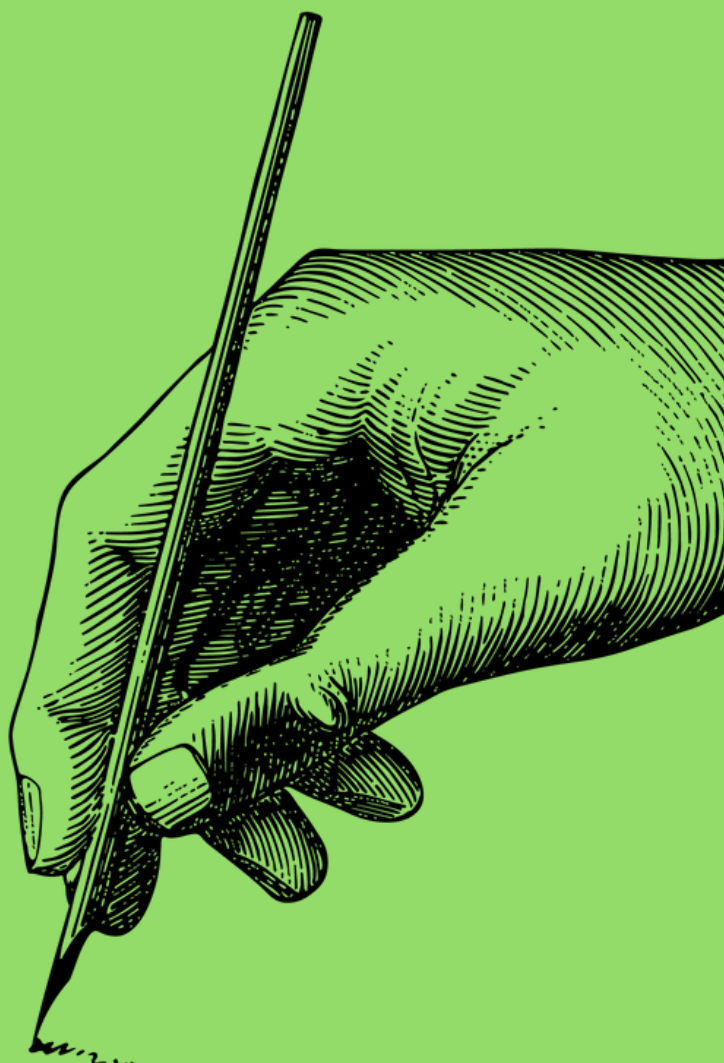


Conservation Planning

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Ringwood RSL Volunteer handling the collection in storage. Photo: Tiny Empire Collective

Museums and galleries have a responsibility to care for their collections. Part of that collection care is knowing what the risks to your collection are and having a plan that outlines how you are going to minimise these risks. This is referred to as a conservation plan.

Conservation covers the management of the environment surrounding collections (preventive conservation) and the treatment of individual objects (remedial conservation).

A conservation plan is the ‘preparation of a strategy for the long-term care of collections. It involves identifying the conservation needs of collections, prioritising them and allocating resources to deal with them’. (ReCollections: Glossary p 10)

WHY DEVELOP A CONSERVATION PLAN?

Collections are the most important resource of a museum: they are what make museums unique and without them, the museum would not exist. Caring for collections makes them safely available to the public now, while helping to preserve them for future generations.

A conservation plan helps you do this in a number of ways. As well as helping you understand more about how to care for your collection, it can also be used to show that you are caring for your collection in a systematic manner when applying for future grants or obtaining sponsorship.

The key benefits to developing a conservation plan are:

- expert assistance in determining conservation needs;
- increased knowledge in collections care;
- ensuring that limited resources are used in the most efficient way;
- assistance in securing grants and support; and
- a well cared for collection.

CHOOSING AND WORKING WITH A CONSERVATOR

You will need assistance from a conservator to develop a conservation plan. A conservator is someone who has been trained and is qualified to carry out conservation. Conservators can be specialised in preventive care and conservation treatment of a particular collection type (specialist conservator), or they can be specialised in the preventive conservation of all collection types (preventive conservator).

Both specialist and preventive conservators can undertake conservation plans, but it is important to check that the conservator you are planning to use is able to provide conservation recommendations for the range of collection types you have in your museum/gallery.

KEY AREAS IN A CONSERVATION PLAN

Collections do not look after themselves: you need to identify what the collection needs and plan how you are going to meet these needs. There is no one way to undertake a conservation plan and all conservators will take a slightly different approach. However, they should all incorporate finding the answers to the following questions:

- What does your museum/gallery have?
- What risks is the collection exposed to?
- What collections care practices are in place?
- What are the priorities?

