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# Use of General Preservation Assessments

## Process

**Karen E. K. Brown**

*This paper describes the typology of general preservation assessments and investigates what is being accomplished based on recommendations identified in the process. The author characterizes the assessment based on tabulated data. A range of institutional types and sizes are represented. The investment of staff time and the role of the consultant are examined. The most frequent goal of respondents was to develop a preservation plan. Interest in repair and reformatting was significantly less than interest in preventive activities. The findings of this study suggest that assessment reports are thorough and organized; report content is consistent across the population studied. The study informs future assessments by defining current practice through the collection of concrete data on specific representative measures.*

Over the past quarter century, general preservation assessments have assisted organizations to understand factors that affect the long-term care of their collection. By evaluating policy, practice, facilities, and collections, preservation needs are determined and prioritized, and resources for implementation identified.<sup>1</sup> The fundamental goal of the general assessment is to provide a fully inclusive review of current circumstances and projected risk, and, by doing so, assist a collecting institution in developing a preservation plan.<sup>2</sup> The findings can help to reallocate existing resources, secure additional funding, raise awareness, and even define the extent of the preservation problem on a national scale. If the study method is reliable and institutional efforts at implementation are continuous, the outcome is a comprehensive preservation program that efficiently and effectively addresses risk in all areas of operation.

Since the late 1970s, authors, including Cunha, founder of the Northeast Document Conservation Center (NEDCC), have emphasized the study and understanding of preservation needs for libraries, museums, and archives.<sup>3</sup> Tools and texts have been developed that together provide a reasonable paradigm to help ensure that a general assessment of preservation needs is complete and that the findings are practicable.<sup>4</sup> However, most methods emphasize the survey process itself; little research has been conducted to identify actual outcomes associated with these assessments. Further, neither funding agents nor cultural institutions are collecting concrete data that accurately reflect the extent to which the goals of preservation programs are being achieved.

Uncoordinated, unplanned preservation activities can result in some areas of need being overlooked. Sporadic efforts to protect collections may demonstrate an interest in preservation, yet without a strategy, resources likely will not

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be well-allocated, and long-term goals will not be achieved. The purpose of this study is twofold: to define current practice and to examine the use of general preservation assessments to determine what is being accomplished based on recommendations provided in the process. Based on data collected from 125 institutions in the United States, this research attempts to gauge the output of general assessments and the extent of preservation programs by examining the implementation of recommended actions.

This research seeks to answer the following questions:

- What types of institutions are conducting general preservation needs assessments?
- How much staff time is needed for the assessment and what are the major goals?
- What topics of concern are being considered?
- What is the content and structure of the report of findings?

This paper characterizes the assessment process and appraises key elements (topical coverage, phases of the study, report contents, and so on), providing a baseline for how the North American model of a general assessment is defined and undertaken. The data's value is to inform future assessments through the collection of concrete data on specific representative measures. The author plans a second paper, "Use of General Needs Assessments: Outputs," that will report what preservation actions are being realized as a result and characterize those attributes of the general assessment methodology that can be labeled as best practices. Factors that facilitate program success and reasons for limited development also will be explored.

## Literature Review

### Assessment Methods

Three primary methods are used to study the problem of collection deterioration: general preservation assessments, collection condition surveys, and item-by-item surveys.<sup>5</sup> The approaches are complementary, proceeding logically from the universal to the specific. Brief definitions of the three types of review provide a perspective on the use of the general preservation assessment process, which is the focus of this study.

The first method, the general preservation assessment, concentrates on the physical environment as well as on the activities, organizational policies, and resources that coalesce into an understanding of all the factors that can affect care of collections. While methods vary in their categorization of topics and the types and uses of data collected, they are typically broad in scope and include information about:

- the administration (mission, collecting policies, intellectual control, staffing/training needs, budgets);
- the building and facilities;
- environmental factors (monitoring and control of temperature, relative humidity, light, pollutants);
- protection against loss (pest management, emergency preparedness and prevention, security);
- the condition, storage, and handling of collections in various formats (including exhibition); and
- remedial treatment (reformatting, repair and conservation, library binding).

The review is intended to be general, although discrete groups of resources may be reviewed for evidence of damage to support identified risks or to recommend specific actions to reduce risk to that group as a whole. Follow-up reports are descriptive in style and emphasize damage prevention by identifying and controlling extrinsic agents of deterioration. This preventive approach is agreed to be central to preservation management because it benefits the collection as a whole and is more cost effective than remedial care.<sup>6</sup> The purpose is not to quantify the scale of the problem, but rather to define need and initiate a planning process that will allow the institution to reduce risks to the collection and better allocate resources for preservation over time.

The second type of review is a statistical study referred to as a collection condition survey. It provides the next level of detail by gathering evidence of damage to the collection itself. By examining a representative sample of its holdings, an institution can predict the cost of action extrapolated to a larger population. Most library surveys that examined the problem of brittle and deteriorated paper in the 1980s were collection condition surveys, although they also testify to the importance of surveying collections more generally.<sup>7</sup>

The third approach, the item-by-item survey, is the most detailed. Its purpose is to provide data about each object under consideration in order to estimate the cost of remedial care on an individual basis and to plan for treatment. An item-level survey also may show which collections are the highest priority, and could include investigation into exact mechanisms of deterioration.<sup>8</sup> Verifiable facts and figures reported from quantitative methods of examining library collections afford useful information and have proven effective in gaining administrative support and securing funding for preservation action.<sup>9</sup>

All three assessment types are valuable as tools for informing administration about their building environments, materials storage and handling, and collection condition and management, enabling them to develop a preservation program. The progression of study from the universal to specific ensures that overall risks have been addressed before expending significant resources on further study and remedial action. For example, like many funding agents, the

New York State Library (NYSL) requires a general preservation assessment before applications for implementation through its Discretionary Grants Program will be considered.<sup>10</sup> Others concur: "The general assessment . . . is now a basic requirement for institutions wishing to receive funds from many federal and private sources."<sup>11</sup> One can argue that preventive activities will extend the useful life of collections and that correcting external factors will reduce the sustained cost of repairing, reformatting, or replacing large numbers of material.

