

# Photograph Collections Survey

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*The preservation strategy of a photograph collection implies the understanding of its physical and organizational content. The conservation plan is based on a survey that allows for identification and quantification of materials and will guide the establishment of priorities.*

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## 1 | Introduction



Collection storage area before treatment, Évora Municipal Archive (Portugal)

The main reason to perform a survey is to establish conservation priorities. It allows for identifying and documenting key conservation concerns and provides a tool for raising awareness and funding.

There are different types of survey – **conservation assessments**, that are treatment oriented; and **collection management surveys** that are part of a preservation strategic plan<sup>1</sup>. The purpose will define the type of survey that is done, this will define the methodology and time frame. Thus, the first step is establishing as straightforwardly as possible the goal of the survey from the institution's viewpoint.

## 2 | Know the Collection Beforehand

It is important to know as much as possible about the collection prior to the on site visit by asking as many questions as possible to the collection managers. This will help establish the priorities of the collection, its use and access needs, available funding, and define the methodology for the survey as well as what should be written as a report.

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<sup>1</sup> The approach of Gary Albright is of the first type, whereas the approach at the IPI is of the second (see interviews in appendix).

The following list presents some of the questions to be asked. One should go through the exercise of envisioning how difficult it may be to answer these questions – if they are too difficult to answer it is better not to ask them. One should also go through the exercise of understanding if this information will be useful. The questionnaire should be easy to answer and not too time consuming.

## **What Matters to know about the Collection prior to the visit**

### **On Access and Use**

- *What is the main goal for requiring a survey at this moment?*
- *Do you intend to apply for funding for carrying out a preservation project?*
- *How was the collection assembled? What is the focus?*
- *What is the size of the collection?*
- *Are objects still being added to the collection?*
- *Is there a numbering system? Please describe the current numbering and description method.*
- *Is there a catalog database?*
- *Is the collection digitized?*
- *What are the main priorities for the collection?*
  - *Long-term Preservation Plan (storage and environment)*
  - *Conservation (cleaning, housing, repair)*
  - *Access (digitization, database description)*
- *Is all the collection accessible to the public?*
- *What is the main use of the collection?*
  - *Internal*
  - *General public*
  - *Specialty scholars*
- *What is the average number of users per month?*
- *What is intended for the future use of the collection?*
  - *Exhibition of originals in-house and loans*
  - *Online catalogue*
  - *In-house access to originals in reading room*
- *Is the institution approaching an anniversary? Will related records be extensively used or need priority in conservation and digitization?*
- *If you have negatives and prints do they correspond?*

### **Materials and Condition**

- *Are there previous reports or data on condition of the collection?*
- *What type of materials do you have?*
  - *Prints*                      · *Color*                      · *Plastic*
  - *Negatives*                      · *B&W*                      · *Paper*
  - *Cased objects*                      · *Albums*                      · *Glass*
- *What periods are the materials dated from?*
- *Is the collection organized by process? Is color separate from BW, paper from plastic, etc.?*
- *Do you identify any of the following deterioration manifestations in the collection:*
  - *Broken glass supports*                      · *Image fading*
  - *Mold*                      · *Acid odor (vinegar)*
  - *Deteriorated plastic supports (channeling, distortion, brittleness)*

### **Storage and Environment**

- *How old and what type of construction is the building where the collection is stored?*
- *Is there more than one location the collection is stored in?*
- *Has the collection always been in its current location?*
- *Do you have a controlled storage environment?*
- *Do you monitor the RH and Temp values in the storage area?*
- *Specify the RH and temperature values of the storage area as much as possible.*
- *How are the materials housed and stored?*

- *Is there a specific HVAC system for the collection storage area?*
- *Is the collection storage area a working place for people?*

**Materials that can be useful to bring on site**

Measuring tape  
Loupe  
Cross polarizer  
Mask  
Gloves  
Lab coats  
Camera  
Data logger  
AD STRips  
Voice recorder



Surveying the photograph collection of the IPCR, Portugal (Image: Luis Pavão)

It is advisable to ask for maps of the storage areas and the designations used by staff for said areas.

