



NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE HUMANITIES
DIVISION OF PRESERVATION AND ACCESS

PRESERVATION ASSISTANCE GRANTS

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Updated October 1, 2024

This FAQ supplements the information provided in the Notice of Funding Opportunity. If you do not see the answer to your question here, consult the Notice of Funding Opportunity.

For additional questions, please contact preservation@neh.gov.

1. What is considered a “Small Institution”?

The Preservation Assistance Grants program is open to both small and mid-sized institutions. Because the program is open to many different institution types (such as museums, libraries, and historical societies), we are unable to provide a definition based on factors such as collection size, staff, or budget. What is considered small or mid-sized also varies based on an institution’s location. We ask applicants to describe their institution’s mission and discuss specific budget and staffing considerations to demonstrate how they would be considered small or mid-sized in relation to related institution types either regionally or nationally.

Because sub-units within a university, such as their museum or library, may apply, we consider the sub-unit as its own separate organization for determining size.

Institution size does not impact eligibility but is a consideration during the review process.

2. Is an institution required to contribute funds from its own budget to a Preservation Assistance Grant project?

No. NEH does not require cost sharing in the Preservation Assistance Grants program.

3. Is staff time an eligible expense?

Yes. Staff, including graduate fellow and intern, time funded by the award must be spent on eligible project activities, such as rehousing collections, taking part in the assessment process, or installing storage furniture.

4. What are some examples of the types of assessments and consultations we can apply for?

Applicants can apply for any of the following activities. Please note this list is not exhaustive:

- general preservation assessment

- digital preservation assessment
- assessing the conservation treatment needs of selected items in a collection
- assessing mechanical systems, such as HVAC, based on collection environmental needs for minor repairs and adjustments to improve efficiency and environmental conditions
- studying light levels in exhibition and storage spaces and recommending appropriate methods for limiting light damage to collections
- developing detailed plans for improving storage or rehousing a collection
- developing plans for improving security or fire protection for collections
- developing and revising disaster preparedness and response plans, including continuity of operations plans
- establishing an environmental monitoring program
- instituting an integrated pest management program
- implementing preventive conservation strategies that pragmatically balance effectiveness, cost, and environmental impact
- consulting with source communities for culturally appropriate methods of preservation and/or documentation
- consulting with scholars to develop accurate vocabularies for use in processing guides

5. How do we find the appropriate consultant and other preservation resources online?

Within the conservation field, conservators usually specialize in the care of specific types of collections, such as objects, paper, or paintings. You should choose a conservator whose specialty is appropriate for the nature of your collections. Similarly, when assessing the preservation needs of library, museum, or archival holdings, you should seek a consultant specifically knowledgeable about the preservation of collections in these types of institutions.

You will find information regarding selecting a consultant along with links to other preservation resources in the Notice of Funding Opportunity in section H. Other Information, Applicant Resources.

6. What information should the consultant provide for inclusion in the application?

A consultant should provide a two-page résumé and a letter of commitment. The letter of commitment should describe the proposed activity or activities and include a detailed plan of work, a budget, and a preliminary list of supplies that the consultant recommends for purchase (if applicable). The letter also should indicate what the consultant would provide to the applicant, such as an assessment or planning report.

7. Can an internal staff member perform an assessment for our organization?

Yes, if this internal staff member has the needed expertise. This assessment should still result in a formal report.

8. What kind of activities and skills can we request training in? Must the training or workshop be in-person? Can we host a workshop?

Applicants can apply for training in the following areas. Note: this list is not exhaustive:

- preservation and care of humanities collections (often offered by collection type, e.g., textiles, paintings, photographs, archival records, manuscripts, and books)
- disaster preparedness and response, including continuity of operations

- methods and materials for the storage of collections
- environmental monitoring
- best practices for cataloging rare books, art, and material culture collections
- proper methods for the arrangement and description of archival collections
- preservation and access challenges for community-based archives
- standards and best practices for the preservation of digital collections
- care and handling of collections during digitization

Trainings and workshops can be both synchronous and asynchronous, held in-person, virtually, hybrid, or be pre-recorded. Your staff and volunteers may attend trainings or workshops hosted by others, or your institution can host trainings and workshops by consultants. If your institution is hosting the training, you may also invite other local professionals from the cultural heritage sector to participate.

9. Which attachments should we provide if we want to purchase storage furniture and preservation supplies?

If you have an assessment, you should attach the portion of the report recommending the supplies. If you have not yet had a preservation assessment recommending the storage furniture or preservation supplies, you must include a letter of commitment from your project consultant or a letter of support from a preservation professional who is familiar with your collections. This letter should provide a justification for the purchase.

10. We received funding elsewhere for a preservation assessment. On the basis of that assessment, we want to apply for a Preservation Assistance Grant to purchase storage furniture. Is this permissible?

Yes. As with all requests for supplies, attach the portion of the assessment report recommending the supplies or a letter of support from the consultant justifying the purchase.

