



Partnership for New York's Cultural Heritage Statewide Preservation Plan

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In partnership with the
Greater Hudson Heritage Network
Museum Association of New York
New York State Council on the Arts
New York Library Association
New York Archives Alliance
Upstate History Alliance

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Executive summary

With a grant from the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS), the Office of Cultural Education (OCE) recently led a statewide preservation survey of New York's cultural heritage community to better understand the condition of New York's collections and the needs of their stewards. Nearly 800 cultural organizations--museums, libraries, historical societies and archival institutions responded to the survey. The results provide essential evidence for designing programs that address New York's preservation needs and advocate for support that will bring resources to our cultural heritage community.

Our cultural heritage

New York lays claim to an unparalleled breadth, volume, and density of collecting institutions – museums, libraries, historical societies and archival institutions which, under charter by the University of the State of New York, steward collections that span the ages. These are unique, tangible documents and cultural objects, as well as a growing body of electronic collections. New York's cultural collections form an incomparable resource for students of all ages – a resource worthy of the utmost care. For decades, New York has actively supported the preservation of its cultural resources through grants services and funds to cultural institutions statewide.

In 2007, the national Institute of Museum and Library Services launched a program to provide funding to all U.S. States and Territories to determine their most important preservation needs. The State of New York was one of the first recipients of these *Connecting to Collections* statewide preservation planning grants. In partnership with key New York cultural organizations, OCE developed and distributed a web-based survey instrument examining the needs of New York's collections and their stewards.

Over 4000 institutions were invited to respond to the survey through a variety of e-mail, traditional mailers, and listserv announcements. The survey was released in early 2009. Nearly 800 cultural organizations--museums, libraries, historical societies and archival institutions participated, for a response rate of 20%. The response reflects the amazing diversity and scale of New York's cultural heritage institutions with budgets ranging from \$190 to \$200 million and collections ranging from a few items in a rural historical society to the vast holdings of the Metropolitan Museum of Art. The results provide the evidence needed to design programs that address New York's preservation challenges and advocate for support that will bring resources to our cultural heritage community.

Partnership

New York's survey project was founded on partnership, which has been and will continue to be a keystone of the plan. Our partners include: Greater Hudson Heritage Network, Museum Association of New York, New York Archives Conference, New York Library Association, New York State Council on the Arts, and Upstate History Alliance. The success of this plan depends on the continuing participation and commitment of current partners, as well as new ones, including the New York 3Rs Association (New York's regional multi-type library system) and other organizations. We will also seek to form alliances with leaders in preservation in the state who can contribute to the success of the plan through their leadership, expertise, and connections. We will reach out to potential partners including the New York State Historical Records Advisory Board, the Comprehensive Research Libraries of New York, the State Emergency Management Office, the New York State Office of Parks and Recreation, the State Historic Preservation Office, and the Alliance for Response/NYC among others.

Why partnership? Partnership is the key to sustainability. It is only through strengthened, lasting relationships across repository types, government, and private organizations and within geographical regions, that we will be able to sustain the health of New York's collections and the continuing education of their stewards. There is value to cross-disciplinary collaboration: the libraries, museums, and archives in New York and nationwide have pursued different approaches to common goals, some more successfully than others. We can learn from each other's mistakes and gains. And despite our differences, we share a common purpose, for which we need to seek and embrace common solutions. Partnership ensures the connections among allied efforts and reduces redundancy and waste, which we can no longer afford in these difficult economic times.

The success of this plan relies on the shared expertise of our partners and other resource organizations in New York. Besides its unparalleled collecting institutions, New York is the home of leading preservation research organizations such as the George Eastman House, the Image Permanence Institute, the Buffalo State College Conservation Program, the NYU Institute of Fine Arts and Audio and Moving Image Preservation Program. Our partners will be expected to make a formal commitment to establishing priorities, making decisions, and implementing the Plan. Resource organizations will be invited to share their knowledge and experience toward advancing preservation in New York. Their role will be to participate in training, serve as mentors, and advise on curriculum.

