

## FINAL NARRATIVE REPORT

2. PROJECT TITLE: A Plan of Action for Nebraska Collections: Statewide Collection Conservation Planning Grant

3. PROJECT PARTNERS: Nebraska State Historical Society, Nebraska Library Commission, Nebraska Arts Council, Nebraska Humanities Council, Nebraska Museums Association, Nebraska Library Association,

4. PROJECT OVERVIEW: Nebraskans with an expanded awareness of the need to preserve collections reflective of our rich and diverse culture heritage will be able to translate that awareness, better skills, and knowledge into confident action that actually makes changes in collection care as a result of the Statewide Connecting to Collections Planning Project. The completed action-based plan was created by engaging representatives from a range of Nebraska museums, libraries, archives, and other institutions and organizations that reflect the political, economic, geographic, demographic realities of our state. Representatives responded to a needs survey and then some gathered at locations statewide to investigate strategies, tactics, and resources necessary to make change a reality and to identify goals/outcomes that would reflect success.

Now that the plan is completed, the actual work of engaging people in communities across the state in a united effort to make changes in collections care can begin in an effective way.

## 5. PROJECT ACTIVITIES

On notification of the award made to Nebraska, project director Lynne Ireland conferred with consultants Liz Bishoff and Tom Clareson of the Bishoff Group about overall project goals, timelines, specific activities, and learning points consultants have gleaned from working with statewide planning efforts in other locales.

A series of telephone conferences with the consultants and the individuals making up the Nebraska advisory team, including representatives from the Nebraska arts and humanities councils, the Nebraska library and museums associations, the State Historical Records Advisory board, the Nebraska Library Commission and NSHS conservation staff enabled the group to

- refine timetables for specific work products,
- agree on the need for additional survey work based on Tom Clareson's assessment of previously gathered data
- review and approve online survey questions and approaches
- proliferate the survey to various constituencies
- continue encouragement of survey targets to complete survey
- organize planning meeting to create draft plan of action for improving collections care and preservation.

The meeting of representatives from museums, libraries, and archives, both local and statewide emphasis, with planning consultants was held November 8- 9, 2010 in Lincoln, NE. Using Open Space Technology the meeting produced a draft plan of action that was subsequently reviewed by the advisory committee prior to being disseminated statewide for commentary and reaction. Data

collected from the online survey in the fall of 2010 helped inform the plan and ensure it is responsive to specific needs identified.

Regional meetings were held April 18-21, 2011 in Chadron, Kearney, Norfolk, and Omaha, Nebraska. These sessions both provided input on the plan and engaged individuals who responded to the survey, reviewed the draft, or were otherwise interested in collections preservation. Mini-workshops with training of value to museum, library, and archives staff and volunteers in particular areas of the state was included to encourage participation in the plan review. Topics were digitization of paper records; photographic collections care; disaster preparedness planning; and creating a conservation roadmap. Not surprisingly, evaluation of these regional meetings indicated that participants rated the specific collections care-related training as more useful to them than the planning discussion. Funding from the Nebraska Arts Council assisted with travel costs for this phase of the project.

The final plan was completed incorporating feedback from statewide participants and was reviewed by the advisory committee. The plan of action was posted online and disseminated electronically by the end of the grant period, but will be presented and discussed more fully at meetings of the Nebraska Museums Association, the Nebraska Library Association, and the Nebraska State Historical Society in September and October of 2011.

The launch of the IMLS "Connecting to Collections Online Community" on the heels of this planning process could not have been more well-timed, since a significant finding of the plan was the need to provide more training for staff and volunteers of museums, libraries, and archives. Delivering that training in a readily accessible and travel-free format was critical to people in smaller organizations. We anticipate that increasing numbers of participants will take advantage of what IMLS is delivering in the coming months, and we will continue to communicate with our varied constituencies to apprise them of these meaningful learning opportunities.

Participation in the IMLS-funded Connecting to Collections Continuing Conversations at the September 2011 AASLH annual meeting offered the opportunity to glean best practices from states where implementation projects have been funded and carried out. Additional conversations with consultants Claerson and Bishoff at that time have also provided more input to consideration of next steps.

The grant period for the planning activity may be over, but planning does in fact continue. The advisory committee will convene in October to determine a plan of action for future implementation of items identified in the plan, including identification of potential funding sources to underwrite plan strategies and objectives. The group also intends to pursue implementation funding from IMLS in the 2012 round, assuming that such funding continues to be available.

## 6. PROJECT AUDIENCE

Staff, volunteers, and board members of Nebraska's museums, historical societies, libraries, and archives were the target audience, but some individual collectors also participated in regional meetings with collections care workshop components. By extension, the audiences of these cultural heritage organizations will be beneficiaries of collections conservation plan activities as they are

implemented in the future. Many of those in the target audience are from essentially rural and marginally funded institutions in communities with declining and aging populations. Assuring a future for the materials held in these collections will require ongoing action, prompted and directed in good measure by this statewide plan.

## 7. PROJECT ANALYSIS

### Achievements:

- Improved survey data on collections care practices and needs of 141 cultural heritage organizations in Nebraska
- Creation of a statewide collections conservation planning document designed to promote action and change within collecting organizations in the state.
- Engagement of staff and volunteers from libraries, museums, and archives around the state in discussing the challenges and future options for their collections and beginning a network for implementing change
- Training for personnel in digitization of manuscripts, photograph collections care, disaster preparedness planning, and developing institutional conservation road-maps.
- Connecting people across the state with online Connecting to Collections conversations created by IMLS to support ongoing learning and action.

### Lessons learned:

- Commitment and good intentions can be undermined by changes and challenges in public funding for cultural heritage organizations. As the project progressed, implementation of the kinds of budget cuts other states had experienced in previous years began to affect the degree of participation of some organizations and individuals.
- Motivating, encouraging, and nurturing action to improve collections care will require ongoing communication. Knowing what needs to be done and actually beginning to do it are two very different things. The road map for improved collections conservation in the state is now available, but it will require ongoing messages and encouragement to see organizations actually start on the journey. IMLS online resources will be a huge help.

### Outcomes:

- Participants in regional meetings and workshops identified increases in knowledge and skills. Monitoring the application of that new learning to the collections problems organizations face will determine whether outcomes change actions.

## 8. NEXT STEPS

- Project advisory committee will continue to support broader awareness of plan through presentation at state museum and library association meetings.
- Committee will confer to determine options for pursuing implementation funding from IMLS and other sources to ensure that some progress and action continues.

## 9. GRANT PRODUCTS

- Three copies of *Assuring the Future of Nebraska's Cultural Heritage Collections: a Statewide Plan* are enclosed.