

CONSIDERATIONS FOR CONTEMPLATING CREATING AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL REPOSITORY¹

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Repository is defined as: “a facility such as a museum, archaeological center, laboratory or storage facility managed by a university, college, museum, other educational or scientific institution, a Federal, State or local government agency or Indian Tribe that can provide professional, systematic and accountable curatorial services on a long-term basis” (36 CFR Part 79.4 (j)).

Factors that may support the need for a new repository:

- Passage of both 36 CFR Part 79 and NAGPRA in 1990: agencies need to comply, increasingly sending out RFPs for curation projects, increasingly including funding in their budgets
- Relicensing: compliance with all current laws
- Agencies prefer to store collections nearby
- Other museums/repositories are increasingly using off-site storage to house incoming collections

CONSIDERATION: Does your organization have the ability and/or desire to provide professional, systematic and accountable curatorial services on a long-term basis?

The main requirements for a repository:

- Space (dedicated, secure from theft and fire, pest-free, environmentally controlled, appropriately lit, curation-quality storage shelving/cabinetry, room to expand)
- Written policies, procedures, forms (these provide accountability, demonstrate commitment)
- “Qualified Museum Professional” (as defined by the Office of Personnel Management) on staff; responsible for managing collections and supervising students, workstudy, interns, volunteers etc.
- Provide access to collections

CONSIDERATIONS: What will the costs be (initial and long-term) for each of these? (See Table 7, Griset and Kodack 1999 for additional requirements.) What kind of support (financial, facilities, staffing, etc.) can your organization provide to a Repository? What grant opportunities are available to repositories?

Starting a repository “from scratch” has its challenges. Once you (as an institution) are behind the idea, the approach to these challenges is two-fold through marketing and partnerships. A new repository will need to market itself to potential donors and depositing agencies (such as the Army Corps of Engineers, Park Service, Public Utility Districts) and form partnerships with other educational institutions and agencies as well as other repositories. Through marketing and partnerships, a newly created repository will hopefully avoid repeating earlier mistakes. There are existing models available of repositories started “from scratch”, in particular the San Diego Archaeological Center.

CONSIDERATIONS: Who are the other main archaeological repositories in your area? What are their collections goals? What are their strengths and weaknesses? How are other repositories structured (staff, facilities, collections status)? Are there partnership opportunities available with other archaeological repositories? What are the main agencies that manage cultural resources on a regular basis? Are these agencies seeking curation services now or do they anticipate future need for curation services?

Collections housed at your Repository (including those that you may already store) can provide research, grant, and educational opportunities. Some of the collections can provide income opportunities in the form of curation agreements.

Types of collections which could be housed at the Repository:

- Collections owned by your organization (provide no income opportunities)
- Collections housed at your facility with agreement (provide income opportunities)
- Collections housed at your facility without agreement (provide no income opportunities)
- NAGPRA-related collections (subject to repatriation) (may provide specific grant opportunities)
- Collection owned by agencies, held-in-trust by your organization (provide income opportunities)

CONSIDERATIONS: What is the status of collections currently housed your facility? Would a full inventory be needed to clarify the status of collections? What resources would be required to conduct a full inventory? How could a full inventory benefit the planning for a repository? How prepared are the current owners of collections (i.e the Anthropology Department) to relinquish control of collections to which it has no ownership?

FURTHER CONSIDERATIONS: What new research opportunities can staff, faculty, or students take advantage of if the collections were managed by a Repository (vs. under the current conditions)? How would the educational opportunities with the collections be impacted if managed by a Repository?

Annual fees for providing curation services vary, but are usually assessed per cubic foot. In Washington State annual fees range between “free” and \$75 per cubic foot. Most repositories and agencies sign between 5- and 20-year agreements. Some repositories have established endowments to generate annual income for collections care. Most repositories appear to have pulled annual figures out of the air (see “Archaeological Curation Fees Across the United States”). What does it really cost to curate a box for one year?

CONSIDERATIONS: What would you need to charge per cubic foot to support on-going care of the collections? Are you (as an institution) capable of managing an endowment?

¹ This article should be cited as follows:

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