Essential evidence

Our survey findings reveal that the cultural heritage institutions of New York State enjoy one of the widest varieties of external preservation funding sources available in the United States and are taking good advantage of those resources. Our institutions have done a great deal to protect and preserve their collections. One hundred seventeen institutions in New York have been awarded over \$26 million from the Save America's Treasures Federal Grants program (data through 2008). The New York State Education Department's Office of Cultural Education has invested over \$50 million in preservation of collections statewide and provided countless preservation workshops, site visits, surveys, and disaster aid, among many other preservation services. But the survey also revealed vulnerabilities, gaps, missed opportunities, and unmet needs that must be addressed if we are to ensure sustained preservation of our shared heritage.

Preservation education is the top need identified through the survey. The survey highlights the need for a targeted effort in disaster planning; fewer than half of New York repositories have a disaster plan in a state prone to natural and human disasters. Finally, it exposes the need for a stronger preservation service infrastructure: more robust connections among the many cultural institutions in New York, regardless of discipline or funding source, that together support stewardship in New York.

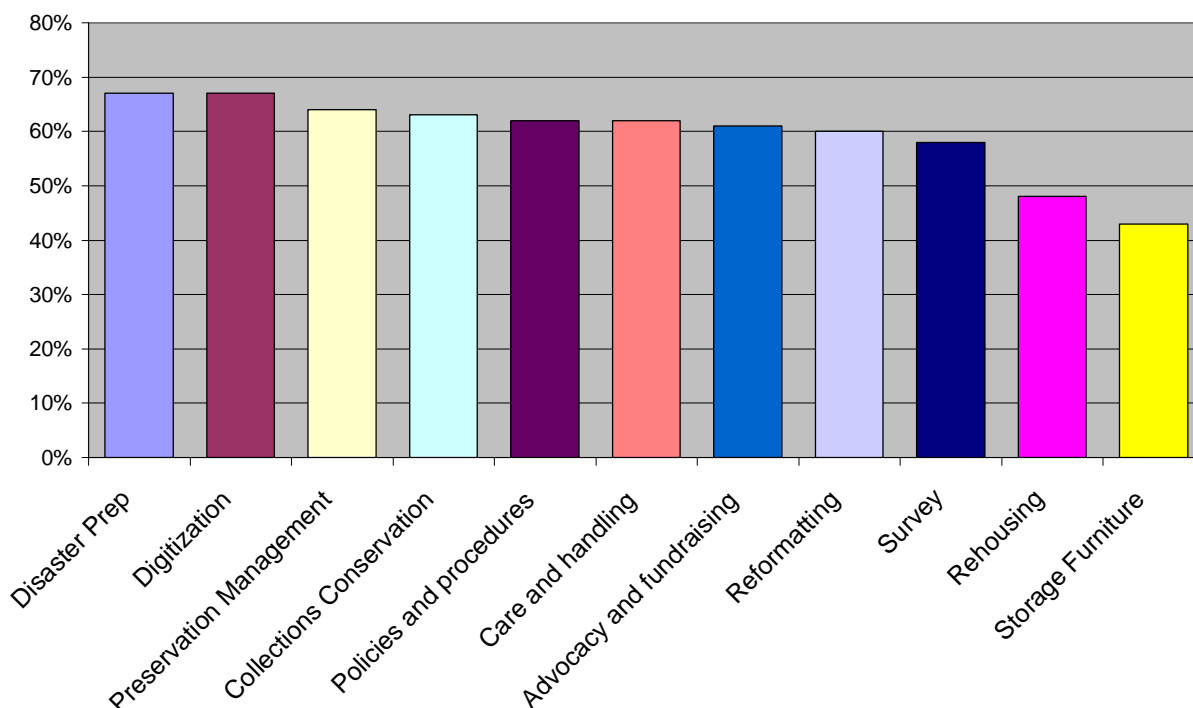
These three strategic priorities; preservation education, disaster preparedness, and infrastructure, form the underpinnings of *Partnership for New York's Cultural Heritage*.

