

## PRESERVATION LEAFLET

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### PLANNING AND PRIORITIZING

# 1-7 CELEBRATING WITH COLLECTIONS

## INTRODUCTION

Anniversaries can be powerful moments of celebration or commemoration. They offer the opportunity to reflect on people and events that have had an impact on both society and culture at large as well as individual lives. Anniversaries may be focused on a geographic region or event, or they may be related to a specific person or organization's history. For cultural heritage institutions, anniversaries often lead to greater interest in and deeper engagement with collections.

While an anniversary can bring increased visitation, research requests, donations, and media attention, it can also increase risk to the collections. This leaflet discusses ways to harness the many benefits of anniversary programming while protecting your collections.

## BENEFITS

If you capitalize on an anniversary, the heightened visibility of your organization can have many benefits, from boosted visitation to national media coverage. Anniversaries are also opportune moments to re-engage donors, pursue grant opportunities, and attract new funders. This attention and funding make anniversaries a valuable time to assess and care for your collections, including conservation treatment for works going on display or that will have increased research interest.

One of the most invigorating opportunities that anniversaries bring is the chance to engage more deeply with your community and foster new community connections and partnerships. This can not only share the workload but also can highlight different collections and perspectives to tell a fuller and more dynamic story. You may be able to collaborate on related exhibits or co-host programs and workshops with partners at neighboring organizations or with institutions located on the other side of the country. Especially for historical anniversaries related to complicated topics and legacies, engaging with diverse community organizations is a way to use your celebration or commemoration to uplift many voices and perspectives.

## RISKS

Increased visibility and access to collections via exhibits, research, or online engagement comes with increased risks.

- Accidental damage during research, digitization, and exhibit preparation. Increased use and handling of collections can result in inadvertent mechanical damage. For example, book spines can become damaged from insufficient support, and pages and photographs can be accidentally folded or torn.
- Theft and loss. The risk of theft and loss (including unintentional misplacement) goes up with increased handling, moving

and loaning of collections, and public exhibition.

- Mechanical damage. Anniversaries may generate more exhibit programming of longer duration, which can cause cumulative light damage and present additional risks to materials that are on display.
- Pests. An increase in visitors and donations can bring unwanted pests into your facility.

## RISK MITIGATION

To harness the many benefits that celebrating anniversaries offer, risk mitigation needs to be included in the planning process. Essential documentation, careful handling of materials, and a strategic use of digitization can ensure the long-term preservation of collections for many anniversaries to come.

## POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

Your institution's policies and procedures will serve as an important foundation for planning an anniversary. Updating or developing these policies is an important first step that should happen well in advance of your anniversary. Consider collaborating with neighboring institutions that also need to review policies, and look for opportunities to share the workload.

**Mission Statement:** Reviewing or developing an institutional mission statement is an important starting point because it shapes the goals and intentions behind any project. For a collecting institution or unit, this statement should reference audience, activities, collecting areas, and preservation.

**Collection Development Policy:** Your collection development policy should indicate the scope and depth of your collection as well as what materials you do

not accept. This is a particularly important document to have leading up to an anniversary that might generate a dramatic increase in donations. The policy might also define areas for future acquisition, identify target audiences, and should include procedures for acquisition, deaccession, and processing.

**Exhibit Policy and Guidelines:** The shape and scope of your exhibit policy depends on your organizational needs. It should include information that helps guide the timeline for an exhibit, selection criteria, conservation, environmental conditions, security, label design and content, and case layout. See NEDCC Preservation Leaflet 02-05 Protecting Paper and Book Collections During Exhibition for more information.

**Intellectual Control:** There are several policies that support intellectual control. Essentially, you cannot preserve and provide access to collections—nor can you know when something is missing—unless you know what you have. Leading up to an anniversary, set aside time to conduct or update you might consider a collection inventory. Also ensure that you have deed of gift forms to use with all donations as well agreements for incoming and outgoing loans.

**Condition Reporting:** This is a procedure that should already be a routine part of collections care, but it is especially important during periods of increased handling. Inspect all parts of an item before it is displayed or goes out on loan. Examine condition during exhibition to identify and mitigate any condition changes. Finally, when the exhibit ends, materials should be

inspected again, and the method and duration of display should be documented.

## HANDLING BEST PRACTICE

Increased interest in your collection whether for use by researchers or for exhibits means an increase in handling by staff members, volunteers, and researchers. Ensuring that everyone who handles collection materials is properly trained in basic handling techniques is critical to preventing mechanical damage.

**Gloves:** Clean, dry hands are appropriate for handling documents and books. Wear nitrile gloves (always powder free) when working with photographs, A/V formats, metals, and fragile materials. The practice of wearing white cotton gloves has fallen out of favor because they provide limited protection for collections and reduce the user's tactile sensitivity.

**Moving Materials:** Before moving collections, clean and dry your hands, tuck in any baggy shirts, ties, or scarves, and pull back your hair. Then prepare your workspace so you have a large, clean, and empty space to work with your materials. Some items might be very large and heavy, so before you pick anything up, consider if you need a partner to help lift it, and where you are going to put it down. Clear the path between storage and your workspace ahead of time.

