

Kentucky’s Cultural Heritage: A Statewide Plan for Collections Assessment and Care

When the report of Heritage Preservation’s *Heritage Health Index* survey was made public, the assessment of the status and needs of America’s cultural heritage collections served to verify what many in Kentucky had already surmised. Much of our state’s cherished history, the artifacts and documents that provide visual and intellectual proof of the state’s past, faces a risky future. Whether due to lack of funding, space, proper care, or adequate attention, or all of the above, Kentucky’s heritage is in danger.

With the support of the Institute of Museum and Library Services’ Statewide Planning Grant for the *Connecting to Collections* initiative, the Kentucky Historical Society Foundation [KHSF] plans to form a unique statewide partnership to begin to assess the needs of collections care and stability in the state and develop a plan to provide training, support, and capacity to ensure the ongoing preservation of the state’s heritage. The KHSF will partner with the Kentucky Historical Society [KHS] Kentucky Museum and Heritage Alliance [KMHA]¹ and the Kentucky Department for Libraries and Archives /State Historical Records Advisory Board [KDLA/SHRAB] to carry out the project. The partnership will form a statewide task force made up of representatives of museums, historical societies, libraries, and archives in the state that will be charged to carry out activities to meet three goals:

1. **To develop an assessment instrument and conduct an initial survey** of the status of Kentucky’s heritage collections and the needs of the collecting institutions;
2. **To develop and carry out a pilot project with three to five collecting institutions** in the state to conduct a more intensive collections assessment that will **inform the development of a statewide collections management plan** to address the state’s heritage collections needs; and,
3. **To provide a series of disaster planning and preparedness workshops** throughout the state that will provide institutions with instructions and guidelines for writing a disaster plan and inform a process to develop a statewide disaster response team.

The project will build upon work already being done by KDLA’s *Kentucky Guide Program*, established in 1979 to promote the use of primary source materials housed in archival and manuscript repositories and focusing on government records, personal papers, records of private organizations and institutions, photographs, maps, and oral history recordings. The proposed *Connecting to Collections* project will fill the gaps of the *Kentucky Guide Program* by focusing on artifact collections in museums and historical organizations; including three-dimensional items, rare books, works of art, newspapers and other published materials.

Need and Rationale

The last comprehensive survey of museums and historical organizations in Kentucky was conducted in 2001. That survey was mailed to 430 museums and historical organizations and had a response rate of about 30%. It was sponsored by two of the three partners who will

¹ The Kentucky Museum and Heritage Alliance (KMHA) is the assumed name for the legal entity known as the Historical Confederation of Kentucky (HCK), cited in the accompanying partnership statement. KMHA is used in the narrative as that is the public name used by the organization.

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participate in this project-KHS and KMHA. [Note: Local history collections in libraries were not included in the 2001 survey.] The findings were eye-opening, yet not surprising. At the time, results from the survey showed that, collectively, Kentucky’s heritage institutions were caring for approximately 3.7 million artifacts and documents; that they served over 6 million visitors in 2000; and that they welcomed over 800,000 school children to their sites each year. And yet these institutions were accomplishing all of this on tragically small budgets. The data showed that, in 2000:

- 26.5% or 115 organizations operated on **budgets of less than \$5,000** per year;
- 30.6% or 132 operated on **budgets between \$5,000 and \$50,000** per year;
- 9.0% or 39 operated on **budgets between \$50,000 and \$100,000** per year;
- 22.9% or 98 operated on **budgets between \$100,000 and \$500,000** per year, and
- Only 11% or 47 museums had **budgets of more than \$500,000** per year.

Although some general assumptions could be made on the probable lack of adequate care of collections being held by many of these 430 institutions based on their small budget sizes, the 2001 survey did not assess collections care or management practices. Overall, one can assume, however, that Kentucky’s heritage collections, like the nation’s, are in need of attention and better care.

A more recent survey of the state’s heritage institutions, conducted by KMHA in the spring of 2007, surveyed the state’s needs for disaster planning. The survey was developed after a lengthy discussion by the KMHA board that focused on two questions:

1. 1. What lessons could be learned from the heritage community’s needs and their response to the devastation caused by hurricanes Katrina and Rita?
2. How prepared would Kentucky’s cultural institutions be if they faced a disaster of similar magnitude?

The goal of the survey was to ascertain the status of disaster planning throughout the state. The findings showed that:

- 53% of the responding institutions did not have a disaster plan;
- Of those who did not have a plan, 44% had a goal of developing a plan in the near future;
- 70% of respondents were interested in taking part in a workshop that included case studies and instruction in how to develop or improve a disaster plan for their institution.

The KMHA board voted to develop a curriculum for a disaster planning and preparation workshop to be held around the state in the summer and fall of 2009.

