

# Appendix D: Collections Assessment Guidelines

These Guidelines have been designed as a tool for use during the site visit and/or in writing the report. They are based on guidelines previously published in CAP's *The Conservation Assessment: A Tool for Planning, Implementing, and Fund-raising*. The Guidelines contain the same categories as the Site Questionnaire. Depending on the specific institution assessment, it may be necessary to broaden or more narrowly focus certain topic areas in tailoring the report document to meet the institution's needs.

The following questions cover many of the topics that need to be addressed in a general assessment report, and can assist in organizing the final summary. All recommendations should include short, medium and long-range recommendations. Summaries should include what the museum is doing well in addition to citing deficiencies.

## 1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- A. Provide a brief summary of recommendations.
- B. Focus on the categories of short, medium, and long-term solutions.
- C. Provide the outline of a positive and realistic action plan.

## 2. GENERAL INFORMATION

- A. Describe the institution
  1. Summarize the institution's overall goals for the assessment.
    - Have additional goals been identified since the return of the Site Questionnaire?
  2. Evaluate the action plan in light of assessment findings.
    - Is there a long-range preservation plan?
    - Does the long-range preservation plan identify specific collections care projects?
  3. Does the institution routinely set aside funds for the conservation and care of collections?
    - Has this amount changed over the past five years?
    - Is the amount allocated adequate to meet the needs of the collections?
- B. Make recommendations for necessary changes or modifications. For example, do members of the governing body need to become more knowledgeable about collections preservation? Describe how the mission statement and/or operations should support each other and reflect collections preservation concerns.

## 3. STAFFING

- A. Describe the staff positions, including volunteers with collections and/or management functions.
  1. Does the institution have staff responsible for the preservation of collections?
    - Review position descriptions and determine if they adequately address preservation duties and responsibilities.
  2. Does the institution have staff responsible for the general maintenance of the building?
    - For historic structures, if the institution contracts with a maintenance service, is the service selected on the basis of experience with historic structures?
  3. Does the institution provide formal orientation or training for staff in collections care and handling?
    - Is additional training necessary?

- B. Summarize findings and recommend modifications or changes as necessary. Recommendations might include additional staff or suggested training opportunities.

#### 4. GENERAL BUILDING/FACILITIES

- A. Describe the building, noting materials, methods of construction and general condition.

1. Site

- Do trees and other vegetative debris accumulate around the base of the structure or in the gutters?
- Does vegetation (which gives pests access and habitat) grow on the structure?

2. Exterior Building

- Are windows and doors operable?
- Are the roof and gutters stable?

3. Interior Building

- What is the condition of the interior spaces?
- Is the building clean, or cluttered and dirty?
- Are there any leaks?
- Is there a housekeeping plan for all interior spaces?
- Is there evidence of rodents, insects or mold?
- Are hazardous materials and equipment properly stored?
- Are there any hazards (inherent or man-made) that threaten the preservation of the collections?

- B. Have any of the following problems been identified which might suggest the need for further evaluation by other specialists such as historic preservation architects or engineers?

- Poorly insulated exterior surfaces
- Poor condition of windows
- Condensation on windows or other surfaces
- Water stains
- Wet basement
- Ground moisture rising up masonry walls
- Metallic corrosion of structural materials
- Deterioration of other structural materials
- Cracks
- Overcrowded electrical junction boxes
- Frequently blown fuses
- Vibration
- Excessive dust and dirt

- C. Summarize findings. Point out the potential conflicts between the preservation of the collections and the preservation of the building. Suggest further assessment by additional specialists, if needed. Recommend a sequence for planning and action.

## 5. CLIMATE CONTROL AND ENVIRONMENT

### A. Temperature and Relative Humidity

1. What conditions is the institution trying to maintain? Are these levels of temperature and relative humidity achievable year-round with present climate control systems? Do the maintenance of these values pose a risk to the building structure? What goals has the institution identified with regard to temperature and relative humidity control?

