

Request for Information on the Current State of Recorded Sound Preservation Submitted by Heritage Preservation, Inc., Washington, D.C.

Heritage Preservation respectfully submits written comments in response to the request for information on the current state of recorded sound preservation by the National Recording Preservation Board of the Library of Congress.

Heritage Preservation, Inc., a national nonprofit organization, in partnership with the Institute of Museum and Library Services, an independent federal agency, recently conducted the Heritage Health Index. This survey was the first comprehensive assessment of the condition and preservation needs of all U.S. collections held in the public trust. The data that the Heritage Health Index collected on recorded sound collections may help the National Recording Preservation Board understand the preservation activities at archives, museums, and libraries.

In August 2004, the Heritage Health Index survey was distributed to more than 14,500 archives, libraries, historical societies, museums, archaeological repositories, and scientific research collections, which included institutions of all sizes from every U.S. state and territory. Surveys were accepted until December 2004, and the results of the Heritage Health Index were published in December 2005 in *A Public Trust at Risk: The Heritage Health Index Report on the State of America's Collections* (available in full at www.heritagehealthindex.org).

The Heritage Health Index had a 24% response rate overall and a 90% response rate from 500 of the nation's largest and most significant collections (including the Library of Congress, all units of the National Archives and Records Administration, and all units of the Smithsonian Institution). From a sampling frame of more than 35,000 potential institutions, the final study population was established to be 30,827 institutions. The Heritage Health Index data has a margin of error of +/- 1.5%. Results analyzed by institutional type, size, or geographic region have a slightly higher margin of error.

Heritage Health Index Findings on Recorded Sound Collections

The Heritage Health Index was planned with the advice of 35 associations and federal agencies that serve collecting institutions. In 2002, the survey questionnaire was developed in consultation with 66 leading collections professionals, including conservators, preservation administrators, archivists, librarians, curators, and registrars. These individuals were convened in nine working groups organized by collection type. The following participated in the Heritage Health Index working group on moving images and recorded sound:

- Chair, Sarah Stauderman, Preservation Officer, Technical Services Division, Smithsonian Institution
- Lisa Carter, Audio-visual Archivist, Special Collections & Archives, University of Kentucky
- Alan Lewis, Subject Area Expert for Audiovisual Preservation, Special Media Archives Services, National Archives and Records Administration
- Gregory Lukow, Assistant Chief, Motion Picture, Broadcasting & Recorded Sound Division, Library of Congress
- Chris Paton, Archivist, Popular Music Collection, Georgia State University
- Rowena Stewart, Executive Director, American Jazz Museum

· Bonnie Wilson, Curator, Sound and Visual Collections, Minnesota Historical Society. The working group was briefed on the survey's goals and proposed methodology. They carefully reviewed a draft questionnaire to ensure that the questions reflected the specific issues relevant to moving images and recorded sound and suggested how to instruct institutions in reporting the specific type and quantity of collections.

The Heritage Health Index asked institutions to report on all aspects of conservation and preservation and to estimate the quantity and condition of the collections for which they have a preservation responsibility. For recorded sound, institutions were asked to report the quantity and condition of:

- grooved media (e.g., cylinder, phonodisk)
- magnetic media (e.g., cassette, open reel tape, DAT)
- optical media (e.g., CD, DVD)
- digital media (e.g., MP3s)
- other recorded sound collections (e.g., wire, dictabelts, music box disks, player piano rolls).

All recorded sound collections were to be counted by item.

The Heritage Health Index found that 56% of U.S. collecting institutions have recorded sound collections items for which they take a preservation responsibility.¹ The survey estimates that there are 46 million recorded sound collections items currently held in public trust by these institutions. Most of these recorded sound items are held by libraries (89%), and the remaining are held by archives (6%), museums (4%), historical societies (1%), and archaeological repositories/scientific research collections (less than 1%). Large institutions hold 52% of recorded sound items; medium-sized institutions hold 30%; and small institutions have 17%. Slightly more than a third of recorded sound items are held by state and county/municipal institutions, 20% by nonprofit institutions, 8% by federal institutions, and less than 1% by tribal-governed institutions.

The Heritage Health Index data revealed that 44% of recorded sound items—more than 20 million items—are in unknown condition.² Forty-two percent are in no need³, 11% are in need⁴, and 3% are in urgent need⁵. When viewed by institutional type, libraries and historical societies

¹ Defined as collections that could not be replaced if lost or damaged, e.g., not current books, magazines, video tapes, sound recordings.