**Researcher Access:** Reduce handling when possible. Allow one user access at a time. Handle materials slowly and with care. Oversize or heavy items should be

transported on a cart whenever possible. Fully support materials while in use. For bound volumes, use book cushions (foam wedges made of preservation-quality foam) or take two clean cotton towels, roll them up, and place them under each cover to take pressure off the spine. Note that last-minute requests from high-profile users (e.g. your city's mayor or a media outlet) can prompt staff and volunteers to take procedural shortcuts that can lead to accidental damage and loss,

### **Scanning, Digitization, and Facsimiles:**

One way to increase visibility and accessibility of collection materials while minimizing physical and environmental risk factors is to pursue a digitization project. Digitization of collections might also be something you contract out to a third-party vendor, or depending on the equipment and staff at your organization, scanning or photographing collections can be done in-house. Purchasing a flatbed scanner, for example, can be an affordable tool that serves researchers near and far. However, it is only useful for documents and can be a time-consuming process. High quality scans may also be used to create facsimiles of important documents and photographs for use in physical exhibits in which the original materials are too fragile for safe display. While these may take some planning and budgeting, the increased interest of donors and availability of grants present opportunities to make collections available digitally.

## RESOURCES

### Funding

Community Preservation Act or other local funding

<https://www.communitypreservation.org/funding>

NEDCC's Creative Fundraising for Preservation, free Webinar Recording

<https://youtu.be/XZdlChYOvs0>

Funding Opportunities

<https://www.nedcc.org/funding>

### Example Anniversary Observations

400<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Gloucester, Massachusetts

Project webpage: <https://www.gloucesterma400.org/>

50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Hip Hop at St. Louis Art Museum (partnership with Baltimore Museum of Art)

Exhibit webpage: <https://www.slam.org/exhibitions/the-culture-hip-hop-and-contemporary-art-in-the-21st-century/>

150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of The Metropolitan Museum of Art

Online exhibit: <https://artsandculture.google.com/story/2wXR-pBlvVqAJQ>

200<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the State of Alabama

NEDCC Stories, We the People: Conserving the State of Alabama's Defining Documents

Blog post: <https://www.nedcc.org/about/nedcc-stories/we-the-people-alabama>

Jamestown Rediscovery Timeline

Online timeline: <https://historicjamestowne.org/history/jamestown-timeline/>

### Policies and Procedures

American Alliance of Museums' Mission and Planning Standards

<https://www.aam-us.org/programs/ethics-standards-and-professional-practices/mission-and-planning-standards>

American Association of State and Local History's Essential Resources

13 Documents to Strengthen Your History Organization

[https://d221a1e908576484595f-1f424f9e28cc684c8a6264aa2ad33a9d.ssl.cf2.rackcdn.com/aaslh\\_706b0f51fefc80cd95618801f0980f6c.pdf](https://d221a1e908576484595f-1f424f9e28cc684c8a6264aa2ad33a9d.ssl.cf2.rackcdn.com/aaslh_706b0f51fefc80cd95618801f0980f6c.pdf)

National Park Service's Museum Handbook has a chapter on performing a collection inventory:

[https://www.nps.gov/subjects/museums/upload/MHII\\_Ch4\\_Inventory.pdf](https://www.nps.gov/subjects/museums/upload/MHII_Ch4_Inventory.pdf)

Society of American Archivists, A Guide to Deeds of Gift

<https://www2.archivists.org/publications/brochures/deeds-of-gift>

Society of American Archivists, Sample Policies, Plans, and Forms

<https://www2.archivists.org/groups/solo-archivists-section/sample-policies-plans-and-forms>

## **NEDCC Leaflets**

02-05 Protecting Paper and Book Collections During Exhibition

<https://nedcc.org/02-05-exhibition>

03-11 Collections Security: Planning and Prevention for Cultural Heritage Institutions <https://nedcc.org/03-11-security>

04-01 Storage and Handling for Books and Artifacts on Paper

<https://nedcc.org/04-01-storage-books-paper>

07-07 Choosing and Working with a Conservator

<https://nedcc.org/07-07-choosing-conservator>

## **Community Partnerships**

We Must Decolonize Our Museums

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jyZAgG8--Xg>

*The Inclusive Historian's Handbook*

<https://inclusivehistorian.com/>

OF/BY/FOR ALL's Free Resources

<https://www.ofbyforall.org/resources>

## **U.S. Semiquincentennial Resources**

AASLH's USA 250<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Resources

<https://learn.aaslh.org/250>

IMLS Funding Opportunities to Support Semiquincentennial Activities

<https://www.ims.gov/webinars/ims-funding-opportunities-support-semiquincentennial-activities>

NPS Semiquincentennial Grant Program

<https://www.nps.gov/articles/000/semiquincentennial-grant-opportunity.htm>

U.S. Semiquincentennial Commission

<https://america250.org/a250-leadership/>

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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