



Canadian Council of Archives
Conseil canadien des archives

Basic Conservation of Archival Materials : Revised Edition, 2003

Chapter 2 – Policy Development

Introduction

Policy development and implementation form the core of the Planning stage in the global preservation approach to collections care. This approach outlined in the Canadian Council of Archives' Elements of Preservation.

Assess → Plan → Act

Policies provide the guiding principles by which an institution is run. A preservation policy, simply put, defines an institution's aims and objectives to providing long-term preservation of its records.

An effective policy is regularly reviewed and revised. It should be written in a realistic and appropriate manner for the institution based on staffing and funding realities. A preservation policy must be integrated into the archives overall policy and procedural strategies.

Policies should be written with the end use in mind. A policy should be clearly and succinctly written so that staff and/or volunteers can implement the policy with a minimum of fuss. Successful preservation policy implementation is a top- down and bottom-up process. If the governing body is not actively involved nor committed to the implementation of the policy it is doomed to failure – regulated to an unopened binder on the bookshelf.

No one policy will fit all institutions as they vary in size, record types, staffing levels and funding. However, certain fundamental elements provide the foundation to a successful reservation policy.

Policy Development

A preservation policy is generally composed of the following elements:

- *Mandate/Mission Statement*
The preservation policy must work within the provisions of the institution's mandate/mission statement
- *Purpose*
Generally, the purpose of most archival collections is to provide access to and preservation of the records
- *Standards/Commitments*
Outlines what the policy is actually committing the institution to do
- *Role and Responsibility*
Identifies which person/s within the institutions is responsible for implementing the policy and procedures. In smaller institutions one person will be responsible for many functions including preservation.
- *Definition of Terms*
Defines any preservation specific terminology

- *Procedures*
Outlines the step-by-step approach to carrying out the policy, e.g. a care and handling policy (see Chapter 4)

A successful preservation policy should:

- outline the institution's preservation aim and objectives to the governing board, staff, volunteers, and donors
- provide staff/volunteers with directions and means to achieving the policy standards/guidelines
- provide a gauge by which the success of the preservation programme can be measured
- provide a gauge by which the institution can measure its performance against other like institutions
- provide a document for ongoing/continuing integration of preservation practice with in all components of archival practice
- provide clear documentation to funding/granting agencies of an institution's commitment to long-term preservation – when taken together with an institution's acquisition policy and global preservation assessment a clear, lucid preservation programme that is fully integrated to the benefit of the whole institutions is presented.

Policy Framework

A basic framework for a preservation policy for a small to medium sized archives should include a commitment to:

1. the concept and practice of preventive conservation as a fundamental objective of the archives policy
2. review and update the preservation policy on a regular basis
3. establish, monitor and maintain standards for temperature, relative humidity and light levels (see Chapters 3 and 6)
4. develop and update of an institution specific disaster plan (see Chapter 6)
5. implement care and handling guidelines (see Chapter 4)
6. provide a clean, organized storage environment and of sufficient size to house the records
7. undertaking a reformatting programme where necessary, e.g. cellulose nitrate or cellulose acetate negatives, audio cassettes etc
8. consult with a conservation professional before undertaking any treatment, restoration or other invasive action which may affect the record (see Chapter 7)
9. establish procedures to prevent damage from vandalism, pests and other sources of damage as determined from the assessment
10. to conduct on-going staff training in preservation

Other preservation related policies and procedures should be developed where needed to function under the primary preservation policy umbrella. Following are several of the most common policies and procedures found in many archives.

Care and Handling Policy and Procedure (see Chapter 4)
Disaster Prevention and Planning (see Chapter 6)
Pest Control Procedure
Public Access Policy and Procedure
Security Policy and Procedure
Staff Training Policy and Procedure

The desire to mount exhibits of archival materials is strong particularly for archival collections within museums. Frequently, it is the most valuable, “artifactual” records which are requested for inclusion in exhibits. Most archives do not include exhibition as one of their core functions and therefore do not have policies and procedures in place to deal with the myriad of preservation issues raised by mounting exhibits or loan of records for exhibit.

A basic framework for an exhibition policy for a small to medium sized archives should include a commitment to:

1. review the condition of the record prior to the exhibition to determine is it is safe to be exhibited
2. monitor and maintain light level standards (lux and UV light) in the exhibit area
3. monitor and maintain relative humidity and temperature standards in exhibit area
4. establish length of time for the exhibit – temporary or permanent
5. the use of adequate support for records on display
6. the use of safe display materials and cases
7. display copies where possible
8. establish loan and borrowing procedures
9. make special arrangements for light sensitive materials or choose not to exhibit the original.

Selected Readings

Guidelines for Developing a Conservation Policy. 1995. Manitoba Heritage Conservation Service Conservators' Committee.

Developing a Conservation Policy for the Museum, Museum Notes #4. 1988. Toronto: Ontario Ministry of Citizenship, Culture and Recreation, Queen's Printer.

Anderson, Joanne, S. ed. 1996. *Guide for Written Collection Policy Statements, Collection Management and Development Guides*, No. 7, Chicago and London: American Library Association.

Chapman, Patricia. 1990. *Guidelines on Preservation and Conservation Policies in the Archives and Library Heritage*. Paris: UNESCO.

Marrelli, Nancy. 1996. *Implementing Preservation Management A How-To Manual for Archives*. Montréal: Réseau des Archives du Québec.

McInnes, David. 1987/88. A Commitment to Care: A Basic Conservation Policy for Community Museums. *Dawson and Hind*. Winter.