
Preservation Needs Assessment Report Template 2007 - 2008

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Sections

1. Title page

- Name of the organisation
- Title: 'Preservation Needs Assessment'
- Author and date of report

2. Table of contents

- Include page numbers for quick reference.

3. Executive summary

- A brief introduction to the organisational aims/objectives and:
 - Up to three key recommendations from the assessment, either exactly as expressed in the report or drawn from a number of observations and recommendations outlined in the report.
 - Any key issues that will impact on the organisation's ability to implement the recommendations (eg additional resources needed)
- No more than one page in length.

Example

The Museum of Kites aims to tell the stories and history of kites and kite fliers in the local region. It performs a major education role with school children and the broader community, participating in community activities like the annual kite flying day and other community events.

The museum is staffed by a small number of committed volunteers. This group have achieved much in the 30 years of operation: securing a dedicated building in 1985, developing public programmes in kite making and flying and producing a number of high quality publications on local kite fliers. However, the collection is uncatalogued and the current exhibitions are suffering from wear and tear after more than 20 years of constant display. The honorary curator has plans in place to redevelop the exhibitions, but the museum needs a major injection of funds to finance the upgrade.

Three recommendations are made following the assessment, they are:

1. Catalogue the collection
2. Stabilise items that have been damaged due to prolonged display
3. Redevelop the exhibitions

Key issues required to carry out the recommendations include:

1. Additional staff for cataloguing and exhibition development
2. Funds to undertake conservation treatment on damaged collection items

4. Key recommendations

- A summary of the key/major recommendations for further action, listed in priority order and cross-referenced to the main body of the report.
- Recommendations must be listed as either: short, medium or long term. Where short term: within 12 months, medium term: within 3 years, and long term: within 5 years.

Example

Short term recommendations:

1. Commence cataloguing the collection, beginning with objects selected for new displays. (6.7)
2. Rehouse photographs in appropriate, archival quality sleeves (4.6)
3. Seek funding for conservation treatments on items to be displayed (5.8)

Medium term recommendations:

4. Prepare an Exhibition policy (3.11)
5. Undertake conservation treatments on items to be displayed (5.8)

Long term recommendations:

6. Develop a new collection store and exhibition preparation area (8.1)
7. Provide training for staff and volunteers responsible for handling the collection (7.4)

5. Policies

- What policies exist that impact on the collection? Eg Collection Management Policy, Collection Policy, Conservation Policy.
- Do these adequately cater for the current needs of the collection?

6. Collection

Description

Broadly outline the types of objects in the collection and the materials they are made from (eg. textiles, books, metal). Include where possible, an outline of collection themes and any sub collections (eg. 'Frank Hurley collection of glass plate negatives').

- What types of objects/formats are collected?
 - Description of the collection, including associations and provenance
 - Size of the collection (eg. 300 objects or 1550+ photographic prints)
 - Has significance of the collection or individual objects been identified? If so, include a summary here and comment on how it impacts on your assessment.
 - Use of the collection (research/display; how frequently accessed; who accesses)
 - Are there alternatives to physical access (such as digital images available on database)?

- Include the above information for each category (eg. for historic artefacts or photographic materials) where relevant.

Condition

Assess the overall condition of types of objects. Include comment on level of cleanliness, types of physical and chemical damage that exist or could be expected, and identify any objects that require immediate treatment. Also prioritise groups of objects that require attention in the next two to five years (please indicate level of urgency).

- What is the overall condition of the collection?
- What parts of the collection are in poor condition?
- What parts of the collection are at most risk?
- Are certain areas of the collection in higher demand than others and what are the repercussions of this?
- What are the priority issues, if any, for the whole collection, or specific parts of the collection?

Handling

- Are people who work with the collection aware of appropriate handling techniques?
- Has the collection suffered damage as a consequence of inappropriate handling?
- Is the collection at risk of damage from inappropriate handling if nothing is done?

7. Building (repository structure)

Examine the building and rooms in which the collection is housed and assess the extent to which the building materials and design assist (or not) the preservation of the collection. Suggest improvements.

Describe the building, construction material and any glaring concerns.

- Where is/are the building/s located? What other buildings are nearby?
- Provide a general description of the building's layout indicating storage and display areas (include a plan or drawing).
- What are the predominant materials used in the construction of the building?
- What is the general condition of the building (exterior and interior)? Has it been well maintained?
- Is there any evidence of water leaks, condensation, rodents, insects, mould in the building?
- Does the building fabric and design moderate external climatic conditions?
- What security measures are in place (eg alarms, window and door locks, security bars, security patrols, key register)?
- Have there been any thefts?

- What means of fire detection and suppression are present?

Include digital images where possible.

