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Peer reviewed

Guidelines for Efficient Archival Processing in the University of California Libraries

Version 4

May 2020

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Table of Contents

1. Introduction	5
1.A. Background	5
1.B. Goals	6
1.C. Core Recommended Principles	7
1.D. How to Use These Guidelines	8
1.E. "Good-enough" Processing Can Be Quality Processing	9
1.F. Implications Beyond Processing	9
1.G. Recommended Policies	10
2. The Goal: Expose All Archival Holdings	12
2.A. Provide a Collection-Level Record for All Archival Holdings	12
2.B. Suggested Access Policies and Procedures	12
3. Appraisal, Reappraisal, and Deaccessioning	15
3.A. Rely on Policy to Guide Appraisal	16
3.B. Appraise Prior to Accessioning	16
3.C. Appraise and Reappraise at a High Level	18
3.D. Deaccessioning	20
3.D.1. Activities included in a deaccessioning workflow	21
3.D.2. Documenting deaccessioning decisions	21
4. Accessioning	22
4.A. Pre-Custodial Interventions	22
4.B. Accessioning Documentation	24
4.C. Levels of Intervention During Accessioning	25
4.D. Create and Publish a Collection-level Record as Part of Accessioning	26
4.E. Timeframe	28
4.F. Deposits	27

4.G. Prepare for Access During Accessioning	28
4.H. Recommendations for Accessioning Born-Digital Materials	29
5. Process Collections at an Appropriate Level	30
5.A. Levels of Control	30
5.A.1. Processing levels and implementation	31
5.A.2. Processing levels and collection attributes	32
5.B. Assessing Collections	33
5.B.1. Use value scores to plan level of effort	33
5.B.2. Target level of control	35
5.B.3. Other factors influencing the level of control	36
5.C. Processing Rates	38
5.D. Assessing Labor Allocations	39
5.E. Processing Plans	40
5.F. Processing Metrics	41
5.F.1. Baseline elements	41
5.F.2. Tracking methodology and tools	43
6. Efficient Processing Approaches	43
6.A. Applicable to All Collections	43
6.A.1 Arrangement	43
6.A.2 Description	44
6.A.3 Preservation	47
6.A.5. Privacy	49
6.B. Managing Multiple Accessions	50
6.B.1. Processing a collection with multiple accessions for the first time	50
6.B.2. Managing additional accessions to a previously processed collection	50
6.C. University Archives	51

6.D. 19th Century and Earlier Collections	52
6.E. Photographic Prints and Negatives	52
6.E.1. Photographic collections managed independently of other archival materials	53
6.E.2. Photographs in manuscript and archival collections	54
6.E.3. Summary chart of processing activities for photographic collections	55
6.F. Audiovisual Recordings	56
6.F.1. User-driven access and processing	57
6.F.2. Arrangement and description	57
6.F.3. Preservation	58
7. Sustainability Plan	59
8. Appendix	60
8.A. Processing Manuals Inspired by MPLP	60
8.B. UC Processing and Accessioning Manuals	60
8.C. Processing Manuals from Other Institutions	60
8.D. Appraisal Policies and Guidelines	60
8.E. Reappraisal and Deaccessioning Policies and Guidelines	61
8.F. Collection Development Policies	61
8.G. Access Policies	61
8.H. Collection Management Policies and Manuals	61
8.I. Digital Preservation Policies	61
8.J. Data Collection Forms	61
8.K. Processing Metrics Tools	62
8.L. Sample Collection-Level Records	62
8.M. Sample Indemnification Statement	62
8.N. Sample Deaccessioning Workflows	63
8.O. Resources for Ethical and Inclusive Description	63

1. Introduction

These guidelines were originally developed in 2011-2012 for special collections and archives in the University of California Libraries and revised in 2019. The University of California has 10 campuses at Berkeley, Davis, Irvine, Los Angeles, Merced, Riverside, San Diego, San Francisco, Santa Cruz, and Santa Barbara.

1.A. Background

In 2009, a Next-Generation Technical Services (NGTS) Phase 2 team surveyed archival processing practices across all UC special collections and archives. As a result of their findings report¹, a NGTS POT (Power of Three) team was charged to accelerate processing of archival and manuscript collections. Accordingly, a Lightning Team was tasked to develop a manual to guide the implementation of the core concepts espoused by Mark A. Greene and Dennis Meissner's 2005 article "More Product, Less Process" (MPLP) throughout the UC system. The 2012 [Guidelines for Efficient Archival Processing in the University of California Libraries](#) was the result of the Lightning Team's work. The *Guidelines* became the template for improved archival processing across the University's campus libraries, following the call for "a new set of arrangement, preservation, and description guidelines that 1) expedites getting collection materials into the hands of users; 2) assures arrangement of materials adequate to user needs; 3) takes the minimal steps necessary to physically preserve collection materials; and 4) describes materials sufficient[ly] to promote use."² This renewed focus on achieving basic physical and intellectual control over all collections, thus improving access to a wider body of materials, prioritized identifying the necessary "golden minimum" of time and resources to invest in each collection.

In 2018, a team of UC librarians surveyed archivist³ colleagues system-wide about how they used the *Guidelines* in day-to-day practice. Survey results supported the addition of specific content areas (specifically accessioning, born-digital processing, and appraisal), and indicated the document would benefit by shifting away from lengthy explanations and defenses of efficient processing strategies -- which are now well-established in archival literature -- and toward extensible collection management. Extensible collection management emphasizes establishing a baseline level of access to all holdings, followed by additional processing based on user demand and assessment-based prioritization.⁴ This approach, when conducted in accordance with existing archival principles and

¹ New Modes for Access Task Group, "Next Generation Technical Services: New Modes for Organizing and Providing Access to Special Collections, Archives, and Digital Formats" (2011).

² Mark A. Greene and Dennis Meissner, "More Product, Less Process: Revamping Traditional Archival Processing," *American Archivist* 68 (Fall/Winter 2005): 212-213.

³ The term *archivist* is used throughout this document to describe both staff and librarians performing archival processing activities in the UC Libraries.

⁴ Recommendations and case studies for extensible collection management and processing are codified in Daniel A. Santamaria's book *Extensible Processing for Archives and Special Collections: Reducing Processing Backlogs*. Chicago: Neal-Schuman, an imprint of the American Library Association, 2015.

standards, emphasizes flexibility and strategic decision-making. Including extensible collection management principles in the *Guidelines* aligns statewide UC practice with national trends, and strengthens our focus on best practices, transparency, and the needs of our users.

This strategy resulted in two key changes. The first was to ground the text in a more holistic approach to archival stewardship. We recognize processing as one component of a larger ecosystem inclusive of many activities undertaken in the life cycle of archival materials. There is emerging research on addressing the operational costs of collecting and maintaining collections, while emphasizing an ethics of collection care.⁵ This reframing recognizes the impact of backlogs on access, staff time, collection development, and space management, and emphasizes the inherently collaborative and interconnected nature of archival work.

The second major change was to interweave processing and management strategies for born-digital content throughout the document, rather than addressing them separately. The decision to integrate this information stemmed from a belief that the *Guidelines* should speak to the day-to-day experiences of archivists throughout the UC system. The increasing prevalence of born-digital material means boutique, siloed approaches are neither practical nor realistic. Born-digital processing *is* archival processing, and thus should be fully operationalized within archival programs. Archivists who are responsible for digital collections must be able to talk with donors and curators about best practices for acquiring, processing, and providing access to digital content, and collaboratively create policies for digital collection stewardship. We hope the *Guidelines* support integration of born-digital appraisal, accessioning, and processing workflows.

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1.B. Goals

These guidelines will help the UC Libraries:

- Implement ethical, efficient, and transparent collection management practices to make materials available for research as quickly as possible
- Standardize archival appraisal, accessioning, processing and access practices
- Define baseline archival processing standards for both analog and born-digital materials
- Integrate born-digital processing into existing efficient processing workflows
- Implement iterative and extensible stewardship and processing approaches
- Assess and communicate the operational impact of archival functions (such as accessioning, appraisal, and processing) across the life cycle of collections and among staff and leadership
- Work in a cost-effective manner

⁵ See [OCLC Collection Building and Operational Impacts Working Group](#) for tools and resources.

1.C. Core Recommended Principles

The following principles set forth in these Guidelines align with the DACS Statement of Principles⁶ and the SAA Core Values Statement and Code of Ethics.⁷ They are recommended as a foundational set of values for archival work in all University of California Libraries.

1. Provide access to all holdings.

- a. A repository's first priority should be to gain collection-level control of all holdings to enable discovery. Collection-level records should note the presence of born-digital and audiovisual material.
- b. Unprocessed collections should be open to researchers by default.
- c. Exceptions may be made for collections with legal or contractual restrictions, fragile or moldy materials, materials with high theft potential, or collections with ethical and/or culturally sensitive considerations.

2. Always look for the "golden minimum."

- a. For each collection, perform the minimum amount of work necessary to make a collection accessible⁸ with standardized, structured description.
- b. Work beyond the minimum should be specifically justified, e.g., due to the material's research value, presence of at-risk media formats, digitization priorities, or other business requirements such as donor relations or use in exhibitions.
- c. Resist the impulse to handle material at the item level.

3. Intentionally and strategically assess the processing work necessary for every collection.

- a. Be flexible in determining processing levels of effort.
- b. Do not expect a "one-size-fits-all" approach for arrangement, description, or preservation across all collections, or even within collections.
- c. Limit time-intensive physical handling and folder-level processing.

4. Develop a transparent, metrics-based understanding of the resources required to care responsibly for collections and ensure accessibility. This helps staff understand expectations, and facilitates frank conversations with administrators and prospective donors.

- a. Document local appraisal, accessioning, and processing practices and procedures. Review these procedures regularly.

⁶ [Describing Archives: A Content Standard \(DACS\) Statement of Principles \(version 2019.0.3\)](#)

⁷ SAA Core Values Statement and Code of Ethics

⁸ The term "accessible" denotes the ability to pursue and achieve access to contextual information and/or content, regardless of format. This reflects the DACS Principles for Archival Description, which state: archival description should be easy to use, re-use, and share; and archival description should be accessible and intelligible.

- b. Consistently measure and analyze the amount of time and resources expended on various tasks related to stewarding collections within a repository. Be able to summarize and report results.
- c. Developing consistent metrics is inherently difficult for born-digital content due to the broad range of possible carrier types, content, file formats, operating systems, and other technical considerations, but archivists must document this work to emphasize its value, determine scalability, and better understand workflows and models as digital processing efforts mature.⁹

It is also recommended that campuses use an archival collection management system, and utilize relevant tools and technologies to streamline the creation, reuse, and management of description or metadata about archival collections.

1.D. How to Use These Guidelines

These guidelines are meant to define a holistic approach to managing collections, regardless of size, format, content type, or value. Although these guidelines suggest many ways to make collections accessible with a minimal amount of work, this minimum is not prescriptive. They are designed to help archivists reduce the amount of effort invested in any one collection so that effort may be employed more broadly across a repository's holdings.

These guidelines are not intended to function as a processing manual. Instead, they should be applied as overarching principles and *used in tandem with your institution's manual*. The guidelines align with professional standards and support our obligations to collection creators, donors, and users, as they:

- Ask archivists and other library stakeholders (including administrators, public services professionals, information technology staff, catalogers, and selectors/curators) to consider their repository's and users' needs and capacities, and make all collections accessible.
- Provide strategies to help archivists tackle massive backlogs.
- Help archivists determine how much processing and preservation work is necessary, and support their informed decisions regarding appropriate time investiture in collections.
- Empower archivists to evaluate the specific needs of a collection and make informed, professional decisions appropriate to that collection's requirements and anticipated use.
- Value archivists' time and expertise.
- Encourage archivists to measure and track processing productivity to help repositories achieve their goals.
- Enable repositories to incorporate born-digital processing into their accessioning and processing workflows.

⁹ See Chela Scott Weber, "[Time Estimation for Processing Born-Digital Collections](#)," in *Hanging Together: the OCLC Research Blog* (2020).

1.E. "Good-enough" Processing Can Be Quality Processing

Quality processing does not necessarily require "one-shot" extensive arrangement, description, or preservation. There are many degrees of processing, each of which can be done well to ensure that an appropriate amount of work has been performed to make a collection accessible and responsibly cared for by the owning unit. In other words, quality in archival processing is not necessarily measured by intensity or level of detail. Quality may be measured by how effectively a processed collection serves its users and how wisely an archivist has expended a repository's resources to achieve this, over time.

An archivist's craft lies in analysis and decision-making. Sound collection management practices and archival expertise weigh many criteria to determine how much description, organization, or preservation is truly necessary. A skilled archivist, working within an environment of documented strategies and priorities for their repository, flexibly applies the most appropriate method of file transfer, physical arrangement, description, or preservation technique from an arsenal of possibilities to achieve sufficient intellectual and physical control over materials. A responsible and well-trained archivist asks, "What are the costs?" and "What are the benefits?" for all processing actions. Iterative processing lays a foundation for future archival interventions, as they may be needed, which requires planning, flexibility, and creative compromises. In sum, the efficient processing techniques described in these guidelines empower archivists to make informed choices about their work so that they may surface more research materials to users.

1.F. Implications Beyond Processing

Implementation of these guidelines will impact every aspect of a repository's operations, including curatorship, donor relations, preservation, public services, cataloging, and the user experience. When the responsibility of caring for and providing long-term access to unique materials is examined across the full spectrum of professional expertise and resources required, it is evident that efficient processing is only part of the puzzle. Efficient processing strategies work best in environments that support collaboration, communication, and transparency in policy and practice. The processing work of archivists intersects with a larger ecosystem of collection management activity, which includes development and communication with donors; acquisition, transfer, and accessioning of materials; metadata creation; access, use, and re-use of materials, their surrogates and their descriptions; and appraisal, re-appraisal, and deaccessioning. These guidelines have been expanded to touch on these areas, as outcomes of each element within this wider scope of work directly impacts the efficacy of archivists.

Library backlogs in the University of California are the result of special collections and archives acquiring more material than library staffing, planning, and resources can handle. Efficient processing is one strategy to help manage the burden, but is not a "silver bullet" in eliminating backlogs. Efficient processing works best when it is part of an overall effort to implement an extensible collection management program that prioritizes baseline access to all collections and

brings judicious pre-custodial appraisal, iterative and re-usable description, and user-driven needs into sharp focus.

Management and mitigation of backlogs is also facilitated by information-gathering and good communication among staff during the pre-custodial intervention (see Section 4.A. for recommendations). Selectors¹⁰ play a key role in facilitating partnerships with creators and donors to make prudent appraisals, and carefully documenting decisions prior to acquisition. This includes initiating frank discussions with donors about library policies and practices that manage expectations and prioritize access, re-use, and downstream digitization. Such conversations require that selectors are cognizant of technical and resource dependencies, and can manage expectations and articulate strategies for both preservation and access. Institutions may need to update or re-examine their access policies and reading room procedures (recommendations for changes to public services practices are addressed in Section 2.B.), as users may need additional support to help them find information in collections that are organized with less granularity.

We will respond to these challenges with the time and intellectual capital gained by implementing "good enough" processing -- that is, quality processing at the appropriate level for all collections, across our repositories. Through this shared effort, we move closer to intentional, wise collection management practices that facilitate ethical stewardship and equitable access.