*For structures with central HVAC:*

2. Describe the general nature of the HVAC system, its age, and in general how well it operates.
  - Are all spaces in the institution on the HVAC system? If not, are collections at risk in spaces not environmentally controlled?
  - Is humidity control integrated into the HVAC system?
  - Describe briefly the humidification system: i.e. steam (source of steam), water spray, atomizer.
  - How is the HVAC system controlled?
  - Are the thermostats and humidistat calibrated on a regular schedule?
  - How is the system maintained, and by whom?
  - Is the system in operation around the clock and year-round or is it used either seasonally or on an as-needed basis?
  - Are windows or exterior doors opened to provide ventilation?
  - What local equipment is used to supplement the central system?
  - If local equipment is used, is it effective for maintaining desired conditions?
  - Is local equipment in good condition and maintained on a routine schedule?

*For structures without central HVAC:*

3. Describe the heating, cooling and other temperature and/or relative humidity control equipment used in the building, its age, and in general how well it is working.
  - What local equipment is used?
  - Is the equipment maintained on a routine schedule?
  - Are windows or exterior doors opened to provide ventilation?
  - Are environmental controls monitored?
    - What areas of the building are monitored?
    - Who is responsible for monitoring?
    - What kinds of records are kept?
    - How are the records used?
    - What types of monitoring equipment are used?
    - How and when are monitors calibrated?

4. Summarize findings. Is the climate control equipment effective for the collections? Are there modifications which could be made, such as the construction of microclimates or the provision of additional local equipment? Is additional expertise needed to further evaluate systems or recommend modifications?

#### B. Pollutants and Particulates

1. Are any measures taken by the institution to protect the collections against the dangers of particulates or harmful gases?
2. Does the institution use materials in either storage, exhibition, building custodial or maintenance activities that could give off hazardous gases?
3. Does the institution test materials used in proximity to collection objects to prevent the use of harmful substances?
4. Evaluate the ability of the HVAC system to filter particulates and gasses.
  - Are there target pollutants of concern for filtration?
  - What part of the air, if any, is filtered (all recirculated air, only fresh air)?
  - How is the effectiveness of the filtration system evaluated?
  - Describe particulate filtration system—what percent efficiency rating on the filter?
  - Describe maintenance of the particulate filtration system (frequency of checking and replacing filters).
  - Describe gas filtration system.
  - Describe maintenance of gas filtration system (frequency of evaluation and replacement).
5. Summarize findings and make recommendations as necessary.

#### C. Illumination

1. Describe the kinds of illumination used in exhibition and storage areas.
  - What are the sources of natural light in galleries or exhibition spaces, and what objects does it illuminate?
  - Are there curtains, blinds or other light reduction materials used to reduce the intensity of the light entering the building? Describe.
  - If blinds or curtains are used, how are they controlled to ensure that the objects are protected from high intensity natural light?
  - How are fluorescent and incandescent lights used in exhibition and storage rooms?
  - Are there regular maintenance and inspection programs for fluorescent lighting to ensure that ballasts are functioning properly?
  - Are lights placed inside of exhibition cases?
  - Are measures taken to reduce the heat build-up of lights used inside of exhibition cases?
  - Can light intensity be controlled?
  - Does the institution have lighting policies which are based on the sensitivity of various materials?
2. What kind(s) of filtration is used to reduce ultraviolet radiation?
  - Is natural light reflected off of wall surfaces which have been treated to absorb ultraviolet radiation?

- Is UV screening material used on windows and skylights?
  - Are UV shields used on fluorescent tubes, and if so, do those shields completely cover the tubes?
3. Is illumination monitored?
    - What equipment is used to monitor light levels?
    - How often is monitoring done, and by whom?
    - Are fluorescent bulbs monitored for UV emissions?
    - Are UV filters and screens routinely monitored to evaluate their continued effectiveness?
  4. When are the lights turned on in exhibition and storage areas?
    - For exhibition areas: are lights on only during exhibition hours, staff hours, other?
    - For storage areas: during staff hours, only when occupied?
    - Are light levels adjusted for the visually impaired?
  5. Does the institution photograph objects?
    - Is photography by visitors also permitted in exhibition galleries?
    - What type of lighting is allowed?
  6. Summarize findings and make recommendations as necessary. Have any objects noticeably faded or become damaged by exposure to light? Can the lighting be modified to better protect the collections?