### General Assessment Attributes

No single North American tool has been designed to study all types of cultural institutions. Because so many general and overlapping categories of review exist, exploring the development of assessment methods may be useful in order to develop a foundation for current practice.

One of the earliest references to the use of a general assessment is included in *Planning for the Preservation of Library Materials*, published by the Association of Research Libraries (ARL) in 1980.<sup>12</sup> A copy of Cunha's report of a preservation survey at the University of Utah Libraries is included as an example of how outside consulting can provide the impetus for establishing a preservation program.<sup>13</sup> Cunha authored *What an Institution Can Do to Survey Its Conservation Needs*, a tool that has seen multiple versions since it was first published by NYSL.<sup>14</sup> The latest version, *Assessing Preservation Needs: A Self-Survey Guide*, is one of the most current self-survey tools available for use by small to medium-sized institutions to assess their own preservation needs.<sup>15</sup> The guide also can assist professional consultants to help ensure the review is thorough and the information gathered is well-organized. Each topical section includes an introduction describing best practices followed by a worksheet with a series of questions that the institution attempts to answer to gauge its needs. This guidebook is not designed to address the needs of general circulating collections, focusing instead on historical collections in paper format.

Cunha points out that the survey is not a plan, but that it will help institutions identify risk, consider the value of items in the collection, develop recommendations for action, prioritize needs, and identify action steps: "The repository will then use these priorities, together with other relevant issues, such as available institutional resources and political considerations, to create a preservation plan that sets forth a specific schedule for accomplishing particular projects."<sup>16</sup>

Patkus asserts that a systematic preservation program, or plan, ensures that scarce resources are used effectively, "and that important preservation activities are not neglected."<sup>17</sup> Patkus' work, while useful, suffers from a lack of information regarding implementation of findings. The brief section

on preservation planning and implementation is limited to information previously presented by NEDCC.<sup>18</sup>

In the 1980s, ARL began a multifaceted, complex program to assist the organization and implementation of a preservation program by its members. ARL's *Preservation Planning Program: An Assisted Self-Study Manual for Libraries*, by Darling and Webster, and its accompanying *Preservation Planning Program Resource Notebook* are based on research conducted with support from the National Endowment for the Humanities for the design and testing of "a self-study procedure to enable academic libraries to identify and address preservation problems."<sup>19</sup> As a basis for formal study, the process described is labor-intensive, suggesting that success in establishing a program is contingent on a significant investment of staff time. Completion can involve approximately two dozen people over a period of up to six months, as well as outside consultants to provide training and evaluation of progress (although the tool can be adapted by smaller libraries where a less formal or exhaustive approach is preferred).<sup>20</sup> The *Resource Notebook* is a companion manual with further information drawn from the published literature.

Darling and Webster's outline of study activities forms the foundation of what can be expected in a general preservation assessment. These include preparing for the planning study and establishing the study framework (Phase I), determining preservation needs (Phase II), and planning the preservation program (Phase III). Identifying and documenting the library's preservation needs and the resources that might be employed to meet them is central to the investigation. Although much of the technical information is out of date, the general approach is comprehensive, reasonable, and still can assist with design of a preservation program.

In 1995, the Canadian Council of Archives published *The Conservation Assessment Guide for Archives* by Dalley.<sup>21</sup> Unlike the NEDCC and ARL tools, this guide was designed for use by a trained conservator with qualifications in archival conservation, preservation planning, the nature of archives, and environmental systems. This text proposes standardized guidelines to assess the effect of policies, procedures, facilities, storage, environment, disaster management, and staff on the preservation of archival holdings. The author describes the assessment as "the first step of the preservation management process which integrates preventive conservation (preservation) into all archival activities."<sup>22</sup> For example, the report guidelines prompt the evaluation of the institution's administration and how preservation and conservation has been considered in financing, long-range planning, mission statements, policies, arrangement and description, and so on. Dalley clearly delineates the responsibilities of the consultant and the institution for the process. Although designed for use in archival institutions, it can easily be adapted to study library collections.

In the 1990s, two similar software applications were developed in an attempt to standardize a study method and compare findings across a defined population. Calipr was produced by the University of California at Berkeley to enable the California State Library to study statewide needs and develop the California Preservation Plan.<sup>23</sup> Another version of Calipr, the PreNapp, was developed by the Research Libraries Group for its members as part of their *Preservation Needs Assessment Package*.<sup>24</sup> These tools are used to produce reports about general needs based on a random sample of four hundred items from the collection itself. The programs are designed to generate recommendations to improve access (such as inventory control and staff education), housing (including emergency planning and environmental control), and condition (through rebinding, repair, use of enclosures, or reformatting). A combination of access and housing problems indicates exposure to risk, which, when coupled with condition, defines the level of risk based on these three factors. The preservation priority for collection materials is further determined by examining value. While useful, the programs alone cannot form the basis for long-term preservation planning; they require the institution to carry out further feasibility studies based on institutional technical and management capability and available resources. General recommendations for preservation action are generated, but no further information beyond a list of published resources is provided to assist implementation.

Emulating Calipr, efforts to assess preservation needs in the United Kingdom and Australia have focused on developing national preservation strategies that are based on aggregating identified needs in individual libraries, museums, and archives. The result has been the development of benchmark schemes that attempt to define levels of performance that can be compared among institutions.<sup>25</sup> Bell and Lindsay contend that the North American general assessment is subjective, that the data collected cannot be used for comparative analysis between institutions, and that progress cannot be measured over time.<sup>26</sup> The benchmark approach, on the other hand, was designed to define levels of performance as basic, good, and best practice, so that institutions, through self-study, can identify the strengths and weaknesses of collections care. Artlab Australia, with the History Trust of South Australia and the State Library of New South Wales, has recently published their efforts to study preservation needs at a state or national level.<sup>27</sup> Their efforts are more far-reaching. They have worked to design a tool suitable to the broadest possible range of cultural institutions. The philosophy behind the tool suggests that use of a standard for risk assessment will lead to: (1) more transparent and accountable assessments; (2) a stronger emphasis on stakeholder consultation; and (3) more practical reports to help ensure responsible management by cultural caretakers, as well as equitable review by funding agents.<sup>28</sup>