1.G. Recommended Policies

Reference to many types of policies are made throughout the guidelines. This list is a starting point for basic useful policies that repositories may elect to have in place to support efficient processing and extensible collection management. Remember that policies are a proactive tool: they are most effective when they are in place and used to guide everyday procedures, not when they are written as a reaction to problems as they occur. Policies should be in writing, openly shared with and taught to staff, and available to the public when appropriate. All policies should be subject to periodic review and revision. Examples of some of these policies can be found in the Appendix.

- **Access policy:** Addresses principles of access followed by the repository, including regulations on special cases (such as audiovisual media, born-digital, and other types of restricted content). Repositories should explicitly address the potential presence of personally identifying or sensitive information in collections. The policy can state the responsibilities of the researcher if this information is encountered, and defines a workflow for staff for remediation and documentation. Strong access policies alleviate pressure to process collections at intensive levels due to privacy concerns, and allow repositories to more freely provide access to minimally processed and unprocessed collections.

¹⁰ The term *selector* in the UC context refers to curators, collection development leads, and others identified as the individual(s) making the *decision* to collect (acquire, accept, or purchase) archival materials.

- **Collection Development policy:** Guide to a repository's specific collecting areas and topical or regional strengths; may include a reflection on the repository's goals for acquisitions. A collection development policy may also include a section describing materials that the library does NOT want to acquire and will not retain (such as clippings, reprints, duplicative slides, unwanted audiovisual media formats, etc.). A Collection Development policy should be public-facing and shared with prospective donors.
- **Collection Management policy:** Addresses all aspects of collections stewardship, including accessioning, appraisal, deaccessioning and disposal, loans, preservation/conservation, and collection documentation.
- **Reproduction/Publication policy:** Guidance for users on publishing from repository holdings, either by means of quotations, in facsimile or by other forms of reproduction (all publication is subject to applicable United States copyright law, Title 17, United States Code). Permission to publish materials is typically required from holders of copyright; some repositories also stipulate permission must be granted from the holding institution, or require applicants demonstrate they have secured the necessary permissions. This may include rules that distinguish between commercial and noncommercial uses.
- **Digital Preservation policy:** Addresses and defines the series of managed activities necessary to ensure that digital material remains secure and accessible into the future. If an institution endeavors to collect born-digital material, it is accountable for its processing, availability, and long-term preservation. A digital preservation policy establishes and makes explicit institutional commitments regarding digital preservation practices.
- **Accepted or Recommended Digital Formats policy:** Describes digital file formats that a repository is currently able to preserve and make accessible. The policy should be public-facing and shared with prospective donors or content sources. Organizations should avoid collecting material that they cannot make accessible or preserve. An accepted or recommended formats policy informs acquisition strategies, promotes transparency, expedites processing, and enforces a common set of expectations among all stakeholders.

2. The Goal: Expose All Archival Holdings

The recommendation is that all UC Libraries provide a collection-level record for every archival and manuscript collection in their repositories, including unprocessed or restricted collections, ensuring that every collection is visible to users. Application of the DACS¹¹ "Single-Level Required" guidelines to create collection-level records in MARC (catalog records) and/or EAD should make this goal possible.¹²

2.A. Provide a Collection-Level Record for All Archival Holdings

Collection-level records should be made available online in the library catalog and/or the Online Archive of California.

Recommendations:

1. For institutions that have not yet represented all their holdings online, refocus staff energies on creating collection-level records for all holdings.
2. Create collection-level records as part of the accessioning process. All collection-level records should indicate if the collection includes born-digital and/or audiovisual material, and its extent (including estimated file size and media carriers).
3. When additional accessions are received for a collection, update existing MARC records and/or finding aids to reflect that addition as part of the accessioning process.
4. Use ArchivesSpace or other archival collection management system to streamline creation and management of collection-level records, and export them in an appropriate format (e.g., EAD and/or MARC) for loading into shared catalogs and the Online Archive of California.
5. If you have box lists or inventories that are serviceable and can be made available in electronic format (such as searchable PDF), consider linking them to collection-level descriptions,¹³ or add a note that inventories are available upon request. For collections received electronically, consider creating a file list immediately and linking it to a collection-level record.

2.B. Suggested Access Policies and Procedures

Discoverable collections will be requested for reference and use. Traditionally, many institutions have limited patron access to unprocessed collections. It is recommended that UC special collections and archives utilize policies and procedures that promote and safely enable access to unprocessed

¹¹ [Describing Archives: A Content Standard](#) (Society of American Archivists, 2019). DACS is the U.S. standard for description of archival materials and their creators.

¹² The full original recommendation is in the POT 3 report, [UC Bibliographic Standards for Cooperative, Vendor, and Campus Backlog Cataloging](#), rev. 7/2012.

¹³ Inventories may be attached to OAC finding aids via RecordEXPRESS or following OAC's procedures for submitting supplemental PDFs. For an example of a collection level record with an attached inventory, see the guide to the [Stanley Habitat Restoration Group Records](#).

materials. Having documented procedures and workflows in place, and being able to demonstrate they are consistently followed (functional requirements, checklists, etc.) is necessary for due diligence in regards to the management of confidential or sensitive materials on behalf of the repository.

MPLP principles advocate that all unprocessed collections, barring donor-imposed or legal restrictions, be presumed open for research. Collections with minimal to no processing may generate legitimate concerns regarding privacy, security, preservation, and the possibility that an additional burden will be placed on the reference staff. Adjust policies and procedures to manage donor, user, and staff expectations, and minimize any potentially negative impacts from making unprocessed collections available for use.

Recommendations:

1. As part of accessioning, determine whether an accession (or parts therein) has restrictions. Note this in the collection-level record.
2. When the condition of an unprocessed collection is unknown, review requested materials on demand to determine suitability for use.
 - a. In the collection-level record, indicate that there is a review process. For example: "The collection is unprocessed. It may contain restricted materials. Please contact the Department of Special Collections & Archives in advance to request access."
 - b. Reviews for sensitive, delicate, or restricted materials can be done by archivists and need not be the sole responsibility of the reference staff.
 - c. Reviewers should assess the urgency of the request by identifying whether the user is visiting from out of town, if they have identified a deadline, and any other competing needs that impact staff time.
 - d. Archivists should look foremost for legal restrictions, such as student records, or donor-imposed restrictions agreed to in the deed-of-gift. For born-digital materials, develop standardized checks to run against unprocessed or minimally-processed material to help mitigate risk of accessing protected information, such as simple pattern searches to identify social security numbers.
 - e. After material is reviewed, update access notes appropriately.
3. Assess your institution's tolerance for risk (some decisions may need to be cleared with campus legal counsel), and develop local policy accordingly. Review and restrict materials based on this assessment. Err on the side of providing access.
 - a. Your institution may need to accept that some overlooked and inappropriate material may get into the hands of researchers. Communicate with library and other campus stakeholders how this risk is balanced against the need to provide timely access to materials and process collections efficiently.
 - b. Establish procedures for reacting to user discovery of material posing privacy concerns.

- c. Consider language in researcher guidelines and registration information that alerts researchers to their responsibility not to publish or disseminate information that is a breach of an individual's privacy.
4. Develop reading room policies to guide use of unprocessed or minimally processed material.
 - a. Determine how you will handle unfolded material, or material in original folders and envelopes with no apparent order. Providing patrons with place cards and instructing them to mark where material is removed from a box is an easy solution.
 - b. Provide gloves when patrons use unsleeved photographs.
 - c. During accessioning or after a review, develop a way to communicate with public services staff about known special access needs. For example, write on the outside of the box that photographs are present and gloves are required for use.
 - d. Where possible and appropriate, have policies and equipment capabilities to facilitate reading room access to minimally processed digital content, and delivery of unrestricted materials directly to researchers over the internet through Secure File Transfer Protocol (SFTP), file sharing, or other means.
5. Work with public services staff to implement strategies for unprocessed or minimally processed materials. Staff need to be comfortable with a variety of surprises.
 - a. Prepare and train staff in access options for digital material that may not be readily rendered due to lack of required software.
 - b. Encourage public services staff to take an active role in reading room management and instruct patrons in how to use materials. Reading room vigilance will help ensure unprocessed materials are not damaged or rearranged during use.
 - c. Some researchers may have more questions because materials are less finely described. Public services may need to provide enhanced assistance for these materials. Alternatively, repositories may recommend that out-of-town researchers hire local researchers (e.g., local graduate history students) to do research for them.
6. Be aware of the implications of sending unprocessed or minimally processed materials off-site, if limited retrieval mechanisms are in place. Be aware of and sensitive to limits on paging and transport procedures, and work with Public Services to mitigate the burden.
7. Track use. Allow user demand to guide processing priorities.
 - a. Efficient processing is an iterative process. If collections are in high demand, if the level of description is not adequate for user needs, or if materials are found to be at risk, the collection can be processed to a higher level of detail and control, or be considered a higher priority for more intensive processing.
 - b. Obtain feedback from reference staff and researchers to determine satisfaction, and identify potential problems.

3. Appraisal, Reappraisal, and Deaccessioning

Appraisal, reappraisal, and deaccessioning are key functions within an access-driven archives program. Appraisal is the process of distinguishing records of enduring value from those of little or no value so that the latter may be eliminated.¹⁴ Appraisal is an iterative process, and while initial appraisal should occur prior to acquisition, further appraisal may take place at finer levels during accessioning and processing. Reappraisal occurs when considering whether to deaccession, or eliminate, material from a repository's holdings.

Appraisal responsibilities of selectors and archivists may vary by campus. It is recommended that appraisal-related roles and workflows are locally documented to clarify expectations and facilitate collaboration.

Responsible appraisal practices ensure transparency to staff and users by documenting archivist actions that impact the nature and use of archival materials. Sound appraisal decisions help repositories provide baseline access to all collections by:

- Encouraging prudent assessment decisions **before** material is accessioned into the repository
- Limiting collecting to no more than institutions can reasonably make accessible
- Relying on well-defined policies to guide decisions, including UC system-wide policies where applicable
- Supporting analysis of the persons, organizations, or functional context behind the records before appraising the records themselves
- Supporting appraisal and reappraisal of high-level aggregations of material
- Minimizing time spent on collections or series that are of limited value, have insurmountable condition or preservation issues, or are infrequently used, heavily restricted, out of scope, or of unknown provenance
- Ensuring transparency to staff and users by documenting archivist actions that impact the nature, use, and understanding of archival materials.

¹⁴ [National Archives \(UK\) Appraisal Policy](#). See also the SAA's [Dictionary of Archives Terminology](#), which defines appraisal as "the process of determining whether records and other materials have permanent (archival) value. Appraisal may be done at the collection, creator, series, file, or item level."

3.A. Rely on Policy to Guide Appraisal

The UC Libraries maintains system-wide appraisal policies for two types of collections: university archives¹⁵ and faculty papers.¹⁶ There is currently no system-wide policy governing appraisal of manuscript collections. Therefore, appraisal of all collection materials must principally align with each repository's local policies, which ensure that operational considerations and professional ethics are the foundation of appraisal decisions. The two principal policy types that guide appraisal are collection development and accepted/recommended formats (see Section 1.G.). All repositories should avoid collecting materials that are out of scope, cannot be made accessible, and for which no processing or accessibility plans are in place.

Repositories should explicitly address personally identifiable records (records protected by state and federal privacy laws) in their collection development policies and discourage the practice of accepting such materials. Whenever possible, reduce intake of sensitive material by communicating to donors that certain materials should not be included, such as student records, patient files, and employment, medical, and financial records. Selectors should explain that it is usually not possible to review individual documents for private information during processing. Convey to donors that they are primarily responsible for identifying sensitive information, and describe the repository's protocol for weeding.

3.B. Appraise Prior to Accessioning

Pre-custodial appraisal ensures major appraisal decisions are made by those with firsthand knowledge of record creators, collection provenance, and the preferences and expectations of donors. Appraisal should involve all impacted stakeholders whenever possible, including selectors, accessioning or processing archivists, and archivists responsible for digital materials. Appraisal decisions directly affect not only space and staffing capacities, but the future access and use of materials. Delayed or postponed appraisal decisions create backlogs, increase tension with donors, and can harm the reputation of a repository. For example, a donor who gives cartons of newspaper clippings and signs a deed of gift has a reasonable expectation they will be valued and processed; for archivists to discard them later during processing may result in confusion and damaged relationships. Take time during pre-custody to assess the materials against the repository's documented collection priorities and appraisal criteria (including a list of accepted formats); it will save time later. If pre-custodial appraisal is not possible, then appraise the material during the accessioning process, or as soon as possible after its physical transfer.

¹⁵ Appraisal of university archives is governed by the [University of California Records Retention Schedule](#) and Section IV. Collecting Scope of the [Policies for Administration of University of California Archives](#).

¹⁶ Appraisal of UC faculty papers is informed by Appendix II. [UC Faculty Papers: Identification and Appraisal](#) of the Policies for Administration of University of California Archives.

Recommendations for selectors (all materials):

1. Assist donors in appraising material before transfer. If possible, schedule site visits.
2. Specific discussions of issues such as privacy, preservation, and access for born-digital and non-digital materials are essential for both selector and donor. It gives the donor time to think about any security or privacy risks present in their materials and to develop a realistic set of expectations regarding the services the library provides. Consider drafting a set of questions or a checklist that addresses privacy and security risks.¹⁷
3. Ask donors to supply description. When possible, encourage donors to create structured electronic description of materials before donation, such as an inventory in .xls or .csv file format. Consider developing a template or electronic form for donors to fill out.
4. Involve archivists in the pre-custodial process whenever possible. This will ensure they have the necessary information to make appropriate appraisal decisions while processing, and provide context on original arrangement. A practical way to encourage this is to have archivists participate in the on-site packing processes.

Recommendations for selectors (born-digital materials):

1. Pre-custodial appraisal is critical when acquiring born-digital content. While it may be tempting to accept an entire computer or box of disks and plan to appraise later during processing, deferring appraisal of born-digital content quickly produces unmanageable digital backlogs and obscures responsible planning for preservation and needed resources.
2. Communication between selectors and archivists responsible for digital collections should begin well before materials are acquired. This ensures that proper steps are taken to appraise materials prior to accessioning, and prepares staff for the work of ingest upon acquisition.¹⁸ Selectors, with the help of archivists responsible for digital collections, can work closely with donors or creators to:
 - a. Provide context for digital files and their organization.
 - b. Recommend tools and software to aid in the creation of file lists or inventories.
 - c. Identify the extent to which the content is duplicated in analog formats in hybrid collections.
3. Selectors and archivists must realistically plan for the process of guiding donors through appraisal of digital materials. Appraisal may be informed by the types and formats of materials the donor possesses. A predominance of discrete, removable media like floppy

¹⁷ See a sample donor survey in [Appendix F \[PDF\]](#) of [AIMS Born-Digital Collections: An Inter-Institutional Model for Stewardship](#) (AIMS Work Group, 2012).

