

APPENDIX B: ESTIMATING CATALOGING COSTS

A. INTRODUCTION

This appendix provides general guidelines that may assist units in estimating cataloging costs. Costs for cataloging museum property vary widely due to variables such as discipline-specific requirements, regional labor costs, staff experience, and the use of permanent or temporary staff. Using in-house staff may be less costly than using contractors, but is possible only when properly trained staff are available in sufficient numbers to complete the project within the desired time. The time required may be less if the cataloging is done by staff who are already familiar with bureau cataloging procedures and the collection to be cataloged. Discipline specialists may be needed in order to catalog some museum property accurately.

The cost per object or specimen or lot is usually lower for large projects than for projects in which only a few objects or specimens are being cataloged. The cost per object or specimen is sometimes equal to the cost per record, but may be much less if a single record is sufficient for multiple objects and/or specimens. Archeological and historical and/or scientific documentation collections, in particular, are often lot cataloged, and may not require a separate catalog record for each item in the collection.

The cost per record and cost per object or specimen also vary among disciplines. The cataloging cost per item is generally highest for Native American (Ethnographic) and history objects, and lowest for historical and/or scientific documentation. The cataloging costs per record, however, are highest for historical and/or scientific documentation and lowest for geology collections. The cost discussions that follow are based on Departmental experience during FY90 and FY91 except for paleontology collections, which were cataloged in FY88, FY89, and FY90. There has been more experience with cataloging archeological and historical and/or scientific document collections. Data for those categories are therefore most representative because of the larger sample size represented. Information for all collection types should be used with caution because of the variables in any cataloging project.

The costs include staff time and related supply expenses to: organize the collection for cataloging; complete a catalog work sheet for each object or specimen or group of objects and/or specimens (if lot cataloged); enter catalog work sheet data into a computer program; number the objects and/or specimens; photograph objects except most natural history specimens, most large quantities of archeological specimens, and most historical and/or scientific documents; recontainerize or otherwise prepare objects or specimens for storage and label the storage containers; and reshelve the objects and/or specimens.

B. ARCHEOLOGY

Cataloging Cost Per Object		Cataloging Costs Per Record	
range	average	range	average
\$.58-\$2.26	\$.92	\$4.21-\$15.49	\$7.98

As with other disciplines, the cost of cataloging archeological collections depends on the nature of the collections and the familiarity of the cataloger with the material being cataloged. Archeological collections can consist of a few complete artifacts. More often, however, the collections consist of diverse, fragmentary materials that need to be sorted, analyzed, numbered, and weighed or measured in association with the cataloging process.

C. NATIVE AMERICAN (Ethnographic)

Cataloging Cost Per Object		Cataloging Costs Per Record	
range	average	range	average
\$.53-\$18.56	\$ 7.96	\$.56-\$21.16	\$9.98

Available cataloging cost data for contemporary Native American collections are limited. These data are for small collections of only a few dozen objects each.

D. HISTORY

Cataloging Cost Per Object		Cataloging Costs Per Record	
range	average	range	average
\$1.44-\$8.27	\$ 4.49	\$1.35-\$14.44	\$9.14

History objects are usually cataloged individually.

E. HISTORICAL AND/OR SCIENTIFIC DOCUMENT COLLECTIONS

Cataloging Cost Per Object		Cataloging Costs Per Record	
range	average	range	average
\$.15-\$4.09	\$.56	\$5.00-\$2120.00	\$165.93

Cataloging costs for document collections are among the lowest per document or document group, and are the highest per record. This is because document collections are often lot cataloged. Costs vary widely depending on the number of documents or document groups per catalog record. The high value (\$2120) was for a very large document collection that needed only one catalog record. Refer to Appendix C for a discussion of such an example.

F. BIOLOGY

Cataloging Cost Per Specimen		Cataloging Costs Per Record	
range	average	range	average
\$.86-\$9.81	\$3.76	\$.86-\$19.63	\$4.31

Available cataloging costs for biology are primarily for birds and mammals, which are usually cataloged individually.

Lot cataloging is more commonly used for fishes, reptiles, amphibians, and invertebrates.

G. PALEONTOLOGY

Cataloging Cost Per Specimen		Cataloging Costs Per Record	
range	average	range	average
\$1.63-\$20.00	\$2.53	\$2.75-\$20.00	\$6.30

Variables include the size of the collection, the amount of lot cataloging versus individual cataloging, and the amount of research necessary to accurately identify the specimens being cataloged.

H. GEOLOGY

Cataloging Cost Per Specimen		Cataloging Costs Per Record	
range	average	range	average
\$.52-\$4.45	\$2.93	\$2.48-\$5.00	\$3.84

Cataloging cost data are available only for the western United States. Rocks and minerals are among the least expensive items to catalog.

I. SUMMARY OF AVERAGE CATALOGING COSTS BY DISCIPLINE

Figure B.1 provides a summary of cataloging costs per individual catalog record and per object or specimen or lot for major discipline categories. The figure also provides the size of the collections that were cataloged at the costs indicated.

Collection Classification Type	No. of Items Cataloged	Average Cost Per Catalog Record	Average Cost Per Item
Archeology	1,238,289	\$ 7.98	\$.92
Native American (Ethnographic)	274	9.98	7.96
History (includes art)	130,572	9.14	4.49
Historical and/or Scientific Documents	1,829,058	165.93	.56
Biology	44,642	4.31	3.76
Paleontology*	10,896	6.30	2.53
Geology	2,092	3.84	2.93
Total	3,244,927	33.52	3.44

*Paleontology data are from FY88, FY89, and FY91

Figure B.1. Summary of Average Cataloging Costs, FY90 and FY91.

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