General assessments of museums funded by the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) through their Conservation Assessment Program (CAP) in the United States differ from benchmark schemes in their emphasis on the individuality of the review, with less attention to aggregating data and more attention to specific actions that are required to reduce risk. *The Conservation Assessment: A Tool for Planning, Implementing, and Fund-raising* was first developed in 1988 to improve the usefulness of assessments by defining the parameters of a comprehensive survey.<sup>29</sup> In 2002, a panel of CAP assessors worked together to try and define best practices for general assessments, reporting that although *The Conservation Assessment*, “provides a framework for the information CAP reports and site visits should cover, CAP assessors are not required to fit into a particular mold, nor is there an interest in standardizing reports.”<sup>30</sup> A later edition, version 9/99, *The Conservation Assessment: A Proposed Model for Evaluating Museum Environmental Management Needs*, was developed by the Getty Conservation Institute.<sup>31</sup> Getty further emphasizes the individual nature of the study and the importance of understanding the institutional context to ensure that “broad strategies for environmental management . . . address the specific needs of the collection within the limitations of the climate, building, and institutional resources.”<sup>32</sup> It argues that the physical environment and organizational environment interact, and that outside expertise is required to make certain of the success of the study:

Past experience has shown that successful conservation assessments involve technical evaluations and critical judgments that go beyond the observation and documentation of the conditions manifested by the building or collections. Architectural and collections assessors rely on education, experience, skills, inquiry, deductive reasoning, collaboration and qualitative analysis to arrive at recommended strategies for environmental management. As might be expected, the analytical processes are highly individualistic and may even vary for the same professional when assessing different museums.<sup>33</sup>

In addition to IMLS, several funding agents in the United States provide substantial financial support to help organizations that are interested in preservation planning to undertake a general preservation assessment, including NYSL and the National Endowment for the Humanities. Application processes help to ensure that institutions are recognized nonprofit organizations with staff, a mission, and mandate; the collections have value and have been reasonably ordered and described; and efforts are being made to protect materials during storage and use. Funding agents also may favor applications in which recognized



experts are committed to conducting the assessment. A self-survey also can result in a useful framework for coordinating preservation efforts. However, expertise, objectivity, and a degree of credibility may be lacking with the North American models.<sup>34</sup> These shortcomings may limit the institution's ability to apply successfully for external funding to implement recommendations.

Many general preservation assessment models have been developed, described, adopted, and utilized to help institutions identify risks to their collections, propose and prioritize corrective actions, and assist with the development of practical plans. Most are useful in defining the responsibilities of the host institution and consultant, the scope of topics that should be reviewed, and how findings should be presented in a final report. Efforts have been made to standardize the study method, and assessors have discussed best practices, both in the United States and abroad. Interests in Australia and the United Kingdom have worked to define activities that represent best practices for preservation, or benchmarks of collections care. The popularity and persistence of several major funding initiatives, including the NYSL Discretionary Grants Program, the Preservation Assistants Grants offered by the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH), and IMLS's CAP, suggests that general preservation assessments are valuable for guiding cultural institutions. However, few data define what is being undertaken or demonstrate its impact. No data correlate preservation activity to having conducted a baseline assessment, and no published information exists that quantitatively describes the effectiveness of general assessments. Based on the methods described in the literature, one must first define the typology of general assessments in order to later relate product with process.

## Study Method

In fall 2003, questionnaires (see appendixes A and B) were mailed to 306 United States institutions that were identified as possibly having undertaken a general preservation assessment. Most of these institutions received public funding to support a preservation project, either through NYSL's Discretionary Grants Program or NEH's Preservation Assistance Grants program. Others were identified with support and assistance from NEDCC, which receives public funding to assist institutions with preservation surveys, training, and education. Those that had undertaken an assessment were asked to complete the questionnaire based on their most recent study (assuming the process could have been carried out more than once in the institution's history). The individual(s) most closely connected with the assessment process were asked to complete the questionnaire, consulting the survey report or other records to ensure the accuracy of their replies.

The survey instrument (see appendix) consisted of two parts. The first part provides a profile of the respondents and collects data about their goals and activities before and after the actual site visit, including how long after the site visit the institution was able to implement findings. It also asks about the involvement of the expert conducting the review, including time spent on site, what topics were considered, and follow-up services. The second part is a list of typical recommendations that might be given in a report of findings. Responding institutions were asked if each item had been recommended, and if so, whether or not that action was accomplished. Finally, participants were asked to identify conditions that might have hindered their ability to implement preservation recommendations, and to comment on how the assessment process could have been improved. Follow-up questionnaires were sent to respondents who did not return their questionnaires after six weeks.

In total, 188 questionnaires were returned (61.4 percent) with 36 institutions reporting that they had not had a general needs assessment, and 24 abstentions. Three questionnaires were deemed invalid, either because the institution was reporting on more than one study, thus confusing the results, or because entire pages of the form were left blank. The research results are therefore based on 125 completed questionnaires (40.9 percent). The respondents represent institutions in 29 states, including 102 located in the northeast (primarily Massachusetts and New York), 11 in the west and midwest, and 12 in the southern United States. The data from the questionnaires were analyzed using SPSS version 11.5.

## Results

### Who Are the Respondents?

Of the responding institutions, 43 (34.4 percent) were colleges and universities (academic institutions), and 44 (35.2 percent) were public libraries. Of the remaining, 11 were museums, 8 were historical societies, 6 were archives, 2 were independent research libraries, and 11 were "other" (including 2 secondary school libraries, 2 government agencies, a nonprofit educational corporation, a theological seminary, and a "cultural institute"). These remaining participants (38 total, or 30.4 percent) are in some cases combined to facilitate statistical analysis of the data. For the purpose of comparison to peer institutions, categorization of institution type by primary function was preferred for this research as it helps to avoid confusion arising from signifying particular departments and units within colleges, universities, or other larger institutions. The types of institutions served by NEDCC, NYSL's Discretionary Grants program, and NEH Preservation Assistance Grants include those with research

materials (libraries, archives, historical societies, and so on), as well as town and county records offices, and museums. The NEH guidelines about the types of institutions and collections that will be funded are much more broadly classified as “humanities” collections, and “may include special collections of books and journals, archives and manuscripts, prints and photographs, moving images, sound recordings, architectural and cartographic records, decorative and fine arts, textiles, archaeological and ethnographic artifacts, furniture, and historical objects.”<sup>35</sup>

Each institution defined its total institutional staff as an indicator of the size of the parent organization, scope of the collection, and scale of the general assessment. This indicator was chosen, as opposed to other options such as size of the collection, because comparing different types of collections is difficult. By using staff size as a measurement, one also may gauge the amount of time an institution can apply to the general assessment process and to the implementation of findings. Sixty-one institutions are relatively small, reporting 19 or fewer staff members. Thirty-nine institutions have between 20 and 69 staff; and 24 are relatively large, with more than 70 staff members. The greatest number of respondents (34, or 27.2 percent) has a staff size of 10 to 19. Of those institutions with more than 100 staff members, 11 are academic. The data on staff size by type of institution are presented in table 1.