The data collected beforehand is most important. It will define the methodology as well as the report and recommendations, and its headlines are already the chapters of the report. Again it is important to keep in mind to collect usable information.

It is important to collect as much information as possible in terms of environment – placing dataloggers on site, collecting outer environmental data or requesting and analyzing information collected by the institution through time.

### 3 | On Site Visit

The survey is the first stage of assessing the preservation needs of a photographic collection. It is the result of the survey along with the knowledge of the collection's needs and use (through the questionnaire) that will determine the preservation plan.

Commonly a survey is done in one or two days. Photographic documentation should be made of the storage units, deterioration forms and any relevant aspect identified during the observation of the collection.

Temperature and humidity measurements on the storage areas should be carried out by placing data loggers in the storage areas and perform a longer period reading (in case there is no maintained measurement of these values done by the institution). If possible and applicable, AD-Strips should be placed to detect acetate deterioration. This is not only useful for the conservator but can be a very powerful visual tool to convince funders of the urgent need to act.

An important part of the survey is talking to the staff that commonly handles the collection to understand what they believe to be the main problems and priorities.

It is also important to know the names the staff uses to refer to different storage areas and work rooms in order to use terminology that can be readily identified when writing the survey report.

#### ***What to achieve during the on site visit***

- *Identification of groups of fast decaying materials (color, nitrate acetate) or that may suffer changes (such as glass plates) in significant numbers*
- *Assessment of storage and environmental conditions*
- *Occurrence of biological infestations or mold*
- *Establish a liaison with someone who can ask questions during the writing of the report*

When doing a survey, the conservator has to have a method beforehand.

Elaborate a scheme or map of the storage area, defining units of organization such as cabinets or drawers. Use of previously designed forms that correspond to these units of storage. Reduce the time in filling these by using checkboxes and codes as much as possible.

One method of sampling, if the collection is uniform, is to exhaustively quantify objects in one unit and extrapolate for the rest of the archive.

Some practical advises to consider during the site visit (Albright, 2005):

1. Meet with the staff and review their goals for the survey. Take as many notes as possible and organize them as you go along.
2. Quick viewing of the collection. This will help you become familiar with the layout. Become familiar with the terminology for storage and working rooms used by the staff.
3. Take breaks. It is likely to feel overwhelmed and doubt you will be able to see everything. Take a few moments to form a preliminary plan of action.
4. Examine the collection. Enjoy the privilege of accessing restricted objects in a collection. Start with something simple such as large groups of similar objects before addressing the more difficult problems. Make sure to address the more difficult collections in the middle of the day when you are at your peak and not at the end of the day when you will be exhausted.
5. Break for lunch. If you do so with the staff, use this time to ask questions you have raised during the examination in the morning. It is also a good time to mention conservation practices.
6. Keep the afternoon period short but don't break the rhythm.
7. End of the day staff meeting – provide a brief summary of your findings. Point out the more serious problems you encountered.

Be aware of the thumb rule “one day onsite = two days of writing”.

Some materials that should be brought to the survey are: lab coat; gloves; respirator; voice recorder; photographic camera; measuring tape and ruler; survey forms; pocket calculator; AD-Strips, cross polarized filters, test tube with trichloroethylene (floating test) for plastic identification; data logger and/or thermo hygrometer; loupe (for printing process identification).

A survey report can be written rather than a treatment proposal (a treatment proposal applies when the surveyor is proposing a treatment to personally carry out or direct).

#### The Report

Should be made appealing by including images of the condition of the collection, AD-Strips data, and clear graphics using tables that present the options clearly

### Survey Report Model

- *Introduction*
- *Goal of the survey report*
- *Description of the collection and materials*
- *Description of the current situation*
  - *Environmental and climate control conditions the collection is in*
  - *Conservation state of the collection (extent of vinegar syndrome, for example, which can be corroborated by using AD-Strips)*
- *Specific recommendations – these can be storage and environmental; treatment of specific groups of higher value or at greater risk.*
- *How to implement the previous recommendations and what are the gains and losses*
- *Conclusion and final comments*
- *Appendix with general guidelines of storage and handling as well as environmental (standard recommendations that apply to most collections) that can be for example tables from IPI's MSQR.*

## 4 | What to Recommend

After compiling information gathered by the survey and questionnaire, it is possible to elaborate a report. The main aspect is to define very clearly the goal of the survey from the institution's viewpoint.

