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PERFORMANCE REPORT

2. Project Title

Pennsylvania “Connecting to Collections”

3. Partners

To accomplish this project, CCAHA worked closely with three Project Advisor organizations: the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission (PHMC), the Pennsylvania Federation of Museums and Historical Organizations (PFMHO), and Lyrasis.

4. Brief Overview

In January 2008, the Conservation Center for Art and Historic Artifacts (CCAHA) was awarded a “Connecting to Collections” grant by the Institute of Museum and Library Services to create a Preservation Plan for collecting institutions in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. To accomplish this project, CCAHA worked closely with three Project Advisor organizations: the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission (PHMC), the Pennsylvania Federation of Museums and Historical Organizations (PFMHO), and Lyrasis. Nonprofit management consultant Diane L. Mataraza facilitated the planning process. The completed plan addresses areas of concern highlighted by the 2005 Heritage Health Index report, as well as specific critical needs identified through a comprehensive assessment process involving a statewide electronic survey and regional focus groups.

5. Project Activities

A rough draft of the process for gathering information from Pennsylvania collecting institutions was first described in the “Connecting to Collections” application to the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS), written by CCAHA staff in late 2007. In broad outline this process was followed in 2008 and 2009, with minor modifications and adjustments made along the way as approved by the Pennsylvania “Connecting to Collections” Task Force. The process of gathering information was always approached as a necessary step toward the primary goal of preparing a preservation plan for Pennsylvania collecting institutions.

Both CCAHA and the Task Force agreed that the final preservation plan had to be based upon accurate and up-to-date information on the current state of Pennsylvania collections and the perceived needs of the people who manage these collections on a day-to-day basis. In order to gather this information, CCAHA proposed a two-step process employing first an electronic survey to all identifiable Pennsylvania collecting institutions followed by a series of focus groups in targeted regional locations.

From March through May 2008, project consultant Diane Mataraza and CCAHA staff worked to create a rough draft of the survey instrument, adapting material from the Heritage Health Index survey (developed by Heritage Preservation in partnership with IMLS), an early draft of the Minnesota “Connecting to Collections” survey, and the survey instrument that was used to prepare Pennsylvania’s 1996 preservation plan. In the week prior to the first scheduled Task Force meeting, a draft of the survey was disseminated to Task Force members for their review and suggestions.

On June 12, CCAHA convened the Task Force, bringing the Task Force leaders together in person for the first time. Leaders from three partnership organizations served as Project Advisors: Barbara Franco,
Executive Director, PHMC; Catherine C. Wilt, Executive Director, PALINET; and Deborah Filipi, Executive Director, PFMHO. In addition to the Project Advisors, the following people agreed to serve on the Task Force: Tom Clareson, Program Director for New Initiatives, Lytras; M. Clare Zales, Deputy Secretary of Education and Commissioner for Libraries, Office of (PA) Commonwealth Libraries; Brenda Reigle, Chief, Collections Care Section, PHMC; Chrisoula Randas Perdziola, Executive Director, Western Pennsylvania Museum Council; Cindy Bendroth, PA Caucus of the Mid Atlantic Regional Archives Association; J. Suzanne Kellerman, Judith O. Sieg Chair for Preservation, Pennsylvania State University; David A. Haury, Director, Bureau of Archives and History, PHMC; Laura Blanchard, Executive Director, Philadelphia Area Consortium of Special Collections Libraries; Jeanne Anne Croft, Preservation Librarian, University of Pittsburgh; and Charlotte Tancin, Librarian & Senior Research Scholar, Hunt Institute for Botanical Documentation, Carnegie Mellon University. Ms. Mataraza facilitated the three-hour meeting, which included presentations of work completed to date and opportunities for brainstorming and discussion.

During this early period, CCAHA staff endeavored to create a database of appropriate e-mail addresses from mailing lists compiled by the Task Force organizations. This process was more challenging than anticipated, requiring the merging of incompatible databases, individual review of the lists to eliminate duplications (complicated by varying names for single institutions), selection of appropriate individuals to receive the survey (emphasis on collections managers, curators, and librarians, whenever possible), and searches for e-mail addresses that were missing on many of the submitted lists. When the task of cleaning the merged databases was completed, it consisted of 1,046 representatives of collecting institutions in Pennsylvania.

After suggestions from the Task Force members were integrated into the survey, technical consultant Surale Phillips used the on-line service Survey Monkey to create a streamlined, user-friendly survey instrument. This survey was officially launched on August 2, 2008, through an e-mail that linked to the Survey Monkey site. Respondents were initially given a deadline of October 10 to complete the survey. As of October 2, there were 374 responses.

The survey included 96 questions arranged into nine sections: Type of Institution, Your Institution’s Collections, Your Institution’s Environmental Systems, Your Institution’s Preservation Activities, Funding for Conservation and Preservation Projects, Staffing and Use of Outside Services, and Information for Statewide Preservation Planning. The questions within each section were designed to follow natural, logical order. “Skips” were programmed into the survey so respondents would not encounter questions irrelevant to their particular collections. The estimated time for survey completion was 20-30 minutes.

Originally conceived as a 10-week survey running from August through October 2008, the deadline was extended to December 2008 to encourage increased participation and to coincide with focus group scheduling. By year end, there were a total of 406 respondents, or 38.8% of the total recipients, which compares favorably with the Heritage Health Index overall response rate of 24%.