Participants estimated how much staff time they devote to preservation activities as an indicator of the level of institutional commitment and interest in preservation (see table 2). The majority, 64 (51.2 percent), reported less than 0.5 full-time equivalent (FTE) staff time devoted to preservation, followed closely by 31 (24.8 percent) of reporting institutions spending 0.5 to 0.9 FTE. Of 125 possible responses, only 15 (12.0 percent) indicated greater than 2.0 FTE. Of these, 9 had a total staff at their institutions of greater than 20 (7.2 percent of responses), and six had a total staff of less than 20 (4.8 percent of responses). A larger staff size did not equate with significantly more time being devoted to preservation activities.

Because many institutions were expected to be small or medium in size (this is a requirement when applying for Preservation Assistance Grants), the presence or absence of a preservation administrator was not chosen as an indicator of commitment to preservation, as hiring a full-time preservation officer generally is not feasible except in the largest institutions. In fact, Higginbotham and Wild have argued that a centralized program may not be the most effective means of administering a preservation program, and that preservation responsibilities should be part of the duties and responsibilities of all library personnel.<sup>36</sup> However, respondents may have underestimated staff time invested in preservation. For example, the 2001–2002 *ARL*

**Table 1.** Respondent profile

Institution Type	Response		Staff Size							No Ans.
	No.	%	>100	70–100	40–69	20–39	10–19	5–9	<5	
Academic	43	34.4	11	2	6	8	10	2	3	1
Public library	44	35.2	4	2	5	11	16	3	3	0
Independent research library	2	1.6	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
Archives	6	4.8	0	0	0	2	1	2	1	0
Museum	11	8.8	1	1	0	1	2	2	4	0
Historical society	8	6.4	0	0	0	1	0	3	4	0
Other	11	8.8	1	1	2	2	5	0	0	0
Total	125	—	18	6	14	25	34	12	15	1
Total Percent	—	100	14.4	4.8	11.2	20.0	27.2	9.6	12.0	.8

**Table 2.** Staff time devoted to preservation

Staff Time for Preservation (FTE)	Staff Size							Total
	>100	70–100	40–69	20–39	10–19	5–9	<5	
>5.0	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	3
4.0 - 4.9	2	0	0	1	0	0	0	3
3.0 - 3.9	2	0	0	1	0	1	1	5
2.0 - 2.9	0	0	0	0	1	1	2	4
1.0 - 1.9	2	0	2	3	3	2	0	12
0.5 - 0.9	4	0	4	8	10	0	5	31
<0.5	7	5	7	10	20	8	7	64
No answer	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3
Total	18	6	13	24	34	12	15	125

*Preservation Statistics* report that Group 4 ARL libraries (those with fewer than two million volumes) had a median 4.80 FTE staffing for preservation activities library wide.<sup>37</sup> Also, the Oberlin Group was recently characterized as having a mean total of 2.0 FTE for library-wide preservation activities.<sup>38</sup> Most of these institutions are libraries averaging collections of fewer than half a million volumes.<sup>39</sup>

Respondents were asked when each institution had undertaken their most recent general preservation assessment (see table 3). The purpose of dating the assessment is to try to determine the activities that are being accomplished over the long term, as well as those that are being accomplished in the period immediately following a review. The earliest date on the questionnaire is the first year that New York state began to provide financial support for general preservation assessments through its Discretionary Grants Program. Information provided by NEDCC listed their earliest assessment clients being served in 1993. NEH Preservation Assistance Grants were first awarded in 2000.

The distribution of responses favored those conducted between 2000 and 2003, with 72 (57.6 percent) surveys conducted during this period. Forty-nine assessments (39.2 percent) were undertaken between 1985 and 1999; four institutions did not answer the question. A cross tabulation of institution type by year of assessment shows that across institutional types, participation by public libraries has remained somewhat consistent, with 21 surveys reported before 1999, and 21 between 2000 and 2003. The period between 1995 and 1999 was a particularly active period for public libraries. General assessments by all other types of institutions combined have increased slightly, with 16 surveys reported before 1999, and 22 between 2000 and 2003. Participation by academic institutions increased steadily

between 1985 and 2002, and has more than doubled since 2000: only twelve were reported before 1999, and twenty-nine between 2000 and 2003.

Note that 88.8 percent of the institutions that participated in this research study reported receiving grant funding to pay for their general preservation assessment (see table 4). This was anticipated, as the mailing list was developed based on public reporting of funded activity identified through regional centers or public agents. The disproportionate number of assessments for colleges and universities may reflect the introduction of the NEH Preservation Assistance Grants program in 2000 and its emphasis on preservation of collections with significant value.

### The Assessment Process

Questions 6 through 16 of the questionnaire attempted to determine if the assessment process and the topics considered meet the expectations outlined in the literature. The responsibility of the host institution and surveyor, stages of the review, and comprehensiveness of the assessment were examined.

Respondents were asked to estimate the time spent by their institution preparing for the review in advance of the site visit (see table 5). Activities could include committee time, application or contract preparation, and so on, and relate to Darling and Webster's first phase of the survey process: preparation for the planning study and establishing the study framework. Overall, 92 (73.6 percent) spent 40 hours or less. Only 13 (10.4 percent) institutions spent 41 or more hours. The data, sorted for analysis according to type of institution, indicate no apparent trends. Colleges and universities represent 7 of the 13 institutions reporting 41 to 100 hours preparing for the site visit.