The report should be useful for the institution and a guide that presents the different options and what can be done to improve the condition of the collection. Be aware that in the course of the survey, the focus of the report may change. Generally the institution is asking for help to define priorities and a course of action. A good survey can help expand the opportunities for an institution. The survey and report are always specific to a collection – they shouldn't be a general recommendation that can apply to any collection. And the list of what you can do is fairly small – improve the storage; treat the images you find are valuable enough to be restored – and think of what is the extent of the improvement you will get by doing those.

One has to identify and refer to different levels of priority. Some groups are so highly deteriorated that they should not be considered a priority, unless they are extremely valuable objects for the institution.

It is advisable to break the collection into small defined groups that can be proposed for treatment separately. This not only represents a more pragmatic approach but it is also a way to apply for reasonable funding.

It is important to maintain achievable goals and not envision impossible overall treatments.

It is important to consider the financial and human means available in the institution in order to write a useful report.

The use of visual illustration of the condition of the collection is a very powerful tool to demonstrate the necessities and priorities mentioned in the report.

In the report one should also look into outside environmental data that is accessible online and can give information on the environment of the collection based on the knowledge of the systems available on site (heating, cooling, humidifying, de-humidifying).

### ***Strategic Preservation Plan***

- *Provide several options presenting pros and cons*
- *Need of improvement for environmental conditions or construction of cold storage vault*
- *Proposed treatments referring to quantities*
- *Advised enclosures and quantities*
- *Budget of materials and salaries*
- *Duration of treatments*
- *Team members necessary to perform treatment*
- *Workflow*

## **5 | Bibliography**

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## Appendix I | Interview to Gary Albright<sup>2</sup>

### **How did you learn to do a survey? Where from?**

*I don't think anybody taught me – I think I just did it. And then you learn from experience.*

### **Do you remember the first survey you did?**

*Yes. It was for the Essex Institute in Salem MA, June 1981, through NEDCC. I keep a copy of almost every survey I have done.*

*I stayed there for a day which is usually how long most of the surveys I do take.*

### **Did you use any models to do the surveys?**

*No.*

### **And nowadays do you use any model?**

*No model. I have a pattern because of what I've developed over the years. If there was a model it would be the CAP Survey form<sup>3</sup>. It tells how to do a general survey; what types of questions to ask - you must have a questionnaire to send out ahead of time to the institution – when you go to do the survey; what to look for; and how to write the report. It tells you how you should approach the collection.*

### **Given this material that already exists, do you think it would be interesting to establish 10 key aspects for a photographic collection survey?**

*I'm not sure I can answer that. It would be of use for somebody, I am sure. I don't know if it would be a new material because a lot of people have done surveys. Jean-Louis Bigourdan has given talks about doing a survey, and in a very practical way. It is slightly different from what I talk about, and this is another way to do it – more generally, as opposed to more collection oriented. So would it be useful? I am sure it would be useful for people who have never done a survey. But for someone who has done surveys before, and has been trained to do surveys only if it would have very specific information (and I don't know if you want to get into that much detail – because then you would have to write a book!).*

*If you are going to do a photograph collection survey you have to know how to identify photographic processes, to an extent, especially to identify negative processes (maybe you don't need to know everything about how to identify printing processes, because they tend to fall into the same direction, which are very similar to procedures with paper materials). NEDCC has on their site a number of leaflets on how to handle objects following a disaster, and a questionnaire to direct people to go through their collection.*

