



The Ohio Heritage Partnership

Statewide Preservation Survey Results

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Executive Summary

The Ohio Heritage Partnership, a collaborative effort including the State Library of Ohio, Ohio Historical Society, and the ICA (the Intermuseum Conservation Association), served as the central sponsors of the “Connecting to Collections” program in Ohio. This national effort, funded by the federal Institute of Museum and Library Services, provided grants to survey the preservation needs in all states and territories in the U.S.

The Ohio program included a web-based survey, a Summit Meeting of cultural heritage leaders from throughout the state, and a series of five Regional Meetings, as well as a plan to develop a directory of cultural heritage institutions within the state.

The survey, which addressed a wide variety of preservation activities, was available from January through March, 2010 to a variety of institution types in the state, including libraries, museums, historical societies, historical sites, archives, and county or municipal records centers. Nearly 700 institutions were informed of the survey, and a total of 290 answered, for a response rate of 41%. Nationally, this is one of the highest response percentages for a Connecting to Collections statewide survey. The project partners were also pleased to see that 78 of Ohio’s 88 counties are represented in the survey results.

Institution types completing the survey included libraries (99 or 41%), historical societies (48 or 20 %), educational institution/academic libraries (college or university) with 32 or 13%, and museums (30 or 12%). Other responding groups included historic houses/sites and local government entities.

While the results of the Ohio Connecting to Collections project shed some very positive light on the State’s preservation activities, the survey discovered a number of trends which cultural heritage institutions must address to continue safeguarding their treasures.

Cultural organizations in Ohio indicated that they regularly undertake a wide variety of preservation activities. However, few indicated that they had undergone some central or “core” activities of preservation program development, including development of long-range preservation plans, preservation surveys of their buildings, collections, and preservation policies, or disaster plans.

The survey surfaced a deep concern about the storage conditions for cultural collections. Almost 70% of respondents felt that half or less of their collections were stored adequately, and the lack of storage space and appropriate storage environment and containers was one of the problems mentioned most often in Ohio’s collection facilities.

One of the best ways to increase the life expectancy of cultural collections is to provide a good storage environment for them, and stave off the damaging effects of temperature, humidity, light, and pollutants. Temperature and light were at least controlled in some areas of the collections. Humidity and pollutants, however, were not controlled in a majority of collections. When not controlled, these environmental forces can be the cause of disasters which damage collections, including mold, leaks, and other problems. Another area of policy development which was lacking was plans to prepare for, mitigate the effects of, and recover from disasters which affect cultural heritage collections. There were positive findings in the development of working relationships between cultural heritage professionals and emergency managers/first responders, as well as in security practices. It is hoped that these activities can serve as the basis of developing better disaster plans for the institutions.

In many of the areas above where policies or practices are lacking, grants, workshops, expert information sources, and onsite visits have been suggested as ways to answer the need for assistance. When asked what services they would like to see in Ohio, these areas were the type of help which survey respondents requested. Workshops and training opportunities were requested to focus on specific formats of materials (books/bound volumes, photos, digital materials, and archival items – which were also among the formats where Ohio institutions held large numbers of collections) as well as on specific topics (disaster preparedness, preservation management, and digitization were the most requested subjects). Ohio has long been seen as a leader in digitizing collections information. However, many institutions lacked the knowledge and basic policies to preserve the materials once they had been digitized.

The need for preservation funding, and the lack of experience in developing grants to fund these activities was visible, and, in some cases, is a root cause of the lack of staffing for preservation in cultural heritage institutions, which was another key concern of a large number of respondents.

With highly-respected institutions such as the State Library of Ohio, Ohio Historical Society, Intermuseum Conservation Association, Ohio Preservation Council, and other preservation and conservation professionals leading the way, Ohio can collaboratively develop a programmatic approach to help all types and sizes of cultural heritage institutions deal with their preservation concerns. The large and rich cultural collections of the State deserve nothing less.

