

# Essential Elements

## for Starting a Library Preservation Program

*Professional Perspectives — Tools and Techniques of the Trade.* The Professional Development Committee encourages members to continue to explore topics after presentations at the local, regional and national levels. We welcome your comments and article suggestions. Please contact Lori Hedstrom at 651/687-5891 or [lori.hedstrom@westgroup.com](mailto:lori.hedstrom@westgroup.com).

Preservation concerns many librarians — e.g., those whose collections contain books valuable to their constituencies because of local interest or rarity; those with numerous 19th- and early 20th-century books printed on brittle paper; or those whose libraries have books damaged by untrained but well-meaning staff members.

Making tough decisions to preserve library materials is an essential part of managing a library. Think about your own collection. Are some volumes in obvious need of attention? Has a water leak been patched but not entirely fixed? Is too much money being spent to rebind books which could be repaired in-house? Have books been set aside for attention though no one is trained to make repairs? Library materials are too valuable to be ignored once they are purchased and shelved. Many elements are necessary to start and maintain a successful preservation program. The tips below will help start a comprehensive preservation program. The steps can be implemented independently, but a comprehensive program must include them all to yield the greatest impact on a library's collections.

**Support from the library administration is essential.** Preservation activities need to be institutionalized. The higher the percentage of books in the categories described above, the more important support is. Because preservation is neither easy nor inexpensive, the library director must decide where preservation responsibilities will be located in the organizational chart. Minor actions, such as dusting books and closing window blinds, can be handled without a program per se. But libraries with many old, deteriorated or valuable volumes need the organization and direction that a full-fledged program provides.

**One staff member needs to hold ultimate responsibility** for the preservation program, and the duties must be incorporated into that person's job description. Some typical duties include

formulating policies and procedures for the preservation and physical treatment of all library materials; evaluating and determining treatment options; supervising other staff members who perform appropriate treatment on materials; taking ultimate responsibility for stacks maintenance, such as book dusting; and determining appropriate housing for materials, including phase boxes. Though the person in charge of preservation is typically in the technical services department, he or she will be responsible for educating all staff members about preservation and for coordinating preservation activities throughout the library.

A **budget line** should be established. The Association of Research Libraries has determined that an appropriate amount is 3–5 percent of the library's acquisitions budget. Therefore, a library that spends \$1 million for acquisitions should plan to spend \$30,000–\$50,000 to preserve its collection. The budget covers reformatting costs (microfilming or preservation photocopying only because digitizing does not preserve intellectual content long term); equipment; supplies; specialty binding services, such as individual phase boxes or hinge boxes; and pamphlet binders or other types of archival-quality housing for items which need protection on the shelf. The budget should also set aside funds for a one-time consultant to assist in setting up a program or in conducting a collection survey. Incorporate the expenses of preserving materials into the costs of acquiring them. Ask book donors to also contribute funds to help preserve the books they donate. Other monetary sources include a portion of the acquisitions or supplies budgets, user fees and fund raising.

Full-fledged preservation programs require several **written documents**. A long-range preservation plan spells out specifically what needs to be done to reach certain goals. For instance, a library with afternoon sunlight shining on

bookstacks from uncovered windows could plan to purchase and install floor-to-ceiling blinds on all affected windows. Another library that shelves books close to ceiling tiles in violation of its fire code may shift books or move them to off-site storage to prevent a disaster. A source to use for writing this plan is Sherylyn Ogden's *Preservation Planning: Guidelines for Writing a Long-Range Plan*, published by Northeast Document Conservation Center in 1997 and available from the American Association of Museums at 202/289-9127. Disaster plans are vital for any type of emergency and should be updated annually. Assistance for compiling a disaster plan is at the SOLINET Web site, [www.solinet.net](http://www.solinet.net). Libraries also need written contracts with their commercial binderies. The contract should refer to the newest binding industry standard, ANSI/NISO/LBI Z39.78-2000, downloadable at [www.niso.org](http://www.niso.org).

A **survey** of the library's current preservation activities and building conditions should be compiled in-house or by an outside consultant. Consult those responsible for the building structure, the heating/ventilation/air conditioning system, and fire protection. A needs-assessment survey, including specific goals and objectives, is part of the final report. Large libraries with numerous separate collections may require additional surveys to determine the needs of each one. The leaflet *What an Institution Can Do to Survey its Own Preservation Needs* provides a comprehensive listing of areas to be considered. It is available from the Northeast Document Conservation Center at 508/470-1010. Also helpful is NEDCC's technical leaflet *Priority Actions for Preservation*, available at the Web site [www.nedcc.org](http://www.nedcc.org).

