



Article: Fund Raising for Photograph Preservation: Eight Days a Week

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FUND RAISING FOR PHOTOGRAPH PRESERVATION: EIGHT DAYS A WEEK

Debra Hess Norris

Presented at the PMG session of the 2006 AIC Annual Meeting in Providence, Rhode Island

Abstract

Results of the Heritage Health Index (HHI), the first comprehensive survey to assess the condition of U.S. collections across the entire spectrum of collection institutions, chronicles the preservation needs of photographic collections, including black-and-white and color photographic print materials, glass plate negatives and lantern slides, cellulose nitrate and acetate film base, post-1950 negative materials, microfilm, and early miniature cased objects. HHI results indicate that there are 727 million photographic materials (not including microfilm and microfiche) in our nation's archives (41%), libraries (29%), museums (21%), historical societies (7%), and archaeological repositories (2%). Twenty-one percent of these collections — or 153 million photographs — are in need of preservation; forty-two percent are in unknown condition.

This data (that also examines storage environments, emergency planning, and preservation staffing levels and may be analyzed by institutional size, type, or location) is a superb resource for conservation advocacy and an exceptional resource for development initiatives aimed toward the preservation of our photographic heritage.

A weakened economy and limited federal resources has resulted in serious funding challenges for cultural institutions; developing *achievable* fund raising goals for the preservation of our photographic heritage is essential. Here, HHI data is troubling. Sixty-eight percent of our nation's cultural institutions spend less than \$3,000 annually on preservation and collections care. Clearly, more stable support must be secured.

This presentation will build on the author's fund raising experience in conservation graduate education where, in the past ten year we have worked in partnership with the administration at the University of Delaware and Winterthur, faculty, alumni, and current students to secure new revenues and diversify our funding base. In doing so, we have raised approximately \$8 million in external support.

In fund raising for photograph preservation we must aggressively pursue all avenues of funding — government, corporate, foundation, professional membership organizations, alumni, and private donors — but do so wisely, with careful consideration of the “best” match. Logical and interesting links between potential donors and fund raising opportunities must be pursued. Promoting the convention of “shared responsibility” for our nation's heritage is also key. Corporations may be courted by promise of name recognition while foundations may be more focused on institutional mission and the opportunity to improve and enhance society in demonstrable ways. In soliciting corporate support, look for naming opportunities and appropriate ways to market the corporate donor to wider audiences. Endowment is a compelling way for donors to feel that they are

supporting sustainability for the benefit of future generations. HHI results reveal that only 13% of cultural institutions use income from endowed funds for preservation.

Our development experience and “lessons learned” translate to fund raising for photograph preservation and include the importance of institutional coalitions and strategic alliances, community and professional service, public outreach and scholarship, passion, top-notch promotional materials, donor cultivation, broad-based development plans with multiple priorities, creativity and innovation.

Combined with HHI data, institutional planning, and preservation assessments, these observations may strengthen development efforts within institutions large and small and provide guidance to conservators in independent practice whose resources are often more limited.

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