

Checklist to Plan the Processing of Pictorial Collections

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The following categories of information and activities should be considered when preparing to process a collection of visual materials. A one-person archives may need a processing plan to organize ideas or draft a grant proposal to seek outside funding for a special project. A large repository may rely on a processing plan to document decisions for a particular collection or to gather advice and feedback about proposed approaches from other stakeholders such as subject specialists. When documentation compiled during appraisal or accessioning is thorough, a processing plan can be brief. When a library or archives receives many groups of similar records, a single generic plan might cover most situations.

Justification

Priority level – Summarize the need to process the material in terms of the repository's overall holdings. State the priorities in terms of research value, uniqueness of material, and demonstrated or anticipated demand. Consider the practicality and simplicity of processing the records and the expenses involved, including staff time to prepare the material and to service it later, storage space, housing supply costs and availability, and conservation and duplication costs. Balance value, use, and condition factors.

Basic Facts

Collection or record group name and accession number – State the formal name of the collection or record group. Sometimes the name has already been established through an instrument of gift, records schedule, or other reference source. Otherwise a name may need to be established. An identification or control number may also need to be assigned based on institutional policies.

Quantity, format, and current storage location – List each part of the records according to format (physical media or size). Include the quantity of material and all current storage locations. Provide a summary of the range of material that needs to be handled and where to find it.

Condition – Summarize the physical state of the material, including current housing.

Acquisition source – List the immediate source of the acquisition, the means of acquisition, and the date the material arrived at the repository.

Restrictions on access and reproduction – Describe any restrictions on access, reference copying, or commercial use. State the source of the restrictions: donor requirement, copyright, privacy rights, national security, theft risk, or fragile physical condition.

Scope and research value – Describe the originator of the material, subject matter, creators, and documentary or aesthetic significance. Summarize past research use and anticipate future uses.

Affiliated repository holdings – Describe related material held by the repository. This information reminds the readers of the plan what records may be available to consult. It also provides a link to people who processed the related material. These people might have valuable information that could help with the current processing.

Related holdings outside the repository – List comparable material at other institutions. This information places the holdings in the larger context and provides names of institutions that might

be consulted for advice. Also mention related materials that are scheduled to eventually arrive at the repository or records in private hands that may be part of acquisition objectives.

Current arrangement and access – Describe the existing physical arrangement. Note the amount of caption information accompanying the photographs. List any existing, inventories, checklists, logbooks, files, or other means by which people have been able to use some or all of the material in the past. The originator of the records may have created these access tools or subsequent owners or researchers may have created them. This information helps determine what organization schemes exist or might help in providing future access. It also serves as a useful reminder of what files to update as a result of new processing.

Proposed Work

Arrangement and access – If the records have an original order, describe any work needed to retain or reconstruct that order. This work can include activities such as refileing or creating checklists. If there is no original order, describe the proposed arrangement. Describe how duplicates and variants will be handled.

Labeling – Provide examples of how the records will be labeled. Describe how individual items will be marked. Show where the marks will be placed on items and say what marking media will be used. Also include diagrams that show where the labels will be placed on standard folders, boxes and other enclosures. Include samples of labels that will be used and illustrations of the type of information that will be included on the label.

Housing – Describe the current housing of the material and explain how the newly processed material will be housed. Include the dimensions for proposed housing, including the sizes for standard sleeves, folders, enclosures, boxes, and flat files. Explain how any odd-size materials will be housed.

Surrogates – Describe what type(s) of reference copies will be provided (if any) and why a particular type is recommended. This might include photocopies, copy prints, microfilm, or digital scans. If no surrogate is proposed, explain why.

Conservation – Describe any conservation treatments required to make the material safe to handle. If extensive treatment is required, prioritize the conservation needs. Indicate if any of the needs are necessary for health and safety of photographic researchers and staff to work with the materials (e.g., mold). Also list preservation requirements such as backing boards for flimsy items and cold storage for nitrate negatives.

Disposal of out of scope material – Describe what materials are deemed out of scope and state how they will be disposed of after processing work has been completed. Explain any agreements for the disposition of unwanted material.

Description - Describe the proposed types of descriptive tools such as finding aids, container lists and catalog records. Include samples of similar descriptive tools or examples of the proposed descriptive tools.

Resources needed

Timeline – Outline how long each project phase is anticipated to last. Note all deadlines and describe any work that must happen before other work can proceed.

Budget – Provide details about the cost of staff, supplies, and equipment. Include the costs of proposed contracts or reproduction work.

Staff needed – List the type of staff needed and for how long (e.g., two full-time technicians for five weeks and one archivist for six weeks.) List the names of the people who will work on the project when they are known.

Supplies needed – List all the supplies and equipment needed. Include everything from pencils and erasers to computers and special software.

Work space needed – Describe the amount of work space needed, along with necessary furniture (i.e., one large work table with chair and light box, one computer workstation)

Storage space needed – Estimate the type and amount of storage space needed once the records are processed, including any special environmental needs (e.g, 4 linear feet of shelving, one map case drawer, and one file cabinet in a cold environment 35°F/25rh)

Related activities

Proposed reference aids, publications or exhibitions – Describe any ongoing projects or ideas for future projects that might involve the records. This helps to coordinate processing efforts with repository priorities and strategic goals.

Publicity – Describe potential plans for publicizing the records once they are ready for public use. Include staff briefings, exhibitions, e-mail and online announcements, published articles, and press releases. Provide talking points for publicizing the records.

Sources

Background information – Summarize the sources that contain further information about the records, e.g., reports in the accession or collection files, published articles, and articles. Particularly relevant articles or a bibliography may be included as an appendix.

Acknowledgments – List the names of all the people involved in devising the processing plan. This provides valuable contact information when questions arise about the records in the future or when another archivist wants to process a similar group of records.