

The National Archives and Records Administration

Preservation Strategy 2019- 2024

Introduction

NARA's preservation programs underpin the successful delivery of NARA's core mission: *'to drive openness, cultivate public participation, and strengthen our nation's democracy through public access to high-value government records.'* Our support is delivered through a complex, highly successful system of preservation processes, policies, and activities designed to extend the useable life of records and access to holdings.

Yet against this backdrop of success, changes within NARA and challenges within a wider cultural arena have prompted a new look at the future of our preservation programs and how they can best support NARA's ambitions as a 21st century archive. The publication of NARA's access driven *2018-2022 Strategic Plan* makes clear NARA's commitment to providing *'cutting edge access to extraordinary volumes of government information,'* providing a clear mandate to shape the delivery of preservation products and services.

This strategy sets out a vision for preservation programs across NARA that can be used to:

- Strengthen relationships among the numerous NARA staff who have varying levels of preservation responsibilities;
- Demonstrate the value and impact of preservation activities and investment for NARA;
- Build on existing and new relationships within NARA and externally; and
- Provide accountability for preservation of holdings as defined in Title 44 of the US Code, principally to *'preserve and make available valuable Federal and Presidential Records.'*

Overall Vision

The overarching aim of this strategy is to establish Preservation Programs (RX) as the recognized hub of archival preservation expertise, leading the delivery of products and services that support access to holdings. This will be achieved through existing preservation programs and by empowering internal and external stakeholders to champion preservation efforts and support the vision outlined above. Where possible, we will leverage established networks and new collaborations to move this vision forward.

Mission, Vision, and Values

This Preservation Strategy 2019-2024 aligns with NARA's current strategy vision and values.

Mission: We will support sustainable access to NARA's holdings for current and future users through preservation, conservation, and research programs.

Vision: As a customer focused team we will deliver effective preservation programs to ensure the highest priority holdings receive the right preservation intervention at the right time.

Values: Our values support NARA's commitment to public service, openness, and transparency.

- **Collaboration:** Create an open and inclusive work environment that is built on respect, integrity,

and continuous learning.

- **Innovation:** Encourage creativity to drive innovation for improved practice.
- **Professionalism:** Pursue excellence through learning and being effective in what we do.

Transformational Outcomes

- Proactive cross-agency engagement, in recognition that challenges are not confined to one policy arena or program area;
- Use of evidence to inform preservation planning and policy is embedded as mainstream;
- Stakeholders are empowered with a sense of collective responsibility for sustainable access to holdings; and,
- Recognition as a leader in archival preservation products and services.

To achieve these outcomes, we will focus on delivering four main goals.

Our Goals:

Strategic Goal 1: Predict, understand, and act to mitigate the risks to NARA's holdings

We will focus on predicting and managing material change and will prioritize building resilience over preventing risk failure.

This will be achieved by:

1.0 Effective coordination and planning

By the end of FY 2021, we will have in place the structures and processes to deliver proactive, coordinated preventive programs focused on the highest risks to NARA's holdings.

Strategies for achieving this:

- Establish a *NARA Preservation Strategy Board* to provide oversight and planning across NARA. The board will be chaired by the Chief Operating Officer and coordinated with the Director of Preservation Programs, with representation from R, A, L, B, and M.
- Establish *Preservation Risk Guidance Groups*. Specifically: Environmental Management, Exhibitions, Digitization, Emergency Planning and Response, Guidance and Training, and Dynamic Media. These groups will be led by RX staff, the Chief of Digitization, and allied NARA staff. These groups will provide oversight and coordination of these key areas.

1.1 Predicting and optimizing environmental performance for improved preservation

Between FY 2019-24, we will predict the environmental performance of key NARA facilities, offer strategies for improved sustainable environmental management, and have a framework for analyzing the costs and benefits to inform storage planning.

Strategies for achieving this:

- Using existing data and the potential of computational modelling, we will predict and report the environmental performance of NARA facilities.
- Working closely with facility managers, we will develop protocols that optimize energy performance while balancing preservation requirements.

1.2 *Managing the risks to dynamic media: audio, video, and motion picture film*

By the end of FY 2020, we will make organizational changes in Research Services, including single-contact coordination in Preservation Programs, to simplify long-term planning and resourcing for optimized efficiency and effectiveness of preservation activities related to dynamic media.