Background

Ohio participated in the Institute of Museum and Library Services' "Connecting to Collections" statewide preservation planning grant program in 2009-10. The Ohio Heritage Partnership, a collaborative effort including the State Library of Ohio, Ohio Historical Society, and the ICA (the Intermuseum Conservation Association), served as the central sponsors of the program in Ohio.

Ohio's program was very expansive in its reach. In addition to a web-based survey, made available from the Ohio Historical Society, the Ohio Connecting to Collections Project included a Summit Meeting of cultural heritage leaders from throughout the state (held on May 7, 2010), and a series of five Regional Meetings, scheduled throughout the state in July 2010. Through these public sessions, the Ohio Heritage Partnership hoped to reach as many of Ohio's cultural heritage professionals, volunteers, board members, and interested members of the public as possible. Another component of the project was the plan to develop a "multi-type" directory of cultural heritage institution information within the state.

The Connecting to Collections survey was made available online from January through March, 2010. In addition, the Ohio Historical Society offered to make paper copies available to institutions that did not have computer capability to complete the questionnaire.

Information on the availability of the survey was sent to a variety of institution types in the state, including libraries, museums, historical societies, historical sites, archives, and county or municipal records centers. Nearly 700 institutions were informed of the survey, and a total of 290 answered, for a response rate of 41%. This is one of the highest response percentages for the statewide surveys which were completed as part of the Connecting to Collections program.

The survey instrument addressed a wide range of activities. Information was gathered on topics including preservation activities, preservation environment/security/disaster preparedness, preservation services and partnering, preservation information and training, preservation planning/funding/staffing, digital collections, and institutional data on collections and resources.

To determine the "reach" of the survey across the state, and to make sure answers were confidential rather than linked to an institution, respondents were asked which county their institution was located in. The project steering committee was pleased to see that 78 of Ohio's 88 counties are represented in the survey results.

Most respondents (61 or 25.2%) reported 1-3 full time or part-time paid staff at their institution, although 38 or 15.7% noted that they have over 50 paid staff members. The majority of institutions responding to a question on average volunteer hours per week indicated less than 10 hours.

Institution types completing the survey included libraries (99 or 41%), historical societies (48 or 20%), educational institution/academic libraries (college or university) with 32 or 13%, and museums (30 or 12%). Other responding groups included historic houses/sites and local government entities. The majority of responding institutions reported an average annual budget of more than \$200,000, although many, especially in the historical society community, reported much smaller budget levels.

Preservation Activities

Respondents were asked about preservation policies and actions they have taken. While 80 participants (approximately 28%) have developed, or were working on a written, long-range preservation plan which describes a multi-year course of action to meet the institution's preservation and conservation needs, 202 respondents, or 70%, had not developed such a plan. Museums, as a group, had the largest percentage of completed preservation plans. The number of organizations developing such a document could be raised through a combination of education and consulting activities.

An important activity which can lead to the development of a preservation plan is having a preservation survey performed on a collection. These surveys can help to determine the extent of preservation/conservation problems, including environmental concerns, collection management issues, security, disaster planning, special collection concerns, and the needs of special formats. Again, a large number of institutions (197, or 69%) had not undertaken a preservation survey. Those who had completed a survey (most often from academic libraries or museums, and with budgets in the \$100,000-200,000 range) noted that it had resulted in positive preservation actions. The institutions that did not see a positive effect from the survey activity mostly had experienced a lack of funding to implement the suggestions from the survey report.

A majority of Ohio cultural heritage institutions responding to the survey had taken a variety of steps to prolong the life of their collections. Activities performed by institutional staff included:

- Rehousing (including refolding and reboxing)
- Use of storage furniture (including shelving and cabinetry)
- Care and handling of collections
- Preservation reformatting (including preservation photocopying or microfilming)
- Environmental monitoring
- Advocacy/grantwriting/fundraising
- Building design/construction/renovation
- Digitization/imaging
- Exhibit policies
- Pest and mold management

When factoring in the performance of these tasks by an external provider (such as a vendor, consultant, or service agency) or volunteers, (who were mostly responsible for preservation activities at historical societies and at institutions with annual budgets of \$25,000 or less) the percentage of institutions completing these activities rose even further.