The amount of time spent preparing for the site visit is less than 41 hours for the majority of institutions. Groundwork through the completion of presurvey is less than anticipated. Eighty respondents (64.0 percent) completed a questionnaire in advance of the site visit (see table 5). Completion of a pre-survey questionnaire is described in most methods: it helps assessors to focus on key areas and use their time on site to its best advantage. Completion of some questionnaires may demand a substantial amount of staff time, effectively involving the institution through self-study.<sup>40</sup>

The data were analyzed to discover if any relationship existed

**Table 3.** Year of most recent general assessment

Year of Assessment	Response		Academic Libraries		Public Libraries		Other	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
1985–1989	8	6.4	3	2.4	2	1.6	3	2.4
1990–1994	14	11.2	4	3.2	3	2.4	7	5.6
1995–1999	27	21.6	5	4.0	16	12.8	6	4.8
2000	21	16.8	7	5.6	7	5.6	7	5.6
2001	21	16.8	8	6.4	8	6.4	5	4.0
2002	23	18.4	13	10.4	3	2.4	7	5.6
2003	7	5.6	1	0.8	3	2.4	3	2.4
No Answer	4	3.2	2	1.6	2	1.6	0	0.0
Total	125	100	43	34.4	44	35.2	38	30.4

**Table 4.** Grant funding

Grant Funding Received	Response		Academic Libraries		Public Libraries		Other	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
	111	88.8	39	31.2	42	33.6	30	24.0



**Table 5.** Preparation and planning for assessment

Preparation Time/hours	Response		Academic Libraries		Public Libraries		Other	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
<20	47	37.6	14	11.2	18	14.4	15	12.0
20–40	45	36.0	16	12.8	16	12.8	13	10.4
41–100	13	10.4	7	5.6	4	3.2	2	1.6
Do not know	19	15.2	5	4.0	6	4.8	8	6.4
No answer	1	0.8	1	0.8	0	0.0	0	0.0
Total	125	100	43	34.4	44	35.2	38	30.4
<b>Pre-Survey Questionnaire Completed</b>								
Yes	80	64.0	26	20.8	31	24.8	23	18.4
No	17	13.6	11	8.8	4	3.2	2	1.6
Do not know	27	21.6	5	4.0	9	7.2	13	10.4
No answer	1	0.8	1	0.8	0	0.0	0	0.0
Total	125	100.0	43	34.4	44	35.2	38	30.4

**Table 6.** Pre-site visit preparation time by staff size

Preparation Time/Hours	No. of Staff							Total
	>100	70–100	40–69	20–39	10–19	5–9	<5	
<20	7	1	5	8	15	5	6	47
20–40	4	4	5	13	8	3	7	44
41–100	0	1	2	3	6	0	1	13
Do not know	6	0	2	1	5	4	1	19
No answer	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
Total	17	6	14	25	34	12	15	125

between the total number of institutional staff and the amount of time spent preparing for the survey (see table 6). Of those with a staff size of 19 or fewer (61), 26 reported spending less than 20 hours, 18 reported spending twenty to 40 hours, and 7 reported spending 41 to 100 hours preparing for the study. For those institutions with a staff size of more than 20 and less than 100 (45), 14 reported spending less than 20 hours, 22 reported spending 20 to 40 hours, and 6 reported 41 to 100 hours; 3 did not know how much staff time was spent in preparation. Of the responding institutions with more than 100 staff, none reported 40 to 100 hours of preparation time. This finding is somewhat remarkable, since one might assume the largest institutions would correlate to a greater amount of time preparing for the assessment.

Most institutions enter into the assessment process with a series of goals for undertaking the study. An understanding of the purpose and potential scope of a general preservation assessment may be assumed from an examination of the major goals cited for undertaking the review. Further analysis of outputs may indicate the extent to which the general assessment contributes to achieving these goals. Respondents were asked to select those goals

that applied to their institution. Fourteen were listed in the questionnaire, and the number of goals per institution was calculated. The mean number of goals per institution was 5.49, indicating that less than half of the topics listed were of interest to most of the respondents. The goals most frequently selected from the list were to: (1) develop a preservation plan (77.6 percent of respondents); (2) improve storage practices (76.0 percent); and (3) improve the environment (65.6 percent). Improving the facility (56.8 percent of respondents), increasing staff awareness of preservation (54.4 percent), and increasing administrative support (52.8 percent) also were important to most institutions surveyed. Advancing repair activities (27.2 percent of respondents) was not the topic of least interest, but it still rated lower than goals associated with prevention and administrative oversight. The topics of least interest were to: (1) increase staffing for preservation (18.4 percent of respondents); (2) advance reformatting activity (to what format was not specified; 15.2 percent); (3) improve exhibition practices (12.0 percent); and (4) other (8.8 percent). Only 4 institutions reported not knowing what their goals were in undertaking the assessment process. The very low response to the category "Other" indicates that the choices

listed covered most areas of concern. These findings are summarized in table 7.

Major goals for undertaking a general preservation assessment were analyzed according to the type of institution (see table 7), with only two apparent trends. The data indicate that of the most frequently selected goals, interest was slightly less among the combined group (20.0 percent), as compared to public libraries (29.6 percent) or colleges and universities (28.0 percent), in developing a preservation plan. Of the topics generating the least interest, 7 of the 19 respondents interested in reformatting are "others," 8 are public libraries, and only 4 are academic. The data suggest that most institutions were concerned with administrative and overall, preventive activities that benefit the collection as a whole, as opposed to remedial care. However, the low mean indicates that perhaps many

institutions were not fully aware of, or interested in, the range of issues that might be considered during a general assessment. With the possible exception of "improving exhibition practice," the goals listed should be covered in most general preservation assessments. The expert conducting the assessment may judge, at its conclusion, whether goals have been met or not. He or she also may be able to help the institution to reconsider its goals and objectives through the report of findings.