The Planning Process & Project Resources (Budget and Personnel)

With the need to reassess the state’s museums and historical institutions to update the 2001 information, and the current plans to develop a disaster planning curriculum, the time is right for KMHA, with the assistance of and access to statewide resources that can be provided by KHS and KDLA/SHRAB, to move forward to assess the collections care needs in the state and to develop a plan to address those needs. In order to carry out the tasks of this project, and meet the project’s goals, a task force of twelve members will be formed that encompasses the following:

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- The project director, Chris Goodlett, head of the Kentucky Historical Society’s Local History Office and staff liaison to the Kentucky Museum and Heritage Alliance. Goodlett is a former curator at the Kentucky Derby Museum in Louisville and has provided field services training to the state’s museums and history organizations in his role at KHS for the two and a half years.
- Scott Alvey, director of the design studio at the Kentucky Historical Society, and the current president of the Kentucky Museum and Heritage Alliance. Alvey was the former assistant director of collections and exhibitions at the Louisville Science Center in Louisville, Kentucky.
- Melissa Shields, is an Archivist III (Document Preservation Supervisor) for the Kentucky Department for Libraries and Archives, and Valerie Edgeworth, the Program Coordinator for the Kentucky Guide Program administered by the Kentucky Department for Libraries and Archives. Ms. Edgeworth is currently on federal funding. Therefore, her contribution and expertise will not be included in the cost-sharing section of the budget.
- Three additional members selected by KHS, with attention paid to experience in museum collections, as well as archival and special collections, and three additional members selected by both KMHA and KDLA/SHRAB, with attention paid to overall task force diversity

The grant administrator will be Lynne Hollingsworth, development associate for grants management for the Kentucky Historical Society. Her grant management experience includes two successful projects with the National Historical Publications and Records Commission. In addition, a part-time assistant will be hired to carry out the administrative work of the project.

The team will be formed between May 1 and June 30, 2009, with the first meeting held in July 2009. Interviews for the assistant position will be conducted in the May-June 2009 time period with an anticipated start date of July 1, 2009. Responsibility for carrying out each phase of the project will be delegated to the task force as a whole with day-to-day activities handled by the administrative assistant. A smaller team of three, comprised of project members, will oversee the general flow of the project and ensure that deadlines are met.

The activities that the task force will address include the following:

Preparatory Phase

May-June 2009:

- Identify task force members and bring them up to date on the work and scope of the project;
- Interview candidates and hire a part-time administrative assistant to carry out the work of the project.

Phase I: Planning and Assessing

July-September 2009:

- Develop a survey instrument to conduct an initial assessment of the status of collections care and needs of collecting institutions in the state.

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- Update a database of collecting institutions to integrate institutions currently served by KHS, KDLA/SHRAB and KMHA.
- Approve curriculum for a disaster planning workshop to assist organizations with planning for and writing a disaster plan.

September-December 2009:

- Distribute survey to collecting institutions in the state.
- Monitor return of surveys and enter data gathered into collections information database.
- Develop format for a series of focus groups on collections needs to be held around the state in early 2010 to gather statewide input into the most effective means to improve collections care in the state.
- Present prototype disaster planning workshop and use evaluations to refine the format and methodology utilized.

Phase II: Implementation

January-June 2010:

- Hold a series of focus groups around the state to gather input into most effective means to improve collections care.
- Hold a series of disaster planning workshops in state. An evaluative tool will be constructed to assess the benefits of the workshop.
- Develop a process for piloting an in-depth assessment of current conditions of collections care in institutions in state and to develop a scope of work to address needs that are found.

June-December 2010:

- Identify three to five institutions in the state to pilot an in-depth assessment of collections care in institutions. In selecting pilot institutions, care will be taken to ensure diversity of size of institution and type of collections held.
- Conduct an in-depth assessment of three to five institutions in the state. The goal of this assessment will be to provide deeper awareness of each institution's collections care needs that will lead to
 1. a scope of work necessary to address each institution's collections care needs and
 2. a method for prioritizing a plan of action for each institution to begin to address the identified needs.

Each participating institution will be asked to complete an evaluation form so the applicant and partner institutions can assess the value of the program.

- Develop a report from the focus groups held earlier in the year to begin to plan potential training workshops and/or other initiatives.
- Assess the need for ongoing disaster planning and preparation training in the state and provide recommendations for establishing a statewide disaster response team for cultural institutions.

Phase III: Project Sustainment

January-April 2011:

- Using information gathered from the pilot sites in the in-depth assessment activity above and the report from the focus groups, the task force will develop a list of recommendations of how to manage, staff, and provide funding to
 - Continue the in-depth assessments of collections care needs for individual institutions with a planned outcome of developing a scope of work and prioritized plan of action for each institution that takes part.
 - Provide workshops and/or other training initiatives needed to prepare paid and volunteer staff at institutions in the state to care for their collections.
 - Identify public awareness projects that could/should be developed to make Kentucky’s citizens aware of the need to fund and ensure that these collections are preserved for the future.
- Begin initial steps towards creating a statewide disaster response team.

Outcomes

Ultimately, at the end of the project, Kentucky’s cultural and heritage community will have achieved the following outcomes:

- **A general assessment of the status of the state’s cultural and heritage collections** that updates our information on the scope of collections in terms of size and type of collections held and provides the state with a first ever opportunity to assess the status of collections care-or lack of care-in the state.
- **A process for conducting collections needs assessments for individual institutions** that provides a prioritized scope of work and action plan for each site, along with recommendations for how to manage, staff, and fund the assessments in the future.
- **A plan for providing training to the staff of institutions** to help them provide better ongoing care and housing for collections.
- **Disaster training for heritage institutions in the state** that leads to more institutions with a disaster management plan.
- **The implementation of initial steps** towards developing a **statewide disaster response team**.
- **Recommendations for public awareness projects** to bring the needs of the state’s heritage collections to public attention.