8. Environment

Survey the internal temperature, relative humidity, light and dust levels and assess whether they pose a risk to the collection. What evidence is there that the environment is putting the collection at risk (eg mould growth/stains, fading, surface loss)? Will any of these factors cause a noticeable difference in the next 50 years?

- What are the seasonal variations in the local climate?
- How well does the building insulate the collection from the external climate?
- What are the sources of natural light in the building?
- What type of artificial lighting is used?
- What are the light exposure levels, eg how often are blinds opened or lights turned on each day/week?
- What controls are in place to modify the environment, eg insulation; blinds on windows etc.

If analysis indicates that there is a problem with high, low or fluctuating temperature or RH, ongoing monitoring is recommended. Records of such monitoring need to be provided with the report to support any recommendations relating to installation of air-conditioning, dehumidifiers or humidifiers.

9. Storage

Assess the storage areas and comment on whether the materials or method of storage pose a risk. What can be expected to change if items are left as is?

- Where are the collections stored?
- What is/are the storage space/s like?
- What types of storage furniture are in use?
- What condition is the storage furniture in (eg. rust-free, operable doors/drawers)?
- What kinds of enclosures are used (eg boxes, sleeves)?
- Are storage methods appropriate (e.g. not overcrowded or on the floor)?
- Are the enclosures of appropriate preservation quality?
- Is there good air circulation around the collections?
- What are the key risks associated with the above?

10. Display/exhibitions

Provide an outline of the existing exhibitions and display layout of the organisation. Include outlying buildings and spaces provided for temporary exhibitions. Keep in mind that in some cases the building itself will be an exhibition item.

- Are there permanent exhibitions, temporary exhibitions?
- How are collection items exhibited?
- What exhibition furniture is utilised? Is this appropriate?
- What lighting is used and is it able to be adjusted?
- What are the risks? I.e. what harm will occur if no changes are made?

11. Housekeeping

Examine the cleaning/housekeeping practices used throughout the building, specifically any cleaning measures, and assess whether they contribute to the long-term care or deterioration of the collection.

- What is involved in the cleaning schedule? Is it too frequent?
- Are the cleaning methods and equipment appropriate? (eg wiping versus brushing, sweeping versus vacuuming)
- Are the cleaning materials appropriate?
- How often are the displays and collection storage areas cleaned (not just vacuuming floors)?
- What level of pest inspection and treatment is carried out?

12. Visitor impact (for collections in heritage buildings)

Assess the impact that the current visitation level has on the wear and tear on the building fabric/site.

- Is there any evidence that visitation is causing wear and tear to any part of the collection and/or building fabric?
- Will the current level of visitation cause a noticeable difference in the collection and/or building in the next 50 years?

13. Disaster preparedness

- Is there a disaster preparedness plan?
- Has a risk assessment been undertaken?
- Does the organisation have a list of emergency contacts?

14. Training needs / skills assessment

- What ability does this organisation have to implement this survey (eg, skills, funding, available people)?
- What in house resources/skills are available to use with the collection.
- Are staff aware of preventive measures for the collection eg Opening and closing blinds, preparing items for storage.
- What training has been given to people?
- What training is required for current operations and future plans?

15. Prioritised recommendations

THIS IS THE KEY SECTION OF THE ASSESSMENT, also could be called 'Preservation Plan' or 'Action Plan'.

Please remember that this report will be used for future projects.

- Extract the key recommendations from the entire assessment
- Express each recommendation as either a short, medium or long term action
- Assign a priority to each recommendation within each time frame
- Provide a timeline to begin/complete each recommendation
- Indicate the likely resources required to complete each recommendation (as this may become the basis of a subsequent grant application)
- Please see the following examples of the way to set out this section

Recommendation	Priority	Resources
Short term		
Upgrade storage shed to provide a more stable environment	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New shelving • Materials to seal internal surfaces of building • Personnel to undertake work
Begin cataloguing the collection (Continue until completed)	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cataloguing system (i.e. a collection management database) • Training in database use • Personnel to undertake work • Digital camera
Seek funding for conservation treatments on items to be displayed	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personnel to write grant application
Purchase housekeeping equipment	4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Funds to purchase the appropriate items of equipment identified in this report
Medium term		
Rehouse photographic collection	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Archive storage boxes, Mylar sleeves and photographic albums • Personnel to undertake work
Stabilise items damaged by prolonged display	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Funds to commission conservators to undertake treatments
Long term		
Reorganise storage area to include an exhibition preparation area	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Additional storage shelving • New work table • Personnel to undertake work

16. Authorship

Indicate who has written and contributed to the writing of this report, their positions and qualifications.

Include any relevant information about conflict of interests here.