

Project Title

South Dakota Connects to Collections

Partners

The *South Dakota Connects to Collections* IMLS project partners include the **South Dakota State Historical Society**, and the **Association of South Dakota Museums**.

Collaborators

South Dakota Heritage Fund
South Dakota State Library
West River Museum and Collections Care Professionals

Many individuals and organizations contributed time and talent to make this project possible, demonstrating their active commitment to the preservation of South Dakota's cultural heritage – from small communities with populations of a few hundred to the largest city in the state.

Overview

The *South Dakota Connects to Collections* project, funded principally by the Institute of Museum and Library Services, goal was to gather a comprehensive picture of the collections held in South Dakota museums, historical societies, archives, and libraries. These institutions hold collections of historic value, reflecting South Dakotans' strong belief that history has an important place in modern life. Using electronic surveys and on-site visits, information gathered from 167 institutions painted a clear picture of the challenges these institutions face in caring for the historic objects and archival material they house. The pressing need to improve collection care and preservation in the state is evident. This project provided vital information needed to focus future conservation/preservation training for the dedicated staff and volunteers working in collecting institutions across the state.

Part 2

Institution Name:

South Dakota State Historical Society through the South Dakota Heritage Fund

Grant #: LG - 41 - 09 - 0017 - 09

A. SITE SPECIFIC PROJECT ACTIVITY:

1. _____ Total # of collection items conserved, relocated to protective storage, rehoused, or for which other preservation-appropriate physical action was taken.
2. _____ Total # of collection items digitized, scanned, reformatted, or for which other electronic or digital preservation action was taken.
3. _____ Total # of collection items with new or enhanced accessibility (include items that were cataloged or for which finding aids or other records were created or computerized) [includes _____ items made accessible to users other than grantee staff for the first time, _____ items with new or enhanced access for staff only].
4. _____ Total # of lectures, symposia, demonstrations, exhibits, readings, performances, concerts, broadcasts, Webcasts, workshops, multi-media packages, or other learning opportunities provided for the public (do not include PSAs or other promotional activities) [includes _____ out-of-school or after-school programs, _____ exhibits].
5. _____ Total # of tools created, improved, or produced for searching, information management, or information analysis by users other than or in addition to grantee staff.
6. _____ Total # of conferences, programs, workshops, training sessions, institutes, classes, courses, or other structured educational events provided.
7. _____ Total # of internships, apprenticeships, mentoring opportunities, or other extended educational opportunities provided.
8. _____ Total # of degrees/certificates earned as a result of the grant [includes _____ Master's, _____ Ph.D. degrees, _____ other (specify): _____].
9. _____ Total # technology upgrades or improvements (specify): _____.

10. If your grant engaged in other activities not covered by the categories above, please briefly identify and quantify them here. Attach another sheet if necessary.

In January 2008, museum and collections-care professionals met to discuss how to use an IMLS Connecting to Collections Statewide Planning Grant. Several needs were identified at the meeting. These included information/training in collections care, disaster planning, collections surveys, professional networking, information-resource sharing, conservation, and access to conservation.

Part 2, continued

10., continued

To address these needs, representatives of the Association of South Dakota Museums, the South Dakota State Archives, the South Dakota State Museum, the Historic Preservation Office of South Dakota, the South Dakota State Library, and other interested members of the state's museum community met and formed a planning group. The group identified the need for a unified, inclusive assessment of the collections held by organizations throughout the state. The group agreed the *South Dakota Connects to Collections* project could develop a comprehensive picture of the state's collections. And based on this comprehensive picture, methods to share professional expertise and resources, plans for future training in collections care and disaster planning could be developed for the sites holding historic South Dakota collections.

The first step of the project was to develop a statewide needs-assessment survey for gathering information from the various collecting institutions. This survey was modeled after the one used for the Heritage Health Index and produced in both electronic and paper formats. An additional section was added to the survey to cover historic buildings held by institutions. A grant-funded employee was hired to conduct site visits to small collecting institutions that did not have the staff or computer links needed to complete an electronic survey. During the course of the project the employee conducted 104 site interviews.

