

Heritage Health Information Survey (HHIS) Report A Snapshot of Facts & Figures

About

The Heritage Health Information Survey (HHIS), collected in 2014, was designed to provide insights into how the institutions that hold our national heritage in trust are progressing over the past decade in the level of care they provide these invaluable items.

The HHIS Report, released in 2019, provides selected updates from the Heritage Health Index of 2004 and assesses the preservation needs of today's cultural heritage institutions with non-living, tangible, and digital collections. The resulting facts and figures highlight the real need for collections preservation and shine a light on the challenges faced by collecting institutions—most notably, smaller organizations.

Collecting Institutions: A Breakdown

- The survey's 1,714 respondents are representative of the nation's **31,000 collecting institutions**.
- Of institutions with collections, 47% are museums, 35% are libraries, 12% are historical societies, 3% are archives, and 2% are other scientific collections.
- Our nation's collecting institutions hold more than **13 billion items**, from furniture to photos and sheet music to soil samples. All are cataloged, shelved, stored, and protected to varying degrees.
- Around **70%** of all collecting organizations have preservation or conservation of their collections named as a priority in their mission.
- The gap in preservation needs between large and small collecting institutions of similar types is widest among **libraries** and narrowest among **archives**.
- **96%** of collecting institutions are **small institutions**.

Damage to Collections

- An estimated **one-third of institutions** have reported damage to their collections.
- The biggest risk to collections is **water damage**.
- Among scientific collections, the greatest risk is **pests**.
- The amount of loose paper in collections is enough to fill **347 Olympic sized pools**.
- Nearly **two-thirds of archives** reported damage or loss to their collections due to obsolete equipment, causing a loss of access to born-digital information.

Small Organizations Face Challenges

- Staffing among types of small institutions varied greatly. While **97% of small archives** reported someone was responsible for collections care, just **73% of small libraries** had a staff member with these responsibilities.
- Small institutions are less likely to have **designated personnel** with conservation or preservation responsibilities, as opposed to medium or large sized organizations.
- They are less apt to have **security systems** and tend to lack environmental controls, with the exception of archives.
- Small institutions are less likely to conduct **emergency planning**.
- **56%** of small historical societies rely solely on **volunteers** for conservation.

Making Progress

Over a ten-year span, our nation's cultural heritage organizations have:

- **Reduced the incidence of damage** from improper storage and light exposure by roughly 30%.
- **Increasingly assigned collections care responsibilities** to personnel, with 86% of institutions reporting in 2014, an 8% improvement over 2004 (78%).
- **Conducted more collection assessments:** the 45% of organizations that have done so is a 50% increase from 2004.
- **Engaged in more emergency planning:** the number of organizations with emergency plans has more than doubled, from 20% to 42%.
- **Placed a greater financial priority on collections preservation,** with the percentage of organizations that provided annual funds for these activities more than doubling from 23% to 49%.