**Priorities** can be determined based on the findings of the survey. Conditions that immediately endanger the collection, such as a leaking roof or faulty wiring, must be addressed first. Staff members must

# A Desktop Learning Opportunity

decide which titles, special collections or other categories have the most pressing needs. Is the foreign and international law collection without peer in the region but in poor condition? Are the spines of the state reporters loose and in danger of coming off entirely? Is the rare book collection in need of dusting and improved ventilation? NEDCC's technical leaflet *Considerations for Prioritizing* discusses many factors relevant to making such decisions, along with a grid for charting the impact and the feasibility of possible preservation actions.

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Physical plant staff should correct deficiencies and improve environmental conditions, especially those that stabilize the temperature and relative humidity levels and prevent the formation of mold spores. Because many environmental control projects are often large-scale endeavors, budgeting for them may be a challenge. Investigate amortizing the expenditures over several years. Those with veto power will need to be convinced of the necessity for these costly amounts. Be prepared with statistics from Conservation OnLine documents, available at <http://palimpsest.stanford.edu>. Large-scale projects are not the only actions that can have a positive effect, however. Several small-scale changes, such as blocking radiant heat from radiators and weatherstripping doors, also produce significant benefits. The substantial outcomes derived from minor, less-expensive projects are detailed in the NEDCC's technical leaflet on *Low-Cost/No-Cost Improvements in Climate Control*. Do as much as possible in this regard: Improving environmental controls is the preservation action with the greatest long-term impact on collections.

**Identify all available options** for repairs, reformatting, boxing, binding, replacing and housing. Contact other area librarians about the sources they use and their

insights and experiences, pro or con. Investigate the services of the library's commercial binder, but don't stop there. Because commercial binding services are high quality and more expensive than in-house binding, that level of workmanship may be justified only for rare books. Alternatively, the library staff can construct sturdy, acid-free phase boxes quickly and inexpensively. Consider cooperating with other law libraries to reformat a title in poor condition or to contract with a publisher to reprint a title or set.

A staff member should be trained for standard book repairs. Contact area librarians to locate a local workshop or someone qualified to teach book repair. If no workshops are available locally, one library or several can contract with the NEDCC, SOLINET, or the Conservation Center for Art and Historic Artifacts ([www.ccaha.org](http://www.ccaha.org)). Each has staff members who conduct workshops for a travel fee.

The person who performs repairs needs dexterity to work with paper and books and must be attentive to details. Set aside a space for the repairs, even if it is shared. Use only archival-quality materials. Two suppliers are University Products ([www.universityproducts.com](http://www.universityproducts.com)) and Gaylord ([www.gaylord.com](http://www.gaylord.com)). Refer to two leaflets from the Amigos Library Services, the nation's largest library-resource sharing network, at [www.amigos.org](http://www.amigos.org): *AMIGOS Book Repair Workshop Supplies List* and *Selecting Preservation Supplies: Some Basic Guidelines*. A source for basic information on book repair is part of the Gaylord Preservation Pathfinder Series, which can be found at [www.gaylord.com/pams/Path4.pdf](http://www.gaylord.com/pams/Path4.pdf).

If you want to learn more about **preservation**, plenty of **resources** are available on the Internet, in print and from library and government agencies.

Check out the numerous helpful Web sites that feature articles, forms, products and other information. NEDCC's Web site contains two outstanding resources: Preservation 101, an online course, and the third edition of *Preservation of Library & Archival Materials: A Manual*. Don't overlook print sources, which are more comprehensive than most individual Web

sites. Investigate workshops in topics such as library binding and disaster planning.

Programs on preservation should be conducted for staff and patrons. Knowing how best to care for materials is not intuitive; everyone who has contact with library materials should be taught to reinforce the actions of staff that are responsible for preservation measures. Northwestern University's Web program is a useful tool about care and handling of books: <http://staffweb.library.northwestern.edu/preservation/chlm/index.html>.

Grants are available to help cover the expenses of setting up a preservation program and for specific projects, such as those to microform or digitize collections. Check out SOLINET's Web site for the leaflet *Funding Resources for Preservation*. Preservation Assistance Grants from the National Endowment for the Humanities ([www.neh.gov](http://www.neh.gov)) fund consultations with preservation professionals, general preservation or conservation assessments, attendance at preservation workshops and training programs, and the purchase of preservation supplies and equipment.

Starting and maintaining a successful library preservation program is never easy. With shrinking budgets and staff, putting preservation on the back burner in favor of addressing more immediate concerns seems attractive. But these practical, efficient strategies will help librarians preserve their volumes for as long as possible.

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