Areas of preservation program activity which institutions had not yet completed by institutional staff were disaster preparedness and recovery, digitization/imaging with preservation policies, preservation management (including assessment, planning, and administration) collections conservation (physical treatment) and preservation of digital files. A number of organizations, however, had completed these activities with the help of external providers or volunteers. Only one action area, "contracting for preservation/conservation services" was seen as not applicable by a majority of the respondents as an activity which had happened at their institution so far.

A finding of great concern to the project partners centered on storage conditions for materials. When asked, from a preservation perspective, how much of their institution's collections they would estimate is adequately stored – in a secure, environmentally-controlled space, on appropriate mounts or containers, in appropriate storage furniture, and with enough space to accommodate access, 39 institutions (14.7%) said none of their collections were adequately stored, 91 respondents (34.3%) said only 1-25% of their collections were stored well, and another 51 organizations said 26-50% were stored safely. All told, almost 70% of respondents felt that half or less of their collections were stored adequately. This is an area to concentrate on in future workshops and activities.

The survey included questions on policies and practices related to intellectual control of collections, and the results in Ohio were far better than many states. When asked if they had a collection development plan, 107 respondents (44.4%) said yes, and 65 (27.4%) said they did, but it was out of date. The historical society and historic house/site communities reported having the least amount of collection development plans. Additionally, the majority of respondents said that 76-100% of their collection is cataloged, and in a computer database. The large number of overall responses from the library community may have contributed to this finding, as museum professionals on the project's advisory committee made comments including "most of the small historical societies and town museums I visit have no inventory at all," and more than one-third of institutions with annual budgets of less than \$25,000 had completed these plans.

In a general question on preservation activity, each respondent was asked to name the top three preservation concerns at their institution. This question received a total of 671 answers, which were content-analyzed into groups. When reviewing all answers, top concerns included:

- Lack of funds for preservation supplies, staff, and activities
- Lack of space to store and exhibit materials
- Environmental issues (temperature and humidity fluctuations, lack of temperature and relative humidity control, lighting issues, lack of environmental monitoring)
- Lack of staff or staff time to work on preservation activities
- Lack of proper storage (environmentally-controlled facilities or storage containers/materials)
- Digitization needs and digital preservation issues
- Lack of a long-term preservation plan or policies

Preservation Environment, Security, and Disaster Preparedness

The findings of the open-ended "top problems" question were reflected especially in the initial questions about environmental control in Ohio's cultural heritage institutions. While the majority of institutions controlled temperature and light levels in at least some areas of their facility, the majority are not controlling relative humidity or air quality in any areas of their collection. Academic libraries reported the greatest amount of environmental monitoring activities. With Ohio's history of relatively wet weather, and pollution from manufacturing processes, strengthening control of these environmental forces is strongly suggested.

In the area of fire protection, a majority of respondents had smoke detectors, fire alarms, and fire extinguishers in their institutions, meaning that fire detection systems were good. However, fire suppression was not up to the same level, as a majority of respondents said they did not have wet-pipe sprinklers, dry-pipe sprinklers, or non-aqueous fire suppression systems such as Halon in their collections. A positive finding in this area, though, was that 232, or nearly 89% of respondents noted that their fire extinguishers were regularly inspected.

Fire and other natural and man-made forces are responsible for emergencies and disasters in cultural heritage institutions. While 92 organizations, or one-third of the respondents, had experienced a disaster which had damaged collections in the past five years, 169 institutions or 64% had not experienced these problems. Of great concern was the fact that 50% of historic houses and sites responding to the survey had recently experienced a disaster.

In those organizations which were hit by disasters, the leading cause by far was water leakage, including pipe or roof damage, at 73 institutions. Flooding and mold outbreaks (14 institutions each) and pests (9 organizations) were other top disaster causes. Vandalism, windstorms, construction dust, falling ceilings, shelving collapses, and firecrackers in the book drop had caused some of the other disasters described in the survey results. In enumerating the damage from these disasters, institutions most often reported that 1-24% of their collections were damaged.

