, although they may not yet feel equipped to handle the challenges these digital materials pose. Institutions with limited resources may feel overwhelmed and unsure.

The term digital document can refer to a wide range of materials, ranging from an email message, to a word-processed document, to a digital photograph, to a blog entry. This section of the manual primarily addresses “born-digital” materials (e.g., materials that were created in a digital format), but the preservation issues discussed here apply equally well to collections created by digitizing paper collections.

Electronic records are a subset of digital documents; in the broadest sense they refer to a record that provides evidence of a transaction between two or more parties. These types of records are often needed as legal evidence, so they must be processed and tracked in more specific ways than other digital documents.

Why are digital documents and electronic records important?

- Digital documents and electronic records already document a great deal of important historical information, and in coming years even more information that should be preserved over the long term will be created only in digital form.
- Digital documents and electronic records do not have the luxury of time. A paper record will not usually deteriorate to the point of loss within five or ten years, but digital documents could easily be lost forever.
- To be retained so they can be accessed over the long term the most effective way, digital documents need to be managed almost from the point of their creation.

Self-Assessment Questions	Yes	No	N/A	Comments
Is your repository responsible for the long-term preservation of digital documents and/or electronic records in its collections? (<i>If no, proceed to the next section</i>)				
Does your repository have a system for regular backup of all digital documents and electronic records in its collections?				
Has your repository copied any digital materials to analog format for preservation purposes?				
Has your repository undertaken refreshing of digital materials in its collections for preservation purposes?				
Has your repository undertaken migration of digital materials in its collections for preservation purposes?				

Self-Assessment Questions	Yes	No	N/A	Comments
Has your repository placed any digital documents or electronic records in a trusted digital repository?				
Does your repository provide use copies for digital documents and/or electronic records that are made available for research?				

23. ACCESS POLICY

What is an access policy?

An access policy is a written statement that describes the repository’s rules and procedures for providing public access to its collections. The policy should take into consideration the type of records that are contained in the repository, the mission of the repository, and the desires/needs of its users. Records should be made available to all users on an equal basis. Staff and researchers should carefully observe any restrictions on access.

Why is an access policy important?

- It protects the rights and privacy of record creators and the sensitivity/confidentiality of records.
- It helps repository staff communicate and enforce restrictions on access to researchers.
- It can help provide security for records that may be fragile, highly sensitive, or extremely valuable.
- It reassures donors/creators that their materials will be properly protected and used in the repository.

Self-Assessment Questions	Yes	No	N/A	Comments
Does your repository have a written policy on collection access? <i>(If no, proceed to the next section)</i>				
Does the policy state who may use the facility?				
Has your repository taken steps to ensure compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act?				
Have the records on restrictions to collections been well maintained?				
Are restrictions on access to collections reviewed on a regular basis to determine if they are still necessary?				
Does the staff consistently and equitably enforce restrictions on collection access?				
Is the copyright law posted for users to see?				

24. REFERENCE SERVICE

What is reference service?

Reference service is providing information to users about the repository’s records, making materials available for research, and providing copies of records when appropriate. When performed by trained staff with knowledge of the organization’s collections and effective research techniques, this service makes research materials more accessible to the public.

Why is reference service important?

- It makes research materials more accessible to the public.
- It helps the staff monitor the condition of materials.
- Good service enhances the organization’s public image and reinforces the repository’s goals of preserving and providing access to historical information.
- Skilled reference service combined with detailed descriptions protects materials from unnecessary or inappropriate use.

Self-Assessment Questions	Yes	No	N/A	Comments
Does your repository have regularly scheduled reference hours?				
Are your reference hours posted?				
Are researchers made aware of any fees associated with using your records or duplicating materials?				
Is a trained staff member available for regular consultation during reference hours?				
Do you ask researchers to register and/or complete a research application?				
Does your repository maintain forms which track what materials are used by researchers?				
Does your repository have written procedures regarding the handling of its materials?				
Are researchers made aware of procedures for requesting and using materials?				
For service and security purposes, is a staff member always present when records are being used?				
Are collection descriptions easily accessible to researchers?				