Initially, all institutions were mailed a project description inviting them to an informational meeting. At the meetings in May 2009, the project and survey were explained, possible outcomes discussed, and questions answered. Meeting locations and resulting attendance were: the Association of South Dakota Museums' meeting in Belle Fourche, SD – 23 attendees; Winner, SD – 11 attendees; Aberdeen, SD – 10 attendees, and Sioux Falls, SD – 19 attendees.

A statewide contact list was developed for the museums/historical societies, archives, and libraries. It was further determined which institutions would receive the survey electronically and which would receive a site visit. Participants could also mail in paper copies of the survey, if they preferred.

There were 171 surveys returned – an extremely high return rate of more than 60 percent. Four surveys were eliminated because the respondents did not hold collections or because more than 75% of the answers were incomplete. Of the 167 remaining surveys (63% return rate), 102 had been obtained by site visit and 65 were returned by either postal or electronic mail.

Data from completed surveys were compiled into a database and a draft report was prepared. During April 2010, survey participants were invited to regional meetings to hear the preliminary results and brainstorm for future planning. Those who could not attend any of the meetings were invited to send in their comments. Meeting locations

Part 2, continued

10., continued

and resulting attendance were: Winner, SD – 5 attendees representing 3 institutions, Aberdeen, SD, Association of South Dakota Museums annual conference – 33 attendees representing 20 institutions, and Rapid City SD – 11 attendees representing 6 institutions.

The final report was disseminated through the communications systems of the Association of South Dakota Museums and the South Dakota Library Association as well as sent directly to all participating institutions. A brochure highlighting the salient facts from the final report is being made widely available. The brochure also will be sent to federal and state policy makers.

B. PORTABLE PRODUCTS (relating to the activity named in section A.)

11. _____ Total # of research reports, papers, books, reprints, or other publications generated.

12. _____ Total # of Web sites developed or improved [include URLs/addresses: _____].

13. _____ Total # of learning resources produced [includes _____ oral histories, _____ curriculum resources, _____ curriculums, _____ Web-based learning tools, or _____ other (specify): _____].

14. _____ Total # of key management documents created [includes _____ emergency plans, _____ conservation surveys, _____ strategic plans, _____ other (specify): _____].

15. If your grant created one or more quantifiable products not covered by the categories above, please briefly identify and quantify them here. Attach another sheet if necessary.

C. PARTICIPANTS/VISITORS/USERS/AUDIENCE (relating to the activity named in section A.)

16. 5 Total # of **community organization partners** [includes 3 informal partners, 2 formal partners].

17. _____ Total # of **schools** (pre-K through grade 12) that used services provided by your grant (include only schools that actively participated, not those to which material was simply distributed or made available) [includes _____ students participating in field trips].

Part 2, continued

18. _____ Total # of **teachers** supported, trained, or otherwise provided with resources to strengthen classroom teaching or learning.

19. _____ Total # of **pre-K through grade-12 students** served [includes ____ youth 9-19 who used, participated, visited, or otherwise interacted with activities, experiences, resources, or products offered by your grant].

20. _____ Total # of **viewers and listeners** for radio, television, and cable broadcasts (for series, include total actual audience for all broadcasts; do not include audience for PSAs or other promotional activities or Webcasts; do not report potential audience).

21. _____ Total # of **users of Web-based resources** provided by your grant (include all individuals the project served). Choose the measure that best represents your use rate (choose only one): ____ visits (hits), ____ unique visitors, ____ registered users, ____ other measure (specify): _____.

22. _____ Total # of **individuals** benefiting from your grant (include all those from questions 18-21 plus others the project served, including staff or others in your field). Only include those who actually participated or used your project services in some way.

23. This number includes: _____ **professionals**, _____ **non-professionals or pre-professionals**, _____ **docents or interpreters**, _____ **volunteers**, _____ **staff** that received services provided by your grant.