CCAHA and the consultants endeavored to make participation in the survey as easy and accessible as possible. All respondents were directed to send any questions regarding the survey to Lee Price, CCAHA Director of Development. Nearly 100 questions were fielded during the survey period, and paper copies of the survey were distributed on request to help organizations prepare their responses. In a few cases, the organizations requested that their institution receive more than one survey, on the grounds that certain departments were sufficiently independent (for instance, a library located within a museum) to be treated as a separate entity. Decisions in these cases were made through discussion among CCAHA staff and consultants.
The survey data was originally stored in an ACCESS database. It was imported into Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS); both data sources served as platforms for the data cleaning process. All comments made under the optional areas requesting anecdotal comments were copied and inserted verbatim into the raw data.

In December 2008, CCAHA staff reviewed the raw survey data. Additional tabulations were requested in certain areas. Decisions were made to create tables to examine responses by organizational type, institutional size (determined by the self-reported range of the institution’s operating budget), and region. The survey was not originally set up to solicit region, so this was backed into the analysis by placement of respondent zip codes into the eight regions commonly used by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania: the Lake Erie region, the Allegheny National Forest Region, Valleys of the Susquehanna, Poconos/Endless Mountains, Laurel Highlands/Southern Alleghenies, Hershey/Gettysburg/Dutch Country Region, and Philadelphia and its Countryside/Lehigh Valley. Later in the process, further tabulations were requested to examine the responses of PHMC sites and participants in the CCAHA Philadelphia Advanced Stewardship Program. Since accurate figures—or even estimates—concerning the number and types of special collections in Pennsylvania were not available, the results of the survey were not weighted.

The original IMLS application proposed convening four focus groups, but at the recommendation of the Task Force, CCAHA added one additional location (Erie, Pennsylvania) to ensure representation from the northwest corner of the state and convened a total of nine focus groups. Ms. Mataraza facilitated the focus groups at the State Library of Pennsylvania (Harrisburg) on November 19, the University of Scranton Weinberg Memorial Library on November 20, CCAHA on November 21, the Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh on December 3, and the Erie Maritime Museum on December 4. Morning and afternoon sessions were offered at four of the sites, except for the Erie site which received a single focus group. Ultimately there were 119 focus group participants, with Pittsburgh represented by 37 participants, Philadelphia by 32, Erie by 21, Scranton by 15, and Harrisburg by 14. Ms. Mataraza taped the focus group sessions and had the tapes transcribed. Key comments were selected from the transcriptions and arranged into an Excel document, sortable by subject matter and region.

The task force was convened again in Harrisburg in February 2009 to review drafts of the survey analysis and preservation plan matrix, prepared by Ms. Mataraza and CCAHA staff members. These documents were approved by the task force, and discussions largely centered on the practical matters of implementing the proposed strategies. The task force recommended that CCAHA be designated as the “management entity” for overseeing implementation of the 2010-2015 Preservation Plan.

The documents approved by the task force were subsequently formatted for publication, primarily as PDFs that would be available as links through the websites of the primary task force members. Twenty color copies of the full 244-page report were printed for distribution to key stakeholders, including the three copies enclosed with this report for IMLS review. A brochure is under development to announce the Preservation Plan and celebrate Pennsylvania’s collections for the official roll-out of the Preservation Plan in fall 2010.

6. Project Audience

The primary audience for the project was the collecting institutions in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, including museums, libraries, archives, and historic sites, as well as important stakeholder audiences such as governmental authorities, funding organizations, and advocacy groups.
7. Analyze the Project

The principal output of this project is the document Preservation Plan for the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, 2010-2015, which includes an analysis of the current state of collections care, strategies for improving collections care, and a five-year timetable for implementation. Our analysis of conditions and needs at Pennsylvania’s collecting institutions revealed significant concerns regarding the fragility of these collections. Many of Pennsylvania’s most important historic holdings must be considered at risk. Millions of items comprise Pennsylvania’s collections, and the financial resources available to care for them are limited and—in some cases—shrinking.

Frustration emerged in both survey responses and focus group discussions. People with responsibility for the care of great collections expressed their need for increased support and assistance. But, above all, their determination to preserve their heritage came through again and again, even as they told of their struggles with a chronic lack of resources.

As the caretakers of these collections shared their visions, they also seized the opportunity to suggest solutions, new strategies, and a willingness to cooperate. More money will be needed to make these ideas work, but the real key to preserving these collections lies in working smarter and more collaboratively. The study covered sites that operate on shoestring budgets, entirely run by volunteers, alongside world-class museums and universities. At the focus groups, there was a consistent feeling that any new strategies would need to be relevant for the small institutions as well as the large, and would need to reach out to all regions of the state and not just the heavily populated urban areas. There was a desire for a rising tide of strategies and resources that could potentially lift all boats.

This plan recommends five broad goals for improving collections care across all regions of Pennsylvania:

Plan Goals
1. Identify and celebrate the Commonwealth’s most significant cultural holdings.
2. Provide leadership and revenue for plan implementation
3. Protect and preserve the Commonwealth’s cultural collections
4. Educate and train collections care staff to address challenges threatening Pennsylvania’s collections.
5. Increase the field’s capacity to address its most critical collections care needs.

8. Next Steps

Responsibilities for implementing the Preservation Plan are assigned in the document to a central management entity (identified as CCAHA by the Task Force at the February 2009 meeting), Project Advisors, Task Force members, and other organizations, as part of an achievable plan for action.

9. Grant Products

Three copies of “Preservation Plan for the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, 2010-2015” are attached.