From Utah’s First People and pioneers to the completion of the transcontinental railroad at Promontory Point, the mining booms and busts to the establishment of the State’s National Parks and the 2002 Winter Olympics, Utah’s history is rich and internationally significant. As essential as preserving our landmarks and scenic wonders, Utahns must make a concerted effort to protect the state’s movable cultural heritage in our museums, libraries, historical societies, archives, churches, and city offices.

In 2009, Utah took a giant step toward this goal when it was awarded a “Connecting to Collections” grant by the federal Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) as part of a national initiative to preserve states’ history and culture. It is only through the support of Utah’s elected officials, the boards of cultural institutions, and the general public that preservation in Utah can be significantly enhanced. Support Utah’s heritage institutions in their ongoing effort to preserve your cultural legacy now and for future generations. Learn more about Utah’s Connecting to Collections statewide initiative by reading the report at www.ualc.net or contacting Randy Silverman (Preservation Librarian, University of Utah Marriott Library) at 801-585-6782 or randy.silverman@utah.edu.
Grant Awareness and Assistance: Beginning with funding for preservation, the survey identified a number of areas needing improvement. For example, although a lack of resources was frequently noted, less than one-third of the respondents had submitted a proposal for preservation grant funding during the past five years. To begin addressing this issue, project leaders partnered with the Western States and Territories Preservation Assistance Service (WESTPAS) in May 2011 to sponsor two workshops on preservation grant writing and fundraising.

Preservation Education: Continuing education programs are necessary to build capacity in existing preservation staff. Over 50% of the cultural heritage staff surveyed reported having attended collection-care training workshops within the past five years, but this did not diminish their thirst for more preservation knowledge. Respondents indicated that short-term workshops were the number one method for bringing preservation information back to their institutions. As a result, project leaders collaborated with the State of Arizona to craft a collaborative grant proposal to support onsite short courses in small institutions in both states.

Preservation Policy Development: The survey also identified a lack of generalized preservation planning throughout the state. Very few survey respondents had yet developed a preservation plan; not many had used grant support to hire a conservation professional to conduct a preservation needs assessment of their collections; and few had implemented standard preservation policies and practices to prolong their collection’s life. Addressing the ubiquitous lack of collection storage space, collections cataloging, preservation education, funding, and staff time—all identified as top concerns—could begin with professional consultations, continuing education and policy development. Another vital corner-stone of preservation—creating an institutional disaster plan—was also lacking in 72% of the institutions surveyed. Project task force and state leaders must work to develop an infrastructure that supports statewide preservation if Utah’s unique cultural heritage is to survive.

Preservation Storage Conditions: The startling discovery that 56% of survey respondents think less than half their collections are adequately stored is troubling. Improved environmental storage conditions are critical to long-term collection health and must become a hallmark of future efforts throughout the state.

Programmatic Solutions: Utah’s cultural institutions confirmed they are anxious to improve standards of stewardship given the collections entrusted to their care, but they lack resources to do so. Survey findings make abundantly clear that awareness about the causes of deterioration must improve, preservation education and training must become more widely available, and statewide disaster preparedness efforts embraced.

From our survey we learned:
1. Less than one-third of respondents had submitted proposals for preservation funding in the last five years.
2. A disaster plan was missing in 72% of the institutions.
3. Over 50% of those within repositories have attended collection-care training in the past five years.
4. Over 56% thought less than half their collection was adequately stored.

Grant Funding During the Past Five Years: To begin addressing this issue, project leaders partnered with the Western States and Territories Preservation Assistance Service (WESTPAS) in May 2011 to sponsor two workshops on preservation grant writing and fundraising.

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