Consortial Survey Initiative

The Survey Process and What Will Happen During Survey Visits
May 2006

Preliminary Visits and Scheduling

Christine will first make a preliminary visit to your site. This will provide an opportunity for her to meet and talk with staff, see the physical setup of your site, look at the kinds of intellectual access and collection management tools available for the collections, and discuss any particular questions or concerns you may have. Preliminary site visits will take place, as much as possible, in the period before the two surveyors are hired (June and early July 2006).

Using the information collected during the preliminary site visits and stated institutional preferences, Christine will prepare a specific schedule for surveying the first few sites, and a proposed surveying order for the rest of the project. The proposed surveying order will be distributed for feedback from sites. Once finalized, the surveying order will provide sites with an idea of where in the project period their site falls, though specific dates will not be attached at that point. As we get further into the project and have a clearer picture of the amount of time involved for surveying at different sites, Christine will contact each institution to set a more specific schedule.

Training

Once the surveyors have been hired, the project staff will undergo extensive training in the survey methods and using the survey database. The project staff will work through background readings on historiographical trends in different subject areas, core texts for different fields of study, and readings recommended by the participating institutions. The project staff may also participate in a series of directed training sessions on various topics, including particular subject areas, conservation issues or specific document types. The project staff welcome recommendations of topics, resources, and leaders for these directed training sessions.

We will hold several group trainings for participating site staff to familiarize them with the survey methods and database. Site staff may also have the opportunity to survey collections at sites other than their own and to participate in directed training sessions when they are offered. In addition, individual training for site staff by the project staff will be available on an ongoing, as needed, basis.

Identifying Collections to be Surveyed

Given the lag between the submission of the grant proposal and the start of surveying, you may want or need to review and re-identify the collections to be surveyed at your site. If you need help in identifying appropriate collections, please discuss this with Christine in your preliminary visit and she will provide additional guidance or set aside time to work with you as needed.

Gathering Basic Information About Your Collections

Closer to the time for surveying at your institution, Christine will make additional visits to gather basic data (including main entry, title, dates, and extent) about the collections to be surveyed at your site and enter it into the survey database. Depending on the amount of information available and its complexity, one or both surveyors may accompany Christine or she may work alone in collaboration with the site staff. If the data about your collections is available in electronic or other distributable form, some of this work may be able to happen offsite.

Please keep in mind that the more information you can provide Christine at this stage, the better the project staff will be able to prepare for surveying your collections.

Composition of Survey Teams

During the time that the basic data about your collections is being gathered and entered into the survey database, Christine will work with site staff to determine the appropriate composition of the survey team (or teams) for your site. Each collection at your site will be surveyed by a team of at least two people. Depending on the degree of participation desired by site staff, a team could include both project staff and site staff or it could include just project staff. Site staff can elect to participate only in the surveying of some collections or they can be involved in all of them. Although we will try as much as possible to develop the appropriate team composition and determine the level of site staff involvement during the pre-survey stage, team composition can continue to be revisited throughout a site's survey process as needed.

Surveying Your Collections

On the first day of surveying at a site, Christine and the other project staff involved (Christine will always be present on the initial day(s) of surveying at a site, but will not always be a member of the surveying team for the site) will provide a review of the survey training as needed and then the team (or teams) will start to survey collections. Each team will be equipped with a project laptop loaded with the survey database and other survey documentation. As much as possible, Christine will address physical setup and handling issues during the earlier visits so that teams can begin surveying as soon as the training refresher course is over.

Surveying involves the members of the team looking at each collection, its access tools, and relevant background research. The visual inspection portion of the process will involve pulling down boxes, opening lids, inspecting volumes, and other tasks necessary to determine the physical arrangement and condition of the collection. The intellectual evaluation portion of the process will involve assessing the content of the collection (subject matter, themes, depth of coverage, and document genres, for example) and its intellectual access tools. Large collections may be sampled, particularly if they contain groupings of similarly arranged or themed material, while smaller collections may be surveyed in greater detail.

Teams will verify the basic information already in the database and make adjustments as necessary. Teams will discuss and achieve consensus to assign ratings (1-5) for physical condition, quality of housing, physical access, intellectual access, interest, and documentation quality. They will write general and preservation notes that explain and justify each collection's ratings by addressing its physical characteristics and research value. Teams will compose or revise abstracts (the equivalent of an EAD <abstract> or MARC 520 and 545) as needed.

Teams will assign subject headings and themes as appropriate. Teams will flag any collections that require further review by Christine, site staff, or specialists. If very basic labeling or rehousing is required to make a collection identifiable for verification, teams will do this according to local procedures, but will otherwise leave collections as they were found prior to surveying.

There will be a number of predetermined local fields in the database for all institutions to track additional information about their own collections. The values in the local fields for your institution will only be visible to you and the database administrators. There may also be the possibility of adding a small number of local fields specific to your institution. Please let Christine know if this would be of interest to you.

Data Verification and Analysis

Christine will review all survey data on a regular basis and ask for clarifications as needed. Site staff will be able to review data about their collections throughout the process, but will only be able to make changes to their local fields during the survey period. Site staff may contact Christine anytime with questions or concerns about specific records.

Once surveying is complete for all sites, the project staff, with input from participating institutions, will analyze the survey data to determine trends and areas of need, both on a consortial and institutional basis. The database will also be made available to each institution for the purposes of generating its own queries and reports. Examples of uses for the survey data and analysis include identifying priority collections for processing, conservation treatment, and exhibits; to develop grant proposals (both consortial and institutional) and other collaborative projects; and to improve intellectual access to collections.

The data from the survey will be available for export to local databases and OPACs, as well as national bibliographic utilities, as desired. (We will not turn over the database records en masse to any bibliographic utility unless all participating institutions agree that this is desirable.)

The project staff will be in close contact with site staff throughout the project to determine both general and specific data analysis and data output needs.

Ongoing Support

Christine is available for questions, concerns and suggestions throughout the project. She can be contacted by phone at 215-732-6200, ext. 201, or email at cdibella@hsp.org. We understand that circumstances change, even over brief periods of time, and we want to be responsive to the needs of staff in the different repositories as much as possible. We truly appreciate the participation of every institution in this project and look forward to working with all of you more closely in the months to come.