Strategies for achieving this:

- Consolidate existing dynamic media preservation services to provide coherent preservation planning and expert leadership for the dynamic media team.
- In coordination with other NARA units with expertise and unique responsibilities, develop agile, robust, and effective contract management protocols to support end to end delivery and fulfillment of external reformatting contracts.

By the end of FY 2024, we will take the lead in ensuring easy to use policies and standards for dynamic media are in place across NARA.

Strategies for achieving this:

- Working with stakeholders, we will identify Agency needs for coordinated dynamic media standard copy types, and develop policies and standards for delivery.
- Through RX's *Preservation Commons* we will ensure information is shared widely across NARA and externally.

Between FY 2021-24, we will prioritize the most at risk audio and video formats, and define the mechanisms needed for a stepped-up program of reformatting.

Strategies for achieving this:

- In collaboration with Custodial Units, we will identify high risk audio and video formats and prioritize them according to archival significance and format risk.
- We will identify financial, technical, staffing knowledge, time, and collaboration needs necessary to develop and deliver a scaled-up reformatting program for at risk audio and video formats.

Contributing Programs to achieve Strategic Goal 1: Preventive Preservation Team, Research Services, Presidential Libraries, Facilities, Heritage Science Research and Testing Division, Office of Innovation, Information Services

Outcomes:

- Economic and environmental value is demonstrated.
- NARA's commitment to the *Energy Independence and Security Act (2007)* is demonstrated.
- The level of 'at risk' dynamic media holdings is reduced.
- Preservation protocols, policies, and standards for dynamic media are in place and communicated across all NARA facilities.

Strategic Goal 2: As an agile customer facing service, we will establish Preservation Programs as a leader in delivering the products and services our stakeholders need to support access to NARA's holdings

To achieve this goal, we will continue to provide preservation, conservation treatment, exhibition, and digitization support programs.

2.0 *Through coordinated communications, we will deliver effective, risk based preservation guidance and best practices.*

We will capture, share, and provide preservation information that can be easily used across NARA and the wider archival community. Single-point coordination within RX is essential to establish priorities, ensure consistency, and deliver efficiencies.

By the end of FY 2022, establish a ‘Preservation Commons’¹ within RX to provide a coordinated targeted information service that can be easily accessed and used by our many stakeholders.

Strategies for achieving this:

- Appoint a lead to oversee the development and delivery of this function, coordinated with the Preservation Risk Guidance Groups (*see Strategic Goal 1.0*).
- Set out a comprehensive delivery plan focused on the highest priority stakeholder needs and the mechanisms for delivery.

During FY 2020-24, foster effective and practical preservation practice across NARA through targeted delivery of the preservation information and resources our stakeholders need.

Strategies for achieving this:

- Develop, deliver, and continually evaluate the services delivered through ‘*Preservation Commons*.’
- Increase capability through established professional networks, the academic community, allied agencies, and organizations.

2.1 *Support access to NARA holdings through conservation, exhibitions, and digitization.*

We will ensure the most significant holdings are receiving the right treatment at the right time.

By the end of FY 2022, we will establish a two-year cycle of project-based conservation treatment focused on ‘significant’ high risk holdings. This will be achieved through collaboration with the Custodial Units.

By the end of FY 2024, all textual, cartographic, and still picture holdings identified as ‘urgent’ as of 2020 will be reviewed, and appropriate preservation interventions will be identified and planned.

Strategies for achieving this:

- Priorities for conservation treatment and custom housing will be determined for the next six (6) years. This will be done in collaboration with textual and non-textual units, in Presidential Libraries, Research Services, and Agency Services, and from input from other key stakeholders.

¹ In this context the term Preservation Commons is used to describe a central clearinghouse for preservation guidance, standards, best practices, etc.

2.2 *Grow capacity to support conservation and digitization of collections*

To meet increased demand for access to holdings, we will build capability in existing facilities and networks to deliver more conservation treatment and digitization preparation.

By the end of FY 2024, establish St. Louis as a ‘Preservation Services Unit’ to scale-up the provision of preservation services to NARA facilities in field offices.

Strategies for achieving this:

- Reorganize to address the two distinct but related functions within RXS: conservation and digitization for both preservation and access.
- Appoint a senior conservator to oversee the transformation of the current provision of conservation treatment for access and preservation beyond the burned files.
- Work closely with the Chief of Digitization and RXC to establish RXS as regional digitization hub.