### **What method do you follow when doing a collection survey?**

*That's in one of my lectures. I begin with a phone call where I ask questions so I can also know how long is the survey going to take, like a doctor would ask a patient on their symptoms. I ask when is the collection date from, how many objects are there, how many different sites are they located in, are they all negatives/ all positives; mostly negatives/ mostly positives, so I gather enough information. Almost always it takes one day, but sometimes it is 2 or 3, depending on the collection. For example at the BMFA I spent 5 or 6 days – they have different sites.*

### **Do you use forms, or make a map of the storage areas?**

*No. I use the CAP questionnaire. I occasionally take maps of the areas.*

### **Do you survey by sample?**

*I do, but not as doing a statistical analysis (although this could be very useful, probably). But I think that if you only have a day there is no time. I take many notes. I have a very specific way to take these notes – not too general, but notes that can help me when writing the survey report (I make a page for each photographic process or for each sub-collection).*

*In the report I make recommendations, but I don't get too specific in terms of what materials to order or proposed treatment, because I think that choice is up to the institution. I can give them specific advice in the future, but I only recommend general aspects such as the use of archival quality material, and then I refer them to an attachment on the report on, for example, choosing materials for storage of photographs. I believe that the report should not be very long – 10 to 20 pages. And the attachments can fill all the things you don't mention on the report.*

### **Do you do any treatment of collections after a survey?**

*Surveys rarely lead you towards treatment. Because treatment is far from the highest priority. Survey reports are generally used by institutions to raise money, or to educate the staff as to what are the problems in the collection. One of the questions mentioned in the CAP model is "Why are you doing the survey", and they list different possible reasons. It is very important to*



<sup>2</sup> Transcript of Interview carried out March 30, 2006 at Gary Albright's House in Mendon. Gary Albright is a photograph conservator in private practice in Honeoye Falls, Mendon, NY, after working for NEDCC and the GEH. Mr. Albright has had extensive experience in photograph collection surveying.

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.heritagepreservation.org/CAP/index.html>

know why the institution wants the survey because you don't want them to be disappointed by what you write in the report.

**Does this change the resulting report very much from case to case?**

In practice not very much, but it changes somewhat the approach of the report. If I was doing an item by item survey the approach would be very different.

**You did a survey of the GEH collection. And at the time you were employed there, so you were not an outsource. Did this change the way you did the survey?**

It was different from other surveys because I had the 1<sup>st</sup> Cycle ARP Fellows involved and working with me on this. We looked at different aspects of the collection. They had to write a paper on what they identified as being the main problems, and I combined these and re-wrote a report that combined all these papers and my own observations.

**Was the report used by the institution?**

I used it. I don't think they used it.

**What percentage of the collection was surveyed?**

We looked at all the collection, but not individually by item. We did sampling, if you want to call it that.

**Did you have an inventory to start from?**

I preferred to look at the collection inventory, not item by item, so I know where different groups are located and what do they consist of. So this way I can make sure I look at all the different materials. In the archives we made sure to look at the negatives in the collection, and to look at negatives from each different photographer; we made sure we looked at the color material.

**Did you work closely with the Curatorial Department to know what they wanted from the survey?**

Every department asked what were we going to do with this survey. I told them my point was to come up with overall priorities in the collection. We wanted the Director to use the survey to establish a preservation plan, to use in the next 5 to 8 years. But it didn't happen.

**Was this the largest survey you ever did?**

Probably the largest in number, but not the largest collection I surveyed. There was for example, the BMFA, but there were others probably larger. I've been to collections where they had "newspaper morgues", where they have a paper collection and they put every photograph they have into files, and you can have a million photographs just there – like in the Cleveland Public Library, which is probably the largest number of photographs I ever surveyed. But you can have a million photographs and do a complete survey of them in 1 or 2 hours, observing some from the beginning, the middle and the end.

**Do you use tools like the AD-Strips when doing a survey?**

That would be very useful but I do not use them because you would have to keep them overnight and I usually take one day for the survey. And in doing that you would have to have a statistical method. But you would only have to use them if you want specific values of the acid activity. Usually from the phone call questionnaire I can tell what I am going to find in terms of what the problems are, and the staff in the institution know what the problems are. Often what you are doing with the survey is just verifying this so that people will listen. An outsider will often have more influence with the Administration than the inside staff.