The second phase of the general assessment, determining preservation needs, includes a scheduled site visit that should allow sufficient time to explore the full range of issues relevant to the institution at hand. The questionnaire asked the respondents to characterize the expert that conducted the assessment. Of 125 responses, 121 (96.8 percent) engaged an outside assessor; 2 engaged a staff member (1.6

**Table 7.** Major goals of the assessment by type of respondent

Goal	Total		"Yes" Response					
	No.	%	Academic Libraries		Public Libraries		Other	
			No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Develop a preservation plan	97	77.6	35	28.0	37	29.6	25	20.0
Improve storage practices	95	76.0	32	25.6	33	26.4	30	24.0
Improve the environment	82	65.6	28	22.4	28	22.4	26	20.8
Improve the facility	71	56.8	24	19.2	27	21.6	20	16.0
Increase staff awareness of preservation	68	54.4	29	23.2	20	16.0	19	15.2
Increase administrative support	66	52.8	25	20.0	23	18.4	18	14.4
Improve security	46	36.8	15	12.0	16	12.8	15	12.0
Increase preservation budget	36	28.8	13	10.4	10	8.0	13	10.4
Advance repair activity	34	27.2	15	12.0	10	8.0	9	7.2
Improve pest management	28	22.4	13	10.4	5	4.0	10	8.0
Increase preservation staffing	23	18.4	11	8.8	5	4.0	7	5.6
Advance reformatting activity	19	15.2	4	3.2	8	6.4	7	5.6
Improve exhibition practices	15	12.0	3	2.4	6	4.8	6	4.8
Other	11	8.8	5	4.0	2	1.6	4	3.2
Do not know	4	3.2	0	0.0	2	1.6	2	1.6
Mean: 5.49								

**Table 8.** Time spent and adequate time for site visit by staff size

Time for Site Visit	Response		Staff Size						
	No.	%	>100	70-100	40-69	20-39	10-19	5-9	<5
<1 day	11	8.8	2	1	1	2	1	2	2
1 day	60	48.0	10	3	6	9	19	3	10
2 days	37	29.6	5	1	6	8	9	5	3
3-5 days	11	8.8	1	1	1	5	2	1	0
Other	2	1.6	0	0	0	1	1	0	0
Missing	4	3.2							
<b>Adequate Time for Visit</b>									
Yes	98	78.4	13	6	10	21	27	9	12
Too much	1	0.8	0	0	0	0	1	0	0
Too little	13	10.4	2	0	3	4	2	0	2
Do not know	11	8.8	3	0	0	0	4	3	1
Missing	2	1.6							

percent), 1 did not know, and 1 respondent did not answer the question (0.8 percent). These results are not surprising; the population was derived primarily from sources that support and encourage the use of outside expertise.

The length of time allowed for the site visit was considered in this study (see table 8). The greatest number of respondents (60, or 48.0 percent) reported their site visits lasted 1 day; 37 (29.6 percent) had site visits that lasted for 2 days. Respondents also were asked to report if enough time was allowed to conduct the site visit properly. The majority (98, or 78.4 percent) reported that the time taken for site reviews was adequate. Only 13 respondents (10.4 percent) thought that too little time was allowed for the site visit. Most granting agencies limit the amount they will fund for consulting services, depending on the scope of the project. For example, NYSL will fund a consultant for only 3 to 4 days, including report writing, unless compelling arguments for greater support are presented. The data indicate that current awards are adequate for the majority of assessments. No conclusions can be drawn by comparing staff size to the data about adequate time for the site visit.

Respondents were asked to identify the topics or issues their assessment considered (see table 9). The purpose of this question was to provide support for the analysis by determining that the population under review had, in fact, undertaken a general review. The mean number of topics considered per institution was 6.54. Environmental factors were the most frequently selected subject, covered in 96.0 percent, or 120 out of 125 assessments. The second most frequently considered topic was the condition of the general collection (87.2 percent), followed closely by collection management (77.6 percent). A majority of respondents reported that the condition of their special collection was considered (68.8 percent), as well as security (68.0 percent), emergency management (66.4 percent), access and use (65.6 percent), and the organizational context for the review (55.2 percent). Staff training needs was reported by slightly less than half of the institutions responding (45.6 percent).

Bibliographic control was the topic least considered but

was still included in many of the surveys (27.2 percent of respondents), suggesting that assistance with cataloging and classification is often required. Of the 34 institutions reporting that bibliographic control was considered, 14 (11.2 percent) were "other" institutions, slightly higher than what was reported by colleges/universities (9 respondents) and public libraries (11 respondents). Both NYSL's Discretionary Grants Program and NEH's Preservation Assistance Grants include bibliographic control as one of the activities that could be part of a general preservation assessment.<sup>41</sup> Bibliographic control, usually considered a pre-requisite for conducting the general assessment to help ensure the client knows what is in the collection, is sometimes identified as a need to assist managing preservation of the collection. By extension, those contracting for a general assessment should consider hiring a consultant familiar with bibliographic methods appropriate to their institution.

The elements of the assessment report (executive summary, background information, appendixes, and so on) should indicate how well the findings are presented by the consultant for use by the client. A high majority of respondents reported that most of the components listed

**Table 9.** Topics/issues considered by type of institution

The Assessment Considered	"Yes" Response							
	Total		Academic Libraries		Public Libraries		Other	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Environmental factors	120	96.0	40	32.0	44	35.2	36	28.8
General condition of the collection	109	87.2	37	29.6	37	29.6	35	28.0
Collections management	97	77.6	32	25.6	34	27.2	31	24.8
Condition of special collection	87	68.8	31	24.8	35	28.0	21	16.8
Security	85	68.0	28	22.4	35	28.0	22	17.6
Emergency management	83	66.4	31	24.8	30	24.0	22	17.6
Access and use	82	65.6	27	21.6	33	26.4	22	17.6
Organizational context	69	55.2	28	22.4	21	16.8	20	16.0
Training needs	57	45.6	26	20.8	15	12.0	16	12.8
Bibliographic control	34	27.2	9	7.2	11	8.8	14	11.2
Mean: 6.54								

**Table 10.** Report components

What was included in the report?	"Yes" Response	
	No.	%
List of recommended preservation action organized by priority	109	87.2
Observations from the site visit organized by preservation topic	108	86.4
Executive summary	100	80.0
Information to achieve the required preservation actions	88	70.4
Background information on preservation topics	81	64.8
Appendices with further resources	77	61.6
Other	2	1.6
Do not know	1	.8
No report was issued	1	.8
Mean: 4.48		

were included with their report (see table 10). The most frequently cited section is a list of preservation actions organized by priority, reported by 109 of 125 institutions (87.2 percent). Most institutions reported that the observations from the site visit were ordered by preservation topic (108, or 86.4 percent); the report included an executive summary (80.0 percent); they received the information needed to achieve a preservation action (70.4 percent); background information was provided (64.8 percent); and the report contained appendixes with further resources (61.6 percent). The data indicate that the components of a final report were consistent across the population studied; only 2 institutions selected "Other" to compensate for components not listed. Only 1 institution reported not receiving a report, and only 1 did not know the contents of the report.