This information should then be collated together to determine a three – five year plan that identifies what actions need to be done, in what order, by who and at what cost.

WHAT DOES YOUR MUSEUM/GALLERY HAVE?

There are two aspects to identifying what your museum/gallery has: the collection and the resources at your disposal. It is important at the start of this process to collate all of the information you have on your collection before you can start assessing risks or identifying priorities for action. The following aspects of the collection need to be identified:

- Different collection types
- Materials they are made from
- Size of each collection
- Significance of each collection
- Collection condition

It is then necessary to identify all of the resources that your museum/gallery has that could be used to care for the collection. This will highlight what additional resources are needed and whether existing resources are being used effectively. The following resources need to be identified:

- Buildings and space available
- Paid staff and their positions
- Volunteers and their responsibilities and areas of expertise
- Existing budget and sources of income or grants

WHAT RISK IS THE COLLECTION EXPOSED TO?

Once the information on the collection and the resources available has been gathered, it is necessary to work out what risks the collection is currently exposed to. This is a key part of the conservation plan and where the expertise of a conservator is crucial. Often conservators take a stage approach to this step, starting with looking at the risks outside the museum/gallery building, then looking at the risks from inside the building, within each room, within each storage/exhibition system in use, and finally looking at the collection items themselves. Don't be surprised if a conservator starts looking around the building or the surrounding environment - it all contributes to the overall picture of the risks that might exist.

There may be a need to **examine the buildings and surrounds** to determine the following:

- What are the common external conditions?
- What is the general condition of the building(s)?
- Does the building(s) provide an effective buffer against external conditions?
- Who is responsible for building maintenance and how often is it undertaken?

The next stage would commonly include an **examination of the environmental conditions**. The environmental conditions examined should always include temperature, relative humidity, light and pollution:

- What internal conditions are being targeted and do they meet the needs of the museum's collections?
- What are the existing conditions?
- What are the existing environmental control measures?
- Is environmental monitoring being undertaken? If problems arise, what actions are being taken?

The next stage would most often include an **examination of the exhibition and storage areas**:

- Are there permanent, temporary, or traveling exhibitions to consider?
- Are items on open or covered display?
- What materials are being to create the display cases and mounts?
- How often are items rotated between storage and exhibition?

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- Are there dedicated or dual use storage areas?
 - Is there an isolation area for items entering the collection?
 - What materials are being used to wrap items and to construct storage systems?

The last area examined relates to the **handling of the collection**:

- How are collection items moved within the building(s)?
- How are items are transported?
- What equipment is being used?
- What skills are required of staff and volunteers to undertake this work?

WHAT COLLECTIONS CARE PRACTICES ARE IN PLACE?

Once the risks to the collection have been determined, an assessment needs to be made of your current collection care practices. This will highlight what risks are currently being minimised, whether all existing practices are correct and what additional practices are needed. Practices that are commonly examined include:

- Condition reporting and treatment
- Housekeeping
- Pest management
- Disaster preparedness planning
- Security

WHAT ARE THE PRIORITIES FOR YOUR MUSEUM/GALLERY?

Remember that the conservation priorities are likely to be different for each museum and gallery. You and the conservator need to decide how you are going to allocate the priorities for your museum or gallery. This can be done by asking the following questions:

- What risks would cause the most damage?
- What damage is most likely to occur?
- What actions would reduce the greatest number of risks?
- What can be done immediately by existing staff or volunteers?

To manage the risks effectively, answer each of these questions to see which risks are on the top of the lists most often - these will be your top priorities to address. From here, work down through all of the risks, identifying their relative priority in the same way.

USING THE INFORMATION TO COMPLETE THE CONSERVATION PLAN

Once this information has been collected, you and the conservator need to use it to complete the conservation plan. To do this, you will need to:

- create a three to five year plan outlining what actions you are going to take in each priority area, each year;
- identify who will undertake each of the actions and the time it will take to complete; and
- identify what each action will cost and what funding or grant support you will need.

When you have completed these steps make sure the plan does not sit static on your shelf, only to be referred to from time to time - it needs to be considered a working document. You should review what has and has not been achieved each year, refine the responsibilities people have been allocated and update the funding requirements for actions that still need to be completed.

FURTHER INFORMATION

Resource	Source	Link
Recollections	Heritage Collections Council	https://aiccm.org.au/conservation/collection-care/
General conservation information, including contact details for conservators	AICCM	https://aiccm.org.au/
Conservation Management Plans	Heritage Victoria	www.heritage.vic.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0022/514273/Conservation-Management-Plans-Managing-Heritage-Places.pdf

AMaGA Victoria can provide assistance with the location of further information on collections care and conservation. Please contact: (03) 9270 5063 or enquiries@amagavic.org.au

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