

MARYLAND HISTORICAL RECORDS ADVISORY BOARD OVERVIEW OF 2011 INSTITUTIONAL SURVEY

SUMMARY

Respondents cited an overall need for additional funding sources to maintain and grow their institutional programs. Staffing is the current challenge of greatest priority. Future need centers on the issues of preservation and electronic collection management. Most respondents do not have a formalized emergency preparedness plan. The majority holding electronic collection has no strategy for the long term storage and migration of data and would welcome guidance on this issue. Entities preferred training workshops for staff education. Lastly, while a re-grant program would be well-received, few institutions articulated their ideas for priority processing or digitization projects.

SURVEY AND RESULTS

In April 2011, an eighteen question survey was mailed to over four hundred institutions throughout Maryland. The mailing list was compiled from address lists reflecting the membership of the Maryland Association of History Museums, the Maryland History and Cultural Collaborative, and the *Maryland Manual Online* historical society registry. These societies ranged from county to local and municipal.

Administration and Operations Assessment

Respondent profile

Museums, followed second by historical societies, formed the bulk of the respondents. Specialized institutions such as churches and schools could be found in smaller numbers. Many had mission statements, acquisition/collection policies, accessions procedures, finding aids, dedicated archival storage areas, and public outreach programs. Funding came primarily from private donations and grants, followed by county or local government monies. Admission fees, annual membership dues, and fundraisers provided supplemental income. Staffing was heavily dependent upon volunteers and interns. Public access to collections varied due to the availability of both paid and unpaid personnel.

Holdings and access:

Objects, private papers and institutional records predominated, followed closely by photographs and books. Optical disks, computer tapes, and microfiche were the least represented. The vast bulk of the collections dated from the twentieth century; least represented from 1634-1699. Intellectual access to collections came from these sources (ranked in order of prevalence): computer database, card catalog, printed guides, online network, and, lastly, variations of staff assistance.

User frequency:

Most entities reported less than 100 patron/research visits per year (through 2009). Usage has generally trended upward.

Current and Future Needs Assessment

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Current Needs:

Funding staff positions was reported as the current priority of greatest need. The conservation of collections, the digitization of records, and the funding of exhibitions followed as the next three areas of pressing importance. Safeguarding collections from possible theft ranked low on the overall list.

Respondents indicated that professional assistance in the areas of general preservation/conservation and the management of electronic records was needed. Approximately half of the institutions held electronic records. Most have no long term storage or migration plans. The majority indicated a need for guidance in this matter.

Future Needs:

Projected needs over the next five years, ranked in order of importance, included the preservation and conservation of collections, the acquisition of additional staff, and additional resources for exhibition planning, fabrication and execution. The need for new or upgraded facilities pre-dominated the other miscellaneous categories.

A re-grant program devoted wholly to processing or digitization projects, offering a maximum of \$5000 to be administered by the MHRAB, held a certain appeal. Yet, only about a tenth of respondents could readily identify a discrete collection to receive such funding. Some expressed the desire to use grant money for staff salaries or facility upgrades.