



Canadian Council of Archives
Conseil canadien des archives

Basic Conservation of Archival Materials : Revised Edition, 2003

Chapter 1 – Getting Started

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Preservation Management Planning

Archival records deteriorate in the natural course of events, and it is the archivist's responsibility to try to slow this process to a minimum. There is a tendency to think that without a conservator's help, the amount that can be done to preserve collections is limited. However, conservation is restricted to the conservation professional in only one aspect—the treatment of records. The single most important step in the long-term preservation of the collection that an archivist can make is to develop and implement a preservation management plan.

Preservation management can be defined as the development and implementation of a systematic preservation plan encompassing all aspects of archives' functions. The goal is to produce a rational, cost effective preservation programme which integrates preservation activities, where possible, into daily archival functions. A preservation management plan encompasses all archival functions and has as its goal the protection and long-term preservation of the collections.

A preservation management programme offers an integrated approach to collections care. An effective preservation management programme enables an archivist to develop a logical, systematic and cost effective preservation plan for the entire archival collection. Implementing a preservation management plan ensures that the dual mandate of access and preservation which govern most archives can be maintained over the long term.

Successful preservation management programmes have strong leadership with a clear focus. Generally, one individual or committee is charged with the stewardship of this programme. An effective preservation management plan often sees the archivist working together with a conservator to develop an integrated, cohesive plan for the institution.

The concept of preservation management was, in part, developed to deal with the global crisis of deteriorating archival collections. Examples of high-risk collections include most paper produced since the mid 19th century which is steadily deteriorating due to its groundwood content; photographic film collections produced on cellulose acetate which are subject to vinegar syndrome; and most modern magnetic media as their stability is limited. The sheer volume of deteriorating archival material dictated that a new approach be developed that would benefit the entire collection. Development of an institution-specific preservation management plan is one method of dealing with this crisis.

A preservation management plan is comprised of three basic steps: assessment, planning and action.

Assessment

The underlying foundation in the development of a preservation management programme is the archives assessment. An archives assessment is undertaken to determine the preservation requirements for the collection and to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the building, policies and guidelines, storage environment, archives' holdings (collection media), holdings maintenance and disaster management. *The Conservation Assessment Guide for Archives* (Dalley 1995) is a comprehensive assessment guide which can be used in full or in an abridged form depending on the size, staffing and holdings of the archives.

Archives assessments, generally, are initiated by the archivist and completed in conjunction with a conservator experienced in working with archival collections. During this process an archivist is not required to become a conservator nor is a conservator expected to have the skills of an archivist. Rather, by working together the knowledge and experience of both can be used to the benefit of the archival collection.

The assessment process is comprised of the following basic steps (Dalley 1995:9):

1. initial contact
2. advance gathering of data
3. site visit
4. assessment report
5. conservation strategy

Conservators with experience working with archival records and archival assessment can be located by contacting provincial and territorial archival associations, conservation departments in larger institutions and through the Canadian Council of Archives (CCA) office. (See Chapter 7: Where to Go for Help for contact information for the CCA, the Canadian Association for Conservation (CAC) and the Canadian Association for Professional Conservators (CAPC).)

The report generated by the archives assessment can be used in a number of ways. Firstly, it forms the framework for all further preservation strategies; secondly, as the report is completed by an external conservator, it can make a persuasive argument for increased funding for preservation activities within the archives; and thirdly, the report can be used as supporting documentation in grant applications.

Planning

The recommendations generated from the assessment are then used for short and long-term planning (Dalley 1995, 14–15).

- Short-term recommendations address immediate problems and opportunities identified in the conservation assessment. They identify projects which can be undertaken by existing staff with existing resources and provide a starting point for further planning. Problems such as infestation which require immediate action are identified here.
- Medium-term recommendations identify those problems and opportunities which will require planning and organization (or reorganization) of human, information, and material resources. Projects that will require additional funding and/or contract staff are usually recommended here.
- Long-term recommendations identify larger goals which will require major funding and/or administrative reorganization, such as obtaining better facilities or changing the relationship with a parent body.

The planning stage involves the development of policies and procedures, identification of collection survey area, development of an environmental monitoring programme and other strategies required to develop the global preservation plan.

Action

Action is the final stage in the preservation management plan. It is here that preservation activities are undertaken. These often include improvements to the environment, establishing priorities for collection preservation, implementing a holdings maintenance programme, reformatting, etc.

A preservation management plan for a small archives often includes the elements outlined below.

10 Point Preservation Plan

1. Assessment
2. Set preservation goals and develop policies
3. Disaster plan
4. Rehouse records into "archival" storage enclosures
5. Relocate specific media within building to most advantageous relative humidity and temperature area
6. Collection survey – high-risk collections, e.g. cellulose acetate, cellulose nitrate negatives
7. Reformatting – photographic negatives, microfilm, etc.
8. Cold storage for some photographic collections
9. Conservation treatment for high monetary value and/or high use records
10. Assessment – to review progress and to set new goals

Implementing a global preservation management plan enables an archives to clearly articulate and develop a cost-effective preservation strategy with defined goals which ultimately preserves the archival collection in a more responsible and cohesive manner than would have been managed prior to the global preservation management plan.

The Canadian Council of Archives and Preservation

The CCA's Preservation Committee is comprised of both archivists and conservators and is charged with the responsibility for planning, coordinating and providing advice related to archival preservation within the Canadian archival community. The Committee's activities are based on the priorities identified through regular, nation-wide consultations undertaken in the course of the Committee's strategic planning process. Of particular interest to archivists are the CCA's funding programme and the Preservation Information Bulletin series.

Funding for preservation management, including assessments and development of preservation policy and procedure, is available to CCA members through their provincial and territorial archives associations or councils. Information about the Conservation Plan for Canadian Archival Records (CPCAR) grant programme is available from the CCA office (www.cdncouncilarchives.ca).

Selected Readings

Dalley, Jane. 1995. *The Conservation Assessment for Archives*. Ottawa: Canadian Council of Archives.

Marrelli, Nancy. 1994. *Implementing Preservation Management A How-To Manual for Archives*. Montréal: Réseau des Archives du Québec.

Ogden Shereilyn. 1999. The Needs Assessment Survey, Planning and Prioritizing Technical Leaflet, Section 1, leaflet 3. *Preservation of Library and Archival Materials*. Andover: Northeast Document Conservation Center.

Ritzenthaler, Mary Lynn. 1993. *Preserving Archives and Manuscripts*. Chicago: The Society of American Archivists. (Chapter 2: Implementing a Preservation Programme)