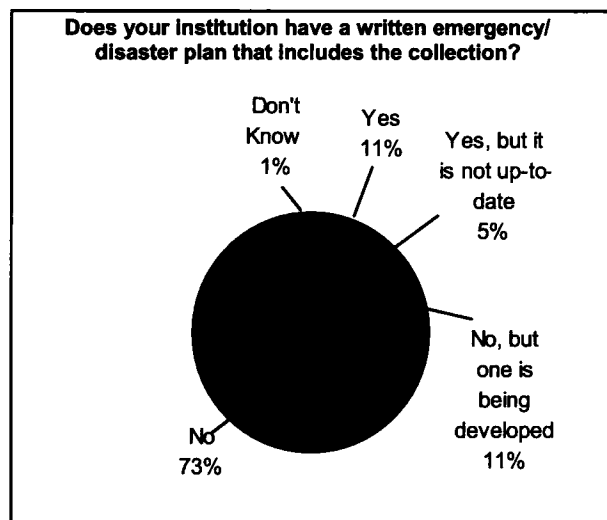
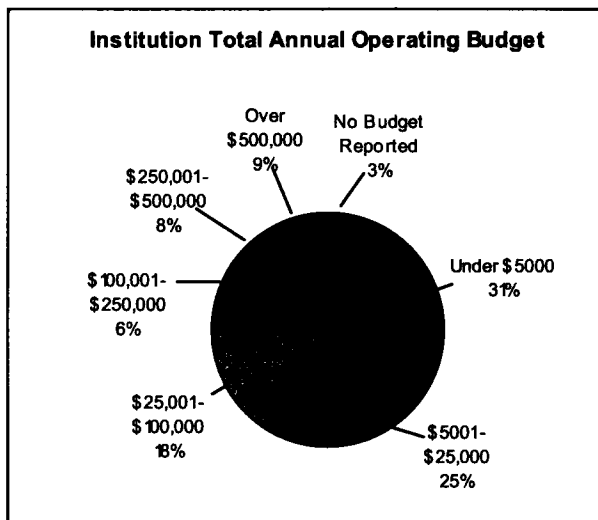
24. If your grant served one or more quantifiable audiences not covered by the categories above, please briefly identify and quantify them here. Attach another sheet if necessary.

South Dakota is a large rural state of more than 77,000 square miles and a population of less than 810,000. The population is clustered along the state's eastern and western borders – leaving many miles with few people in between. The majority of the state's collections are housed in small institutions, often run entirely by dedicated volunteers. South Dakota has more than 130 local historical societies/museums, several dedicated archives, 17 interpretive centers, more than 25 historic buildings/sites, 11 Native American museums, and 154 public libraries. Most of these institutions hold collections of historic value, reflecting a statewide belief that history holds an important place in modern life. Many local historical societies and museums are seasonal operations with no climate control in a state where temperatures fluctuate from -40 to over 100°.

Findings & Analysis

Collecting institutions in South Dakota reported multiple challenges in their efforts to preserve history. Among the findings:

- **Only 34 of 161 (21%) of the responding institutions have collections completely cataloged.**
- **Most lack the financial capability or staff to develop collections-care and emergency/disaster plans.**