Respondents were asked to report on the types of follow-up services they received after the site visit (see table 11). Only 50.4 percent of institutions discussed the findings with their consultant before their report was submitted, and fewer than half (43.2 percent) reported that their consultant inquired if they had any corrections or concerns. However, 36.8 percent reported that the assessor responded to requests for further information, and 46.4 percent discussed implementation strategies. After the site visit, 32.0 percent of assessors gave an oral report of findings. The mean number of follow-up services per institutions was 2.40. Only 7 institutions reported no follow-up services after their site visit.

While a report of findings may be well-prepared, this alone does not indicate how well-considered the preservation actions are in the context of the institution under review. The consultant should discuss findings before submitting a written report, or submit the written report in draft form for review by the host (and other participating consulting specialists), and make revisions before considering the report final.<sup>42</sup> CAP assessors, in presentations given in June 2002, suggested that a correlation exists between successful program development and a positive working relationship with the consultant.<sup>43</sup> A few written comments submitted by volunteers that participated in this study highlighted the need for more discussion with the surveyor before, during, and after their report was submitted. In addition, 4 institutions

cited the lag time between the site visit and delivery of the written report as unsatisfactory and longer than anticipated. Overall, this study suggests that collaborative analysis and strategizing between host institution and assessor was weaker than anticipated. Further investigation into this phase of the assessment process may be warranted.

To finalize the characterization of the assessment process, participating institutions were asked to report how much staff time was spent reviewing the findings of their report (see table 12). The majority of institutions spent 40 hours or less on the review, with 56 institutions (44.8 percent) spending fewer than 20 hours, and 41 institutions (32.8 percent) spending 21 through 40 hours. Only 7 institutions reported spending 41 hours or more, and 18 reported that they did not know how much time was spent. No significant trends were noted by institution type or staff size. These data indicate that most institutions invest one week or less of staff time reviewing the final report of their assessment. This figure seems low, although it is comparable to the time spent in advance of the site visit (see table 5). The findings of this study are a good indicator of the amount of time most institutions can expect to spend when undertaking a general assessment. Most published resources have been less clear about the amount of time it will take to conduct an assessment, stating that it is dependent on the size and type of institution participating, among other factors.<sup>44</sup>

**Table 11.** Follow-up services

	Yes		No	
	No.	%	No.	%
After the site visit, the assessor				
Discussed recommendations before submitting a report	63	50.4	62	49.6
Discussed implementation strategies	58	46.4	67	53.6
Inquired if there were corrections, concerns, etc.	54	43.2	71	56.8
Responded to questions for further information	46	36.8	79	63.2
Delivered an oral report of findings	40	32.0	85	68.0
Requested your evaluation of the assessment	37	29.6	88	70.4
Do not know	17	13.6	108	86.4
Provided no follow up services	7	5.5	118	94.4
Other	4	2.3	121	96.8
Mean: 2.40				

**Table 12.** Staff time reviewing findings by staff size

Review Time/hours	Staff Size						Total
	>100	70-100	40-69	20-39	10-19	5-9	
<20	9	3	7	12	15	5	56
21-40	3	2	4	10	13	2	41
41-100	0	0	1	1	0	1	5
100+	0	0	0	1	1	0	2
Do not know	6	0	2	1	5	3	18
No answer							3
Total	18	5	14	25	34	11	125

## Conclusion

This paper characterizes the assessment process and appraises key elements, providing a foundation that defines preservation reviews that have been undertaken since the late 1980s by a range of United States institutions, primarily colleges and universities, and public libraries. The value of this data is that it informs future assessments through the collection of concrete data on representative measures that could stand for the whole. Of the institutions that participated in this study, most are small or medium in size and received funding to hire an outside expert to conduct their review. The time invested by the host institution in preparation for the assessment, and in reviewing the findings of the subsequent report, is less than two full weeks in staff time per institution. Most assessments are broad in scope and favor the study of preventive activities. The largest part of cited goals were to develop a preservation plan, improve storage practices, and to improve the environment. The time allowed for site visits is adequate in the majority of cases, and the report content is consistent across the population studied. A review of follow-up services suggests that collaborative analysis and strategic planning with the assessor is weak. Further investigation into the role of the consultant, especially during report preparation and after its delivery, is warranted. A second paper, "Use of General Needs Assessments: Outputs," planned by this author, will report what preservation actions are being realized as a result of the process. In addition, the paper will try to characterize those attributes of the general assessment methodology that can be labeled as best practices.

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### Appendix. Questionnaire: Use of General Preservation Assessments (Part I)

Please answer each question to the best of your ability. You may choose not to answer any question(s) you do not wish to. Please leave these questions blank.

I PREFER NOT TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY

MY INSTITUTION HAS NOT HAD A GENERAL PRESERVATION ASSESSMENT

If you checked either of the boxes above please return the questionnaire now. Thank you.

**Part I: The General Preservation Assessment Process**

1. Which of the following most closely defines your institution? *Check one*

- College or university    Public library    Independent research library    Archives    Museum  
 Historical society    Other (please describe):

2. What is the total number of your institutional staff?

- > 100    70 – 100    40 – 69    20 – 39    10 – 19    5 - 9    < 5

3. How much staff time is devoted to preservation activities?

- More than 5.0 FTE    4.0 – 5.0 FTE    3.0 – 3.9 FTE    2.0 – 2.9 FTE    1.0 – 1.9 FTE  
 0.5 – 0.9 FTE    Less than 0.5 FTE

4. When was your most recent assessment conducted?

- 1985 to 1989    1990 to 1994    1995 to 1999    2000    2001    2002    2003

5. Did you receive grant funding to pay for the assessment?

- Yes    No    Do not know

6. How much time do you estimate was spent in advance of the site visit preparing for the review? Include committee time, application/contract preparation, etc.