11. If I am in a non-contiguous state or jurisdiction, what can I use the extra \$5,000 for?

Applicants from the non-contiguous states and jurisdictions of Alaska, Hawaii, Puerto Rico, the U.S. Virgin Islands, Guam, American Samoa, and the Northern Mariana Islands may request up to \$5,000 extra to cover travel costs for consultants from outside your state or jurisdiction and/or shipping costs related to the purchase of preservation supplies (such as environmental monitors, rehousing folders, or storage furniture). The amount requested should be equal to the actual costs of travel or shipping up to the \$5,000 limit.

12. What is the difference between the Preservation Assistance Grants (PAG) program and the Sustaining Cultural Heritage Collections (SCHC) program?

Both programs support preventive conservation, but they differ significantly in scope. PAG is directed at small and mid-sized libraries, museums, and other cultural heritage institutions that seek to build their capacity to preserve and care for their humanities collections at a foundational level. Awards are capped at \$10,000 for applicants within the contiguous 48 states, and \$15,000 for applicants in non-contiguous states and territories, and in a typical project a single consultant offers basic advice on caring for humanities collections. The PAG program also supports policy development in physical and intellectual collections management, collections surveys and inventories, the purchase of preservation supplies and staff training.

Small and mid-sized institutions might apply to the SCHC program to plan or implement larger, more complex projects focused on sustainable preventive care strategies that pragmatically balance effectiveness, cost, and environmental impact. SCHC projects take a higher level of preparation than PAG awards. Organizations applying for Implementation, SCHC Level I (up to \$100,000) projects must have undertaken a general preservation assessment or other targeted collections assessment, identified preservation challenges and priorities, and be ready to implement small-scale improvements to environmental conditions and other sustainable conservation measures. This preparation might have been supported by a PAG award.

Implementation, Level II SCHC projects (up to \$350,000), often involve interdisciplinary teams that might include architects, building engineers, conservation scientists, conservators, curators, archivists, and facilities managers, among others. Planning for such complex projects may have been supported by a SCHC planning grant that allow up to \$50,000 for interdisciplinary planning.

You can learn more about the SCHC program [here](#). If you still have questions about which program is best for you, please contact us at preservation@neh.gov.

13. Is the purchase of equipment to control the environment of a storage area an eligible expense?

Yes, you can apply to purchase environmental monitoring equipment and discrete units and supplies to control the environment, such as window air-conditioning units, portable dehumidifiers, window blinds, and door draft stoppers if recommended through a preservation assessment. You cannot apply to purchase environmental control equipment that is part of a building's HVAC system, such as an air handling unit.

For capital campaigns intended to update building climate control systems, consider the [SCHC program](#).

14. What assistance is offered for digital collections?

You may apply for digital preservation assessments or the development of detailed plans for the preservation of your digital collections. Through the education and training component of Preservation Assistance Grants you may request support for training that focuses on both preservation and access issues for digital collections. For example, an institution could apply for support to attend workshops on such topics as standards and best practices for the preservation of digital collections, or the care and handling of collections during digitization. Applicants who have a digital preservation assessment and/or worked with a consultant to develop a digital preservation plan may also request funding for digital storage media, such as external hard drives, RAID, NAS, and LTO systems.

15. Is reformatting of collections an eligible activity?

Reformatting of collections is not an eligible activity in PAG, however you may seek funding to develop a digitization plan. These plans are often made with the assistance of a consultant and in tandem with digital preservation assessments.

The Humanities Collections and Reference Resources (HCRR) program funds reformatting projects. Learn more about the [HCRR program](#).

16. Is fully processing a collection and other extensive cataloging and descriptive activities eligible?

Extensive cataloging, indexing, arranging and describing archival collections are not eligible through PAG. However, you may perform format and location surveys or inventories, update condition reports, develop processing plans, and perform other initial preparatory steps towards describing your collections. This work is often done in tandem with rehousing collections.

For larger planning or implementation projects to process collections, consider the HCRR program.

17. Does the PAG program support repair or renovation of buildings or other structures damaged by disasters?

No, but the PAG program can support the care of damaged *collections*. Eligible activities include disaster planning and mitigation, the purchase of emergency supplies and equipment, and education and training for disaster planning and response.

18. How do we make the case for the humanities significance of our collections?

Describe how your collections relate to the community, field, and/or time period they represent. What histories can be told through the collections and how might they deepen or diversify understanding of American history and culture?

For example, an initial description of an archival collection might state that the collection comprises two hundred letters written by prominent political figures between 1870 and 1885; twenty-four linear feet of records documenting the environmental impact of a regional coal mining company active from 1940 through 1970; fifty-two maps documenting the history and development of the local transportation system; twelve volumes of birth and death records for local residents from 1860 to 1950; and nine hundred photographs depicting community life during the 1930s and 1940s.

An initial description of a museum collection might state that the collection comprises ten thousand objects from the early 1800s to the present, including approximately one thousand costumes and items of personal adornment, four hundred agricultural implements, and hundreds of household products and furnishings.

Also think of ways to connect your collections to both local and national narratives and highlight specific examples to help make your case.