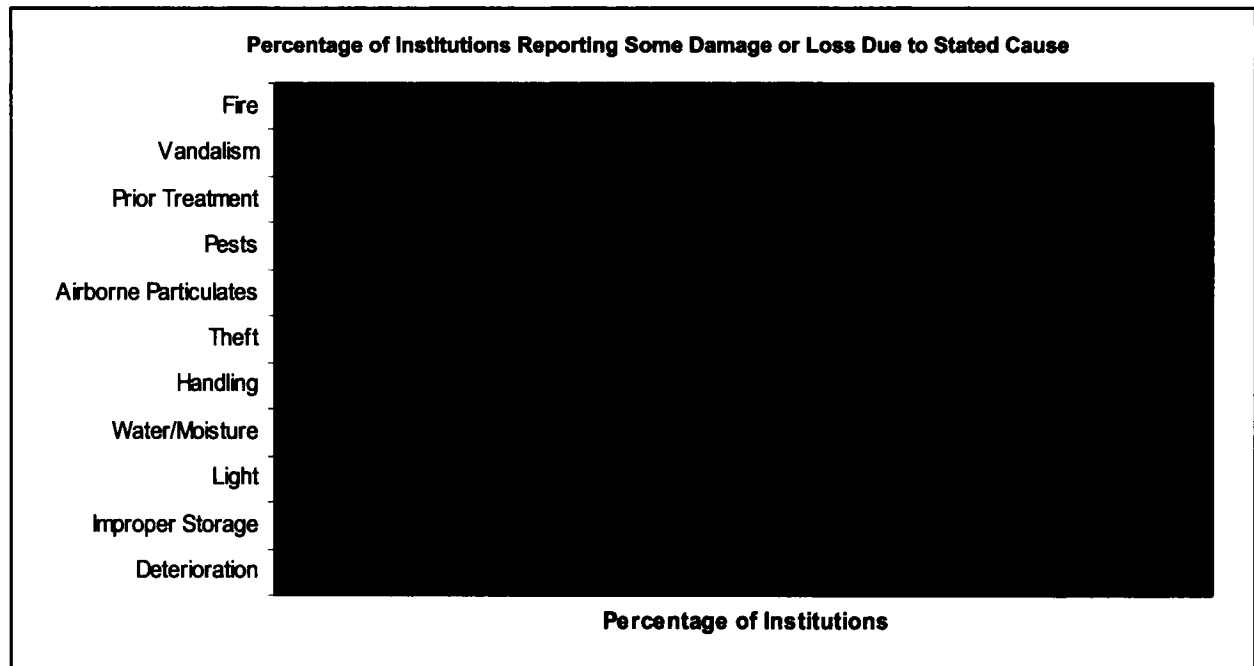
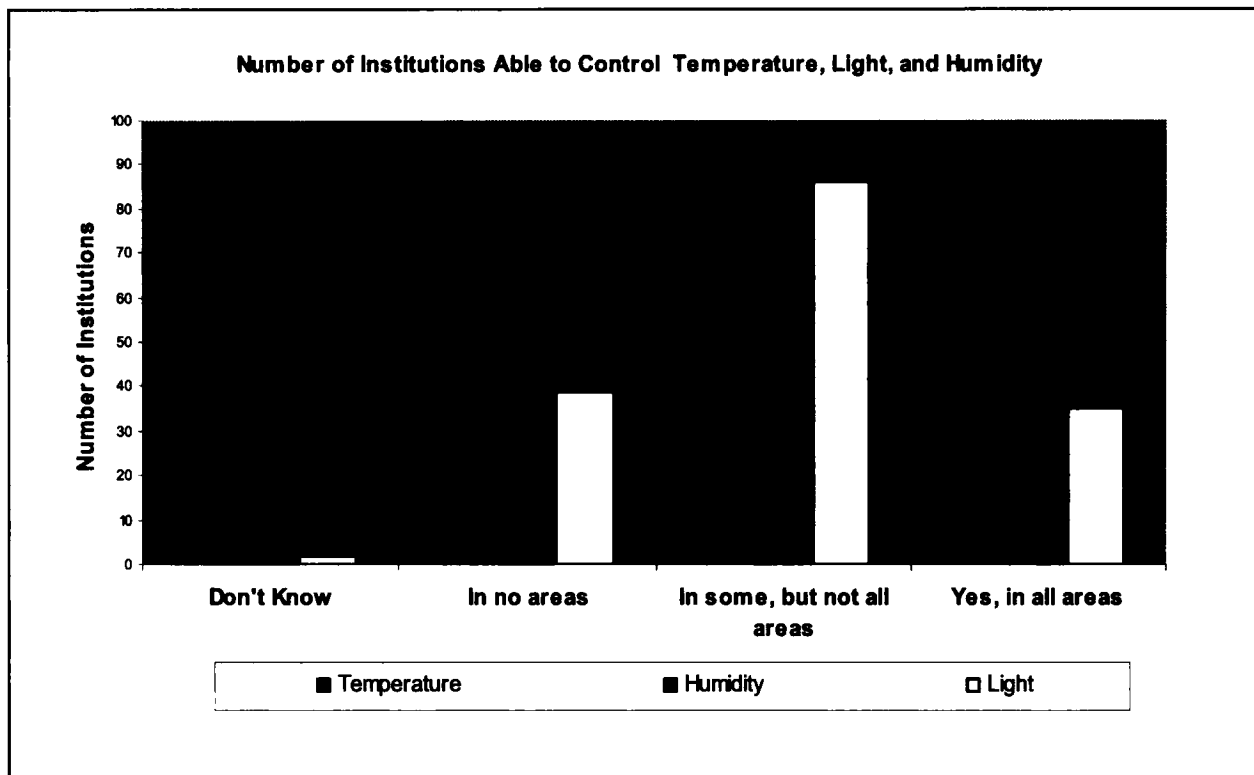


