



# Conserve O Gram

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## Planning A Research Space

All parks and centers with museum objects, archival collections, or library collections should have a research room or space. It is a dedicated workspace within a museum where researchers (both within and outside the Service) may access, examine and study collections. Conditions within this dedicated space should protect and preserve the objects during research.

### *Research Space Criteria*

Research space should:

- Be dedicated to the research function
- Provide appropriate security for the collection
- Provide environmental controls adequate to prevent damage to the objects
- Be large enough to accommodate the needs and equipment of researchers using the collection now or in the future
- Be convenient to staff offices, collection storage space, researcher staging area, restrooms, curatorial work area, and/or laboratory
- Be accessible by persons with disabilities
- Have electrical, phone service and any other pertinent utilities necessary to meet the needs of the research function and satisfy all applicable codes (both national and local codes)

Each of these criteria will be discussed in more detail below.

### *Dedicated Space*

Other functions (such as collection storage, curatorial or common-use staff work areas), generally are not included in the same space with

the research function. Combining research space with space occupied by other functions makes securing and preserving the collection during research more difficult. It may be harder to control the environment to the appropriate levels for object preservation and harder to secure the objects if more people are routinely and frequently using the space.

### *Security*

Security of the collection during research is a major concern. Theft, defacement and destruction of documents or objects can occur. The level of security is based on an assessment of the risks to the collection. See NPS *Museum Handbook*, Part I, Chapter 9, Museum Collections Protection for security standards and specifics on performing a risk assessment.

Some collections may have low inherent risks because they are of low value, commonly available, and have low demand by the general public as collectibles. Collections of low risk may require only basic security measures. Other collections with higher risk would require more stringent security measures, such as continuous monitoring by staff. Examples of high risk collections include coinage, postage stamps and firearms because they are generally of high value, significance, and collectibility.

Archival/manuscript collections require more stringent measures because they are not cataloged at the item level, so loss of missing items is more difficult to prove. Trained research room staff must continuously monitor all researcher use (including staff use) of archival collections if they are to remain secure.

Ideally, research space should be observable from staff offices or work areas. Consider the use of a wall with glass windows. For collections with extremely high value, consider the installation of a video camera monitoring system to continuously view or record researcher use of the collection. Establish procedures to ensure that staff routinely monitor the space or review the video camera recordings noting irregularities. Researchers must sign in on the visitor log, which includes date, time in/out, name, organization, address, phone number, area of interest. Researchers should also complete the Researcher Registration Form (NPS *Museum Handbook*, Part II, Appendix D).

The structure housing the research space should have appropriate intrusion and fire protection/suppression systems as determined by a risk assessment.

The space should have limited entry/exit points—preferably the minimum number dictated by life safety codes for the size of the space. A small room may require only a single door that is a minimum of 36” wide. It may be a double door if larger objects require entry.

### ***Environmental Conditions***

Conditions in research space should not contribute to object deterioration. See NPS *Museum Handbook*, Part I, Chapter 4, Museum Collections Environment for standards and guidance on achieving appropriate environmental conditions.

Don't subject objects to rapid changes in temperature and relative humidity (RH) when removing them from storage. Temperature and RH conditions in the research space should be kept close to the same general temperature and RH levels as in collection storage space. In many instances research space controlled to human comfort levels (70°F and 55% RH) would exert minimal risk to the majority of objects during

research, provided the objects can be safely acclimatized to those conditions.

Objects stored in specialized cold conditions, such as nitrate, color, and black and white photographic materials, should be acclimatized to the conditions of the research space. You may remove metal objects from dry/desiccated conditions (below 35% RH) for short periods of time for research without damage. Be sure to return objects to storage as soon as possible after research use.

Maintain light levels that do minimal damage to objects. Lights should be UV filtered to limit damage to sensitive objects. Sunlight should be excluded from the space.

### ***Space Issues***

Research space for large, frequently researched collections may occupy as much as 25% of the combined storage and work space (exclusive of exhibition space) in the facility. However it is more common for the research space to take about 10% of the space.

Research space should be adjacent to or close by curatorial offices, collection storage and curatorial workspace in order to limit the distance objects must travel from one location to the other.

A staging area should be established outside and in close proximity to the research space to accommodate the needs of the researcher. The staging area is used to check, store and secure the researcher's outer garments, handbags, briefcases, containers, and packages while research is conducted. These items should not be brought into the research room.