**So usually the staff is pleased with the survey being made, even if it is outsourced?**

They usually are, because they believe it's going to reinforce their position.

**Do you have some involvement in the follow-up of your survey?**

Rarely. Many times the surveys are not used.

**What do you think was the most successful survey you made?**

It's hard to tell. Again the case of the BMFA was a successful one. There I was working with a conservator who wanted to do something with the survey. I finished the survey in 1995; I have recently visited them and as a result of that survey they now have a cold-storage vault. This is very gratifying to know. I also did a survey for the National Archives in Washington DC. As a result of that survey they were able to hire a photograph conservator (Constance McCabe, who is now the conservator of the National Gallery). These are the things you like to hear about. But for these results you have to have the same person in an institution working for a long period of time for a specific goal. In an institution where staff changes frequently it's difficult to achieve the results.

**Usually who initiates the survey – the curators, the directors, the conservators?**

It depends on the type of institution. In a small institution it would probably be the director. Many of these surveys are ordered because they are required for future funding.

**What is the cost involved in terms of your service?**

*I usually spend 4 or 5 days working on the survey, so I charge the daily price I practice. The price also depends on the location where the survey is done, due to transportation expenses.*

**Which was the most difficult survey you've made?**

*I think it was a survey I did in Long Island, and the reason I call it the hardest is because I really got angry at the conditions they were keeping the materials. They had the drawers so packed that every time you opened them you were damaging the objects. The reason was they didn't have room.*

**How many surveys did you in total?**

*Around one hundred. I have been doing less recently.*

**How do financial constraints influence the survey or the report?**

*I don't exactly change the report, but I change the priorities, regarding what I know the institution can afford or is aiming for. And this will depend on what the staff has told me of the situation of the institution. If I know it's realistic to recommend climate control then I list it as the top priority. Most of the time it's not, so I won't recommend climate control but I'll recommend an air conditioner; or I recommend, if nothing else, a monitoring device with the goal of eventually getting climate control. So, yes, the financial constraints do affect the report. If I know the institution is going to use the survey to apply to a certain type of funding it will affect the report, to give them a better chance to get that funding – so, again, I may change the listing of the priorities slightly. Obviously if I think their number one priority is the nitrate film, then I'm going to say that regardless. But many times the priorities are judgment calls, anyway, so I make the statements based on what are the staff's priorities, the conservation priorities, how much money do they have, what are the chances of being able to get a grant, etc., and I will use that as the basis setting the priorities in the report.*

**What are the key elements you look for when doing a survey?**

*I look at the building, how is the collection handled, what is it used for, condition, what is the staff's preservation education level.*

*You have to know the right questions to ask. For example there was a case where I kept hearing about this nitrate collection that was stored in a garage with no climate control. I had the suspicion that, because of the dates of the negatives, they could be not nitrate. So I asked to see this collection and confirmed that it wasn't nitrate, and so they were stored back in the main building.*

**In disaster recovery operation is there a parallel in terms of procedures as to a survey?**

*In a survey I usually don't get into disaster policies. In the disaster recovery it is a completely different procedure.*

**What are the key bibliographic references on surveys?**

*You usually don't get to read other peoples surveys, because the institutions don't want to disclose that information.*

*In terms of procedural methods there is the CAP and the NEDCC documents.*

**How can you make the survey as efficient as possible, so you can carry it through in one day?**

*I know that after a certain point you just don't get more information. Once you start to see the same problems repeatedly in one area you know you can move to observe another part of the collection. And you develop a way of keeping yourself moving, because it's easy to get distracted and loose time.*

## Appendix II | Conversation with James Reilly<sup>4</sup>

If you want to educate conservators about photograph collection surveys you have to keep them focused on what are the practical purposes of the survey. The IMLS decided that the one-day surveys were important so CAP Surveys were developed and the methodology is very defined. It is usually an outside expert that in a one day visit will write a report that the institution can use for applying for a grant.

We have been called upon more for collection management responsibilities.

