



Collections Care and Preventive Conservation

Working Group Report Summary

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Collections care and preventive conservation are the foundations of cultural heritage conservation and collections management practice.

As the Held in Trust (HIT) Working Group on Collection Care and Preventive Conservation assessed the current state of collections care and preventive conservation of cultural heritage in the United States and globally, it became clear that additional cross-disciplinary training, new partnerships, and an emphasis on resilience are essential to ensuring the field can meet the challenges facing the preservation of our diverse cultural heritage.

Outlined below are the areas of key consideration the Working Group identified for this central pillar of cultural heritage preservation work.

KEY CONSIDERATIONS

Centering the value and meaning of cultural heritage

When considering preservation of cultural heritage, we must first ask ourselves who we are preserving it for and why. Advocacy becomes a key factor in ensuring we are clear about the importance of our work and those it will impact. By centering the conversation around the meaning and value of cultural heritage, we change how we view the care of collections and preventive conservation from a reactive model to a proactive one that engages with communities through conversations based on trust.

Training and engagement

The best approaches for collections care and preventive conservation are centered on the audiences for whom we do the work. Given the remarkable range of cultural heritage in the U.S. and globally, care and preservation can have many forms and require training beyond traditional educational pathways. Cultural competency is an essential part of preservation and should be reflected in the training of those who will perform preservation tasks. Communities who care for their own cultural materials must be engaged as partners in identifying and addressing strategies to increase their power and agency in caring for their cultural heritage.

Resilience in collections stewardship

Collections care and preventive conservation must evolve to meet the challenges faced by the cultural heritage sector and the world in which we live. Among other seismic shifts, these challenges include climate disasters that have not been experienced in modern history and the adoption and effects of new technologies. Resilience is key in collections stewardship to care for both cultural heritage and the people who do the caring.

STRATEGIC GOALS

The HIT Collections Care and Preventative Conservation Working Group has identified the following three strategic goals to guide collections care and preventive conservation today and into

the future. Further detail on these goals and an outline of benchmarks over the short, medium, and long term can be found in the Working Group's [full report](#).

GOAL #1: Build advocacy

Professionals in the field can work together and with community caretakers to advocate that preventive conservation and collection care are given equal weight and proportional funding to other activities such as curation and education. In advocacy work, the field should focus the conversation about cultural heritage preservation on the audiences and cultures we serve, including diverse voices and experiences to secure the broadest possible support. As part of this work, professionals and institutions need to consider the ethical dimensions of collections care, including recognizing and addressing a legacy of illegal, unethical, and traumatic acquisition and collection practices. Additional resources will need to be allocated to repatriation, decolonization, and provenance research as part of preservation and preventive conservation practice.

GOAL #2: Create more expansive and inclusive training for collections care and preventive conservation

The field needs to provide a collections care framework in which training, policy, and practices are centered on the people/object interaction and framed within social and environmental challenges. Trainings will emphasize resilience, adaptability, and creative decision-making. To engage communities and allied professions, the field should include flexible trainings that can take place outside of institutional centers and encourage dialogue and shared learning. Communities who care for their own cultural materials must be engaged as partners in identifying and addressing what training and other programs are needed to help them meet their goals. The field will also benefit from recognizing and legitimizing the expertise of allied professionals and community caretakers in collective preservation efforts.

GOAL #3: Build resilience and adaptability in collections stewardship

The field can work together and with allied professionals and communities to prioritize adaptable concepts of preventive conservation and collections care that can scale for different sizes and types of institutions while meeting the changing needs of our world (e.g., climate crisis). Fostering creativity and non-standard approaches will be essential. Resilience is built by creating connections with a broader community of care, as well as identifying the cost of ownership of collections, to be better equipped to care for cultural heritage in an accessible and sustainable way.

IN SUMMARY

Collections care and preventative conservation is an opportunity to contribute to the reorienting of cultural heritage preservation towards a people-centered endeavor. Through more inclusive training, language, and practices, the field can empower communities and allied professions as partners or sole stewards. By sharing knowledge and ideas, we can build resilience and energize the field to meet the challenges to preserving our nation and the world's cultural heritage.

To learn further details around the findings and recommendations of the HIT Working Group on Collections Care and Preventive Conservation, please access their [full report](#).

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