



## Criteria for Selecting Records for Conservation Treatment

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Most records held by a local government are needed for the information they contain, not because of their significance. Staff and researchers are primarily interested in the content of a record and not its storage medium, whether microfilm, electronic, or paper. As long as the information is readable, it is usable. For this reason, most preservation problems (torn pages, fragile bindings, damaged records) can be addressed through reformatting—providing a use copy of the record by photocopying or microfilming.

Only a very small quantity of archival records need to be retained in their original format. In those instances when the actual record itself is valuable, the condition of the original is of primary interest. The process by which records are selected for conservation treatment is extremely important, since conservation requires more staff and financial resources than preventative activities. A series of questions can determine whether or not conservation is in fact the appropriate preservation option. These questions will also be used by grant reviewers when evaluating LGRMIF conservation grant proposals. A government's ability to justify the cost of conservation is based on responses to the following questions:

- What is the value of the records? Do they have intrinsic value<sup>1</sup>? Monetary or artistic value? Unusual historical value?
- Are the records in a unique format (photographs, maps) whose attributes (scale, size) would not be adequately reflected if they were reformatted?
- Is there a scarcity of documentation due to local disasters, age, or destruction?
- Do the records reflect a significant core function of the government?
- Are the records used often by either internal or external researchers? Is that use causing significant damage? Can researchers use an alternative format such as microfilm?
- Has the material been microfilmed or otherwise duplicated?

- Is treatment necessary before copying can be safely performed?
- Do records have exhibit potential? Educational uses? Such records are often rich in information and convey the immediacy of an event, depict a significant issue, or impart a sense of the person who is the subject or originator of the record. In such cases, a copy cannot equal the impact of the original document.
- Is treatment absolutely necessary, or will some intermediate preservation action suffice, such as placing torn documents in polyester sleeves?
- What is the physical and chemical stability of the records? Is information likely to be lost if intervention is delayed?
- How large is the overall records series? Are all records in similar condition, with similar needs?
- Can the records be appropriately housed following treatment? Will storage methods (environment and housing) and use continue to damage the conserved records?<sup>2</sup>

These questions have been expanded and formatted into the attached *Conservation Evaluation Form*. By analyzing the responses to these questions, a local government can decide, for instance, that a volume of minutes which will be filmed and then retired should only have bridging mends; that a map which is frequently consulted should be re-enforced and encapsulated; or that the way a volume of minutes is stored should be addressed before the volume is rebound.

Examples of local government records that are likely to merit conservation treatment include (but are not limited to):

- minutes of the chief legislative body
- vital records predating 1880
- records establishing the mission of the government such as charters
- records predating 1865

## CONSERVATION EVALUATION FORM

<b>SERIES NAME:</b>	
<b>QUANTITY OF MATERIAL:</b> <i>(Note portion of total if not whole series, e.g. 1 vol. of 20, 5 items of 20 cu. ft.)</i>	
<b>VULNERABILITY &amp; EXISTING CONDITION</b>	
a.	Frequency of use. Is the material used often by researchers <i>Assign a value 0-5. 5 = heavy use (once/week), 3 = some of the material is used frequently, 0 = little use (once/year).</i>
b.	Fragile or unstable medium (such as color photographs, thermofax, film or magnetic tape, ground wood paper). <i>Assign value: 0-5. 5 = most (&lt;2/3) of the series is unstable, 0 = (&gt;1/3) most of the series is stable.</i>
c.	Fragile format (such as oversized materials, glass plate negatives, inflexible, folded or rolled documents, scrapbooks). <i>Assign a value of 0-5. 5 = most of the series is in a fragile format, 0 = most of the series is not in a fragile format</i>
d.	Existing damage/deterioration. <i>Assign a value or 0-5. 5 = a majority of the series has structural damage and cannot be safely handled in current condition, 3 = The majority of the materials have structural damage but they can be safely handled, 0 = the majority of materials are structurally sound and can be safely handled.</i>
e.	Poorly housed (acidic enclosures, overcrowded or unsupported folders, damaging attachments). <i>Assign a value of 0-5. 5 = most of the items are poorly housed, 3 = some of the materials are poorly housed, 0 = all of the series is housed in acid-free protective enclosures and supported properly.</i>
f.	Will improved environment and housing stabilize the material and halt or slow further deterioration? <i>Assign a value of 0-5. 5 = material will continue to deteriorate, 0 = improvements will halt all further deterioration.</i>
g.	Is treatment necessary before copying can be performed safely? <i>Assign a value of 0-5. 5 = extensive repairs are needed on most of the records before copying, 3 = modest number of repairs will be needed, 0 = very few documents will need treatment.</i>

<b>ACCESS</b>		
a.	Is the material confidential or restricted in any way? Assign a value of 0-5. 0 = the records are permanently restricted, 1 = restricted 50-75 yrs., 2 = 25-50 yrs., 3 = 10-25 yrs., 5 = records open to the public	
b.	Has the material been microfilmed or otherwise duplicated? Assign a value of 0-5. 0 = duplicated, 5 = not duplicated	
c.	Will the material be housed in a stable environment and secure storage area after conservation treatment? Assign a value of 0-5. 5 = temp between 60-70°, RH 40-45%, good air circulation; 0 = widely fluctuating temperatures, little air circulation	
d.	Are records described to improve access? Assign a value of 0-5. 5 = no inventory description exists and there is heavy reliance on staff and user browsing, 3 = an brief but informative inventory worksheet description exists, 0 = an archival series description exists.	
e.	Are records physically accessible? Assign values 0-5. 0 = extensive physical access has been provided for the series (volumes, boxes and folders are clearly labeled, records easy to retrieve), 3 = boxes are labeled but access to folders is difficult, 5 = access is extremely difficult (boxes are not labeled or in order on shelves, no listing of contents is available).	
<b>APPRAISAL SYNOPSIS</b>		
a.	Does it have evidential value (reflects the operations or functioning of the local government)? Assign a value of 0-5. 5 = very valuable, 0 = low value	
b.	Does it have research or informational value (useful data about people, places, events)? Regionally? Statewide? Nationally? Assign a value of 0-5. 5 = very valuable, 0 = low value	
c.	Does it have intrinsic value (must be retained in original form) or can it be replaced by a duplicate? Assign a value of 0-5. 5 = all of the material must be retained, 3 = some of the material must be retained in its original form, 0 = information in other form acceptable	
d.	Does the material have exhibit or educational potential? Assign a value of 0-5. 5 = all of the material has very high potential, 3 = some of the material has potential, 2 = a few of the items may have potential, 0 = rarely would the material be used	
<b>VALUE TOTALS</b>		
	Add all the values	
<b>PRIORITY LEVEL</b>		
<i>1st (top) Priority = 70-54 pts.; 2nd Priority = 53-36 pts.; 3rd Priority = 35 - 18 pts.; 4th (lowest) Priority = 17-0 pts.</i>		

<sup>1</sup> Intrinsic value is the value inherent in a document because of: unique form or physical feature; aesthetic or artistic quality; uniqueness resulting from age; value in exhibits; contents in relation to famous or historically significant people, places, things, issues, or events; or documentation of institutional establishment or formation of institutional policies.

<sup>2</sup> Ritzenthaler, Mary Lynn, *Preserving Archives and Manuscripts*. Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 1993, p. 133–134.