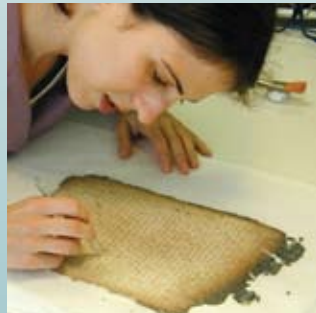


# Connecting to Collections

... *A Call to Action* ...

*A national initiative of the  
Institute of Museum and Library Services*



Dear Colleague:

Sustaining cultural heritage and connecting people to information and ideas are core themes of the Institute of Museum and Library Services. The collections in museums and libraries link people to the full spectrum of the human experience: culture, science, history, and art. By conserving and preserving collections, museums and libraries provide tangible links to history and to the world we live in today.



IMLS has taken a leadership role in encouraging a logical and comprehensive approach to preservation and conservation in the United States. This important work is supported through every IMLS grant category for both museums and libraries. The Institute also participates in several cross-agency initiatives, including Preserve America.

One vital way IMLS provides leadership is by helping institutions identify the best ways to use technology to manage, preserve and provide access to collections. In addition to providing grants for digitization and to help address digital preservation issues, the Institute hosts an annual Web Wise conference, bringing together library and museums practitioners and technology experts to share the latest innovations.

In December 2005, Heritage Preservation and IMLS released "A Public Trust at Risk: The Heritage Health Index Report on the State of America's Collections," the first comprehensive survey of the condition and preservation needs of our nation's collections. This landmark study found that immediate action is needed to prevent the loss of millions of irreplaceable artifacts.

Armed with this documentation, the Institute launched *Connecting to Collections: A Call to Action*. Libraries, museums, and archives across the nation as well as other public and private partners have answered the call to raise public awareness about the value of collections care. This pamphlet explains the steps we are taking together. We at IMLS invite you to be a part of this important effort so that future generations can continue to connect to the collections that are our heritage.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Anne-Imelda M. Radice". The signature is fluid and cursive.

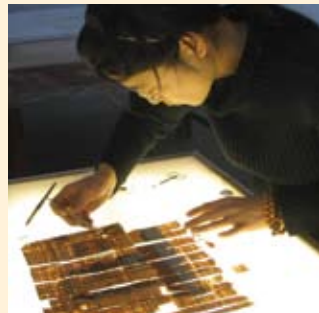
Dr. Anne-Imelda M. Radice  
Director, Institute of Museum and Library Services

## Connecting to Collections: A Call to Action

In celebration of the tenth anniversary of the Institute of Museum and Library Services, IMLS has embarked on a major initiative on behalf of our nation's collections. Responding to the Heritage Health Index clarion call to action, the Institute has launched a multifaceted conservation initiative to build on our commitment to helping museums and libraries care for their collections and prepare for potential disasters. This is in addition to the millions of dollars IMLS invests in conservation and preservation activities each year.

The initiative includes four components:

- **The National Conservation Summit.** Representatives of small and medium-sized museums and libraries from every state met with national leaders in Washington, DC in June 2007. The summit, organized in cooperation with Heritage Preservation and held at the Donald W. Reynolds Center for American Art and Portraiture of the Smithsonian Institution, explored strategies for preserving endangered collections, using new technologies, engaging the public in conservation, and identifying funding resources. Summit participants will play a key role in spearheading the initiative nationwide. Proceedings of the event will be available on the IMLS Web site and on a DVD.
- **Four Forums** to take place in cities across the nation beginning in January 2008 and continuing through June 2009.
- A **Conservation Bookshelf** that includes books, bibliographies, a guide to on-line resources, DVDs, and other high-quality materials will be distributed widely. We would like to acknowledge the Getty Foundation and the Henry Luce Foundation for their generous support of this project.
- **Planning Grants** to support collaborative efforts to address the recommendations of the Heritage Health Index. The agency plans to make these awards available to each state in 2008 and 2009.