- **Most institutions cannot provide adequate environmental controls and security.**

Of the institutions responding, 127 of 167 (76%), own their facilities but have difficulty in providing a stable, secure environment for their collections. A number of institutions, (28 of 167, 17%) have collections stored outdoors, mainly due to lack of indoor space to house large agricultural objects which are significant to local- and state-settlement history. A significant number of institutions 87 of 167 (52%) reported having no environmental-monitoring equipment. More than 50% of the institutions responding do not have alarm systems for fire/water damage (89 of 167, 53%) nor do they have security systems (92 of 167, 55%) beyond doors that lock. **Therefore, protection of the collections in these storage facilities is a risk.**

- **Collections are at risk from a variety of causes including improper storage, light exposure, pests, prior treatments, airborne particulates, theft, water or moisture damage, poor handling, fire, and vandalism. The highest cause of "some damage or loss" was deterioration.**

Findings & Analysis, continued



Findings & Analysis, continued

- **Small operating budgets hinder many institutions' ability to function at a professional level.**
- **Institutions face losing collections because they lack funds and staff for conservation and/or preservation.**

Most institutions, 156 of 167 (93%) have less than the equivalent of one full-time staff member – volunteer or paid – caring for collections. To further complicate this, aging leadership has become a significant problem. **As observed by one respondent, there is a lack of young volunteers emerging. “As second- and third- generation, we have a connection directly with the pioneers that is being lost because younger people don't have that.”**

When asked, *Do you have funds specifically allocated for conservation / preservation activities in your annual budget?* respondents answered 66% (110 of 167) *No*, 16% (27 of 167) *Yes, not a specific line item*, 15% (23 of 167) *Yes, a specific line item*, and 4% (7 of 167) *Don't Know*. Two-thirds of the 31% (50 of 167) that responded having some funds for conservation/preservation activities, indicated it was less than \$1,001 dollars. **There needs to be greater awareness and response to this issue.**

- **Many smaller institutions lack involvement and support from their local communities.**
- **Historic buildings – regarded as an important part of the collections – present a unique set of preservation challenges.**

Next Steps

South Dakota lacks the dedicated funds and financial resources to fully meet the needs identified in this report. Therefore, we must utilize systems already in place. The following recommendations address the steps needed to improve the state of South Dakota's collections:

- To mitigate geographical and financial challenges, deliver collections-care and disaster-preparedness training programs through existing state-based distance-learning systems
- Create in-state regional mutual-assistance groups to support small institutions in the areas of collections care, disaster preparedness, and community engagement
- Use existing and emerging communication tools – such as newsletters and web-based interaction – to enhance awareness of present and future support services at the national, state, and regional levels
- Continue efforts to obtain private and public money to support, on a statewide basis, needed training for collecting institutions
- Develop and deliver programs that teach and empower collecting institutions to engage their local communities and policy-makers for increased awareness and support
- Maintain a database of all collecting institutions in the state to enhance ongoing communications

These Next Steps are not offered in a vacuum, but in the context of efforts already underway within the state. First, South Dakota has applied for a *21st Century Museum Professionals Grant* to address the need for professional development throughout its small and midsized museums. If approved, this three-year internship project would serve more than 10 percent of the in-state collecting institutions and be a springboard for improving museum best practices and regional collaboration. Second, there is a policy initiative underway to increase state field services to collecting institutions and, statewide efforts to build a constituency of collecting institutions to address policy concerns and budget issues. Third, South Dakota is developing a partnership with North Dakota to seek a *Connecting to Collections Implementation Grant*. Fourth, the South Dakota state museum director has become a member of the Grant Oversight Committee of the Texas initiative to implement the IMLS *Connecting to Collections Continuing Conversation Exchange* project.

Throughout the survey process, small, volunteer-driven collecting institutions expressed concerns regarding leadership succession. Although this is not directly addressed in the Connecting to Collections Initiative, it is certainly core to the spirit. With the “Next Steps” steps we can resolve the issue creatively. One survey participant put the challenge clearly, “As second- and third- generation, we have a direct connection with the pioneers. That is being lost.”