¹⁸ See [Born Digital: Guidance for Donors, Dealers, and Archival Repositories by Council on Library and Information Resources](#) (Council on Library and Information Resources, 2013) for guidelines on the acquisition process, including conducting initial collection reviews, assessing privacy issues, and creating acquisition agreements for born digital collections.

disks and zip disks, for example, makes appraisal more difficult as these formats are time intensive, and donors may no longer have the equipment necessary to view these materials. Digital content that is easily accessible and searchable via larger capacity storage, like USB drives or cloud storage, can make appraisal with donors a more achievable task.

4. If possible, meet with the record creator to gather contextual information such as file organization, and communicate what formats the library is currently able to preserve and make accessible. For example, if digital records in a proprietary file type require specialized software for access (e.g. CAD files), the donor may be willing to convert the files upfront to a more accessible format.
5. Be prepared to respond to unexpected and potentially sensitive born-digital materials that the donor did not intend to give, such as inadvertently downloaded email. Manage donor expectations by clearly communicating the scope of labor required to screen for sensitive content.
6. The use of automated tools can make it possible to efficiently appraise and assess large collections of digital files on site.¹⁹
7. Create a set of regular expression pattern searches and a master set of keywords for each content type unique to the collection or phrases that will be helpful in searching for PII, PHI, HIPAA, FERPA, or other privacy or donor identified restrictions. Create another set of keywords that will be helpful in identifying materials the repository *is* interested in acquiring²⁰

3.C. Appraise and Reappraise at a High Level

Performing appraisal or reappraisal at high levels saves staff time, storage, and supply costs. Ideally, major appraisal decisions are made prior to acquiring materials. However, appraisal can also occur during accessioning and processing activities. Archivists should feel empowered to carry out appraisal during these stages and collaborate with selectors as needed.

Recommendations for all materials:

1. Appraise large aggregations of material at the collection, series, subseries, box, directory, or other appropriate macro-level. Consider the functions and activities of the records creator and how they fit into the collecting mission of the repository, rather than accepting everything and deferring appraisal to folder or item-level review while processing. Consider which functions should be documented, and select record groups or series that best represent those functions.

¹⁹ Such as BulkExtractor in the BitCurator environment, or ePADD for email.

²⁰ See [A Regular Expression Search Primer for Forensic Analysts](#) (Tim Cook, 2011) for a guide on some commonly used regular expressions for sensitive data. This can also be done in BulkExtractor, see [Find Potentially Sensitive Information with Bulk Extractor Viewer](#).

2. When possible, identify and assess meaningful series within collections during appraisal. Material can then be packed roughly according to identifiable groups or series, thereby reducing or potentially eliminating time spent surveying the collection before processing.
3. Do not weed items from folders. "Weeding is for gardeners, not archivists."²¹
4. Document major appraisal decisions. Decisions can be documented in the collection management system, the collection file, and in appraisal notes in finding aids.²² Documenting appraisal actions in finding aids is in accordance with [DACS Principle 6](#) and ensures that appraisal decisions, which may impact user's access to and understanding of materials, are transparent.
5. Use consistent documentation practices to inform decision-making for future accruals and build informed relationships with records creators and their agents.

Recommendations specific to born-digital materials:

1. Appraising digital content at a high level means surveying carriers, disk-images, and directories, not individual files.
2. Do not rename or re-arrange digital files during appraisal. Focus on selection decisions and identifying accepted formats -- that is the focus of the intervention during this phase.
3. Commonly discarded digital content includes system files, software applications, user libraries, and duplicate files.
4. Duplicate files can be identified by comparing hash values or using tools that automate the recognition and deletion of duplicate files, such as TreeSize Professional or FTK.
5. Tools may also be used to sort files by format, size, and other data points, which may aid the appraisal process. For example, sorting by file size allows you to easily see the largest files in the collection, some of which may not be essential to retain. Similarly, sorting by format extension allows you to easily identify software applications or file formats that are likely out of scope.

Recommendations specific to audiovisual recordings:

1. In general, do not invest resources in converting, viewing, or listening to audiovisual material as part of the appraisal process. Instead, determine what formats your repository can accept, and what type of documentation (labels on media, donor/creator provided inventories) you require. It is okay to accept unlabeled or poorly labeled items if it is likely they contain significant content. However, this approach shifts the burden of identifying important materials to future researchers, so have a workflow in place to provide researchers access to under-described content on demand.
2. Determine an appropriate appraisal level (such as series or subseries, based on anticipated content or accepted formats). Have a high degree of confidence, based on context and

²¹ Greene, p. 181.

²² See [DACS 5.3: Appraisal, Destruction, and Scheduling Information](#)

- existing documentation, that the selected recordings align with existing collection development policies.
3. If the recordings are known to have exceptional rarity and/or research value, consider immediately planning for the resources necessary to reformat or create digital access copies (including grant opportunities). Many magnetic media formats are fragile and nearing the end of their lifespan.
 4. Be cautious about letting the cost of transfer or repair determine your appraisal decisions. Professional and unusual formats have a greater likelihood of having unique content on them. Unlabeled videocassettes or audiocassettes are much less likely to be as important as an unlabeled 2" videotape, which likely was professionally recorded and saved for a reason. If the cost of transfer or repair is too high for your institution or you have no way to playback the format, you can take this into account during your appraisal, but don't make it the determining factor.
 5. Remove commercial, popular, or commonly available recordings, if not highly relevant and integral to the collection.
 6. If reformatting cannot be performed in-house, ensure that donors, curators, and administrators are aware of the reformatting costs. Ask donors for playback equipment or funds to reformat (digitize) recordings.

3.D. Deaccessioning

Deaccessioning refers to the permanent removal of collections or portions of collections from a repository. It is a legitimate and ethical archival practice that is part of the continuum of archival stewardship. Deaccessioning happens only after a collection has been reappraised using a well-documented reappraisal process. Not all reappraisal work leads to deaccessioning; in fact, reappraisal may result in the decision to process collections further for better usability.

Like appraisal, deaccessioning is a collaborative and shared responsibility. Decision-making should include applicable stakeholders such as curators, archivists, donors, and administrators. UC University Archivists have the authority to deaccession University Archives material, per Section VI of the [Policies for Administration of University of California Archives](#). The University of California Libraries does not currently maintain a system-wide policy on the deaccessioning of manuscript collections, therefore, deaccessioning of these materials must principally align with each repository's local policies.²³

Unlike routine weeding, deaccessioning is a formal process and all campuses should have a written deaccessioning policy in place before undertaking this work. Consult the most recent version of SAA's [Guidelines for Reappraisal and Decassessioning](#), and adhere to the suggested guidelines to mitigate risk. When undertaking deaccessioning, it is also important to allow time and space for the

²³ A case study of a UCLA University Archives reappraisal and deaccessioning project is published in Jackson, Laura U. Reappraisal and Deaccessioning in Archives and Special Collections. 2019.

emotional labor needed to manage any rejection felt by donors, or a donor's family, in the course of establishing terms for the return or transfer of materials. Practice empathy and active listening around this perceived loss.

3.D.1. Activities included in a deaccessioning workflow

A deaccessioning workflow should address the decisions and actions to be undertaken at each step of the deaccessioning process, with the ultimate goal of making that process consistent, appropriately documented, and compliant with all applicable legal and procedural protocols. This allows for both clarity and accountability. Workflows will vary depending on how much of a collection will be deaccessioned and whether or not there is gift documentation. See [Appendix 8.N.](#) for sample scenarios. Activities should include:

- Review of any existing gift or purchase documentation and legal agreements between donors and the Regents.
- Collaborative and documented decision-making by collection stewards and administrators, which includes participation from across collection development, collection management, and public services.
- Communication with donors and other stakeholders. Depending on the specific language in a signed deed of gift, a notification letter may not be necessary.²⁴ However, courtesy notifications provide transparency and may help to mitigate any potential damage to donor relationships.
- Method and extent of material disposition (i.e., returning to the donor, shredding, deletion of content, or transfer to another repository) and any corresponding documentation.
- Updates and changes to collection description, visibility, and access to researchers.

3.D.2. Documenting deaccessioning decisions

Because deaccessioning can raise legal concerns, impact donor relations, and be time-intensive, it is important that deaccessioning work is approached in a systematic and transparent fashion with thorough documentation. Capture deaccessioning decisions in some or all of the following places:

- If applicable, updates to deeds of gift, and other legal forms
- Collection files: memos, correspondence (including emails), and deaccession records
- In text files or logs that document actions taken and detailed information within an Archival Information Package (AIP) containing born-digital records
- ArchivesSpace (or other collection management system)
- Finding aids (as applicable, for information that will assist the public, such as transparency about disposition schedules)

²⁴ SAA, "Guidelines for Reappraisal and Deaccessioning," p.23.

4. Accessioning

Archivists have a professional obligation to make collections accessible to the public in the shortest possible time. During accessioning, baseline control is established over newly acquired accretions, descriptions are crafted and made accessible, and the stage is set for further processing, if justified. As summarized by Daniel Santamaria, "any archival repository or special collections library invested in processing and exposing backlogs should also ensure that newly received material [...is not...] simply taken into the repository and left to linger in a newly created backlog."²⁵

Accessioning is the linchpin of the archival collection management program. During accessioning, archivists establish foundational administrative, physical, and intellectual control over incoming records: content and condition are reviewed, and materials are described, labelled, and stabilized for storage and retrieval. Accessioning straddles both acquisition and collection management and, as such, is a singular opportunity to centralize documentation and information from a variety of stakeholders. An accessioning workflow will increase the accessibility of collections, lay the foundation for future processing efforts, and minimize processing backlogs.²⁶

4.A. Pre-Custodial Interventions

Prior to the transfer of a collection or accretion to the repository, there are potential opportunities for the archivist to gather information, make recommendations, or stabilize the materials. This information will facilitate administrative, physical, and intellectual control during accessioning and later processing efforts.

While it is recommended that the following activities take place during the pre-custodial intervention, some may not be feasible given the constraints of time or relations with the source or donor. The archivist uses professional judgement to ascertain the extent to which these activities can take place.

Recommendations:

1. Gather data that can be repurposed and reused.

- a. Information gathered during pre-custodial discussions between donor and archivist can be utilized in future management of that collection.
- b. Encourage donors to document technical and contextual information, create container and/or file lists, and make inventories of media carriers in a collection. To be most effective, document this information in a structured format (such as an

²⁵ Santamaria, Daniel A. *Extensible Processing for Archives and Special Collections: Reducing Processing Backlogs*. Chicago: Neal-Schuman, an imprint of the American Library Association, 2015. pp 45.

²⁶See Yun, Audra E. *Archival Accessioning*. Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 2020 for additional guidance and recommendations for establishing an accessioning program.

Excel spreadsheet) that can be easily entered into the accession record, resource record, and/or ingested into the repository's archival information system.

- c. The more information is gathered in structured and consistent ways, the more efficient and manageable it will be to create baseline access to materials. Examples of forms for data collection can be found in [Appendix 8.J](#).

2. Engage in stabilization and/or preventative conservation measures.

- a. Document the site in which the materials were held with photographs or field notes.
- b. Perform an assessment of the materials via sampling, noting document condition.
- c. Rehouse materials into clean boxes, and ask the donor to store materials in a stable environment until transfer.
- d. When rehousing alone does not provide the appropriate level of stabilization and pest mitigation, place the materials in plastic bins or seal boxes in plastic bags until they can be treated and made safely accessible.
- e. **Physical stabilization:** It is important to identify and address the presence of vermin, pests, and mold immediately upon receipt for all physical materials, including audiovisual and born-digital carriers. The transfer of materials with these preservation concerns can pose health concerns for staff, as well as possible infestation of other collections in the repository, especially those without quarantine spaces. If materials are suspected of harboring pests prior to transfer, the archivist works in collaboration with stakeholders, such as the curator and preservation team, to determine if the value of the collection warrants the labor and resources to undertake timely preservation and/or conservation interventions. More typical, mundane preservation issues, such as slumping papers, broken housing, and over-stuffing, should also be addressed during accessioning.
- f. **Digital format assessment:** If a collection contains media from which files need to be transferred to capture their data, this will greatly increase the processing time and cost of ingesting and preserving the collection. It is possible that some information can never be captured due to disk failures or hardware/software incompatibilities. In these cases, the archivist works with selectors, donors, and digital preservation staff to determine if the value of the collection warrants the enhanced interventions required to make the collection available. In some cases, this can be an opportunity to have conversations with donors about file formats that the repository is able to manage (see the Accepted Formats policy outlined in Section 1.G.). If a donor is interested in transferring materials that the repository cannot currently process or make accessible, for example, can the donor arrange to have the materials migrated to an accessible format prior to transfer? Such arrangements greatly decrease cost and processing time.

3. Collaborate with selectors to document all pre-custodial actions.

- a. Depending on the repository's resources, accessioning and processing may not occur soon after transfer. Interventions undertaken on the materials by the records

creator, their agent(s), selector, and/or archivist prior to transfer, therefore, may not be communicated or comprehensively understood later. These interventions may pertain to appraisal, preservation, arrangement, and preparing materials for physical or digital transfer.

- b. Utilize field notes to document and keep track of interventions and compile them in the collection file and/or accession record for future reference.
- c. It is particularly important to document a successful or failed transfer of digital materials, documenting the number of files and the size of the payload. The result of any failures should be acknowledged with the selector and donor in order to attempt the transfer of materials again.

4.B. Accessioning Documentation

It is imperative that *prior* to the transfer of a collection or accrual to a repository, appropriate gift agreements, memoranda of understanding (MOUs), purchasing and invoicing records, and other property agreements be negotiated and fully executed. The deed of gift or purchase agreement, in particular, ensures the owner or creator has verified their right and authority to give materials to the repository, and that the repository accepts legal custody. Without the deed of gift or purchase agreement, the repository may find itself held liable but without viable evidence of the transaction. What constitutes appropriate custodial documentation may vary, but typically includes:

- Deed of gift or addendum to existing deeds of gift
- Records transmittal form for University Archives
- Purchase agreement or bill of sale
- Inventory identifying the materials which have been agreed upon to transfer
- Resolution of the Board or Organization, for organizational records, documenting the organization's decision to place the collection at the repository and authorizing an individual from the organization as the primary signatory on the deed of gift
- Gift-in-kind receipt, probate or trust records, or similar philanthropic or charitable gift documentation
- Statement of financial value for gifts valued under \$5000 or financial appraisal (valuation) for gifts valued over \$5000
- IRS Form 8283 for donations claimed as charitable gifts for tax purposes

Executing a deed of gift is recommended for all collections. Collections without gift documentation ought not be deposited, accessioned, or processed until proper documentation has been executed, wherein the donor has legally transferred the materials to the repository, and has agreed upon the terms and conditions of the materials' stewardship. Materials with a deposit status must be prioritized lower in accessioning and processing queues.

A permanent collection file including the document(s) above as well as records of pre-custodial actions should be kept in a location (digital and/or physical) that is accessible by stakeholders in the repository.

4.C. Levels of Intervention During Accessioning

Accessioning is the first (and in some cases only) opportunity for archivists to achieve some level of physical and intellectual control of a collection or accrual.