## The Heritage Health Index

"A Public Trust at Risk: The Heritage Health Index Report on the State of America's Collections," a project of Heritage Preservation and IMLS, revealed that our collections of objects, documents, digital material, and living collections are not only essential to America's cultural health, but are imperiled and in need of swift protective action.

The study's findings, announced in 2005, are sobering. HHI concluded that

- 190 million objects held by archives, historical societies, libraries, museums, and scientific organizations in the United States are in need of conservation treatment;

- 65 percent of collecting institutions have experienced damage to collections due to improper storage;
- 80 percent of collecting institutions do not have an emergency plan that includes collections, with staff trained to carry it out; and
- 40 percent of institutions have no funds allocated in their annual budgets for preservation or conservation.

HHI identified four concrete recommendations to greatly alleviate serious conservation problems and spare us the painful loss of some of our most valued treasures.

In addition to support from IMLS, the study was also made possible by the Getty Foundation, the Henry Luce Foundation, the Samuel H. Kress Foundation, the Bay and Paul Foundations, the Peck Stacpoole Foundation, and the Gladys Kriebel Delmas Foundation.

## Meeting the Needs Identified by HHI

The Institute has long supported projects that seek to address the needs that have now been documented by HHI. As the examples below illustrate, components of preservation and conservation are supported by all of the Institute's grant categories. IMLS funds institution-based projects, as well as broader, collaborative efforts. See [www.ims.gov](http://www.ims.gov) for more examples.



Cover of HHI Report. Visit [www.heritagepreservation.org/HHI](http://www.heritagepreservation.org/HHI) to read the full report.

### Recommendation #1: Making Safe Conditions a Priority

HHI found that collections are at risk of damage because of improper environmental conditions and storage. High temperatures and humidity, light, pollutants, dust, pests, and other environmental factors can harm and even destroy living and non-living collections. IMLS helps to eradicate these serious threats, primarily through the thousands of Conservation Project Support grants awarded since 1984. Museums for America grants and other IMLS programs also help institutions improve environmental conditions.

#### Example: Pittsburgh Zoo and PPG Aquarium

With a 2005 Conservation Project Support Grant, the Pittsburgh Zoo and PPG Aquarium was able to purchase and install a new cooling system in its penguin exhibit. This allowed the zoo to maintain proper temperatures on very hot days, replicating the birds' natural environment and seasonal changes. Prior to receiving the IMLS grant, the zoo had to carry tons of ice to the penguin house to maintain the appropriate temperature on hot summer days. The new system has allowed this important living collection to thrive.



### Recommendation #2: Establishing Emergency Plans

According to HHI, 80 percent of collecting institutions do not have an emergency plan for their collections with staff trained to carry it out. This means that 2.6 billion items of historic, cultural, and scientific significance are unprotected by an emergency plan should their institutions be struck by disaster. All collections are at risk from catastrophes ranging from hurricanes on the scale of Katrina to a broken water pipe. Institutions that prepare for emergencies dramatically improve the chances that their collections will survive. IMLS has worked to empower institutions to develop emergency plans.

#### Example: Foundation of the American Institute for Conservation

In 2006, the Foundation of the American Institute for Conservation of Historic & Artistic Works (FAIC) used a 21st Century Museum Professionals grant to create a team of "rapid responders" that can be mobilized to provide emergency assistance to museums in the wake of hurricanes, earthquakes and other natural and man-made disasters. When fully implemented, the project can potentially benefit hundreds of museums and save countless irreplaceable objects from needless damage and loss. With FAIC's high-level training on emergency response procedures, damage assessment methods, salvage techniques, and the organization and management of a recovery operation, a nationwide taskforce of 60 museum specialists will respond on short notice to emergency situations.



