

A Statewide Preservation Program for Minnesota

The information gleaned from the statewide survey and four focus groups indicates that Minnesota is not unique. As a state, it conforms closely to the national pattern of preservation need indicated by the Heritage Health Index, a nationwide survey conducted by Heritage Preservation, in partnership with the IMLS. Based on the information obtained during this project, an outline for a statewide preservation program for Minnesota was developed.

Minnesota's proposed preservation program is compatible with the four recommendations that resulted from the Heritage Health Index. These state that, nationwide, individual institutions must:

- give priority to providing safe conditions for the collections they hold in trust;
- develop an emergency plan to protect their collections;
- assign responsibility for preservation to members of their staff;
- assume responsibility for finding the support to preserve their collections.

The Minnesota Historical Society and its partners can foster and facilitate this work, but each institution must develop some basic level of capacity on its own.

Connecting to Collections / Minnesota identified the following four areas as the highest priorities for the state. They are the most urgent and readily achievable and would have the highest impact for the greatest number of institutions. These should be considered first in seeking any funding:

- create and maintain a web-based information clearinghouse;
- develop and distribute a range of training and educational products;
- provide every repository with the basics of an emergency plan;
- create a framework for shared technology services.

These priorities establish an outline for a statewide program, broken down into specific steps and tasks that are practical, cost-effective and fundable. Each would require that the MHS work closely with partners and constituencies to accomplish appropriate results. Implementation and work plans would depend on funding. Ideally, all the projects would be knitted together within a sustained, ongoing program, built upon the current preservation outreach activities of the MHS. If, however, funding for a comprehensive program is not obtained, each activity could stand alone, leading to discrete, measurable outcomes.

To implement any of the priorities, the MHS will have to identify additional funding sources. It will explore possibilities for on-going funding to sustain an overall program and already has compiled a list of potential grant-funding agencies that would support components of the project that could stand alone. With the latter, it can match goals of the various agencies with activities

in the plan and write proposals to move forward. A comprehensive funding plan would investigate the possibilities for a re-grant program, to assist institutions at the local level.

All the possible projects should include efforts to promote and advocate for preservation support from both the government and private sector. Following the successful approach of the IMLS summits, a statewide summit for networking, inspiration and brainstorming should launch any preservation work. To raise further the profile and visibility of preservation projects, a program might include a media campaign to call attention to the state's cultural heritage and the citizenry's responsibility to preserve it, as well as the development of a conservation media kit scalable to local markets.

The following activities would be part of the program's implementation plan.

- Create and maintain a web-based information clearinghouse
 - Develop web-based tools, informational leaflets, and on-line resources for collections care
 - Provide models of plans and policies
 - Produce guidelines of appropriate practice indicating minimal, better, and best practices so institutions can position themselves with regard to preservation standards---they can gauge where they are and where they need to go
 - Provide on-request informational assistance /help-line

- Training and education
 - Implement a "Train the Trainers" program to provide local expertise
 - Establish a structured internship program
 - Provide coaching in grant writing
 - Offer guidance in development of a business plan
 - Share success and failure stories/case studies
 - Assist in writing long-range preservation plans
 - Aid in institutional needs assessment surveys and site visits
 - Assist in the development of integrated pest management programs
 - Support collaborative initiatives to purchase storage materials and share services
 - Facilitate sharing of staff and volunteers
 - Work with state and regional professional associations and schools
 - Promote mutual help

- Provide assistance with new media (Audio-visual and Digital)
 - Create a framework for shared digital technology services
 - Develop a common application for digitization and access
 - Develop guidelines of appropriate and preventive practices ("do no harm")
 - Investigate shared cold storage

- Provide every repository with the basics of an emergency plan
 - Conduct 1 to 2 day tutorials that result in a basic emergency preparedness plan for every participating institution
 - Provide templates/boilerplates scalable to different institutional sizes and complexity
 - Produce sample plans and models for different institutional sizes and complexity
 - Develop a coordinated statewide emergency preparedness plan