Self-Assessment Questions	Yes	No	N/A	Comments
Does your repository answer written requests for information?				
Does your repository answer telephone requests for information?				
Does your repository answer e-mail requests for information?				
Are statistics on reference use kept?				
Are users able to have materials photocopied?				
Are users allowed to photocopy materials for themselves?				
Do you have methods of reproducing photographs?				
Do you have forms for reproduction requests?				
Does your repository reserve the right to refuse to copy material when there are risks to the material?				
Do you have a policy on publication of materials from your collections?				
Is the federal copyright law posted and strictly observed?				

25. EXHIBITS

What is an exhibit policy?

An exhibit policy helps guide a repository’s staff in making decisions about what exhibits to offer the public, how they are to be developed, and how collection preservation concerns will be addressed. Institutional goals, appropriate content, methods of presentation, preservation precautions, responsibility for exhibitions, and methods of evaluation should be among the items discussed in an exhibition policy.

Why are exhibits important?

- Exhibits create greater awareness of a repository’s collections.
- Exhibits can bring in new visitors to a repository.
- Exhibits can show collections in new context and support the repository’s educational mission.

Self-Assessment Questions	Yes	No	N/A	Comments
Does your repository have an exhibit policy that determines the kinds of exhibits it will develop? <i>(If no, proceed to the next section)</i>				
Do your repository’s exhibits fit into the institutional mission and strategic plan?				
Does the exhibit policy outline:				
• Funding sources for exhibits?				
• Staff/volunteers responsible for developing exhibits?				
• Criteria for determining what should be included in exhibits?				
• Criteria for determining how long collections can be safely exhibited (including use of copies)?				
• Preservation requirements for light levels during exhibition?				
• Preservation requirements for display methods during exhibition?				
• Preservation requirements for climate conditions during exhibition?				

26. COOPERATIVE PROGRAMS

What are cooperative programs?

Cooperative programs involve two or more repositories working together to increase or improve their services. Cooperative programs could include loans of materials, exchanging or temporarily sharing staff for special projects, developing multi-repository disaster-preparedness plans, jointly purchasing supplies or equipment, joint applications for grant projects or consultants, sharing a facility, or working together in advocacy and public outreach efforts. Mission statements and acquisition policies that minimize competition enhance cooperative programs.

Why are cooperative programs important?

- Combining resources with another repository frequently helps both organizations meet their goals.
- Joint efforts may provide access to additional staffing, physical, or financial resources.
- Working with another repository may provide access to experience or expertise not available within the repository.

Self-Assessment Questions	Yes	No	N/A	Comments
Does your mission statement and collection policy encourage cooperation with other repositories?				
Has your repository participated in a cooperative program?				
Has your repository considered cooperating with another institution with similar holdings to create descriptions and access to the materials?				
Does your repository loan materials to other organizations? <i>(If no, proceed to the next section.)</i>				
Does your repository have a written policy on loans?				
Has your loan policy been reviewed within the past five years?				
Does your repository use a loan form that clearly describes the materials, loan period, and responsibilities of both organizations?				
Are materials adequately insured and protected by the borrowing institution?				
Does your repository keep adequate records of loans and review these records on a regular basis?				

27. OUTREACH

What is outreach?

Outreach is the provision of services or programs that promote awareness of the nature and importance of preserving our documentary heritage. Outreach can take many forms including reference service; exhibits focusing on archival collections; written reports, brochures, newsletters, etc.; repository guides; on-line public access catalogs or bibliographic networks; workshops, lectures, field trips, or repository orientations for key groups such as students, genealogists, scholars, etc.; donor contacts and web sites.

Why is outreach important?

- It raises public awareness and promotes understanding of the importance of historical records and historical records programs.
- It helps build a strong local base of support for the archival program.
- It encourages increased use of the repository and its collections.
- It aids in identifying new sources of archival records.
- It enhances the repository's image.

Self-Assessment Questions	Yes	No	N/A	Comments
Does your repository offer any public programs such as workshops, lectures, etc.?				
Do you have exhibits focusing on your archival materials?				
Is your repository open to the public on a regular schedule?				
Does your repository publish brochures?				
Does your repository publish a newsletter?				
Are published repository guides available to the public?				
Is your repository's catalog available through an on-line public access catalog or a bibliographic network?				
Does your repository have a web site?				
Does your repository target key groups of researchers?				
Does your administrative staff contact potential donors of materials?				