In most cases, internal staff only (52%) or internal staff and institutional volunteers (26%) took care of cleaning up or replacing damaged materials.

The best method to battle disasters and recover damaged collections is to have an institutional disaster plan. While a majority of respondents (126, or almost 48%) did not have such a plan, when looked at in total, nearly the same amount either had a current plan (34 or 13%), were developing a plan (37 or 14.1%) or had a plan which had not been updated in over a year (54 or 20.6%). A large number of the existing plans were initially created in 2000, 2003/04, and 2008/09; many of the plans had been updated in 2008/09. About 30% of museums reported having disaster plans, while nearly 70% of both the historical society and historic house/site respondents did not have a plan. Disaster plan completion rates were worst at institutions with annual budgets under \$25,000.

Providing assistance to those institutions which need to complete or update their plan would certainly help to improve the disaster readiness of the state's cultural heritage sector. Additionally, Ohio is doing much better than other states in the overall number of plans that are in some stage of completion.

Another excellent result of the survey was the number of institutions (210 or 82.4%) that have a working relationship with their local emergency responders. For example, local firefighters or police officers may have walked through that cultural heritage facilities. This means that the first responders may have a basic familiarity with the institution when they have to respond to a disaster there.

A majority of institutions also utilized a variety of security practices and systems for their facilities. Control of items brought into collections, alarm systems, written policies and procedures, control of access to collections, and employee and volunteer screening were utilized in all areas at a majority of the responding institutions. Other systems in use included video surveillance cameras. The only security option not utilized by a majority of the group was security guards. Institutions with smaller annual budget levels reported having the least security measures.

Preservation Services and Partnering

There were a number of statewide preservation services which respondents would like to see available in Ohio. The leading services would be preservation grants to individual institutions (196 respondents or 79%, including 100% of museums responding); preservation workshops (175 or 70.6% – especially popular with public libraries and historical houses/sites); experts to contact for preservation information (157 or 63.3%); onsite visits by a preservation professional (153 or 61.7%, strongest among historical societies and historic homes/sites) and assistance with disaster planning and recovery (141 or 57%). The only services not supported by over half the respondents were help with general conservation/preservation surveys, and loan of environmental monitoring equipment.

Another question targeted services where institutions would like to see statewide preservation contracts negotiated by a state agency. The leading services of interest were disaster recovery (including vacuum freeze drying and onsite clean-up), with 152 interested institutions (61%) and statewide preservation supply contracts (140 or 56.2%). Electronic data storage (119 or 47.8%) and collections storage (109 or 43.8%) garnered some positive support, as well.

Collecting organizations expressed “some interest” in a variety of collaborative preservation activities including mutual assistance agreements for disaster response, mentoring activities in preservation, collaborative grant projects, “train-the-trainer” programs, shared technical equipment, setting up regional special interest groups on preservation, collaborative exhibitions, and collaborative digital collection building. The only category where the majority of institutions expressed “no interest” was shared storage facilities.

Preservation Information

Almost all of the methods of obtaining preservation information for staff which were mentioned in the survey were seen as useful by the respondents.

One method – onsite visits at the institution – was seen as very useful by 96 organizations, or almost 40% if the group. Other methods seen as generally useful were:

- Print materials, including books, journals, pamphlets, newsletters (152 or 60.3%; many museums and historic houses/sites found this service very useful)
- Videos/DVDs (143 or 58.8%)
- Websites (135 or 55.6%)
- Conferences (134 or 57.3% of the respondents to this category)
- Communication with resource people by telephone or e-mail (130 or 52.4%)
- Electronic materials such as journals and reports (128 or 52.9%)
- Online tutorials (117 or 48.5%)
- Listservs (110 or 46%)
- Short-term training workshops – one or two-day sessions (109 or 44%)
- Webinars (96 or 41%)
- Distance learning course (92 or 38%)

Institutional staff visiting other collections was also seen as a beneficial way to gather preservation information. The only two methods seen as “not useful” were long-term training workshops of a week or more, and college or university preservation courses.