² Unknown condition: Material has not been recently accessed by staff for visual inspection and/or condition is unknown.

³ No need: Material is stable enough for use and is housed in a stable environment that protects it from long-term damage and deterioration.

⁴ Need: Material may need minor treatment or reformatting to make it stable enough for use, and/or the collection needs to be re-housed into a more stable enclosure or environment to reduce risk of damage or deterioration.

⁵ Urgent need: Material needs major treatment or reformatting to make it stable enough for use, and/or the material is located in an enclosure or environment that is causing damage or deterioration. For machine-readable collections, deterioration of media and/or obsolescence of play-back equipment or hardware/software threaten loss of

both have about 46% in unknown condition, while archives and museums have about 30%. Archives have the greatest percentage in need at 43%, followed by museums and archaeological repositories/scientific research collections, both at 24%. Museums have the most recorded sound collections in urgent need at 9%.

Large institutions lead in having recorded sound items in unknown condition (55%), but small institutions do not know the condition of 41% of their recorded sound collections. Small institutions cite the greatest needs for recorded sound, with 17% in need and 4% in urgent need. By governance, conditions are relatively close to the national average, with the exception of federal institutions, which have 23% of recorded sound in need and 15% in urgent need, and tribal-governed institutions, which have 83% of their collections in unknown condition.

The following chart shows the quantity and condition by specific type of recorded sound collections. The quantities total slightly less than 46 million items because some institutions could only report totals for their recorded sound collections.

Condition of Recorded Sound Items (by specific type)

	Quantity (in items)	In unknown condition	In no need	In need	In urgent need
Grooved media	9.6 million	59%	23%	13%	6%
Magnetic media	21.5 million	30%	52%	16%	2%
Optical media	12.4 million	52%	43%	2%	3%
Digital media	0.4 million	61%	36%	3%	0%
Other recorded sound items	0.2 million	74%	8%	15%	3%

Magnetic media accounts for the largest portion of recorded sound collections, has the most in unknown condition, and has one of the highest percentages in need at 18% (16% need, 2% urgent need). Grooved and digital media are the most likely to be in unknown condition.

Other Findings Related to Recorded Sound Collections

The Heritage Health Index included two questions about institutional preservation activities that directly relate to recorded sound. When asked whether their preservation program includes the preservation of audio-visual materials and playback equipment:

- 23% of collecting institutions report institutional staff are involved in this activity.
- 8% use external providers for the preservation of audio-visual materials.
- 9% are not currently preserving audio-visual materials but plan to do so.
- The preservation of audio-visual materials is not done at 38% of institutions.
- 25% report that it is not applicable to their institution.

Since libraries are significant holders of recorded sound collections, it is interesting to note that the responses from libraries are similar to the figures listed above. The exception is that the preservation of audio-visual materials and playback equipment is not done at 45% of libraries (45% of public libraries, 44% of academic libraries, 49% of independent research libraries, and 43% of special libraries).

For all collections that are currently in need of treatment, institutions were asked to identify all the causes of the damage or loss of access to them. Obsolescence of playback equipment, hardware, or software was one such agent of damage. Forty-six percent of collecting institutions reported no damage or loss; 28% have had some damage or loss; 4% have had significant damage or loss; and 22% don't know the extent of damage or loss due to obsolescence. The high percentage of institutions that don't know how much damage or loss has been experienced by obsolescence compares with the high percentage of institutions that have recorded sound collections in unknown condition. Twenty percent of libraries report they do not know how much of their collections have been damaged by the obsolescence of playback equipment, hardware, or software; the figure at public libraries is 25%; at academic libraries it is 11%; at independent research libraries it is 14%; and at special libraries it is 16%.

Additional Data

The Heritage Health Index gathered data on all types of collections at archives, libraries, historical societies, museums, archaeological repositories, and scientific research collections. The results were analyzed by institutional type, size, geographic region, and governance. To protect the confidentiality of individual responses, Heritage Preservation cannot report the data of specific holders of recorded sound collections. However, it may be possible to do a specialized run of aggregate data from institutions with large holdings of recorded sound if the National Recording Preservation Board would find this information useful. Such data could elucidate the environmental conditions, preservation staffing levels, disaster preparedness, and preservation budgets of institutions with significant holdings of recorded sound. For additional information, please contact Kristen Overbeck Laise, Vice President, Collections Care Programs, Heritage Preservation, 202-233-0824, klaise@heritagepreservation.org.