One of the first surveys I did was of the Beinecke Rare Book Library, at Yale. They have some unique photographs. The reason they asked for the survey was that it had been a few years since the collection had an overall assessment of condition. They wanted to know which photographs needed conservation and how was the collection general conservation condition. When doing the survey I saw a very high standard of care in terms of housing materials and shelving units. On the other hand I observed that the storage room was at a warmer temperature than the reading room. No one had ever told them that this was a fundamental aspect of preservations of the collection. As far as I could tell the overall collection was in good condition but they needed to improve on the bigger strategic factors. The preservation officer that had worked there for 11 years had never visited the mechanical room where the HVAC system was and that defines the environment in the storage area.

The purpose of these overall surveys for the institutions is to answer the questions – are we doing the right thing? What are the next steps?

It usually sums up to either getting further helping, setting priorities and getting money; or to answer some specific questions such as “are we managing this film collection in the right way?”.

First of all, when doing a survey one has to have a very defined purpose. After establishing this, you define a limited set of questions to answer through the survey that will be useful and meaningful for that specific purpose.

When you are doing a survey, you are looking for something, so you have to know what you are looking for and why, how will this information be useful to you.

A treatment oriented survey, like the ones done by for example Gary Albright is different than the preservation plan oriented surveys that are carried out by IPI. The one day survey is usually the hiring by an institution of an outside expert to write a report in order to apply for a grant.

The collection management survey is a strategic tool for the collection manager.

When doing surveys, methodology is very important. You have to be rigorous in collecting information that serves your purpose and that you can make sense of afterwards. You should use forms that are pre-designed and will cover your action trigger points.

We were hired to do survey of several microfilm collections that were owned by a consortium of libraries. We began by trying to define everything that goes wrong with microfilms. So we designed a survey form that included all that we could think of that could possibly be relevant. That is wrong. We started to record information about the boxes – and try to correlate that with the appearance of red spots or other type of silver image deterioration – mirroring, yellowing; we recorded how many splices there were; physical condition (damage to the reels, deformation). So very soon you have a two page form. And when you are on site, you find yourself in a room at 55 degrees and you realize that you can do three films in half a day, one film an hour at best. This means that in 400 000 rolls of film you will be able to look and record information of 50 of them in 3 days. We came back with a lot of information and started to realize that there was not much statistical validity, and you have to make sense of the data. If you were to extrapolate information and say there is 10% films that have to be duplicated due to deterioration you cannot say which ones or where they are. What is important is what are the global action items that you know after the survey that you didn't know before. Did you think before that some were deteriorated and some weren't? Yes. Do you now know how many are deteriorated? No. Which of these forms of deterioration was it possible for them to do anything about? What level of deterioration is enough to say they have to be duplicated?

You have to know what information to gather and what are you going to do with it. And realize that it will always be more difficult and time consuming to collect the information and use it than you thought.

After doing a few surveys we realized that there were only a few action points in terms of condition. The truth is that elements like silver mirroring only rarely compromise the use of the film. It is all about environmental conditions – re-boxing only makes sense if you are going to store the collection in an appropriate environment.

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<sup>4</sup> Transcript of Interview carried out January 25, 2007 at the Image Permanence Institute in Rochester. James Reilly is the Director of IPI and Co-Director of the Advanced Residency Program.

Nothing can be done about silver image deterioration. If you copy the microfilm, whatever is there will stay. To prevent the further progression of that damage can be controlled through improving the environment. So the question becomes – what kind of environment is it in? For silver image deterioration is primarily about relative humidity and secondarily temperature. It was a big deal for us because we are interested in the topic of silver image deterioration; but collection managers knew that it was in the first few laps of near the core or splices, and they had taken the major steps to control that. There were more germane questions such as vinegar syndrome – what was its status and distribution in the collection? When AD-Strips were developed they became a very useful tool. You put that together with the environment data and you have an action agenda. Once you have a proper statistical survey of the vinegar syndrome and data on the environment you can predict the life span of a collection, define options with their pros and cons.