Preservation Training

Information from the survey supported the interest in learning about preservation. At 149 participating institutions (60.3%), staff had attended a training program on preservation in the past five years. Additionally, institutions preferred, by a large majority, one day-training sessions.

The need for training on a variety of collection types was noted. Need was most evident for preservation training on these formats:

- Books and bound volumes (152 or 63.3%)
- Photographic collections (143 or 59.3%)
- Digital materials and electronic records collections (132 or 55.7%)
- Unbound sheets (archives, manuscripts, maps, etc.) (124 or 51.5%)
- Moving image collections (104 or 43.7%)
- Recorded sound collections (102 or 42.9%)
- Historic objects (92 or 38.7%)

Historic structure preservation was also “written in” as an answer to this category. In addition, an urgent need for training in photographic collections preservation was indicated by 44 respondents or 18.3%.

While there was some support for workshops on preservation of ethnographic artifacts, metalwork, furniture, domestic artifacts, machinery/technical/agricultural/medical/scientific artifacts, archaeological collections, natural science specimens, and hazardous materials, a majority of institutions answering these questions saw no need for training in these topics.

When asked about the preservation topics where training was needed, the “top vote getters” included:

- Disaster preparedness and recovery (149 or 62.3% of respondents to this specific question)
- Preservation management (139 or 60.2%)
- Digitization/imaging with preservation policies (135 or 57%)
- Collections conservation (134/57%)
- Digitization/imaging (135/57%)
- Preservation reformatting (133/56.6%)
- Care and handling of collections (127 or 53.8%)
- Advocacy/fundraising/grant writing (125/53.8%)
- Preservation of digital files (124/52.5%)
- Pest management/mold (108/50.5%)
- Environmental monitoring (111/47.7%)

Institutions with budgets of less than \$25,000/year reported the most “urgent” need for training on many material formats and preservation topics. Advocacy, collections conservation, and digitization with preservation policies also attracted a number of urgent need ratings from respondents, and disaster preparedness and digitization received urgent ratings across all institution types.

Areas of lesser need were training on rehousing and storage furniture (an area where many institutions were already active), moving collections, building design/construction/renovation, contracting for conservation/preservation services, and exhibit topics.

While training had been supported in the past, and there is strong support for future preservation training initiatives, there are some potential barriers for institutions to take part in training. Travel costs (123 or 50%) were the biggest roadblock, especially for academic libraries and museums. Registration cost (118 or 48%) was next on the list, and particularly troubling for public libraries and historical societies. Other concerns were non-availability of workshops in the region (noted by historic house/site respondents); inability to spare staff time; distance to the workshop site; and inability of all-volunteer staff members to attend training sessions. In the area of registration costs, institutions responded most often that they, or their employer, would be willing to pay \$50-99 per course for preservation workshops.

Preservation Planning and Funding

Preservation funding has most often come from the institution’s own budget (197 respondents or nearly 80%) or donor funding (45 or 18%, but nearly 40% of the historic house/site respondents).

Far fewer institutions had utilized federal, state, foundation, or corporate grants to fund preservation activities. These findings were in synch with the fact that 149, or over 60% of the responding institutions, had not made a grant proposal related to preservation over the past five years. Lack of staff time or expertise to complete the application, the need for additional project planning and preparation prior to applying for a grant, not knowing enough about funding sources, and preservation/conservation not being an institutional priority were seen as barriers to developing grant applications for preservation/conservation support. Some of the “mechanical” aspects of grant development were seen as problematic, as several respondents noted the difficulty of electronic grant submission. Overall, museums were the leading group in making grant applications, and almost 50% of organizations with annual budgets of \$25,001-100,000 have made grant applications.

When the survey asked for specific information on preservation funding sources, only “line items in the institution’s operating budget” (50 or 23.5%) and private foundations (36 or 16.9%) had been utilized by more than 10% if the respondents as a source of preservation funding over the past five years. County grants and Ohio Humanities Council Grants were other resources mentioned.