- Less than 20 hours    20 to 40 hours    41 to 100 hours    More than 100 hours    Do not know

7. Your major goals for undertaking an assessment were to: *Check all that apply*

- |   |   |  |
|---|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Increase staff awareness of preservation | <input type="checkbox"/> Increase administrative support      | <input type="checkbox"/> Develop a preservation plan   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Increase staffing for preservation       | <input type="checkbox"/> Increase the budget for preservation | <input type="checkbox"/> Improve the facility          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Improve storage practices                | <input type="checkbox"/> Improve the environment              | <input type="checkbox"/> Improve security              |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Improve pest management                  | <input type="checkbox"/> Advance repair activity              | <input type="checkbox"/> Advance reformatting activity |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Improve exhibition practices             | <input type="checkbox"/> Do not know                          | <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please describe):      |

8. Did your institution complete a “pre-survey questionnaire” to help familiarize your assessor with the institution in advance of the site visit?

- Yes    No    Do not know

9. The expert who conducted your general preservation assessment was: *Check one*

- Outside assessor    Staff member    Volunteer    Student    Do not know    Other (please describe):

10. Did your assessor use a guide or tool to direct the assessment?

- Yes    No    Do not know

11. The site visit lasted:

- Less than 1 day    1 day    2 days    3 to 5 days    Other (please describe):

12. Do you feel there was adequate time to conduct the site review?

- Yes    Too much    Too little    Do not know

B. The assessment considered: *Check all that apply*

- |  |  |   |  |
|--|--|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Organizational context              | <input type="checkbox"/> Collections management          | <input type="checkbox"/> Access and use | <input type="checkbox"/> Bibliographic control |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Emergency management                | <input type="checkbox"/> Environmental factors           | <input type="checkbox"/> Training needs | <input type="checkbox"/> Security              |
| <input type="checkbox"/> General condition of the collection | <input type="checkbox"/> Condition of special collection |   |  |

14. Which of the following was included in your assessment report? *Check all that apply*

- Executive summary                       Background information on preservation topics  
 Observations from the site visit organized by preservation topic  
 List of recommended preservation actions organized by priority  
 Information to achieve the required preservation actions  
 Appendices with further resources    No report was issued    Do not know    Other (please describe):

15. After the site visit your assessor: *Check all that apply*

- Discussed recommendations before submitting a report       Delivered an oral report of findings  
 Inquired if there were corrections, concerns, etc.       Requested your evaluation of the assessment  
 Responded to requests for further information       Discussed implementation strategies  
 Provided no follow-up services       Do not know       Other (please describe):

16. How much time did the staff spend after the site visit reviewing the findings generated from the assessment?

- Less than 20 hours    21 to 40 hours    41 to 100 hours    More than 100 hours    Do not know

17. How long after the conclusion of assessment (i.e., report delivery) did you begin to implement findings? *Check one*

- Less than 2 weeks    2 to 4 weeks    1 to 3 months    3 to 6 months    6 months to 1 year  
 1 to 2 years    More than 2 years    Do not know    No findings were implemented

18. Did you draft a written preservation plan based on the information provided by the assessment?

- Yes    No    Do not know

19. Have you updated your preservation goals and objectives since your assessment was conducted?

- Yes    No    Do not know

20. Since your assessment administrative and staff support of preservation has: *Check one*

- Increased    Decreased    Stayed the same    Do not know

**Part II: Outcomes**

21. The following are recommendations that might be reported based on findings of a general preservation assessment. Please indicate if they were recommended to you and, **if yes**, whether or not they were accomplished.

RECOMMENDATION	RECOMMENDED AS PART OF ASSESSMENT <i>Check One</i>			RECOMMENDED & ACCOMPLISHED SUBSEQUENT TO ASSESSMENT <i>Check One</i>		
	YES	NO	Do not know	Accomplished	Partially Accomplished	Not Accomplished
Form a preservation committee						
Change the organizational mission to include preservation						
Conduct further assessments of the building or collections						
Have collection materials appraised						
Obtain outside funding for preservation activities						
Reallocate existing resources for conservation/preservation activities						
Hire additional staff to assist with preservation activities						
Provide staff with preservation training						
Assign preservation responsibilities as part of staff job descriptions						
Improve structural design of facility where collection is stored/used						
Improve structural integrity of facility where collection is stored/used						
Construct a better facility for storage and/or use of the collection						
Relocate to a better facility for storage and/or use of the collection						
Write an emergency prevention and response plan						
<b>Improve or install:</b>						
Plumbing						
Physical access						
Physical security						
Lighting						
Environmental controls						
Environmental monitors						
Air filtration						
Physical security						

Fire alarms						
Sprinkler system						
Pest management						
Improve handling of collections						
Improve storage systems (shelving, cabinets, etc.)						
Increase storage space						
Improve or increase use of proper storage enclosures						
Improve care of specific collection formats (i.e., photographs, rare books, magnetic media, etc.)						
Improve quality and appropriateness of commercial library binding						
Improve quality and appropriateness of in-house repair methods/materials						
Increase contracting of outside conservation services						
Improve exhibition practices						
Reformat holdings:						
To microfilm						
To other photographic film format(s)						
As photocopies						
By digitization						
Other						

22. Which of the following may have hindered your institution's ability to implement preservation recommendations. *Check all that apply*

- Change in administration   
 Change in institutional mission   
 Change in organizational structure  
 Shift in organizational priorities   
 Reduced staffing levels organization-wide  
 Need for further information about best practices on preservation topics  
 Need for further preservation training  
 Reduced staffing levels in preservation units   
 Decreased institutional funding  
 Disaster resulting in significant loss of the collection   
 Transfer of collection to other institution  
 None   
 Other (please describe):

23. Please provide any comments you might have about ways that might improve the general preservation assessment in the space below.

**Thank you for your input and assistance with this project. Please respond by November 30, 2003, using the self-addressed, stamped envelope provided or mail to:**

Karen Brown, Preservation Librarian  
University at Albany Libraries LE310  
1400 Washington Ave.  
Albany, NY 12222