Accessioning can be performed at varying levels of complexity and detail based on pre-custodial appraisal and initial assessments. Some examples that facilitate the creation of an accession record with robust physical or intellectual control include:

- A donor-supplied inventory at the box, folder, file, or item level
- Field notes from the curator, archivist, and/or donor that provide detailed or summary information about groupings or other filing levels within the accession
- Physical processing, file arrangement, or format migration provided by the donor or other non-repository staff
- Media-heavy accessions with metadata on the containers that would be easy to inventory at the item-level
- Bound volumes and scrapbooks with container descriptions that would be easy to inventory at the item-level
- Born-digital content where directory-level and/or disk-level titles can be generated automatically
- Field notes from the curator, archivist and/or donor that provide essential contextual information about the who, why, when, where, and how of a collection's creation. These field notes may contain information about a collection's creator and the relationships and circumstances surrounding the creation of a collection that might not be obvious from the materials themselves.

Physical condition is of primary concern during accessioning. Some important considerations to note that may impact a collection's future processing prioritization or level of preservation activity include:

- Significantly soiled, damaged, or water-damaged materials
- Pest infestations, or evidence of vermin
- Evidence of mold requiring immediate remediation
- Fragile or at-risk media formats (such as magnetic media, disk and disc media, glass plate negatives, nitrate negatives, reel-to-reel recordings, etc.)

In situations where the physical condition of materials is dire and requires immediate attention, "accessioning as processing" (addressing both the preservation or conservation needs of the material, in addition to an appropriate level of description, immediately) may be the best solution; in such situations, the repository has already committed significant resources and time in handling items in the collection.

At the point of receipt or transfer of custody to the repository, the archivist should have a general sense of next steps for creating a baseline description, and record their notes in the accession record.

4.D. Create and Publish a Collection-level Record as Part of Accessioning

Every accession should have a corresponding accession record in the repository's archival collection management system. The record includes information that can be reused in a brief collection-level catalog record and finding aid to enable discovery.²⁷ As part of the accessioning workflow for a new collection, create a brief collection-level catalog record *and* a DACS single-level required finding aid²⁸ for the Online Archive of California (OAC). Make preliminary box-level inventories or legacy finding aids available for download. Indicate if the material is unprocessed or minimally processed and, if necessary, that it may require review before use. Indicate the presence of born-digital and/or audiovisual materials and identify how patrons can request access to these materials. For small collections, or collections with low value scores, a robust catalog record and/or brief finding aid created during accessioning may be entirely sufficient for full intellectual control and the collection may be considered "processed." Repositories are encouraged to set local policies for what types of collections (based on size, value, or existing description) are considered "processed" immediately following accessioning.

In addition, consider adding one of the following sample statements to a Conditions Governing Access note:

Collection likely to have restrictions:

This collection is unprocessed. It may contain restricted materials. Please contact the Department of Special Collections and Archives in advance to request access.

Collection not likely to have restrictions:

The collection is unprocessed, but is open for research. Please contact the Department of Special Collections and Archives in advance to request access.

²⁷ As stated in the *DACS Principles of Archival Description*, each collection within a repository must have an archival description. In some instances, operational or structural workflows may prohibit timely creation of collection-level catalog records; it is necessary to create a collection-level finding aid at minimum. Examples of collection-level catalog records and collection-level finding aids can be found in the Appendix.

²⁸ See [DACS Chapter 1: Levels of Description](#) for a definition of single-level required records.

For unprocessed or minimally-processed born-digital collections, consider adding the following sample statements to a Physical Characteristics and Technical Requirements Note:

CONTAINS UNPROCESSED [AUDIO/ AUDIOVISUAL/ DIGITAL] MATERIALS: Materials require assessment and may need further processing. Contact Archives and Special Collections in advance of your visit to request access.

An indemnification statement in a finding aid or on the departmental website may also be appropriate (see [Appendix 8.M.](#) for an example).

For an accretion to a previously processed collection, update the MARC/catalog record and finding aid to represent the new material. Create a new series for the accretion rather than intellectually integrating the materials into the existing collection order.

4.E. Timeframe

Repositories should enable discovery and access through collection-level catalog records and minimal finding aids *within two months of receipt* to avoid accessioning backlogs. Record all known information in the appropriate field in the accession record, access statements, and descriptive text; additional details can always be updated and improved as needed. In some instances, materials arrive at a repository well in advance of receipt by the archivist, leading to accessioning queues and bottlenecks. One way to address this issue is to schedule regular meetings with selectors coordinating acquisition of materials. These meetings can be used to review and hand off received materials, as well as relevant documentation. Curatorial field notes and initial impressions of the materials are particularly valuable and should be retained. When the initial access points are ready to be made public, inform the curator/receiving individual: this is excellent information for donor relations and can reassure all concerned that the materials will have appropriate stewardship at your institution.

Archival teams may want to consider (as part of their workflow) sharing a regular report of new accessions, including new or updated catalog records, to departmental colleagues to promote communication and transparency about acquisition activities. This can be especially helpful to public services staff. This can be done via email, or more passively with a project management tool like a Confluence Wiki, JIRA, or Trello board that is open to all stakeholders.

4.F. Deposits

Deposits should be extremely rare and treated as lowest-priority accessions in the repository processing queue. Deposits are resource and labor intensive, both in terms of managing internal documentation and facilitating access. An archivist's time and other institutional resources are better utilized working with materials that are officially the property of the institution.

If an institution does accept deposits, it's important to clarify the nature of the deposit: is the donor planning to transfer custody eventually? If so, is the timeline for transfer of ownership stated in the deposit agreement? Is the deposit a defined-term loan, such as for an exhibit? Be sure to document access and use related information as well: can the records be open for use? Who holds copyright? How will reproduction requests be handled?

Accessions without required custodial documentation should be treated as deposits, until gift or transfer paperwork is in place. In all cases, deposits should be recorded in the collection management system of record. As for any accession, record the name of the depositor, arrival date, nature and quantity of materials, and restrictions. Also document the terms of the deposit and retain contextual correspondence.

4.G. Prepare for Access During Accessioning

During accessioning, the archivist establishes baseline physical, administrative, and intellectual control of a collection. During this process, the archivist has an opportunity to assess whether the baseline control is sufficient for facilitating immediate user access. This may be the case for small collections, those with low to medium research value, or even larger collections with a lot of readily usable descriptive information. For example, a box or file list, field notes, or other information may be gathered from a curator or records creator, and can quickly be re-used in a finding aid.²⁹ As part of accessioning, conduct preliminary searches for challenging or fragile materials (including obsolete media or rare or proprietary file formats) and document their location and any necessary restrictions. Discuss with the curator or selector who arranged the purchase or the gift: are there any known restrictions, condition problems, or unusual media that might present challenges for preservation or access? Alert public services staff to any special access needs by embedding this critical information in the collection management system and description.

To provide access to unprocessed born-digital materials, archivists will need to rely on the existing documentation, like donor-provided information or file lists, to identify which files pose immediate access risks. Establish a set of keyword or phrase checks to run against digital files to screen for PHI/PII/HIPAA/FERPA, and any identified donor restrictions.³⁰

Detailed and well-documented accessioning workflows facilitate access and build a foundation for future iterative processing. Thorough accessioning is efficacious because it saves future processors' time, and minimizes the ongoing work of updating records, reviewing unprocessed material, and maintaining a backlog or queue. Most importantly, incoming materials that are made functionally accessible through accessioning do not necessarily need to be added to processing backlogs. Archivists can always return to collections and invest more time in processing and description, but

²⁹ See also: Christine Weideman, "Accessioning as Processing," *American Archivist* 69 (Fall/Winter 2006): 274-83.

³⁰ For a recommended set of specific items to screen for, refer to Faulder et. al. "[Digital Processing Framework.](#)" (August, 2018).

accessioning is a one-shot opportunity, a unique window of time for the archivist to apply their judgement and expertise.

4.H. Recommendations for Accessioning Born-Digital Materials

While accessioning traditional paper-based collections primarily involves documentation and description to establish intellectual, legal, and physical control, the accessioning cycle for born-digital materials includes additional interventions. Accordingly, accessioning born-digital content is often inherently more time-intensive. The recommendations below are a baseline target for repositories seeking to responsibly accession born-digital materials. All born-digital materials have access dependencies, including the physical hardware and peripherals required to read the source media or the specific software and computing environment necessary to render a file. One cannot simply put a hard drive in a box, file a deed of gift, and complete an accession record to achieve the intellectual control and foundation for iterative processing sought by accessioning. Performing the actions recommended below greatly improves initial control over born-digital content, helps facilitate future access, and represents responsible stewardship of these materials.

1. Assign unique IDs.
 - a. Consider including the accession number in your naming convention. This is done to ensure that there is a direct correlation between the accession, the physical media on which the files were received, and the files themselves. For example, if files arrived on a hard drive, physically label the hard drive with a unique ID and then assign that same ID to a parent folder into which the files will be transferred.
2. Work with IT specialists to see if campus-wide security protections for running virus scans exist; depending on your institution's practices, running distinct virus scans on content from legacy media may be redundant, as virus checks may already be running in the background.
3. Transfer files off carriers.
4. Perform a cursory review of files:
 - a. For text-heavy collections: Use automated tools like bulk_extractor to check for PII/PHI/HIPAA/FERPA, or other privacy/sensitive info.
 - b. For digital AV or photographs: Visually and/or aurally spot check contents for PII/PHI/Privacy/Sensitive info.
5. Generate a file list and hash values³¹ for collection contents. There are many open source software and scripts to generate these.
6. Package content for storage and add hash values for entire batches/accession.

³¹ A hash value can be thought of as a digital fingerprint. It is a numeric value that uniquely identifies data.

5. Process Collections at an Appropriate Level

"A collection is 'processed' whenever it can be productively used for research."³² Good processing expedites getting collection materials into the hands of users; assures arrangement and preservation of materials *adequate* to user needs; and describes materials *sufficient[ly]* to promote use.³³

5.A. Levels of Control

Archivists often use the concept of "levels of control" to manage arrangement and description. Processing work may be viewed as a continuum whereby archivists start with the most general or largest grouping of materials (e.g., a collection) and proceed in organizing and describing smaller and smaller subsets (e.g., series, subseries, files, and finally, items). Some collections, or parts of collections, require more finely detailed organization and/or description than others.

As stated before in these guidelines, as a general rule, every archival collection should have a collection-level description available online for users to discover. This should be a repository's first priority, and such description is likely adequate for small collections and those with low-research value. The key to efficient processing is to find the most appropriate level of work for appraising, preserving, arranging, and describing materials within a collection, relative to its research value and condition. Processors must exercise a "golden minimum" of effort required to make materials discoverable and usable.

After a repository has the minimum level of control over all of its holdings, we recommend low or moderate effort processing, particularly for those within institutions with processing backlogs.

Many collections will be adequately usable with series or subseries level control. Some collections, due to their value, use, condition, formats, and/or complexity will warrant folder-level control. Even when processing at the folder-level, processors may look for efficiencies that save time and resources. Intensive folder-level work and, if absolutely necessary, item-level handling, should be extremely rare.

The charts on the following pages provide an overview of considerations for determining appropriate levels of processing effort. Further guidance on assessment related to processing levels, particularly determining research value, is in section 5.B. Note that equivalencies of terminology and appropriate actions are provided as a conceptual framework, not hard-and-fast definitions. For levels of digital processing and a set of minimum processing requirements for born-digital archival material, please see the [Digital Processing Framework](#).³⁴

³² Helen Slotkin and Karen Lynch, "An Analysis of Processing Procedures: The Adaptable Approach," *American Archivist* (Spring 1982): p. 157

³³ Greene, p. 212-213.

³⁴ Faulder et. al. "[Digital Processing Framework](#)." (August, 2018).

5.A.1. Processing levels and implementation

This chart describes the different processing levels that may be employed, with suggested description, arrangement, preservation, and appraisal actions relative to each level of effort.

Level of Effort	Level of Control	Description	Physical Arrangement	Preservation	Appraisal
Minimal	Collection Level	Collection-level MARC and EAD record (DACS single-level required). Box list optional; repurpose existing description. Extent statement(s) inclusive of audiovisual and digital materials when present.	As is	Rebox if current housing is unserviceable.	Appraise in bulk; do not weed. For collections with privacy concerns throughout, restrict collection and review for use on demand.
Low	Series or Subseries Level	Collection-level MARC record; plus brief EAD finding aid with series/subseries descriptions and minimal box list. Repurpose existing description. Extent statement(s) inclusive of audiovisual and digital materials when present.	Put series and/or boxes in rough order. Arrange materials needing reformatting or mediated access (such as AV and born-digital) together to facilitate future work.	Replace damaged boxes. House loose items. Replace folders, binders, or envelopes only if unserviceable.	Appraise series, subseries, or discernible chunks; avoid finer levels of weeding. For series with privacy concerns throughout, restrict series and review for use on demand.
Moderate	Folder Level (expedited)	Collection-level MARC record; plus brief EAD finding aid with series/subseries descriptions, and container list with some file-level descriptions. Include carrier-level inventory of audiovisual and born-digital material.	Within series, put folders in rough order (preserve existing order when usable). Organize loose items.	Replace boxes. Retain good existing folders and labels. Selectively perform preservation actions. Rehouse/sleeve AV and born-digital material in poor housing. Reformat prioritized audiovisual material.	Appraise at the folder level; do not weed items. Segregate folders with privacy concerns.
Intensive	Folder Level (traditional)	See Moderate level (above) and add: Robust top-level notes, and container list with fairly detailed and refined file-level titles and descriptions. Include carrier-level inventory of audiovisual and born-digital material.	Within series, put folders in order. Impose new organizational scheme or make significant improvements to enhance ease-of-use. Organize loose items.	Replace boxes and folders. Selectively perform preservation actions for fragile or valuable items. Reformat audiovisual material.	Appraise at the folder level; do not weed items. Segregate folders with privacy concerns.
Highly Intensive	Item Level	See Intensive level (above) and add: detail in description throughout container list for files and some individual items, and enrich explanatory and contextual notes.	Items are placed in a defined, standardized order within boxes and folders.	Replace boxes and folders. Address all housing or preservation needs for fragile items. For extremely high priority content, transcribe audiovisual material.	Item-level appraisal and weeding appropriate. Segregate items with privacy concerns.

5.A.2. Processing levels and collection attributes

This chart presents basic considerations for determining appropriate levels of processing.