Preservation Staffing

Few of the institutions surveyed (48 or almost 20% answering this question) responded that they had collections care staff members or volunteers with formal training in preservation or conservation (such as a graduate program, equivalent experience or training, or Professional Associate/Fellow status in AIC – the American Institute for Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works). Academic libraries had the most staff with this level of training. These findings are very close to the average found in other states' Connecting to Collections Surveys.

Other findings in staffing were of some concern. By far, the most institutions (90 or 37%) indicated that their staff is assigned preservation/conservation duties as needed, or are full-time employees with a variety of responsibilities, including preservation. At 48 institutions (19.6%), no staff person or volunteer has preservation or conservation responsibilities. Only 37 institutions (approximately 15%) had paid staff whose job duties are predominantly preservation/conservation on a full-time or part-time basis; at 34 institutions (14%), volunteers provided all preservation/conservation services (this was especially prevalent among the historical society respondents).

Digital Collections

Over 60% of the cultural heritage organizations participating in the survey (150 respondents) had some type of digital collections.

Top formats of born-digital materials (those collected in their original electronic format) were digital photographs, video/audio, databases, and sound recordings. Conversion to digital format has most often been performed on photographs, documents, manuscripts, maps, and specific periodicals/journals.

There were some areas of concern in the stewardship of digital assets by Ohio's cultural heritage institutions. Only 25 institutions had a documented digital preservation plan in place to manage their digital assets for ten years or more. However, 36.4% (55 institutions) said they were operating some type of digital repository or digital archive for access to and preservation of digital files.

While 32 (about 22%) of respondents create backup copies of their digital files daily, 29 (18.8%) do so twice a month, and 26 (17.4%) backup weekly. The biggest concern was that 18 institutions (12.8%) said they never backup their digital files, and 32 or 21.1% didn't know their institutional backup plans, including a number of public and academic libraries, and also those organizations with budgets under \$25,000 a year.

Since the destruction caused by Hurricane Katrina, backing up digital files in multiple locations, or even in different states, has been seen as a good initial step in preserving digital collections. A concern discovered in the Ohio survey is that many organizations were storing their digital backups within three miles of their location, or even onsite in the same building or the same room as their use copies. Some institutions, even those with larger annual budgets, did not know where their digital backups were stored.

Institutional Information – Collections

Respondents were asked to estimate the size of their collections of various formats of materials. In review of this data, the survey analyst used early data from approximately 240 institutions to determine "combined collection sizes" for the formats asked about in the survey. The numbers shown below are the midpoint calculations for number of items held (number of respondents multiplied by the median amount of materials in each answer category). The estimates below may be conservative, as some collections may be bigger. Also, since the survey had a 40% response rate, it may be possible that the overall number of items held in Ohio

cultural heritage repositories is two-and-one-half times the amount of each category shown. The formats “measured” included:

- Books and bound volumes (monographs, serials, newspapers, scrapbooks, albums, pamphlets) – 26,217,500 volumes
- Unbound sheets (archival records, manuscripts, maps, etc) – 304,595 cubic feet
- Photographic collections (microfilm/fiche, photographic prints, negatives, slides, transparencies, daguerreotypes) – 11,214,100 items
- Moving image collections (motion picture film, videotape, laser disk, CD, DVD, minidisk) – 2,072,000 items
- Recorded sound collections (cylinder, phonodisc, cassette, open reel tape, DAT, CD, DVD, MP3) – 1,271,400 items
- Digital materials collections (floppy discs, CD-R, DVD-R, data tape) – 305,050 files
- Digital material online collections – 4,998,300 items
- Art objects (paintings, prints, drawings, sculpture, decorative arts including fine metalwork, jewelry, timepieces) – 810,600 items
- Historic and ethnographic objects (textiles, costumes and accessories, ceramics, glass) – 1,354,400 items
- Metalwork (arms/armor, metals, coins) – 30,550 items
- Furniture – 29,250 items
- Domestic artifacts (frames, household tools/machines, dolls, toys, musical instruments) – 175,150 items
- Machinery, technological/agricultural artifacts, medical scientific artifacts, transportation vehicles – 127,600 items
- Archaeological collections – 3,119,000 items
- Natural science specimens (zoological, botanical, geological, paleontological, palebotany specimens – 2,515,350 items
- Hazardous materials (artillery shells and other ordnance, food, pharmacological specimens, nitrate or cellulose film, taxidermy specimens) – 76,150 items