Strategic Priority #1: Preservation Education

Issue Statement: While preservation training is widely available in New York, the survey results demonstrate a need for expanded and strengthened content. We propose designing a cohesive curriculum focused on all aspects of collections care, but particularly on the areas of need identified by the survey. Topics will be delivered in a logical sequence, building on previous offerings or existing knowledge. The national preservation community has confirmed the value of this approach toward building core competency in preservation management, as well as lasting relationships among participants and their institutions. New York's survey, as well as the 2005 Heritage Health Index, demonstrates both need and interest:

- The 2005 Heritage Health Index report showed that 70% of institutions surveyed nationally need training in numerous preservation topics for their staff.
- New York's collection caretakers want to attend training 57% of respondents noted that someone at their institution attended a training program on conservation or preservation in the past five years.

Level of Need per Training Topic



- We learned that our delivery plan needs to take into account New York respondents' impediments to attending training: travel costs (529 or 74.2%), registration costs (461 or 64.7%) unavailability of workshops in the institution's region (415 or 58.2%) and distance (408 or 57.2%).
- When asked about the most useful methods they currently use to obtain preservation information a majority of respondents said that print materials, electronic materials, phone and e-mail contacts, and short-term (one- to two-day) training workshops were either useful or very useful.

Action 1: Design a cohesive curriculum focusing on the topics identified through the survey.

Outcome: All collections stewards throughout the state have access to the same caliber of content and the same opportunities to build their knowledge and to collaborate with colleagues.

Outcome: Partner educators have access to quality preservation curriculum for their educational outreach.

Action 2: Deliver preservation education/courses using various methods. Offer options for receiving training: in person and online.

Outcome: Expanded, equitable, affordable access to preservation education throughout the state.

Outcome: Choice of delivery methods: in person, phone, web-based.

Outcome: Regional educators trained (“Train the Trainer”).

Action 3: Promote training and explore incentives to learning. Consider the California model, which requires institutional commitment.

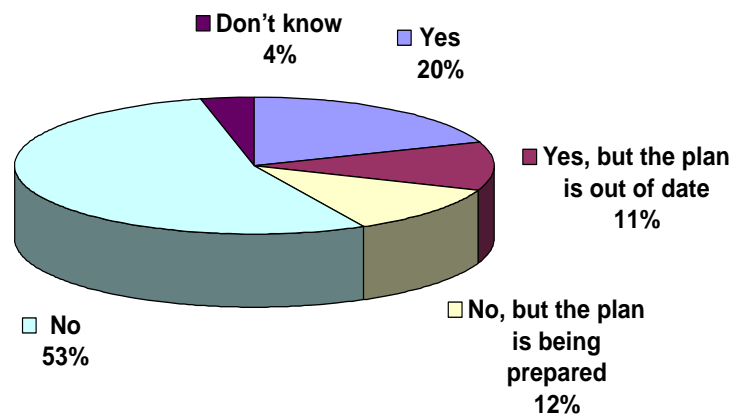
Outcome: Attendance at workshops is increased from 57% of surveyed institutions (2009) to 75 % (to be measured by a follow up survey/longitudinal data).

Strategic Priority #2: Disaster Preparedness

Issue Statement: The survey revealed some alarming data related to disasters and their impact on collections.

- Over 26% of institutions had experienced a disaster that damaged collections.
- Over 53% of institutions have no disaster plan or have not updated their plan in the past three years.

Percentage of respondents who have a disaster plan



- 67% of institutions rated disaster preparedness as their top training need.
- 81% of respondents noted that their staff, instead of outside vendors, carry out the recovery of damaged collections.

Writing disaster response plans is widely regarded to be the highest priority and most cost-effective preservation action heritage institutions can take to improve their protection against catastrophic collection loss. We have observed that many who attend disaster response workshops do not write a disaster plan on their return to their

institution. We attribute this to training models that do not provide the tools to make it easy for trainees to draft a plan or adequate follow up assistance. Nor do our models require institutional commitment. In contrast, the California model requires both the participant and their supervisor to sign a letter of commitment that gives a due date for the disaster plan to be completed. They also provide feedback on draft disaster plans. We propose that New York adopt a similar approach.