Level of Effort	Level of Control	Typical Collection Attributes
Minimal	Collection Level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Recent accessions (all accessions get minimal description upon receipt). ○ Collections less than 2 linear feet. ○ Collections with low research value or little expected use. ○ Collections with no donor-imposed restrictions. ○ Collections with simple organizational schemes. ○ Collections with uniform kinds of materials or subjects. ○ Collections with special formats (i.e. VHS, CDs, floppy disks) that do not contain media markings or labels. ○ Collections with low risk copyright issues and do not contain sensitive, confidential, or personally identifiable information.
Low	Series or Subseries Level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Collections greater than 2 linear feet. ○ Collections with low to medium research value and expected research use less than every few years. ○ Collections with potentially high research value or use that need expedited processing to get materials into the hands of users quickly. Patterns of use may be tracked for making further processing decisions. ○ Series of any size with adequate existing order, description, and housing. ○ Series for which a succinct scope and content note in place of a folder list would offer adequate information for discovery. ○ Series of any size in which content or format (i.e. VHS, CDs, floppy disks) is uniform and the existing arrangement is adequate for finding material, appropriate to the anticipated level of use. ○ Series with low research value, even if the content and/or formats are highly varied. ○ Collections lacking discernible order for which a rough sort of materials enables use.
Moderate	File Level (expedited)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Collections with moderate to high research value and expected research use at least once per year. ○ Series or collections with serviceable existing housing, organization, and/or description. ○ Series where the content and/or formats are highly varied. ○ Collections that have easily identifiable restrictions. ○ Collections that may contain copyright issues and/or sensitive, confidential, or personally identifiable information.
Intensive	Folder Level (traditional)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Collections with high research value and expected research use on a regular basis. ○ Collections or series with little to no original order or housing. ○ Collections or series with a wide variety of topics or material types. ○ Collections or series with privacy issues, where restricted materials are scattered throughout. ○ Collections that have known and limited copyright, privacy, and legal concerns.
Highly Intensive	Item Level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Rarely appropriate; reserved only for collections, or materials within collections, that require this level of effort for discovery and use, and/or have significant security concerns. ○ Collections that have known and considerable volume of copyright, privacy, and legal concerns.

5.B. Assessing Collections

Many factors are weighed when planning for appropriate levels of processing effort and intensity. These include: an understanding of the collection's value to the repository; anticipated patterns and volume of use; digitization and/or digital collection priorities; condition of materials; format instability and other preservation issues unique to born-digital and audiovisual materials; access barriers and use restrictions; and the institution's available resources, particularly staffing. Individual series within collections may also warrant differentiated levels of effort. Remember the fundamental principle that *all* materials in the repository ought to be both accessible and adequately usable, even when a minimal level of effort has been prescribed following a value assessment. This section will guide you in making such assessments.

As a general rule, intensive processing efforts should be reserved for collections that require it, as defined in the recommendations below. In other words, a collection with demonstrated research value and projected high use should be processed more finely than one with comparatively low value. This is especially true if other factors are present in a high value collection, such as poor condition, little or no discernable organization, or the existence of digital and/or audiovisual media, which may require more intensive processing interventions. These guidelines emphasize **comparative** valuation assessment; all collections have value, but realistically, they do not call for the same processing intensity. To plan an appropriate processing strategy for a collection or series, we suggest the following steps:

1. Assess the comparative value of the collection.
2. Target the appropriate level of control.
3. Consider other contributing factors that impact processing at your repository.

5.B.1. Use value scores to plan level of effort

How important is a collection (or series) to researchers, scholarship, and your institution? Four value criteria are key to assessing the level of effort necessary to make materials accessible.

In collaboration with repository stakeholders, archivists may choose to incorporate all four criteria into a standard value assessment, or they may choose to use only those criteria most relevant to them. Other important factors exist (described in 5.B.2), but the criteria presented in the table below form a logical foundation for strategic approaches to determining processing intensity.

Criteria	Definition	Data to use in Assessment
User Interest	Projected (and current) use analysis, including digital collection creation, programming, exhibits, and instruction. Consider interdisciplinary or non-traditional uses and/or emerging trends in scholarship.	Requests for similar materials; paging data (RLFs or Aeon); prospective programming; reference inquiry data; Google analytics of repository website or OAC; any additional, relevant information from informed sources or stakeholders regarding utilization of, or interest in, materials
Subject Relevance	Alignment with documented local collecting priorities. Consider how rare or unique the content is; does it add significantly to the primary resources available on a topic? Does the subject material challenge, reframe, or add nuance to dominant historical and cultural narratives, or have the potential to expand public knowledge and discourse on a topic?	Curatorial documentation; collection development policy; institutional campaign themes
Access Restrictions	Are there barriers to access imposed by agreements or legal requirements? (3 indicates no restrictions to access; 1 indicates severe restrictions are in place.) At its logical extreme, restricted material on deposit should get minimal treatment.	Deed(s) of gift; deposit agreements; donor/creator correspondence; legal requirements or compliance
Barriers to Use	Are there barriers to use imposed by the physical condition, carrier(s), or format of the material? (3 indicates substantial issues intensive processing can mitigate; 1 indicates minimal processing is most appropriate).	Appraisal/site survey documentation; physical condition of materials; preservation assessment (include audiovisual and born digital-specific assessments); audiovisual and born-digital media and file inventories

For repositories that prefer to assign numerical values to assessments, a scale of 1-3 is recommended. Using this matrix, archivists can calculate value scores to help inform levels of

processing effort. **Only collections, or parts of collections, with the highest scores will be considered for intensive processing actions.**

Using the table below as a guide, assign a rating from 1-3 for each of the four values, for a total score of 4-12.³⁵ Repositories are encouraged to use only criteria most relevant to them, and employ a numerical valuation only if it is helpful for them to do so. A scale of 1-3 is suggested here for ease of use; but other schema can certainly be locally developed.

Scale	User Interest	Subject Relevance	Access Restrictions	Barriers to Use
1	Negligible	Negligible	High	Negligible
2	Moderate	Moderate	Limited	Moderate
3	High	High	Negligible	High

5.B.2. Target level of control

Given the value rating of the collection, what level of intellectual and physical control should be achieved? What level of granularity is appropriate to support discovery and use?

Using tabulated value scores, determine the range of processing levels appropriate for collections (or series) in the table below. Remember, lower levels of effort can always be applied to collections that have been assigned high value scores.

Value Score	Appropriate level of effort or control
4-6	Minimal effort → Collection level processing
7-9	Minimal-to-moderate effort → Series or subseries level processing, may consider folder level (expedited) processing
10-12	Intensive effort → Folder level (expedited to traditional), in some cases, may consider item level

This chart illustrates that *in general*, the higher the value score, the more intensive processing effort can be exercised. Intensive levels of processing are not appropriate for collections with lower scores. Most collections are processed appropriately with minimal or moderate levels of intensity. Calculating a collection's value score is most useful when done consistently across collections, with

³⁵ Previous version of the *Guidelines* recommended evaluation of four value criteria, each rated on a scale of 1-5.

collaborative input from stakeholders, to create a cross-section of comparable scores. Level-of-effort recommendations, informed by value assessments, can be documented in accession records or processing plans.

Erring on the side of under-processing is advisable because a collection can always be processed to a more granular level in the future, but you cannot undo time-consuming processing that wasn't needed. Consider whether the time and cost of each processing task will help researchers with access and discovery, or protect important materials from damage. If you are not adding a lot of value with your actions, then reduce your level of effort.

5.B.3. Other factors influencing the level of control

Value assessments help identify targeted processing levels, but the exact amount of labor any given collection may require to make it adequately usable also depends on other circumstances. Some collections have certain characteristics or qualities that demand more staff time, even when a minimal level of effort has been prescribed. For example, a collection with mold cannot be processed following a strict "minimal" intensity protocol, as it will require rehousing and some item-level preservation work. Here are six additional factors to consider when planning the allocation of time and resources to process collections.

1. Preservation or Conservation Needs

- a. Are specific interventions necessary to mitigate major or pervasive preservation threats? Is there a potential harm to library employees, users, or adjacent collections unless these threats are addressed? Examples: mold, insect or vermin infestation, nitrate film, vinegar syndrome.
- b. Is housing substandard (boxes, folders, envelopes, or bindings for bound items)? How much use can the existing housing withstand, and does the existing housing damage the materials inside? Can labels be affixed adequately?
- c. Is the physical condition or manifestation of the materials impacting their accessibility?
- d. Are materials damaged (i.e. warped vinyl, scratched optical media) to the point that content is no longer accessible?
- e. Would conservation or preservation treatment prevent damage or further deterioration, given expected use patterns? Is this level of work justified?
- f. For media materials, will the typical user wait or pay for materials to be migrated to playable formats upon request? What equipment is needed for access?
- g. For digital and audiovisual materials, does the repository have resources to migrate and render content off obsolete media? Is there a preservation infrastructure in place to preserve migrated content? Are formats particularly resource-intensive? Text documents and still images on optical media or hard drives require fewer resources than preserving social media accounts, databases, and applications.

- h. What is the anticipated lifespan of legacy media carriers present in the collection? Are they impacted by failure? (Note that all audiovisual and born-digital carriers are inherently unstable and content must be migrated as a basic intervention.)

2. Orderliness and Arrangement

- a. How much arrangement or enhanced organization is truly needed to make the materials accessible? Is the best organization simple, or complex?
- b. Size matters. Nearly all small collections can be given minimal arrangement, as users can more easily peruse all boxes themselves. Larger collections may be difficult to page and serve with weak or problematic organization.
- c. Do digital folders, files and directories show an arrangement or working order? Are related files spread widely across various carrier media?
- d. Is there an existing order to the collection? Are there obvious series?
- e. How much non-archival content is present (publications, photocopies, digital applications or software programs, duplicates)? Does it detract from the accessibility of unique materials? How easy is it to identify and separate during processing?

3. Metadata and Description

- a. How much description is necessary to make the collection discoverable, usable and support expected levels of research?
- b. Are the materials homogeneous or heterogeneous? Is series-level or box-level description adequate to facilitate satisfactory use?
- c. To what degree can you rely on existing description, such as folder titles and inventories? Are folder titles legible and accurate?
- d. Can some level of intellectual access (i.e. creation and last date modified, number of files and folders, and size) be provided quickly and programmatically through a computer-generated file or directory listing or tree for digital content? Would such a list hold any actual meaning within the context of the record's creation?
- e. How much tolerance will researchers and/or reference staff have for browsing for needed information? Do your users expect to get useful results lists when searching across finding aids for key-words?
- f. If there are plans to digitize materials and/or develop an online digital collection, have you consulted with stakeholders engaged in this downstream work to determine a description strategy? Does your library have the resources to support the intensive level of effort (such as item-level metadata) typically required?

4. Documentation

- a. Is all appropriate and necessary documentation readily available? Include curatorial documentation, gift documentation, inventories, box lists, and surveys inclusive of audiovisual and digital materials, accession and resource records, and catalog records.

5. Privacy and Personally Identifiable Information (PII) Issues

- a. Does the collection contain legally restricted records with private information (such as student, financial, personnel, medical, or attorney-client records)?
- b. How easy is it to identify records with privacy issues and segregate them? For born-digital materials, can archivists be reasonably confident that sensitive files or text strings can be identified using computational tools, such as pattern searches?
- c. If restricted materials are present, should restrictions be made at the series, subseries, folder, or item levels? How onerous are blanket restrictions?

6. Institutional Resources

- a. Who is available to complete the work? Can a team approach be utilized?
- b. Does the library have the capacity and resources necessary, including staffing, equipment, and documented workflows? Mandating a level of intensive processing, without the resources to accomplish it, is ineffectual.
- c. Is the level of processing effort prescribed for a collection or series dependent on gaining specific information, special equipment, technology, or materials? Have resources been allocated to ensure that these dependencies are addressed?
- d. Has the repository identified a funding source (internal or external) to support processing? Does the funding justify or enable more intensive levels of work? Has management demonstrated a commitment of resources to the collection?

5.C. Processing Rates

There are many ways to process collections, and archivists practice a variety of approaches unique to individual levels of experience, subject knowledge, and other skills. Very few archivists would process the same collection in exactly the same way; however, it is possible to derive some averages across the profession for how long processing takes, taking into consideration the level of control achieved and the initial state of the materials. The chart below is designed to help determine the time and resources needed for a processing project, depending on the level of processing desired.

Note that the amount of time required for processing audiovisual and born-digital materials is highly variable and dependent on the format of the physical media, digital content types, existing file structure, assessment of materials for restricted items, and software needed to process, render, and access files. It is recommended that repositories locally track the amount of time required to process audiovisual and born-digital materials, and utilize this documentation in project planning.

**Average processing rate (hours per linear foot)
given level of processing effort and condition of the materials**

	Poor condition or many barriers to access ³⁶	Average condition or moderate barriers to access	Excellent condition or few barriers to access
Minimal effort - Collection level	1-3	1-2	1
Low effort - Series or Subseries level	4-8	3-6	2-4
Moderate effort - File level (expedited)	9-14	7-11	5-8
Intensive effort - Folder level	15-21	12-17	9-13
Highly intensive effort - Item level	22+	18+	14+

5.D. Assessing Labor Allocations

Determining labor allocations among archivists, library assistants, paid interns, and student employees for processing depends in large part on an institution's size, structure, and local practice. Often, institutions are short on professional staff, but may have funds for student assistants. Delegating processing tasks and dividing processing between staff of different skill levels and wages can leverage available resources more effectively than having a single archivist process a collection from beginning to end. Three possible different models are outlined below, though all processing plans are influenced by the size, complexity, and format of materials in collections.

Team processing -- Supervisory archivist, archival processor, and assistant (student assistant or paid intern): The supervisory archivist is the project manager, overseeing and giving guidance on the processing project. The supervisory archivist is involved in creating, or guiding the creation of, the processing plan; training staff; ensuring that deadlines are met; and ensuring quality control. The supervisory archivist reviews the work of the archival processor and does the final editing to the finding aid. The archival processor executes the processing plan and delegates tasks to the assistant, such as inventorying, rehousing, labeling boxes and folders, and physical arrangement.

Team processing, by format -- Digital archivist, and archival processor: The digital archivist creates workflows for accessioning, processing, and providing access to born-digital content, trains the

³⁶ Barriers to access include any conditions that impede user access and require staff attention before collections may be used productively, and include: disorganization, poor housing, inadequate description, preservation issues, the presence of special media or other fragile materials, etc.

archival processor, and is involved with creating the processing plan. The archival processor executes the processing plan, with technical support from the digital archivist.

Archival processor and assistant (student assistant or paid intern): The archival processor surveys the material, creates a processing plan, and is responsible for intellectual arrangement and description. The processor delegates tasks such as physical arrangement, refolding, typing container lists, and labelling to the assistant.

Supervised student assistant or paid intern as processor: This model gives the student assistant or paid intern the bulk of the responsibility for a processing project. The supervisory archivist provides training and gives guidance and direction, but the assistant surveys the material, creates a processing plan in consultation with the archivist, completes the intellectual arrangement, physical arrangement, description, and rehousing. The archivist reviews the work and does the final editing to the finding aid.

5.E. Processing Plans

Many institutions use processing plans to proactively manage work. Processing plans keep projects on track, ensure collections are processed at an appropriate level and that extra work is justified and sanctioned, support transparency and continuity, and document decisions and interventions. A processing plan might include the following elements, many of which can be pulled from a robust accession record:

<i>About the collection</i>	Collection Creator/s
	Collection Title
	Collection Number
	Accessions to be processed
	Brief description of the creator, from existing documentation
	Brief description of the collection, from accession record
<i>Value</i>	Assessment (see table in section 5.B.1.)
<i>Proposed processing level</i>	Justify proposed level. Explain any variances (e.g., series or subseries that deserve more granular work).
<i>Appraisal</i>	What? How much?
<i>Restricted or sensitive content</i>	What? How much? Propose a method of handling. Justify any variance from processing level.
	Proposed methodology for restricted content discovery in born-digital materials. Proposed tools and tactics for surveying for such material.
<i>Arrangement</i>	Proposed arrangement
	Potential arrangement issues
	Proposed labor strategy (who does what?)
	Outline of born-digital arrangement as received. Proposed strategy for integration of born-digital arrangement into physical (if applicable).

