

Project Description
For PACSCL Conference "Something New for Something Old: Innovative Approaches to Managing Archives and Special Collections"
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The PACSCL Consortial Survey Initiative is a 30-month project funded by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation to assess backlogged archival collections in 22 Philadelphia area institutions. Using a survey instrument adapted from the Historical Society of Pennsylvania's model, the project team is assessing unprocessed, underprocessed and underdescribed archival collections in a range of physical formats.

While the assessment model was developed at the Historical Society of Pennsylvania and has been successfully adapted by Columbia University, the University of Virginia and other institutions for their use, the PACSCL Consortial Survey Initiative marks the first time that the model is being applied cross-institutionally and to a range of types of academic and cultural institutions.

The project is part of PACSCL's Greater Philadelphia Research Collections Network, a set of initiatives that will allow researchers, students, and lifelong learners to explore and engage with the rich documentary resources of the Philadelphia region, fostering scholarship and education, community awareness, heritage tourism development, and regional economic growth.

Participating institutions

22 institutions have collections that will be surveyed during the project:

Academy of Natural Sciences
American Philosophical Society
Athenaeum of Philadelphia
Bryn Mawr College
Chemical Heritage Foundation
College of Physicians of Philadelphia
Free Library of Philadelphia
Haverford College
The Historical Society of Pennsylvania (including collections of the Genealogical Society of Pennsylvania under the terms of the two institutions' strategic alliance)
Independence Seaport Museum
Library Company of Philadelphia
Philadelphia Museum of Art
Pennsylvania Horticultural Society
Presbyterian Historical Society
Rosenbach Museum & Library
Swarthmore College
Temple University
Union League of Philadelphia

University of Delaware
University of Pennsylvania
Villanova University
Wagner Free Institute of Science

Additionally, the National Archives and Records Administration – Mid Atlantic Region serves in an advisory capacity to the project.

The project team has also worked with staff at Chester County Historical Society, Drexel University, and the Lutheran Theological Seminary of Philadelphia to enable them to survey some of their own collections.

The survey method

The survey instrument provides for the qualitative and quantitative assessment of a number of physical and intellectual characteristics of collections: physical condition, quality of housing, physical access, intellectual access, quality of documentation, and interest. Each characteristic is given a rating of 1 to 5 (5 being the highest; no fractions or decimal points allowed). The quality of documentation and interest rankings are added to form the Total Research Value Rating, or RVR. These numerical ratings assist with statistical analysis and cross-collection comparisons. In addition to the ratings, the survey team provides descriptive assessments of all collections and develops or enhances bibliographic and heading information.

Surveying is done in teams of no fewer than two people. Survey teams may include project staff and participating institution staff, or project staff only. When surveying, teams visually inspect each collection, consult the intellectual tools available for it, then discuss and achieve consensus to assign ratings and develop the assessment narrative. Because many of the tasks are similar, the survey method lends itself to inclusion in an institution's accessioning routine.

The survey database

Survey data is recorded in a shared FileMaker Pro database developed specifically for the project. Each surveyed collection receives a collection-level record that includes bibliographic information, assessment data, information on special formats and the availability of intellectual access tools, name and subject headings, and administrative information on collections. *Describing Archives: A Content Standard* (DACs) is the content standard for the archival description, which also maps to MARC to enable sharing of collection data between the survey database and union catalogues and local OPACs. In addition, the database can output collection-level EAD, HTML, and PDF files. Because the database includes fields that allow institutions to maintain internally significant data related to their collections such as location and provenance information, the database can also be used as a basic accessions or collection management system for individual institutions. For those institutions that already have a collection management system, the survey data can be exported in a range of formats.

The results

As of October 26, we have surveyed 2,088 collections totaling over 19,400 linear feet in the 22 participating institutions. The public interface to the survey database contains information on 1,346 collections in 12 institutions.

All institutions have gained improved physical and/or intellectual control over these collections. Multiple institutions have already developed intern, volunteer, and project archivist projects for surveyed collections identified as priorities. One institution is using the survey work to seed a new implementation of Archivists' Toolkit.

PACSCL as a consortium used the survey as the basis for a pending grant proposal to process 194 collections high research value collections and improve access to all of the collections from the project. Future consortial grant proposals will also draw from the survey data.