### Recommendation #3: Assigning Responsibility for Collections Care

Trained professionals are essential to the survival of collections. But HHI found that 80 percent of collecting institutions do not have paid staff dedicated to collections care. While acknowledging that not every institution has the resources to have a professional conservator on staff, the study recommended that all must have staff assigned to such basics of collections care as monitoring conditions and ensuring safe storage, transport, and display. Building the professional capacity of museums and libraries is a fundamental component of the mission of IMLS. Many of the Institute's grant programs can be used for this purpose.

#### Example: Cornell University Library

In collaboration with the American Indian Higher Education Consortium, Cornell University Library used a 2004 National Leadership Grant to train 12 qualified Native American museum and library professionals to help establish and maintain preservation programs in institutions within their regions. The program prepared the interns to train other librarians, archivists, and technicians in preservation basics through workshops, seminars, on-site surveys, simulations, needs assessments, and the establishment of a regional disaster plan and response capability. This training will enable Native American tribal colleges to greatly extend the life of their cultural heritage materials, to conduct studies of their collections and services, and to prepare viable proposals for external grant funding to support Native American collections.



### Recommendation #4: Inspiring Widespread Support for Collections Care

Across the country, libraries, archives, and historical societies are preserving the objects that constitute our heritage, whether they are nationally recognized or have local significance. These collections provide enjoyment and inspiration, and they generate community pride. Institutions should view collections care responsibilities not as a perpetual drain on resources, but as an exciting opportunity for attracting new support. Increased awareness of the concept of conservation engages the public, encourages participation in an institution, and attracts financial support. IMLS supports projects that recognize the need for public education about conservation work.

#### Example: Nebraska State Historical Society

The Nebraska State Historical Society, Nebraska Library Commission, and statewide public television network Nebraska Educational Telecommunications (NET) used a 2005 Partnership for a Nation of Learners Community Collaboration grant to show people how to preserve their treasures. Professional conservators offered information and advice about family heirlooms at three community-based conservation clinics. NET produced and broadcast a television program featuring the clinics and visits to the Gerald R. Ford Conservation Center in Omaha to illustrate more detailed conservation techniques. The conservators presented four in-depth video conferences for staff and volunteers of the more than 600 not-for-profit museums and libraries in the state. Through these activities and a complementary Web site, the project will help Nebraskans save personal and public historical materials, educate staff in cultural heritage institutions in conservation techniques, and increase community knowledge and appreciation of their heritage.





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The Institute of Museum and Library Services is the primary source of federal support for the nation's 122,000 libraries and 17,500 museums. The Institute's mission is to create strong libraries and museums that connect people to information and ideas. The Institute works at the national level and in coordination with state and local organizations to sustain heritage, culture, and knowledge; enhance learning and innovation; and support professional development. To learn more about the Institute, please visit [www.ims.gov](http://www.ims.gov).

The Institute welcomes public and private partners to join in the *Connecting to Collections* initiative, and would like to thank the following organizations for their generous contributions:



**Heritage Preservation**

*The National Institute for Conservation*



NATIONAL  
ENDOWMENT  
FOR THE  
HUMANITIES



NATIONAL  
ENDOWMENT  
FOR THE ARTS

A great nation  
deserves great art.



Smithsonian  
*Donald W. Reynolds Center for  
American Art and Portraiture*

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Archival Storage Materials

### Photo Credits

Cover top: American flag made in 1865, showing new repairs, being rolled for storage by Mary Williamson. Courtesy: American Textile History Museum, Lowell, MA. Cover bottom: A page of the Dutch Colonial manuscript being conserved by Jennifer Sainato. Courtesy: New York State Archives. Right panel: Senior Conservator Soyeon Choi mends papyrus fragments at the Conservation Center for Art and Historic Artifacts. Inside spread, far left: Gentoo penguins enjoy their indoor habitat. Left: Group photo of AIC CERT team and instructors in front of the Charleston Museum. Right: Courtesy: Cornell University Library. Far left: Objects conservator Debbie Long confers with Joan Young of Omaha, NE at a conservation clinic. Courtesy: Tom Sain for the Nebraska State Historical Society