Preservation	What work will be completed? Justify any variance from processing level.
	Potential preservation issues
	Proposed labor strategy (who does what?)
	Proposed strategy for retention of carrier and digital format migration.
Description	What work will be completed? Justify any variance from processing level.
	Proposed labor strategy (who does what?)
Labor estimate	Estimate hours of labor (or calendar days) required to process the collection
Supply estimate	Determine supply needs and costs, if appropriate.
Storage estimate	Determine cost to store, preserve and maintain access to physical and digital materials in perpetuity, if appropriate.

5.F. Processing Metrics

When making decisions about processing and estimating time and resource allocations, it is useful to have past data from your repository at hand. Processing metrics provide valuable information about activities performed during processing workflows, and inform fact-driven decision making.

Tracking processing is recommended as a programmatic activity. Measuring the time spent on certain tasks provides accurate and meaningful data on local processing rates and helps identify bottlenecks. At the UC system-wide level, data sharing can facilitate the development of common benchmarks for efficient processing, and can be used to iteratively refine heuristics such as those provided in Section 5.C.

The intent of a processing metrics program is not necessarily to measure the productivity of individual staff. The intent should be on measuring *processes*, i.e., assessing the time and resources required to process collections, and the impacts of taking particular approaches. Averaged data points can be used to estimate staffing and resource requirements for different collections, illustrating the investment in processing work.

Emphasis should be placed on tying metrics to processing levels, as outlined in Section 5.A. Metrics are most useful when tied to a clear understanding of the type or condition of material, and the extent to which a collection was processed.

5.F.1. Baseline elements

The following elements constitute baseline data points that should be recorded for each processed collection to promote a shared understanding of processing across the UC system. Repositories may opt to further differentiate tracking of specific processing tasks or activities. If elements are further

differentiated (beyond the baseline elements enumerated below), or if additional elements are added, it is important to ensure that they are clearly defined and understood by repository staff.

Element	Definition/Notes
Repository	Name of contributing program, department, etc.
Collection	Collection title and number
Project start/end dates	The date active processing began, and the date of the final publication of a collection record or finding aid.
Value score	Indicate total value score on a scale of 4-12 , as outlined in Section 5.B.2.
Condition	General characterization of the overall condition of materials in the collection: poor, average, or excellent. Evaluate condition as it presents barriers to access.
Processor(s)	Enumeration of staff, student assistants, etc. involved in processing.
Original extent	Linear feet and digital content measurements must be defined and agreed upon by repository.
Total processing hours	<p>The total number of staff hours required to process the collection to the specified level (as outlined in Section 5.A.) prescribed in the processing plan.</p> <p>Repositories may elect to measure hours spent on specific processing activities; however, a "Total processing hours" element is recommended. Measured workflows may include: accessioning; planning and surveying; rehousing and other preservation strategies; logistics like building boxes and collection shifts; preparation of materials and forms for deposit or onsite storage; authoring and publishing finding aids and catalog records; digitization; imaging, copying and migrating digital files; metadata and checksum generation.</p>
Processing level	<p>Minimum (Collection level) Low (Series or subseries level) Moderate (File level (expedited)) Intensive (File level (traditional)) Highly intensive (Item level)</p>
Average processing rate	An estimate of the average processing hours required to process 1 linear foot of the collection.
Funding source	Indicate if processing was externally funded, and identify source, if applicable.

5.F.2. Tracking methodology and tools

Time tracking intervals and frequency of reporting remains at the discretion of the repository. Archivists can use a collection management tool, like ArchivesSpace, to report processing time, or collaborative tools like Airtable, Trello, or JIRA, or simple spreadsheets. See [Appendix 8.K](#) for additional tools that can be adapted by repositories for recording processing activities at a more granular level.

6. Efficient Processing Approaches

This section presents strategies for minimal, low, and moderate-effort processing (i.e., collection level, series/subseries level, or expedited file level processing), as defined in Section 5.A. Time-saving techniques are emphasized. Section 6.A. provides strategies applicable to all collection types, including born-digital materials, followed by sections 6.B.-F. with additional considerations for multiple accessions, university records, 19th century collections, photographs, and audiovisual materials. These approaches are meant to supplement and support local processing manuals.

6.A. Applicable to All Collections

6.A.1 Arrangement

1. Minimize physical arrangement (or re-arrangement) of files.
 - a. Look for a "good enough" organization. Trust that users have the patience to examine the contents of a box (or more), as well as multiple folders, to find needed information.
 - b. Leave folders in existing order, rather than alphabetizing them or imposing another order. Users can search online finding aids for needed items. Allow the finding aid to guide users to the right location in a box, or across multiple boxes.
 - c. For born-digital materials, do not arrange files. Allow users to use keyword searching to comb through directories of the file and folder names.
 - d. While it is important to identify series, and which files constitute a series, it is not necessary to bring all the folders that are part of a series together physically. The finding aid can be used to intellectually bring together related material stored in different containers.
2. Do not work at the item level. Keep to the level(s) of control recommended in the processing plan.
 - a. Never arrange items within folders.
 - b. Do not remove items from folders and place in other folders. Rather than sorting finely, describe the variety of content in folders as you find it. (Exceptions may be made for preservation threats or restricted materials.)

3. Folder, but do not sort, clumps or piles of unfolded material.
 - a. Group loose papers into folders, keeping adjacent, related items together.
 - b. Don't sort loose items. Rather, describe the items collected in the folder. Use whatever information can be gleaned quickly, e.g., dates, material types, prevailing correspondent.
4. Tolerate larger aggregations of related materials and simple arrangement schemes.
 - a. For moderate processing, look to gain physical control at the file unit level. (A file unit may consist of multiple folders.) Consider whether adding detail helps a user identify a box with relevant materials.
 - b. Avoid elaborate hierarchies. Establish subseries or sub-subseries only when necessary for users, taking provenance and original order into consideration.
5. Limit perusal of documents within files.
 - a. For minimal processing, identify series and subseries based on existing order and/or existing folder description. Do not examine the contents of every folder, but only take quick glances inside a few to confirm the proper identification of the series.
 - b. For moderate processing it is also not necessary to examine the content of each folder. Use existing order and description to identify and order series and subseries; only examine the contents of folders when necessary for description.

6.A.2 Description

1. Create a MARC record and/or brief EAD record for all collections.
 - a. A collection-level record is appropriate for unprocessed or minimally processed collections, as well as collections that might not be immediately available due to PII, PHI, HIPAA, FERPA, or other privacy concerns.
 - b. More detailed MARC records, with access points and more specific notes, are appropriate for moderately to intensively processed collections.
 - c. Use ArchivesSpace or an archival collections management system to streamline the creation and management of collection-level records, and export them to MARC and/or EAD.
2. A collection-level record may provide adequate access to some collections. Further description might not be necessary in the following cases:
 - a. Collections are small enough for users to review physically in a single research day.
 - b. Collections that have homogenous subject matter not requiring rich description.
 - c. Collections with no known PII, PHI, HIPAA, FERPA, or other privacy concerns.
 - d. Container numbers are clearly delineated within either arrangement notes or scope & content (summary) notes. Example: [Frank P. Doherty papers on Hiram Johnson, 1922-1969](#).
 - e. Notes are rich and detailed enough to enable discovery through keyword searching.
 - f. Controlled access points are provided for key individuals, organizations, and topics.

3. Vary descriptive detail appropriate to the material present.
 - a. Uniform material may be effectively described at the box or series/subseries level.
 - b. Levels of description may vary within a collection.
 - c. Do not describe the subject content of correspondence, unless of the foremost value and importance.
 - d. Descriptive detail must help lead a user to a relevant box. Rather than describing folders with related content individually, look for ways to describe multiple folders of related content together. For example:

Moderate-effort description (recommended)	Intensive-effort (traditional) description
F. 2-7 Research files on "Utopian Experiments in American History", circa 1974-1985	Research files on "Utopian Experiments in American History" F. 2 California's Utopian colonies: lecture notes, articles, and other materials, 1979-1983 F. 3 European Utopian socialists: lecture notes and articles, 1974-1985 F. 4 Fourierism in America: lecture notes, undated F. 5 Introductory material: syllabi, course notes, and other materials, 1981-1982 F. 6 The Mormons: lecture notes, articles, and other materials, 1974-1985 F. 7 The Oneida Community: lecture notes and articles, 1980-1981

Example adapted from the [Minnesota Historical Society's Detailed Description Guidelines](#):

Existing description on folders within a box	Low effort / series-level description	Moderate effort / folder level (expedited) description
Apple sales, 1976. Sales reports, 1977. Macintosh apples, 1972-1980. Apple pests, 1972. Pest control, 1973-1974. Refrigeration of apples, 1974-1976. Apple shipping and transportation, 1973-1979. Banana sales reports, 1971-1973. Sales reports for bananas, 1974-1975. Organic farming, 1972-1974. Organic farms, 1974-1982. Banana pest control, 1978. Pesticides for bananas, 1979. Cabbage sales, 1972-1976. Reports of cabbage sales, 1977-1979. Organic farms, 1974-1976. Cabbage pests, 1972-1973. Pesticides used on cabbage crops, 1974-1976.	Farming records, circa 1972-1980 Includes information about organic farming, pesticides, sales, and shipping for apples, oranges, and cabbages.	Farming records, circa 1972-1980 Apples (7 folders) Bananas (6 folders) Cabbages (6 folders)

4. Use scope and content notes strategically.
 - a. A good scope and content note for a series, subseries, or large chunk of files may make arrangement and description at the folder level unnecessary. It is often less time consuming to summarize contents in a note, rather than organizing or listing out individual folder titles. Use keywords to improve identification of material in online searches.
 - b. For examples of relevant scope and content information for born-digital materials, see examples in the [UC Guidelines for Born-Digital Archival Description](#).
5. Write brief scope and content notes and biographical/historical notes.
 - a. Provide enough information to help users determine that a collection is appropriate to their research needs. Leave detailed research to the researchers.
 - b. Notes should contextualize the collection at the repository, rather than be an exhaustive history of a person or organization. It can potentially mislead users if a lengthy top level note describes aspects of an agent's history not represented in the collection.
 - c. If there are published biographies or histories available, refer and cite to those rather than writing long notes.
 - d. Use a short chronology rather than a narrative note if it saves time.
6. Repurpose existing description.
 - a. For moderate processing, rely on the existing file and folder names for all material (physical and born-digital). Use the creator's folder headings, directory/file names, and descriptions whenever possible.
 - b. Do not systematically rename digital files. Invent or refine folder descriptions to further identify the contents of folders only when it is necessary in order to enable discovery. Provide context on the digital content in a scope and content note.
 - c. Use the Processing Information note to indicate where donor-created description was repurposed. This is especially important when repurposing description that may include historical or outdated terminology. See [Appendix 8.O](#) for resources on ethical and inclusive description.
 - d. When possible, encourage donors to label materials or create inventories with Excel or Google Sheets before donation. Consider providing a simple spreadsheet template for donors to fill out. Spreadsheet inventories with structured data allow archivists to easily standardize and repurpose data for upload to ArchivesSpace or another collections management system.³⁷ Or have student assistants or paid interns create inventories by transcribing existing labels.
 - e. If your repository has non-standard inventories (not in EAD), scan or convert them to PDF and make them available online. Nonstandard description of a collection

³⁷ One option is to use the [aspace-import-excel](#) spreadsheet plugin to upload descriptive inventories in spreadsheets to Resource records in ArchivesSpace.

available online is better than none at all. You can host them on your own website and link to them from your finding aid, or you can upload them to the Online Archive of California (OAC) with the California Digital Library's Record*EXPRESS* utility.

- f. For born-digital logical file directories, utilize directory export tools like Directory List and Print to capture directory file names, folders, create date, and last date modified. Create a CSV or PDF document that you can attach to the finding aid and upload on the OAC.
 - g. If a creator provided extensive description, make it available as a supplementary finding aid or as the collection's primary container list.
7. Record approximate dates for collections, series, subseries, or folders. Do not examine items to determine exact dates.
 8. Write sparingly, but do include essential identifying information.
 - a. If your repository finds it necessary to include the same information on every folder (e.g., repository name, collection title, collection number, etc.), use labels or stamps.
 - b. For moderate processing, abbreviate information on the folders, but elaborate or spell out in the finding aid if more complete information enables discovery.
 9. Reconsider how you use folder numbers.
 - a. Omit folder numbers from finding aids for collections with low security risks. Folders may still be numbered within boxes to help with refiling.
 - b. Do not number folders by using a consecutive sequence throughout a collection. Start over with 1 in each box.
 10. Rely on web search engines (e.g. Google) to index and surface your online finding aids and limit the construction of authorized terms to MARC records.
 - a. Rely on the description in your finding aids to lead users to you. Currently most users start their research in Google, and UC finding aids on the OAC are well exposed to Google searches. If your finding aids include description with names, topics, and places, then users will discover your finding aid.
 - b. Constructing authorized subject headings is time consuming. Deemphasize this work and rely on a limited number of key base headings rather than exhaustive subject analysis and construction of subdivided heading strings. (e.g. "Earthquakes", not "Earthquakes—California—San Francisco – Sources")
 - c. Rely on time saving ArchivesSpace plug-ins like the LCNAF plug-in to import Name Authority Cooperative Program (NACO) authorities.

6.A.3 Preservation

1. Pay most attention to active, major threats.
 - a. Examine folder contents very briefly, with an eye for major threats (active agents of damage) such as insects and mold, off-gassing plastics or films, or nitrate. Even minimal processing must mitigate active threats. When handling such materials,

- ensure that appropriate protective measures are taken. When in doubt, consult with a preservation or conservation professional for safety precautions.
- b. Assess less active threats broadly. Can material be handled by users without *likely* damage that results in loss of information or harm to the user? If so, do not intervene.
2. Store materials in an environment with stable temperature and humidity.³⁸
 - a. Well-maintained environmental controls protect materials more effectively than proper enclosures for individual items. Focus on improving your storage areas for all materials before focusing on preserving individual items.
 3. Limit re-folding.
 - a. Do not replace folders that are in good, serviceable condition. Only replace folders in poor condition, or when necessary to support expected levels of use. Folders should adequately hold and protect materials as they are taken in and out of boxes.
 - b. If replacing folders, delegate this task to student assistants or paid interns.
 - c. If necessary, staple original adhesive file labels to folders to prevent loss of information.
 - d. If original folders or envelopes have annotations, but must be replaced, retain the original enclosure, or photocopy the exterior. Do not transcribe detailed information.
 4. Deal efficiently with fasteners and wrappers.
 - a. Do not routinely remove metal fasteners (e.g., staples, paper clips, or binder clips) from materials. Leave them in place unless they pose a threat to the preservation of the textual content, prevent access, or could harm users
 - b. Bundles originally housed in rubber bands or other un-usable wrappers such as plastic bags should be rehoused in the most time-efficient way possible. Use an archival envelope or a folded 11 x 17 sheet of paper to maintain arrangement.
 - c. Avoid unfolding, flattening, or unrolling items, unless the value of the collection warrants item-level treatment.
 5. Postpone item-level preservation actions until a user requests access.
 - a. If material would be damaged through use, and intensive preservation actions are necessary, defer the preservation actions until the user demand is clear.
 - b. Specify in a restriction note in the finding aid that preservation action is necessary before use (such notes should be in alignment with the repository's access policy, with workflows and costs clearly defined). When users request the material, perform the appropriate action in accordance with your policy. This strategy might be appropriate for brittle rolls of paper, rolls of photographs, photographic negatives, original audio-visual material, floppy discs, etc.