It is important to note that this question mainly serves to enumerate the number of items in the State’s cultural heritage collections. It does not note that all of these materials are in a specific condition (excellent or poor, for example), or specifically in need of repair or treatment. This information does, however, show the large size and scope of Ohio’s collections, and can help planners in determining the type of information, education, and service offerings which might be of assistance to the largest number of collection items.

Comments from Survey Respondents

Perhaps one of the most important parts of the survey was the ability for the respondents to make comments about the preservation conditions and needs of their collections. The candid comments were eye-opening, and can serve as further justification for future preservation action within the state. A selection of the 58 comments included in the survey results:

- “In most of the smaller museums, the awareness of the preservation/conservation of the collection is not a high priority.”
- “Please do not overlook or forget about the many, many small museums/sites with little or no funds to properly house their items. Working with OAHSM (the Ohio Association of Historical Societies & Museums, now the Ohio Local History Alliance), it is clear that there are a great deal of volunteer organizations wanting to take proper care of their collections but have neither the knowledge or funding to make that possible.”

- “Local Historical Societies that operate with an entire volunteer staff are so limited in the preservation/conservation of our collections due to lack of expertise, lack of funding for archival materials, and the time to catalog and maintain a proper collection for security of the items for the future.”
- “We have so many original historical records that need preservation/conservation that it is hard to decide where to even begin. We have no budget to speak of and would greatly benefit from a professional needs assessment survey.”
- “We have more to do than we have funding or expertise to do, but we are not without resources or knowledge.”
- “We need professional help in this area.”
- “We often have questions as to what to keep and probably tend to keep more than we need.”
- “We have little in the way of true archival materials, (but) would appreciate guidance in what to collect and how to collect it.”
- “We are having trouble getting all our collections and memorabilia inventory completed in a timely manner so our museum can use them.”
- “It is very difficult to estimate how many items are within our collection, or how many cubic feet.”
- “MONEY is the big problem not just now (economy) but all the time for us.”
- “We need assistance with preservation as well as ways to learn how to find and write grants.”
- “I ... lack experience in filling out grants and find it a little overwhelming.”
- “Our parent institution ... does not support our interest in archival preservation of library materials.”
- “It has been impossible to convince our local government officials to address our needs as there is just not any local money to be spared at this time.”
- “The two biggest challenges are convincing members of the Board of Trustees and the general public that preservation/conservation is an important part of museum work, and finding the money to pay for it.”
- “It would be great to have literature or other educational information that could be shared with management letting them know the importance of best practices and guidelines for museum collections.”
- “We are concerned about the lack of consistently-followed preservation practices for our digital projects, and have already lost some of our digital files due to deterioration of the CDs they were previously stored on.”
- “When we (were) forced to confront our preservation issues after a mold outbreak, we floundered about for guidance and help to deal with our problem. Having one statewide, centralized source to provide help would have been an incredible relief.”
- “Having a mutual aid agreement with nearby cultural heritage institutions would be a huge positive step forward. Having this paired with a repository of disaster supplies that all in this mutual aid agreement could draw from would also be greatly beneficial.”
- “We need access to equipment that will assist in preservation efforts.”
- “I would avidly welcome the opportunity for more (preservation) training workshops.”
- “We need to be able to train volunteers in the basics of preservation ... things we can do on a shoestring budget.”
- “Cooperative preservation planning and pooling resources would be desirable.”
- “Without outside help, we will not be able to adequately preserve our collection for future generations.”
- “Where do you get interested people with time?”
- “We need help... where does one start?”