Research on large, heavy or unwieldy objects, such as architectural fragments or cannons may, with proper supervision, occur at the location where the objects are stored.

### ***Equipment for Research Space***

Consider furnishing the research space with:

- One or more large work or library tables (36" x 72" to 48" x 96") or desks (36" x 60") with an appropriate number of chairs or folding tables that can be set up as needed if space is limited. Work surfaces should be clean, washable, stable, well-lit, and three times larger than the largest materials being researched within the space, so that researchers can work with groups of materials for comparison purposes.
- A fume hood and sink with water supply, if applicable, for use with wet and dry natural history collections
- Videotape and audiotape playback equipment, microfilm or microfiche reader/printers, computer with modem, typewriter and TV/VCR, if applicable. These pieces of equipment could be placed on mobile carts. Also make available dollies, carts, and book trucks for moving objects. These pieces of equipment, however, are generally not housed in the research space.
- A small reference library, including dictionary, atlas, encyclopedia, thesaurus, "Who's Who" type bibliographical dictionaries, finding aids, and other standard reference works on a bookshelf
- A bulletin board to display policies and procedures
- A hat and coat rack or locker and equipment stand for checking, storing and securing the researcher's outer garments, handbags, briefcases, containers and packages while research is conducted. This equipment should be located in a staging area, the curator's office or the curatorial workroom, not in the actual research space.

### ***Access for Researchers with Disabilities***

Access to the research space must meet all requirements as specified in the Americans with

Disabilities Act of 1990. Specifically the space will have:

- Passageways a minimum of 36" wide
- Doors a minimum of 32" wide
- Ramps, if a change in floor level exceeds 1/2 inch
- Elevators, if the building is multi-story
- Platform lifts, if the installation of an elevator is impractical

### ***Utilities***

The following utilities are needed for the research space functions:

- Outlets for task lighting and to run electronic equipment, such as laptop or desk computers. Outlets should be adjacent to the work surface that the researcher uses. Electrical service must meet local and national codes.
- Phone service with appropriate jacks to allow a computer local area network to be established if access to object descriptions in the museum catalog is to be provided
- Vent ducts if a fume hood is needed for research on natural history materials
- Hot and cold water supply lines if a sink is needed for research on natural history materials

### ***Planning for Research Space in a New Facility***

Work with key professional staff (architect, museum curator, archivist, conservator, museum specialist, librarian, and contractor) who can provide planning and assistance. Key professional staff may be found in the park, the support or cluster office, the regional office, or a program center office. Define your specific needs. Space must meet the primary criteria indicated above.

If you are forced to reduce space in a new building and must combine research space with

other activities, select compatible functions, such as library space, curatorial work space or staff offices. These spaces must be able to accommodate adequate work surfaces and allow staff monitoring of the researcher.

### ***Upgrading Your Facility for Research Space***

For planning research space in an existing facility, you should work with key professional staff who can examine your particular situation and provide guidance and planning assistance. Ensure that the space meets the primary criteria as indicated above.

If your situation is such that you cannot meet some or all of the primary criteria, you should begin planning to correct deficiencies or upgrade facilities to meet the criteria. It may be necessary to upgrade facilities or correct deficiencies in stages or increments if total costs to correct deficiencies are more than funding amounts allocated annually.

If you don't have enough space to make a separate research area, low-cost immediate improvement can still be made. The park can create a separate workstation or research space in a curatorial office or work space. The park may also consider sharing research space with related non-museum activities, such as a library reading room, provided the non-museum space is convenient to the museum storage space. Consider research activities in collection storage space as a last resort if no other space is available

and a risk assessment determines the impact on object preservation and security is minimal.

If research does occur in the collection storage room or if some objects are stored in the research room, objects can still receive a degree of security by storage in locked museum cabinets or in sealed containers on shelving. Cabinets and sealed containers will also buffer the immediate microenvironment around the object and reduce environmental deterioration of the object. The park staff should continuously monitor all research work in the collection storage space. If the park doesn't have enough staff that can be devoted to supervise researchers, explore other options. One option is to have research conducted in spaces constantly occupied by staff. Establish procedures and train staff to give attention to the activities of the researcher. Another option is to allow research only when staff is available. Arrange research appointments at a time when the researcher can be adequately monitored.

See NPS *Museum Handbook*, Part III, Appendix D for more guidance on planning a research space.

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