Regarding film surveys we at IPI ended up with a methodology that is very precise, very focused and results in information on various options. What would it get us to re-house the entire collection? Since housing has very little to do with vinegar syndrome or silver image deterioration or color dye fading, than re-housing falls in the priority list. So we don't care how many red-spots, splices, etc. we are not going to do anything with that information. It is a given that a microfilm collection of a certain age is going to have red spots. So what is important is to define options that will improve the overall condition of the collection. And generally this means improving the environmental conditions.

## Appendix III | Conversation with Jean-Louis Bigourdan<sup>5</sup>

The first thing is to define the goal of the survey. Think about the how the need of the survey came to be important. The goal of the survey can ultimately change what to look for, the methodology to apply, the time you are going to spend.

The one day survey of a collection implies that the surveyor already has most of the answers. What they will deliver in this type of survey are generic guidelines of how to store, handle, type of enclosure to use. It usually doesn't answer the specific problem of the collection.

You ask for the age, what materials are there, has the collection always been in this location and generally you can have an idea of what you will find.

If you apply the generic guidelines of storage, handling and housing, and you include it in the report chances are it will be so overwhelming that nothing will happen. Or it can be a report designed to apply for a grant that was already expected to be received.

When the report is specific to a collection and includes specific actions that can be taken you can make a difference. Even just referring actions focused on a group of materials in the collection. The survey is usually asked because the caretaker of the collection does not know where to start and the surveyor will be answering that question.

In a one day survey I would think of a methodology that would address about these things – where to start? And this changes from one institution to another. For example if the collection is never accessed it means the main aspect will be storage so you can propose that they apply for a grant just for monitoring the environment. Ask for decay examples that can mean something – is there glass plate delamination, is there dye fading, is there vinegar syndrome? So you can categorize big groups of materials in terms of vulnerability. Every time you have color it will be the dyes. With glass plates there will probably always be silver mirroring but you cannot change that - you should focus on things where you can make a difference. For example if there is delamination of the emulsion from the plate – that can tell you something. In terms of physical damage due to use you can make suggestions for improving handling.

Another question is how long the collection is intended to last. The answer commonly is forever or as long as possible. If they have color slides they should be aware that they will not last forever. You cannot achieve quantitative answers in one day. Learn what kind of resources do they have – funding, value of the collection (that may help raise funding). All you do in a way is help them improve the situation and getting funding is a big part of it, and they will use your report to apply for funding so you must help them make a case.

In 1996 at the LOC I spend two times two days, and I looked at all the materials that one can think of. I didn't look at everything, I just had a feel of all the materials.

We visited all the spaces they had photographs in. After that I made a plan to spend more time and look at some objects and record the condition and type of decay I could see, in broad categories.

In photo collections you can more or less predict what you will see. You cannot know the quantities, but I am not sure that is really important. If you know the exact quantity you will probably scare people and in terms of decay you cannot reverse it, and can even work against the collection. If you have a decay that is progressing over time such as acetate collection you can predict what will happen in the long-term depending if you improve its conditions or not. With acetate the advantage is you have tools that can help predict the evolution of the deterioration. With dye fading you cannot predict accurately.

I think that if you make a very generic survey report you can almost have the report before going to the site.

One thing that has happened more and more is collections applying to NEH. They want the survey report to support their need to duplicate and apply for the grant. Many have used AD-Strips and they present the results in the report making it a very powerful example for the needs of the collection.

I you have 20 applications for grants and they are all generic, how can you decide between them? How do you choose?

In a one day survey at the Buffalo Museum of Science I started by speaking to the manager. It was an important glass plate collection for which there was some available funding. They wanted to know where to start. When I got there I knew the size of the collection, the photographer, the process.

I had three questions: what they used the collection for? (It was a collection that could become a source of revenue for the museum, they could sell reproductions); where they were stored (environment); what were the major problems? These were images of snow flakes that were on a very dark background. What I realized was that I had a preconceived idea of the various sections of the report based on what was more important to achieve the goal.

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<sup>5</sup> Transcript of Interview carried out January 25, 2007 at the Image Permanence Institute in Rochester.