#### D. Pest Control

1. Is there evidence of pest damage to the collections?
  - What types of objects have had a history of pests problems?
  - Is there evidence of biological activity (e.g. spider webs, rodent droppings, mold etc.) anywhere within the structure? Describe the nature and location of the activity.
2. Does the museum have a regular monitoring program for pests in the building?
  - Are objects treated for pests prior to entry into the building?
  - Are objects isolated/examined before entry into collection areas?
  - Are windows screened against pests?
  - Are pesticides used routinely on collections objects, on the structure, around the exterior of the structure or in interior spaces?
  - What pesticides are used, in what formulations and on what materials?
  - What is the schedule for the application of pesticides?
  - Has the pest management program been effective?
  - Are any of the pesticides or other techniques used for eradication posing a threat to collection materials?
3. Are plants or flowers permitted in the building?
  - Are they treated for pests prior to entry to the building?
4. Is food stored, prepared or consumed in the building?
  - Where is food stored, prepared or consumed?

- Are special precautions taken for disposal of food wastes or food storage?
  - What custodial measures are taken to keep all food preparation and consumption areas clean and pest-free?
5. Summarize and make recommendations as necessary.

#### E. Housekeeping

1. Does the staff or do outside contractors do the housekeeping? How often is the institution cleaned? (Summarize the cleaning schedule for each area of the institution). How is it cleaned?

### 6. COLLECTIONS AND COLLECTIONS POLICIES

- A. Describe the institution's collections and their general condition. Review procedures (written or observed) for handling and use of collections. Are there any procedures which place the collections at risk?
- B. Review condition reporting procedures. Check how condition of collections is assessed. When reports are done, is photographic documentation also completed?
- C. Describe any procedures that are unique to the institution's collection type, i.e. preparation, dissection, sampling.
- D. Summarize the condition of the collections by categories. Are there any observable collection condition problems? Recommend a sequence for planning and action, rating the needs of specific surveys and/or interventive treatment from immediate to long-range.

### 7. EXHIBITIONS

- A. Describe current exhibitions.
  1. Are they long-term or short-term?
  2. Are all objects in enclosed exhibition cases or are some collections exhibited in the open? How much of the collection is exhibited in the open? Are there adequate physical barriers for objects in open exhibits?
  3. Are there period rooms?
  4. Is the museum a historic house museum?
  5. Are components of the exterior of the structure collection materials?
  6. Is there anything in the exhibition space that is not a collection object (e.g. window treatments, diorama props, etc.)? Are they considered expendable?
  7. For what purpose are exhibit cases accessed?
  8. What materials are used to construct exhibit cases, and are those materials tested prior to their use?
  9. Do case construction materials appear to be a hazard to the objects within?
  10. Are the exhibit cases air-tight? If the cases have ventilation holes, is screening and/or filtering material installed over the holes to prevent entry of dust or pests?
    - Are microclimates created in exhibit cases? Who constructs and maintains them? How often are they monitored and maintained? Have there been any problems with them?
    - Are objects on display monitored for changes of condition? How is this done and by whom?
    - Are objects on display supported and secured? Are proper materials used? Should support

systems be modified? Should other materials be used?

- What materials are used to clean the galleries and period rooms? Are any of these hazardous to collections? Is there evidence that cleaning materials have damaged the collection or building?

B. Summarize findings and make recommendations as necessary.

## 8. STORAGE

A. Describe the institution's storage facilities.

- Describe the type of hardware used in storage.
- Describe the condition of the storage equipment. Is metal cabinetry free from rust or other corrosion? Do closed cabinets have gaskets in good condition to exclude pests? Do doors operate smoothly, close tightly and have working, keyed locks? Is storage equipment free from splinters, nails, and bolts which can damage objects?
- Are there non-collection items housed in storage that might damage the collections?
- Are objects well supported in storage?
- Are objects padded against mechanical or physical damage?
- Are objects that are stored in acidic storage equipment protected with buffered materials? Are materials appropriate for type of objects stored?