³⁸ Shereyn Ogden. "[Temperature, Relative Humidity, Light, and Air Quality: Basic Guidelines for Preservation.](#)" Northwest Document Conservation Center Preservation Leaflet (2007).

6. Transfer content off of source media.
 - a. All content which the repository has chosen to preserve will need to be transferred off of carrier media eventually. Without intervention, all digital and audiovisual materials will become inaccessible and unusable over time. The decision to leave media (digital or audiovisual) on its original carrier may be a short-term solution borne out of necessity, but it should not be a long-term collection management strategy.
 - b. Prioritize content that is stored on readily accessible contemporary storage devices (such as hard drives with USB connections). Legacy formats with more barriers to access should be prioritized only when the additional resources required to transfer this material can be justified. Public service procedures and usage statistics can guide prioritization for processing.
 - c. Avoid disk-imaging unless the added cost has been justified.³⁹ Logical file transfer is sufficient for most cases.⁴⁰
7. In general, leave media materials where you find them. Rely on public service procedures to address usage.
 - a. Do not routinely separate material from files based on media type.
 - b. Exceptions: Make separations if the media poses a significant physical threat to nearby material, to human safety, or has significant research or monetary value in its own right to the degree that separate housing and description is necessary for preservation, discovery, and use (see Section 6.E. on Photographs, for example). Audiovisual media formats often have special handling and storage requirements (see Section 6.F.3).
 - c. If media has special handling needs, find efficient ways to communicate this to public services staff via visual cues (stamps, labels) or description.

6.A.5. Privacy

1. Whenever possible, reduce intake of privacy-protected material. Communicate to donors and offices (for University Archives) that certain materials should not be included.

³⁹ Recent scholarship has called into question the default practice of capturing and retaining disk-images as a necessary intervention. This is due to the ethical problems involved in capturing data donors may not have consented to make available (and, in some cases, may not even have had the ability to consent to make available), the extra staff time and effort required to facilitate a disk-imaging and processing workflow, and the natural resource and environmental sustainability implications of storing and preserving the vast amounts of data that accrue when disk-imaging is regular practice. See for example, "[Ethically Sourced Forensics](#)," presentations of Keith Pendergrass and Talya Cooper at the 2017 BitCurator Users Forum; and Pendergrass, Keith L., Walker Sampson, Tim Walsh, and Laura Alagna. 2019. "[Toward Environmentally Sustainable Digital Preservation](#)." *The American Archivist* 82 (1): 165–206

⁴⁰ Logical file transfer refers to copying the bits that comprise the particular files in question and transferring them to a new location. Disk imaging refers to making an exact bit-for-bit copy of an entire storage environment (such as a hard drive) on which files are stored.

2. Assess risk to determine appropriate level of review for restricted materials.
 - a. Determine likelihood that the donor's activities resulted in the production or retention of restricted records. The amount of effort used to look for restricted materials should be weighed against this.
3. For collections with voluminous legally-protected information throughout, rather than investing in the labor required to do extensive restriction reviews during accessioning and processing, wait to do the review until a user requests the materials.
 - a. This strategy is especially appropriate for low-use materials.

6.B. Managing Multiple Accessions

Collections with multiple accessions pose processing challenges. When processing a collection with multiple accessions, or when receiving accruals for a collection you have already processed, you must consider to what degree you integrate materials physically and intellectually.

6.B.1. Processing a collection with multiple accessions for the first time

Level of Effort	Arrangement	Description	Example
Minimal	Keep all accessions distinct. Do not integrate or interfile one accession into another. Do not integrate born-digital accessions with other born-digital accessions.	For collection-level record, briefly describe the content of each accession to help users select which accession is most appropriate.	
Low-Moderate	Keep all accessions distinct. Identify and arrange series/subseries within each accession. Process at file level if appropriate.	Describe each accession separately. Use series/subseries or file level control as appropriate.	
Moderate-intensive	Physically and intellectually integrate accessions. Do not integrate born-digital accessions with other born-digital accessions.	Describe at the file level.	SIO Office of the Director Records, UC San Diego Library

6.B.2. Managing additional accessions to a previously processed collection

Level of Effort	Arrangement	Description	Example
Minimal	Keep all accessions distinct. Do not integrate or interfile one accession into another. Each accession might start over with "Box 1." Do not integrate born-digital accessions with other born-digital accessions.	For a collection-level record, briefly describe the content of each accession to help users select which accession is most appropriate.	University of California, Irvine, Vice Chancellor, Student Affairs records
Low-Moderate	Keep all accessions distinct. Identify and arrange series/subseries within each	Represent new accessions following the processed materials.	F. Sherwood Rowland papers, UC Irvine

	accession. If appropriate, arrange each accession at file level.	Describe each accession separately. Use series/subseries or file level control as appropriate. Do not attempt to integrate description with the processed materials.	University of California, Irvine, Black Student Union records John Taggart Papers, UC San Diego Library
Moderate	Keep all accessions distinct. Identify and arrange series/subseries within each accession. If appropriate, arrange each accession at file level. Make efforts to arrange new materials similarly to previous efforts.	Bring similar series or subseries together intellectually in the finding aid. Do not integrate description intellectually below the subseries level.	University of California, Irvine Central Records Unit records
Moderate-intensive	When adding additional materials, arrange new materials in boxes at the end of a processed collection.	Integrate the folder descriptions intellectually. Sequential folders in the finding aid will be in different boxes.	Southeast Asia Resource Action Center Records, UC Irvine
Intensive <i>Not Recommended</i>	Physically integrate the new accession, effectively reprocessing the entire collection.	Folder-level description	

6.C. University Archives

Collections of paper-based records in UC University Archives are well suited to MPLP approaches. Many of them are modern, subject to record schedules, and maintained with some sort of filing system. However, collections with frequent accruals pose challenges, as does our obligation as university employees to protect sensitive materials (particularly student or personnel records) and to provide timely access to public records. A few additional strategies are relevant:

1. Limit the scope of record groups, or increase the granularity of how you manage archival collections (e.g., use series, accessions, record units, etc. as the primary means of managing a collection in the University Archives instead). This will reduce the frequency with which you need to update existing finding aids and catalog records with new accessions.
 - a. Manage materials for each major figure in an office separately. For example, for the Chancellor's records, maintain separate collections for each Chancellor, rather than one big record group for all Chancellors.
 - b. Manage materials from each office, regardless of their division, separately. For example, if you receive records from multiple units with a division of student affairs, don't group them all together in one record group for student affairs.

- c. Manage distinct series from the same office separately when appropriate. For example, University of California (System). Office of the President. Records: Permanent Files, 1952-1975; or University of California, Irvine, Office of the Vice Chancellor, Student Affairs Budget Records.
 - d. Don't be wedded to managing records based on the campus structure. For example, if you receive materials from a committee, individual, or a special topic of interest, manage the material at the level of granularity in which it arrived, rather than trying to integrate it into an existing collection or structure. For example: [Smith \(Donovan\) Files Relating to Space Utilization at the University of California at Berkeley](#), or [Ariel \(Joan\) files on Women's Studies at the University of California, Irvine](#).
2. Refer to state, university, and campus policies about restricted classes of records. Each campus maintains these policies and procedures. (See also Section 6.A.5 Privacy Issues.)
 3. Conduct outreach and training sessions to encourage campus offices to take a more proactive role in appraisal and description.
 - a. Develop policies and procedures to guide transfers of records that limit the work the University Archives must complete to make these records available.
 - b. Require that campus units follow the university record schedules.
 - i. Get the campus record manager involved.
 - ii. Train staff in campus units to recognize archival records.
 - iii. Do not allow transfer of restricted or non-permanent records. Return them to the office of origin for disposal and/or weeding.
 - c. Require that campus units provide electronic inventories of materials they transfer (create a template so you may easily repurpose this inventory for a finding aid).
 - d. Give campus units archival boxes to pack records, and train them to pack materials appropriately. If necessary, give them folders to use and instruct them in how to label appropriately.

6.D. 19th Century and Earlier Collections

Although MPLP was a response to voluminous 20th century collections, some repositories have successfully implemented MPLP's efficient processing techniques for earlier materials, as well.

The same principles should apply for pre-20th century collections as for modern collections. Determine the value of the materials for your institution. Evaluate what level of processing effort is required to make the collection adequately usable. Only perform work that is appropriate to the value of the materials for your institution and expected patterns of usage. Just because material is older, doesn't mean it deserves intensive resources and labor.

6.E. Photographic Prints and Negatives

Photographic collections are often among the most highly used and valued resources in a repository. As such, they often warrant more processing labor than other materials. However, some kinds of photographs occur in great volume and have lower value than others: family snapshots and

portraits; unidentified portraits; and voluminous and repetitive files of negatives and/or contact sheets. These are good candidates for efficient processing techniques.

6.E.1. Photographic collections managed independently of other archival materials

Recommendations for arrangement:

1. Preserve existing order. Avoid sorting photographs by subject if they occur in a provenance-based archive or collection. Subject sorting can result in physically similar items being inappropriately separated, obscuring evidence that they were likely from the same roll of film or developed/printed at the same time.
2. Avoid item-level arrangement. Matching of prints and negatives is not feasible in large collections, so arrange and describe as separate series. Use parallel descriptions between the two series to facilitate matching.
3. Avoid item-level weeding. Retain duplicates, unless voluminous. Duplicates may have unseen value. For example, the presence of numerous copies indicates a preferred, heavily used image, and this can be significant evidential information for public figures. Subtle differences in contrast or retouching may be apparent among numerous proof prints of an image, providing evidential value of the emphasis or "spin" sought by image creators. Note that researchers often know more about specific subjects or families than archivists can.

Recommendations for description:

1. Most photographs do not need to be described at the item level. Folder-level description is sufficient for discovery of most photographs. Family photographs of limited research value may be described at the collection or series level only. Scope and content notes need not mention all individuals, places or subjects present; only those represented voluminously or those of known importance.
2. Describe relationships between negatives and prints in the most efficient way possible.
 - a. When negatives and prints are stored separately, make the folder descriptions parallel to facilitate matching through the inventory.
 - b. Describe clear correlations of prints and negatives when evident, rather than spending time matching item-by-item and assessing relationships.
 - c. Clarify when negatives are known to be represented by prints. Standard phrases like "Prints available for some" or "No prints available" are helpful.

Recommendations for preservation:

1. Isolate nitrate and acetate film, negatives, and transparencies, and store them properly. Nitrate film and acetate film both pose threats to people and material housed with them.
2. Rely on good storage environments for rather than providing the best sleeving/housing for all photographs. Deterioration can be slowed by cool or cold storage.

- a. Color photographs (whether film or photographic prints) are unstable and must be stored in the best cold/moderately dry conditions possible, so separation of voluminous or highly valued color material is recommended when feasible.
3. Limit the housing of individual items. Strictly limit polyester and polyethylene sleeving, saving such housing for the most exceptional items. Also limit interleaving.
4. Good handling policies protect materials better than aggressive and expensive housing of items. Require that reading room users wear gloves when handling unsleeved photographs. Instruct staff and researchers in handling material, avoiding flexing and abrasion, etc.
5. Be mindful of box weight. Photographs are often heavier than other materials on paper because of their composition, and sleeving, and/or mats which add even more weight. Avoid creating heavy boxes that cannot be safely moved or are at risk of collapse.

6.E.2. Photographs in manuscript and archival collections

Recommendations for arrangement:

1. Do not routinely separate photographs found in chiefly textual archival collections.
 - a. Leave them in place when:
 - i. They are intrinsically related or physically attached to manuscript material (e.g. photo illustrations in a report, or photos enclosed in a letter that discusses them)
 - ii. They have little or no research interest outside the context of the manuscript material (and therefore do not merit separate description and subject or form/genre access points)
 - iii. There is no extreme preservation threat
 - iv. Anticipated reproduction requests can be met, and resulting surrogate images controlled
 - b. Always make separations if the media poses a significant preservation threat.
2. Consider separations if photographs have sufficient research or monetary value in their own right to justify separate housing, description, and management.
 - a. Even when physical separations are necessary, retain the photographs as part of the archival collection, perhaps as a separate series or in another box. This is generally more efficient than creating a separate collection for the photographs.

Recommendations for description:

1. Develop strategies to enable discovery of photographs by researchers even if photographs remain in chiefly textual archival collections.
 - a. Use simple and consistent standard terms in MARC records and throughout finding aids, such as "photograph(s)" or "includes photographs" to let researchers know where to find images.

- Describe photographs in the intellectually relevant place on the finding aid, even if physically arranged separately. Example:

Gruenther, Alfred M. (Alfred Maximilian), 1899-1983

box 9, fld. 37: Correspondence & Red Cross medals (with 5 photographs), 1956-1959

box 5, fld. 2: Gryphon (yacht) - 2 negatives with corresponding prints, undated

box 5, fld. 3: SIO Pier - 20 negatives, some with corresponding prints

Recommendations for preservation:

- Isolate nitrate and acetate ("safety") film, negatives, and transparencies, and store them properly.
- Rely on good storage environments rather than providing the best sleeving/housing for all photographs. Deterioration can be slowed by cool or cold storage.
- Minimize handling threats to photographs within paper-based archival collections by one or more of these strategies:
 - Sleeve them, but leave them in the same folder with papers.
 - Place them in a new archival folder adjacent to the folder of origin.
 - Leave them *in situ*, but communicate to public services staff and researchers that photographs are present and glove use is recommended (e.g., include a note in the finding aid, or use a stamp on the folder or box).

6.E.3. Summary chart of processing activities for photographic collections

Level of Effort	Level of Control	Description	Arrangement	Preservation
Minimal	Collection Level	Collection-level record in MARC or EAD	As is	Rebox if unserviceable in current housing. Identify locations of film-based media (negatives and slides) for separate storage and/or restriction.
Low	Series/ Subseries Level	Brief finding aid or more detailed MARC record with series/ subseries descriptions and/or box listings.	Put series and/or boxes into rough order.	Replace damaged boxes. House loose items. Replace folders, binders, or envelopes only if unserviceable. Remove film-based media (negatives and slides) for separate storage.
Moderate	File Level (expedited)	Succinct finding aid with abbreviated folder lists or simple inventories. Existing description repurposed. Brief reference to photographic process or format may be included.	Put folders in rough order. Preserve original order when usable. Perform rough sort of loose items. Note relationships between negatives and prints in broad terms (container or folder level).	Replace boxes. Retain existing folders and labels when in good shape. House batches of physically similar material in sleeves of folders. Provide individual archival folders or enclosures only for exceptional items.