Action 1: Identify and adopt a model disaster preparedness curriculum for New York's heritage community. (Consider the California model.)

Outcome: Curriculum is applicable to diverse institutions.

Outcome: All collections stewards throughout the state have access to the same caliber of content and the same opportunities to build their knowledge and to collaborate with colleagues.

Outcome: Partner educators have access to quality curriculum for their educational outreach.

Action 2: Deliver disaster preparedness training.

Outcome: Raised skills and knowledge among staff.

Outcome: Better protected collections.

Outcome: Resources and technical support for institutions to write a disaster plan are available.

Outcome: Increased number of plans—increase from 47% to 60% (follow up survey/longitudinal data).

Strategic Priority #3: Infrastructure

Issue Statement: This program is aptly titled *Connecting to Collections*. In New York we have incomparable collections and dedicated collection stewards and cultural organizations. We have great resources, but they're not so well connected. The survey exposed the need for a stronger preservation services infrastructure: more robust connections among the many cultural institutions in New York, regardless of discipline or funding source, that together support collection stewardship in New York. The majority of collections and stewards are located in the New York City metropolitan area, but institutions throughout the state hold important collections. In many of these areas, preservation professionals are few or non-existent. Prudent use of new technologies will allow us to alleviate some of the geographic and economic blocks to improved collections stewardship.

- Most institutions lack trained preservation staff or staff assigned with responsibility for preservation. A vast majority of responding institutions (586 or almost 75%) said they did not have collections care staff with formal training. When asked what

barriers institutions face in taking action to preserve collections, 44% cited inadequate staff expertise.

- Only 4% of respondents said they had ever participated in mutual assistance agreements, while 53% expressed interest in them.
- 45% of respondents showed an interest in preservation mentoring.

Action 1: Initiate a “Train the Trainer” program to expand access to quality education.

Outcome: Regional leaders.

Outcome: Raised knowledge and skills.

Action 2: Encourage and support mutual assistance agreements and shared resources (e.g., freezer, ultrasonic welder).

Outcome: Access to resources and support.

Outcome: Community of practice.

Outcome: Swift and appropriate response to emergencies.

Action 3: Design/develop website with resources, calendar, etc.

Outcome: Regional resources easily accessible.

Outcome: Calendar searchable by region and topic.

Outcome: Easy and affordable access to reliable information.

Action 4: Develop mentoring program pairing experienced professionals with new and rising ones in the same region.

Outcome: Access to guidance.

Outcome: Increased professionalism.

Outcome: Relationships built.

Action 5: Develop advocacy tools to 1) help institutions raise awareness of and support for their preservation needs and 2) help New York’s heritage community work together to gain support for the statewide plan.

Outcome: Increased support for preservation in local budget (follow up survey/longitudinal data).

Outcome: Increased grant funding available.

Next steps

New York has taken a big step in moving forward in preserving its collections. It has forged new ground by bringing together key players in New York’s preservation community. We have shown that while our institutions and collections are diverse, our needs are common. Armed with a wealth of data and newly formed partnerships, we have laid the foundation that will allow us to address the myriad issues facing cultural

repositories in the quest to preserve their collections. New York's statewide plan is the result of a desire to address the most pressing and common needs of the survey respondents. It is by no means a checklist of all preservation needs. The success of the plan depends on sustaining existing partnership efforts, seeking new partners, and using all partnerships in new and meaningful ways.

We will start by strengthening our infrastructure and using technology to facilitate communication among partners and to our collective customers. With the expanded use of technology and partnerships, we will address some of the needs identified in the survey with little additional cost. We will use technology to its full advantage and not just for the sake of using it.

New York, like most states, is struggling just to keep current programs and efforts afloat. Implementing this plan will require creative and prudent use of existing resources and new funding. The *Partnership for New York's Cultural Heritage* intends to apply for a *Connecting to Collections* implementation grant in December of 2010.

We gratefully acknowledge the Institute of Museum and Library Services *Connecting to Collections Program* for their support, without which this project would not have been possible.