So there is always sections on condition and use and environment evaluation (either they monitor already or you get a sense of it). These two elements basically dictate the needs of the collection.

To put together the preservation recommendation there is a short list of things that can be done: improve the environment; stabilize the objects physically (treatment is in this category); duplicate or reformat the materials. I suggest a few choices. You have to develop some practical things to do in these three categories. You cannot tell them, and this is where I am different from others, you have to have this temperature and RH. You cannot just recommend the standard recommendations. They know this. What they need to know is how to go as close as possible to that. Instead of changing the enclosures use that money to buy a fridge that will greatly improve the condition of the collection. You have to be realistic and try to figure out what to do. Things like what kind of freezer to buy.

In the last survey I did they needed to make a case for having cold storage. The survey ended up to be about how to implement the cold storage. Again here the needs of the collection were predetermined by speaking on the phone. I spent one day and a half to look at the various scenarios on how to implement the cold storage. So each collection is at a different stage of the preservation process. In this case they wanted to use the sealed cabinet approach to cold storage. But when you need 200 of those cabinets you have to think about it. Is this the correct approach?

For me a report should be most importantly tables and flowcharts that can show you the various steps to go through and synthesize information so the "good information" doesn't get lost.

It is not always possible but if you can develop a table that in one quick look the people can see the various options it is very effective. And based on those you can easily make a cost estimate. You have to understand how the institution functions.

I think I did not write two reports that were the same. I speak about the materials and what they are used for and then balance what can be done.

In this project, before the survey they had chosen one method (the cold vault) they had the space, an engineer, but they didn't think about any other alternatives. So in the process you can help them in many ways and make a careful cost analysis of the different options. In the end they will be able to choose the best fitting option for them. And also interesting is the fact that in the process they learn so much that they can apply the same process to the whole museum, to revisit what they are doing with the other collections. So everyone learns something.

In the case of the National Museum of Denmark there had been a condition survey (inspecting visually, using AD-Strips). The goal here was to support them to build a whole new building for the collection, to devise a strategy. I designed what to look for, how big of a sample, how many people on staff were needed. They placed the AD-Strips, and I sent data loggers and told them where to put them (depending on the deadline you can do the readings). I designed the survey, structured the sampling, trained the people there to put the strips, to judge the color, to distinguish acetate from polyester, they entered the data onto an excel file (3-4 weeks), send the file, the data logger and I just did the analysis of the data. This also makes it cheaper for the institution and they can participate in the process, so it works very well.

On the survey you have to ask yourself what you need to know.

When you are asking questions to the institution you should imagine how difficult it will be to answer – if it is impossible for them to know you shouldn't ask it. And ask yourself what will you do with that information – how it will change the actions to take and the decisions. You want to know what are the most valuable objects, which are more degraded, which are more accessed. It is important to structure the type of information you want to gather (materials, condition, storage, use).

A good survey can help expand the opportunities for an institution. The survey and report are always specific to a collection – they shouldn't be a general recommendation that can apply to any collection.

You can specify a list of general recommendations of what should or should not be done, but you should focus on the actions where you as a conservator can help make a difference in that specific collection. And focus more on what to do rather than what not to do. And the list of what you can do is fairly small – improve the storage; treat the images you find are valuable enough to be restored – and think of what is the extent of the improvement you will get by doing those.

If you have an institution, for example, that has already a duplication lab, you can identify a group of materials to be duplicated because they are close to be lost. If for example there is 10% of the collection that can benefit from duplication and you recommend that, you have to find those 10%. And this can take years until you find that group. So in this case if you invest in having a colder storage, the whole collection will benefit. This is the type of reasoning that I make. So instead of using AD-Strip to find all the objects that need duplicating I use them to show there is a problem that can be solved by, for example, moving a group from one storage area to another that is colder. So you have to be prepared to be flexible and use your knowledge to provide with the best option.

You can have a general outline, but you tailor to each institution both the survey and the report. There is a lot of planning, cost analysis and equation of possible benefits.