



INDIANA HISTORICAL SOCIETY COLLECTIONS ADVISOR

A RESOURCE FROM IHS LOCAL HISTORY SERVICES

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PLANNING COLLECTIONS STORAGE AND RESEARCH SPACES

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There are many times in the life cycles of museums that it becomes necessary to rethink collection storage and research spaces. A continually growing collection or an increased number of patrons wishing to research the collection, often serve as the catalyst of such changes. Whether planning and moving to a new space entirely, or simply needing to rethink current building usage, it is important to keep in mind a few key things in those early stages of space planning. If a collection change-up is in your future, take a look at the below sections for things to consider when planning collections storage spaces, research rooms and a few tips for both.



[Display of Hoosier Cabinetry at Home Show](#). (Bass Photo Co Collection, Indiana Historical Society)

COLLECTIONS STORAGE

- * Check with an architect or engineer to understand the load-bearing capacity of the building and make sure the space is structurally sound to hold the weight of both the collection and the storage shelves.
- * Consult the collections inventory to determine what types of storage furniture are needed, what sizes, and how many of each.
- * Use powder-coated shelving rather than wood.
- * Make sure there is enough space between shelving units to allow for easy retrieval of boxes.
- * Number storage units and individual shelves to make object location as easy as possible.
- * Provide protections for the collection; such as water sensors, fire suppression, non-UV lighting



ONLINE RESOURCES

[Chapter 7: Museum Collection Storage](#)
(National Park Service)

[Appendix D: Guidance on Planning for a Research Space](#)
(National Park Service)

FROM OUR LENDING RESOURCE CENTER

[Planning Successful Museum Building Projects](#)
(Walter Crimm, et al)

[Managing Previously unmanaged Collections](#)
(Angela Kipp)

[Reshaping Museum Space](#)
(Suzanne MacLeod, ed.)

[Moving Archives](#)
(John Newman and Walter Jones, eds.)

UPCOMING TRAINING AND PROGRAMS

[Digitization for Small Institutions](#)
Feb 6 and 7 -
LYRASIS online class.

[Interpreting Difficult History](#)
Feb. 7 -
Wisconsin Historical Society webinar.

and dust covers.

- * Plan in space to grow, not just space to store the items in the collection at this exact moment.
- * Maximize storage space by locating all other work outside of the storage room, such as cataloguing, accessioning and so forth.



[Fairbanks Library Reading Room](#). (Martin Collection, Indiana Historical Society)

RESEARCH ROOM

- * Comply with all Americans with Disabilities Act regulations.
- * Talk to current researchers and find out how they use the space and what they might benefit from in a future arrangement or space.
- * Visit other research rooms as a researcher to see how different organizations approach their reading rooms and think about what might, or might not, work in your own space.
- * Follow the 80/20 rule and design a space that works perfectly most of the time for most visitors, rather than worrying too much about the occasional digression from the average.
- * Keep in mind the number of researchers typically using the space at one time.
- * Determine the rules of the space and include any necessary accommodations: if purses and bags are not allowed in the room, provide lockers; if no coats are allowed, provide coat racks
- * Create a space for patrons to place finished items, especially if there are open-shelves that patrons have access to at all times, because a miss-shelved book is a lost book.

BOTH

- * Start by listing all of the activities planned to take place in each space in order to plan appropriately.
- * Employ a room-design software or simple graph paper to create an actual floor plan and consider various arrangements of the space.
- * Think about the outcome of each space, how should people feel in the space, what should they be able to do (research in silence, discuss items being studied, et. cetera).
- * Zone the space in a way that seems reasonable for what will be done there. Storage spaces might be zoned by object size, material, or type; while research rooms may be zoned by topic or activity.
- * Measure doorways to guarantee that new storage or research furniture (and collection items) can get into the designated space.
- * Plan ahead for any work easier done when the room is empty, such as updated electrical, HVAC, or painting.
- * Get input from various staff and volunteers about the space set-up, there may be some good ideas that bubble up.
- * Ascertain if there are any code requirements that might affect the spaces.
- * Have a plan for the safety and security of collections, staff and patrons in each space.

There are quite a few things to consider when planning for a newly arranged storage or access point for the collections. The first thing to do is have a vision for the space, know where the organization is headed in regards to how the collection is used. This will be especially useful if the changes to the storage and research areas will need to happen piece-meal so everything can stay on track and there is agreement of what happens first, second, and last.

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[Local History Services](#)

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