28. **ADVOCACY**

What is advocacy?

Another form of outreach, advocacy refers to the efforts made by a repository’s governing board or administrative staff to secure financial and other support for their programs. Advocacy efforts might include letter writing campaigns, personal contacts, public meeting, or special publications. These efforts may be directed towards the general public; local, state, and federal governing bodies; or funding agencies.

Why are advocacy efforts so important?

- They increase public support for historical records programs.
- They educate the public on archival issues.
- They help the public and resource allocators understand why historical records are important.
- They increase financial support.
- They promote cooperation between repositories and allied groups.

Self-Assessment Questions	Yes	No	N/A	Comments
Does your repository participate in advocacy campaigns in support of historical records issues?				
Has your repository cooperated with other organizations in support of historical records issues?				
Have you joined or are you familiar with state or national associations and organizations which campaign on behalf of archival issues?				
Does your repository have an ally in the community with effective advocacy influence?				

29. SUMMARY

For each element, review your responses and determine if you are generally satisfied with your repository's current status or if this is an area that needs improvement and check the appropriate box. If this is an area that needs to be addressed as soon as possible, check the priority box. After completing the summary, list your priority elements in the appropriate order at the bottom of the form.

#	SECTIONS	ACCEPTABLE	NEEDS IMPROVEMENT	PRIORITY
1.	Mission and Strategic Planning			
2.	Legal Authority			
3.	Funding Sources			
4.	Financial Recordkeeping			
5.	Trained Staff			
6.	Volunteers			
7.	Consultants			
8.	Acquisition/Collection Development Policy			
9.	Collection Assessment/ Archival Appraisal			
10.	Documenting Acquisitions			
11.	Accessioning/ Deaccessioning			
12.	Arrangement			
13.	Description			
14.	Environmental Control			
15.	Emergency Planning			
16.	Fire Protection and Security			
17.	Storage Facilities			
18.	Collections Care			
19.	Duplication and Reformatting			
20.	Preservation Planning			
21.	Digitization			
22.	Digital Documents and Electronic Records			
23.	Access Policy			
24.	Reference Service			

#	SECTIONS	ACCEPTABLE	NEEDS IMPROVEMENT	PRIORITY
25.	Exhibits			
26.	Cooperative Programs			
27.	Outreach			
28.	Advocacy			
	TOTALS			

PRIORITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

30. COLLECTION SURVEY

A complete assessment of your archival program includes identifying the size and contents of your collections. It is difficult to “measure” your collections exactly; however, the following may be helpful in estimating.

- If your collection is unorganized, estimate roughly how much space the historical records would occupy if they were in boxes or on shelves.
- Do not count an item or group of materials more than once. For instance, if you know the number of photographs and the linear feet they occupy, give one or the other but not both.
- Use the following approximations, if necessary, to estimate total number of linear feet:

1 Hollinger box/document case (approx. 12”x5”x10”)	=	0.5 lin. ft.
1 Records center carton (approx. 15”x12”x10”)	=	1 lin. ft.
1 Transfer carton (approx. 24”x12”x10”)	=	2 lin. ft.
1 Filing cabinet drawer	=	2 lin. ft.

I. SIZE – TOTAL COLLECTION

1. Paper records (including unpublished, handwritten or typescript materials such as loose correspondence, letter books, office files, scrapbooks, ledgers, and other similar materials.) _____ lin. ft.

2. Other materials (estimate number of items or number of linear feet for each of the following.)

Photographs (include slides & negatives) _____ photos or _____ lin. ft.

Microfilm _____ reels or _____ lin. ft.

Oversize paper (maps, blueprints, etc.) _____ items or _____ lin. ft.

Motion picture film _____ reels or _____ lin. ft.

Videotapes _____ items or _____ lin. ft.

Audiotapes _____ items or _____ lin. ft.

Computer media (disks, CD’s) _____ items or _____ lin. ft.

3. Volumes (published books, journals, etc.) _____ items

4. Artifacts _____ items or _____ items

II. PROCESSED MATERIALS (arranged, described, finding aids available) _____ items or _____ lin. ft.

III. UNPROCESSED MATERIALS _____ items or _____ lin. ft.