Intensive	Folder Level (traditional)	Finding aid includes detailed folder lists or item lists, scope and content notes, and/or historical notes at a folder or item level. Folder titles are refined and standardized. Physical descriptions such as photographic process and format are provided.	Put folders in order, imposing or improving organizational scheme. Sort loose items into folders. Items may be given unique numbers. Record relationships between prints and negatives in as much detail as possible.	Replace boxes and folders. Provide archival folders or plastic enclosures for a significant percentage of items, individually or in small batches. Sleeve all negatives individually. Selectively perform preservation actions for fragile or valuable items.
Highly Intensive	Item Level (traditional)	Detailed finding aid includes item lists with image descriptions, physical descriptions of media, format, dates, and other explanatory notes.	As above, and: Assign items unique numbers, and match prints to negatives, giving them corresponding numbers, or cross-references.	Comprehensively address housing or preservation needs by providing archival folders or plastic enclosures for all items, individually. Reformat negatives to provide use copies (print or digital).

6.F. Audiovisual Recordings

Unique audiovisual materials pose many processing, preservation, and access challenges. They are often underutilized due to a lack of description, or insufficient resources in staffing, equipment, and technology to make access copies readily available. However, recordings may receive surprisingly frequent use when service copies are discoverable and available for researchers to consult.

This section primarily addresses audiovisual recordings on analog media carriers (such as reel-to-reel recordings, videos, and films). This is not to confuse the fact that some audio and video content on carriers, such as DAT and DigiBeta, are digitally encoded, and of course optical media such as CDs and DVDs can have audiovisual content on them in media-specific encoding or in file-based formats, such as MP3, WAV, and MPEG files. Parts of this section are applicable to digital audiovisual files, particularly the advice regarding description, but additional guidance on appraisal, accessioning, and processing of digital audiovisual recordings can be found throughout these guidelines, particularly in the recommendations for born-digital materials.

The difficulties with caring for and accessing audiovisual materials are widely known.⁴¹ Repositories may not have trained staff or specialized equipment to play various formats, or to create digital surrogates for patron use. Older formats are fragile, with short life spans, and a single use may inadvertently damage them. To correctly identify and catalog recordings, archivists have

⁴¹ For more on sound preservation, see [The State of Recorded Sound Preservation in the United States: A National Legacy at Risk in the Digital Age](#) [PDF] (Council of Library and Information Resources and the Library of Congress, 2010); and [ARSC Guide to Audio Preservation](#) (Association for Recorded Sound Collections, the Council on Library and Information Resources, and The Library of Congress, 2015). For more on visual preservation, see [Guidelines for the Preservation of Video Recordings](#) (International Association of Sound and Audiovisual Archives, 2018).

traditionally wanted to listen to or view items, especially when labelling is poor or nonexistent. This level of content analysis is time consuming.

Despite these challenges, efficient processing strategies can be applied to audiovisual collections and help researchers discover recordings with high research value. There are many ways to streamline processing of audiovisual materials that result in better description and enhanced accessibility.

6.F.1. User-driven access and processing

Most repositories have policies forbidding users from playing original, unique audiovisual recordings due to their fragility and the threat of damage or loss. Such policies typically stipulate duplication (creation of a digital surrogate) is required to create an access copy, with costs subsidized by either the repository or the researcher. However, repositories may want to consider that blanket policies may not be the best approach, and allow the use of some original audiovisual materials on a case-by-case basis following evaluations of the importance and rarity of the content, or fragility of the format. These decisions don't need to be made at the time of processing, but can be made by trained staff when items are requested. Consider the following:

- When original audiovisual materials are requested, assess the risk. Certain formats are less prone to damage and still familiar to some users (e.g. audiocassettes, videocassettes) and for some types of content, such as commercial recordings, it may be acceptable for patrons to use or view originals. Always inspect material for damage or vulnerabilities before use.
- Formats unfamiliar to patrons or with high potential for damage, or requiring specialized playback equipment, should never be played by patrons and need to be reformatted. These include all open reel audiotape and video formats, acetate-based film, and cartridge formats such as, but not limited to, U-matic videotape, and Digital Audio Tape (DAT).
- A standardized Physical Access or Technical Access note can be included in finding aids and MARC records to alert patrons, such as "Service copies of audiovisual items may need to be made before viewing or listening. Please contact [Repository] for further information."

It is acceptable (or realistic, given staffing levels) to delay bulk reformatting activities until users request the material. However, repository staff, including archivists, managers, and public services/reference specialists, should understand that items without readily accessible digital surrogates may be passed over by researchers for other documents. The lifespan of obsolete media is nearing its end, and reformatting costs are expected to rise in the future for certain formats. Archivists should be alert to use patterns across collections and consider planning for strategic bulk reformatting projects using one-time monies or preservation-focused grant opportunities.

6.F.2. Arrangement and description

Description is the key to discoverability for audiovisual recordings. Devote staff resources to achieving a finer level of description at the expense of arrangement. Item-level descriptive

information is likely to be more useful to researchers than a careful hierarchical arrangement (such as alphabetical by cataloger supplied title, or chronological by approximate date). There are exceptions: you may have a large audiovisual collection created by a professional studio with strong and meaningful internal organization. However, audiovisual recordings found in personal papers are often disorganized and poorly labeled. Unless the content is extremely important, it is probably not worth the time to determine if there is an existing arrangement or if one can be imposed.

Recommendations:

1. Item-level description is often the best way to control each copy.
 - a. Box-, series-, or subseries-level description of recordings can pose logistical challenges simply due to the odd and varied sizes of formats, which may require storage in specialized climate zones or shelving areas. Reformatting for access or preservation results in multiple copies in different file-based formats.
 - b. Series-level descriptions of audiovisual items with homogenous content may sometimes be appropriate. For example, recordings of board meetings arranged chronologically can be described as a group. Radio airchecks of a weekly radio program can be found easily if the original order is maintained.
2. There is no need to view or listen to each item.
 - a. A simple item-level inventory, based exclusively on the labels on the tapes, may be sufficient for researchers to identify relevant content.
 - b. In the finding aid, communicate where the description is from: "Item titles were transcribed from original labels on each recording," or "Item titles were transcribed from [creator]'s personal reel inventory list, which gave each recording a unique number and brief description." This way, researchers know the origin of the description.
3. Most researchers care about content, not format.
 - a. However, details about the format are important in determining whether a patron can view the original, if reformatting needs to be outsourced, or if the tape is an original or duplicate. Documenting format type is also useful for internally prioritizing collection care and management.
 - b. Use judgement as to when and if detailed format information should be gathered and reported at the item level. If identical formats are grouped together by series or subseries, report that in the series-level notes.

6.F.3. Preservation

Audiovisual recordings are fragile and require specialized equipment, however, there are efficient approaches to preserving them.

Recommendations:

1. Store audiovisual items in an area with the best possible climate control. Proper climate control is the best insurance policy against premature deterioration and content loss.
2. Do not routinely rehouse audiovisual items (the lifespan of the item is probably already shorter than possible damage from inadequate housing), but do consider how they are stored.
 - a. AV items should not be left unprotected; supply protective enclosures if they are lacking.
 - b. In general, store media upright (including open reel sound recordings and LPs). Film reels should be stored flat. Consult a media specialist when in doubt about best storage orientation.
 - c. Do rehouse film on metal reels or in metal cans onto cores in archival cans, and rehouse lacquer discs in deteriorating sleeves into acid-free sleeves.
3. Limit playback of specialized formats to trained staff.
 - a. Original pre-LP and grooved media, such as lacquer discs, and all open reel audiotapes and videotapes should only be played back by archivists or technicians with appropriate training in those formats.
 - b. When well-maintained equipment is available, relatively modern cartridge formats such as audiocassettes and videocassettes can be played back by non-specialist staff.
 - c. Certain cartridge formats with substantial and known problems with media and equipment, such as U-matic videotape and Digital Audio Tape (DAT), as well as film and all open reel audiotape and videotape formats, should be left to trained staff.
 - d. When in doubt, consult with an audiovisual specialist.
4. Limit non-essential item-level preservation.
 - a. Do not regularly undertake routine conservation activities such as rehousing tapes in acid-free containers, tying down open reel tape ends, or exercising (rewinding) tapes. Save those treatments for materials with the highest research value, and consider attempting such treatment only during reformatting activities.
5. Outsource large reformatting projects.
 - a. Vendors give quantity discounts on large volumes of homogenous formats in similar condition, so save these kinds of projects for outsourcing.
 - b. Utilize in-house staff time and equipment for on-demand, patron initiated reformatting requests for access copies.

7. Sustainability Plan

The authors recommended that [Guidelines for Efficient Archival Processing in the University of California Libraries](#) be reviewed and updated roughly every five years, as archival processing approaches, technology, and collection management practices continue to evolve.

This document belongs to all UC librarians and staff who work with archival and manuscript collections, and is supported by the UC Heads of Special Collections Common Knowledge Group (HOSC). It is hosted in the University of California Systemwide Libraries collection on eScholarship, and it is recommended that future iterations of the [Guidelines](#) also be published here.

8. Appendix

8.A. Processing Manuals Inspired by MPLP

- [PACSCL Surveying and Minimal Processing Manual](#) [PDF]
- [Minnesota Historical Society's Physical Processing Manual](#) [PDF]

8.B. UC Processing and Accessioning Manuals

- [UCB, Bancroft Library](#) [PDF]
- [UCI Accessioning Manual](#)
- [UCI Processing Manual](#)
- [UCSC Center for Archival Research and Training](#)

8.C. Processing Manuals from Other Institutions

- [New York University Archival Collections Management: Arrangement and Description](#)
- [University of Maryland](#) [PDF]
- [Beinecke Library, Yale University](#)
- [University of Texas at Arlington](#) [PDF]

8.D. Appraisal Policies and Guidelines

- [UC Faculty Papers: Identification and Appraisal](#)
- [NARA Strategic Directions: Appraisal Policy](#) [PDF]
- [Staubitz Archives Appraisal Policy](#) [PDF]
- [National Archives \(UK\) Appraisal Policy](#) [PDF]
- [City of London, London Metropolitan Archives Appraisal Policy](#) [PDF]
- [Redwine, Gabriela, et al. "Born Digital: Guidance for Donors, Dealers, and Archival Repositories." Washington, DC: Council on Library and Information Resources, October 2013.](#)
- [SAA Acquisitions and Appraisal Section Bibliography](#)

8.E. Reappraisal and Deaccessioning Policies and Guidelines

- [SAA Guidelines for Reappraisal and Deaccessioning](#) [PDF]
- [University of Baltimore Special Collections Deaccessioning Policy](#)
- [Loyola Marymount Special Collections Guidelines for Deaccessioning and Deselecting Materials](#) [PDF]
- [University of Oregon Deaccessioning Policy](#)

8.F. Collection Development Policies

- [UCLA Collecting Priorities](#)
- [Hoover Institution, Stanford University](#)
- [Cal Poly Collection Development Policy](#)

8.G. Access Policies

- Access policy information in the Processing Information note (sample language): *Collections are processed to a variety of levels, depending on the work necessary to make them usable, their perceived user interest and research value, availability of staff and resources, competing priorities. Library Special Collections provides a standard level of preservation and access for all collections and, when time and resources permit, conducts more intensive processing. These materials have been arranged and described according to national and local standards and best practices.* ([Jonathan Fielding papers](#), UCLA)
- [UC Santa Cruz Access Policy, section on Privacy and Personally Identifying Information](#)
- [DLF Levels of Born-Digital Access \(2020\)](#)⁴²

8.H. Collection Management Policies and Manuals

- [Rockefeller Archive Center Documentation](#)
- [Collection Services Manual for the Stuart A. Rose Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library at Emory University](#)
- [Program documentation on archival technical services at NYU](#)
- [American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming](#) [PDF]

8.I. Digital Preservation Policies

- [SCAPE Published Preservation Policies](#)

8.J. Data Collection Forms

- [AIMS Donor Survey, Appendix F](#) [PDF]
- [University of Florida Surveying and Processing Plan Worksheet](#)
- [Paradigm records survey for donors](#)

⁴² While not an access policy, the Levels of Born-Digital Access can support the development of access policies that expressly address born-digital.

- Checklist of Recommendations for Repositories, Appendix D (pp 26) in [Born Digital: Guidance for Donors, Dealers, and Archival Repositories](#)

8.K. Processing Metrics Tools

- [PACSCL/CLIR Hidden Collections Processing Project, Processing Worksheet](#)
- [Processing Metrics Collaborative: Database Development Initiative](#)
- [UCLA Post-Acquisition Activity Tracker](#)

8.L. Sample Collection-Level Records

- MARC record: [Berkeley Gray Panthers](#)
- OAC finding aid: [Martin M. Barnes Papers](#)
- Unprocessed accrual to a processed collection: [Donald McKayle Papers](#); [Critical Theory Institute Records](#); [Karen Tei Yamashita Papers](#)
- OAC finding aid as the final stage of processing: [Nelle Branch Recipe Collection](#)

8.M. Sample Indemnification Statement

Manuscript collections that include twentieth and twenty-first century archival materials may contain sensitive or confidential information that is protected under federal, state, and/or global "right to privacy" laws, including but not limited to certain educational, medical, financial, criminal, attorney-client, and personnel records (Social Security numbers, bank account and credit card numbers, employment and medical records, etc.) Researchers are advised that the disclosure of certain information pertaining to individuals without the consent of those individuals may give rise to legal claims and liability, for example, publication of defamatory content concerning an individual's private life, or publication of confidential and sensitive personally-identifiable information about an individual (such as social security number or health information).

UCSC Special Collections & Archives staff have taken care to identify and, in some cases, remove Personally Identifiable Information found within archival collections when undertaking archival processing work. However, privacy protected information may be revealed during use of the archival collections, particularly in those collections that are unprocessed or have been minimally processed. Researchers who find sensitive personal information in any collection should immediately notify a UCSC Special Collections & Archives staff member.

You agree to make no notes or other record of privacy protected information if found within the archival collections, and further agree not to publish, publicize, or disclose such information to any other party for any purpose if found within the archival collections. In accessing collections in our repository, you assume all responsibility for infringement of right to privacy in your use of the material, and agree to indemnify and hold harmless UCSC Library Special Collections & Archives, its agents and employees against all claims, demands, costs, and expenses arising out of use of archival collections held by UCSC Special Collections & Archives.⁴³

⁴³ [UC Santa Cruz Special Collections & Archives Access Policy](#)

8.N. Sample Deaccessioning Workflows⁴⁴

There is an executed deed of gift, want to deaccession whole or part of collection:

1. List and segregate materials not to be retained.
2. Contact donor (or heir) via mail offering to return or discard material with a deadline for response. Donor letter templates can be found in Appendix B of SAA's *Guidelines*.
3. If no response within reasonable deadline, document and proceed with discard.

There is no deed of gift, want to deaccession whole or part of collection

1. Same as above.
2. If there is no known donor or heir, consider [CA state abandoned property law](#) in consultation with your campus legal counsel.

8.O. Resources for Ethical and Inclusive Description

- [Archives for Black Lives in Philadelphia Anti-Racist Description Resources](#) (2019) [PDF]
- [Design for Diversity Toolkit](#)
- [Identifying & Dismantling White Supremacy in Archives](#) (2016)
- [Protocols for Native American Archival Materials](#) (2007) [PDF]

⁴⁴ Based on "Workflows for Faculty Papers Accession" developed by Heather Briston, University Archivist and Head of Curators and Collections, UCLA in 2017.