Contributing Programs to achieve Strategic Goal 2: Preventive Programs Team, Conservation, Preventive Programs – St Louis, Office of Innovation, and Presidential Libraries

Outcomes:

- The number of holdings needing urgent attention is reduced.
- A tested proof of concept for delivering scaled-up services through existing facilities and networks.
- Increased conservation treatment and digitization delivers greater access.
- Enhanced reputation as leaders in archival preservation.
- Staff across NARA facilities are empowered to deliver effective preservation activities.

Strategic Goal 3: Exploit science and technology for improved practice

We will deliver an applied heritage science research program to address key challenges and opportunities facing NARA.

3.0 *Develop a heritage science² research program*

In collaboration with NARA stakeholders, including Digital Preservation, and external partners we will build our research profile through the delivery of world-class research, testing, and development.

By the end of FY 2024, we will put in place the mechanisms to enable collaboration with the university sector nationally and internationally, and allied heritage organizations.

²The umbrella term heritage science is now widely adopted internationally as it better reflects the adoption of cross-disciplinary scientific research that enables access, conservation, management, and the interpretation of cultural heritage. This is achieved through, for example, analysis, conservation, chemistry, and statistical methods. Heritage science encompasses conservation science, archeological, and building science.

Strategies for achieving this:

- Put in place the mechanisms to support research collaborations e.g. interns, postdoctoral researchers, etc.
- Identify new funding opportunities to support delivery of *Heritage Science Research strategy*.
- Take a leading role in the on-going development of a DC Heritage Science Network

By the end of FY 2020, establish the structure and the processes to develop the research themes set out in the *Heritage Science Research Strategy*.

Strategies for achieving this:

- Set out plans to establish an integrated program of ‘knowledge transfer’ in RX designed to accelerate innovation and to improve practice;
- Appoint a Director of Heritage Science Research to lead this critical function; and
- Identify a means for critical review of the research strategy as part of building continued support.

3.1 Accelerate knowledge transfer to practice

We will lead and partner with allied organizations to collaboratively support NARA’s Heritage Science Research Strategy.

By the end of FY 2024, we will have implemented strategies to grow capacity through collaborative relationships with the higher education sector, allied collections, and industry nationally and internationally.

Strategies for achieving this:

3.2 Enhance our reputation as leaders and innovators in heritage science research

We will exploit the potential of scientific analysis to understand how records were made and used as well as to inform practice. We will continue to share our work and expertise through published guidance, standards, and materials testing to a wide community.

Between FY 2019-24, we will accelerate knowledge transfer and trial new technologies and interdisciplinary approaches to improve preservation practice.

Strategies for achieving this:

- Establish a ‘What Works Lab’³ within the Heritage Science Research program as an exemplar of knowledge transfer and translational research shared within NARA and with broader communities of practice.
- Take a leading role in established professional networks for revised national material testing standards for the USA.

By the end of FY 2019, we will publish the outcomes of our research annually.

Strategies for achieving this:

- Working through RX’s *Preservation Commons* (see Strategic Goal 2.1) we will take an active role

in sharing our work in ways that are useful to our customers.

- We will publish our research in peer reviewed academic journals.

Contributing Programs to achieve Strategic Goal 3: Digital Preservation, Office of Innovation, Preventive Programs, Research Services

Outcomes:

- NARA'S research reputation is enhanced.
- Environmental and economic value of research is demonstrated.
- Capacity and resources are growing.
- Decisions are informed through better use of data and a multidisciplinary approach.

Strategic Goal 4: Developing our team

We need to be sure we have the right competencies and skills in place to transform Preservation Programs as a proactive, customer facing service able to address the challenges of a 21st century archive.

4.1 Defining the competencies and skills needed to deliver RX's future programs

We will define the right competencies and skills needed to deliver dynamic Preservation Programs.

By the end of FY 2020, assess professional development needs and develop a strategy for all of RX to inform individual development plans.

Strategies for achieving this

- We will target staff development resources and ensure that they are focused on the RX requirements to develop a high performing team, e.g. project management, communications, data analysis, and risk management.

Contributing Programs to achieve Strategic Goal 4: RX, Human Capital

Outcomes:

- Our teams have the skills and competencies in place to support NARA's preservation programs now and in the future.

³ The *What Works Lab* describes a function within the Research and Testing team that will review existing research and trial new techniques and innovations with the view to informing policy and address challenges. The goal is to provide up-to-date evidence and accelerate the transfer of research outcomes to practice.