B. What types of storage exist?

- Is all storage in the same building?
- Is there off-site storage?
- Is there short-term temporary storage or preparation areas? Under what circumstances do objects enter these areas?
- Where are permanent storage facilities located with respect to other museum functions?
- Does the institution have special storage areas for especially sensitive or valuable objects?
- How many doors open into the storage area? Which of these doors are used? Are doors secured and alarmed to protect against unauthorized entry? Are doors gasketed to prevent changes in environment or pest entry?
- Are storage areas designed for the ease of cleaning? Can staff clean under and on top of cabinetry?
- Is there enough space to permit the movement of staff, equipment and objects into, out of and through storage?
- Do water, steam, drain and fuel pipes run through storage areas? Do sewer lines run beneath storage areas?
- Are there any pieces of equipment located in storage areas which require monitoring and servicing by building personnel?
- Are the storage areas located below grade? Does water drain away from the building or do storage areas flood during heavy rains? Are objects and storage equipment located at least four inches off the floor to protect against potential flooding?
- Are collections stored in attics, behind or under exhibition cases, or in other areas which might pose a threat to their safety?

- C. How are storage areas organized?
- How are collections organized within storage areas?
  - Do all objects have locations in collections storage?
  - Are storage areas overcrowded? Are collection objects stored on the floor or in the aisles between cabinets?
  - Does the institution need additional space for storage? Is there additional space within the institution which could be used for storage? Could existing spaces be reconfigured for better use of space?
  - Are all objects readily accessible or must objects be relocated for access to others?
- D. Who has access to storage?
- Are access registers maintained?
- E. What are the policies of monitoring storage areas and moving objects into and out of storage?
- Are storage areas routinely monitored for building or equipment problems, object conditions, evidence of pests?
  - Describe the procedures taken for the movement of objects into or out of storage. Are collection relocations documented?
- F. Are storage areas used for activities other than collections storage?
- Do any of these activities endanger the safety of collection objects?
- G. Evaluate the institution's storage policies. Summarize findings and make recommendations as necessary.

## 9. EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS

- A. Does the institution have an emergency preparedness plan?
- What type of emergencies does the plan address?
  - Who has copies of the plan?
  - Are there copies of the plan located at various points in the building and does appropriate staff know where it is located?
  - Is the plan current? How often is it updated?
  - Do staff members know what to do in an emergency? Are there regular emergency preparedness drills? Test the alarm system if possible.
  - Does the institution maintain supplies to cope with emergency situations? Where are they kept? Are they inventoried regularly?
  - For institutions in areas of potential natural disasters such as earthquakes, have special precautions been taken to minimize damage?
  - Do the local emergency preparedness coordinators (fire department, city, county government, etc.) have copies of the emergency preparedness plan? Have they been consulted in the development of the plan? Have they been informed about the special nature of the buildings and collections?
- B. Does the institution have regularly scheduled site visits by the fire department?
- C. Does the institution have regularly scheduled site visits by their insurance company?
- D. Evaluate the protection the fire detection and suppression system offers.

- Does it meet the needs of the collections?
  - Are sprinkler heads and nozzles located so that they do not pose a threat to collection objects?
- E. Summarize findings and make recommendations as necessary.

## **10. SECURITY AND SAFETY**

- A. Within the last five years, has there been vandalism to the collections or building?
- Is there a plan for preventing vandalism?
  - Is there a plan for dealing with vandalism?
- B. Does the institution have a Bomb Threat Report and Response Plan?
- C. Does the institution have a Hostage Response Plan?
- D. Does the institution have any passive security measures for the collections such as locks on exhibition cases and storage room doors, assigned keys, and sign in/out logs?
- E. Does the institution have any active security measures for the collections such as CCTV, perimeter alarms, live guards, or keycard entry systems?
- F. Does the staff perform regular safety/security inspections? If so how often?
- G. Have any other special precautions been taken to protect the institution and collections in the event of natural or other disasters?

## **11. CONCLUSION AND SUMMARY OF FINDINGS**

- A. Provide an overall summary of what was determined during the site visit.
- B. Cite examples of where the institution is doing things correctly.
- C. Establish short, medium and long-term recommendations based on collections needs and available resources.
- D. Where possible, apply cost projections for specific improvements
- E. Provide information on resources for further improvements such as special consultants, appropriate grants, training programs, background information on any of the conservation issues you discussed in your report, and information on where to obtain conservation supplies.