Conclusion

While the results of the Ohio Connecting to Collections project shed some very positive light on the State’s preservation activities, the survey discovered a number of trends which cultural heritage institutions must address to continue safeguarding their treasures.

Cultural organizations in Ohio indicated that they regularly undertake a wide variety of preservation activities. However, few indicated that they had undergone some central or “core” activities of preservation program development, including both the development of a long-range preservation plan, or a survey of their buildings, collections, and preservation policies. Developing a statewide effort to help individual institutions address these needs, through education and assistance on plan development, must be a cornerstone of Ohio’s continuing efforts in preservation. In fact, the survey illustrated that a number of the organizations which had completed these activities did so with the help of external providers or volunteers, strengthening the call for external assistance.

In both the statistical review of the survey, and the list of top preservation problems, there is a deep concern about the storage conditions for cultural collections. Almost 70% of respondents felt that half or less of their collections were stored adequately, and the lack of storage space and appropriate storage environment and containers was one of the most often mentioned problems seen in Ohio’s collection facilities.

One of the best ways to increase the life expectancy of cultural collections is to provide a good storage environment for them, and stave off the damaging effects of temperature, humidity, light, and pollutants. The survey found that, while a majority of institutions did not control environmental factors in all areas of their collections, temperature and light were at least controlled in some areas of the collections. Humidity and pollutants, however, were not controlled in a majority of collections.

A combined focus on these two areas of concern – collection storage and exhibit space, and the environment within those spaces – is key to address in information, education, and through on-site consulting.

When not controlled, environmental forces can be the cause of disasters which damage collections, including mold, leaks, and cause other problems. Another area of policy development which was lacking was plans to prepare for, mitigate the effects of, and recover from disasters which affect cultural heritage collections. There are a variety of educational offerings and online resources to assist institutions in developing these plans; bringing that information, and, where needed, some professional assistance to complete plans, should be a bedrock activity in Ohio’s future preservation program. There were positive findings in the development of working relationships between cultural heritage professionals and emergency managers/first responders, as well as in security practices. These activities can serve as the basis of developing better disaster plans for the institutions.

In many of the areas above where policies or practices are lacking, grants, workshops, expert information sources, and onsite visits have been suggested as ways to answer the need for assistance. When asked what services they would like to see in Ohio, these areas were exactly the type of help which survey respondents requested. Contracting for assistance with disaster recovery and to gain discounts on preservation supplies was favored by a majority of respondents, who were interested in partnering on these and other collaborative preservation initiatives.

Workshops and training opportunities were requested to focus on specific formats of materials (books/bound volumes, photos, digital materials, and archival items – which were also among the formats where Ohio institutions held large numbers of collections) as well as on specific topics (disaster preparedness, preservation management, and digitization were the most requested subjects). Travel and registration costs were seen as some of the biggest barriers to attending training, so future training provision should include electronic/online offerings on some of these topics.

In both the comments included with the surveys, and the questionnaire results, the need for preservation funding, and the lack of experience in developing grants to fund these activities was visible. One activity the Ohio Heritage Partnership organizations and others in the state which provide education can do is to offer more information and training in grant development to help organizations gain the funding to move their programs forward. The lack of funding, in some cases, is a root cause of the lack of staffing for preservation in cultural heritage institutions. Can “traveling experts,” who have made a great impact in the historical society community, help to address the preservation needs of libraries and museums as well?

Ohio has long been seen as a leader in digitizing collections information. However, many institutions lacked the knowledge and basic policies to preserve the materials once they had been digitized. Best practices are just now being developed in this area on a national and international basis; Ohio institutions should tap into this information and education to better preserve their collections.

With highly-respected institutions such as the State Library of Ohio, Ohio Historical Society, Intermuseum Conservation Association, Ohio Preservation Council, and other preservation and conservation professionals leading the way, Ohio can collaboratively develop a programmatic approach to help all types and sizes of cultural heritage institutions deal with their preservation concerns. The large and rich cultural collections of the State deserve nothing less.