

## Determining Use Patterns for Museum, Archives, and Library Collections

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In the middle 1990s, National Park Service (NPS) Western Regional Curator Jonathan Bayless proposed a different way of doing collection management plans (CMPs). Three of us had been doing the classic “operations evaluation” type of CMP in the Southeast, Western, and Pacific Northwest regions for a number of years, and they just were not being accepted and used by the parks.

Bayless proposed changing the approach: rather than address technical issues in collections management procedures, address the core “issues” that were preventing the park staff from implementing a viable museum management program.

Along with this change in philosophy we realized that our view of any park museum operation was very single-dimensional, and that we had been relying mostly upon information from a single individual, or single park division, to identify and document the needs of the park as a whole. In order to expand our view of park operations and needs, we decided to survey the park staff in advance of our on site visit. Since I had an interest in survey methodology, I volunteered to develop the system.

Development of a meaningful survey requires some background study and testing. Through the annual conferences of the American Association of Museums (AAM) I had become acquainted with the Visitor Studies Association, and their quarterly publication *Visitor Studies*. I also used Randi Korn’s book *Visitor Surveys: A User’s Manual* (an AAM publication) and Judy Diamond’s *Practical Evaluation Guide: Tools for Museums and Other Informal Educational Settings* (University of Nebraska Press), among other references.

We took the survey through two beta tests: one at Sequoia–Kings Canyon National Parks while doing a collections storage plan, and one at Yosemite National Park when developing a programmatic outline. In addition to tightening up the survey format, these test runs documented two other required factors:

- First, the survey must have “buy-in” from park management, and must be sent out under the superintendent’s signature.
- Second, the survey must go to every member of the park staff, including both permanent and temporary-status employees.

With these two conditions in place, we began getting some interesting results that were usable in understanding what was required in planning for museum operations in a specific park.

### Survey Objectives

The primary objectives of the survey are to determine the following information:

- Percentage of staff using the park collections and library;
- Percentage of staff using non-park information resources;
- Primary areas (categories) of material use, and reasons for use of those specific resources;
- Primary reasons staff do not use park museum collections and library;
- What measures may be necessary to promote resource availability and use; and
- General impressions concerning the value and use of archives and museum collections.

In addition, some limited demographic information is collected to develop a collective length of service and experience profile, and to demonstrate equitable response to the survey from each park administrative unit. Demographics can also assist in understand-

ing the motivation and needs of the respondent population.

### Survey Methodology

The survey is distributed to the temporary and permanent park staff under a memorandum from the superintendent, requesting that the survey be completed by a certain date and returned directly to the responsible CMP team member. Two types of questions were used to collect different types of information:

- *Checklist questions* designed to determine what types of services were being used, and what types of services were needed; and
- *Evaluative questions* designed to determine the respondents' attitudes toward park-specific operations, and servicewide operations in general.

Respondents were also given two opportunities to add comments: one in the "services used" and the other in the "services needed" sections. Write-in responses are not generally used in this type of survey because they often fail to elicit a statistically valid response, and any response that is generated is often difficult to quantify.

A response rate of 12% is required for this "mail-out/mail-in" type of survey to be considered statistically valid. The responses are then considered the "sample population" and results are considered to be representative of the "sample universe." Higher response rates naturally translate into more reliable statistics. In the twenty surveys conducted thus far, we have discounted the results in three due to inadequate response (less than 12%). The remaining 17 parks have various response rates between 12% and 83%, for an average response rate of 48%. As a result, we are confident these compiled results are accurate for the Pacific West Region (represented by ten parks) and the Intermountain Region (represented by seven parks).

We have documented some interesting trends:

- Over half the park staff use the park

library, and under half use the park collections. More than one-third of the staff use non-NPS collections for their information needs.

- Park photo collections are used the most, followed by resource management records, historical archives and administrative records. Archaeological and historical collections were used less.
- Herbarium collections are used most among the natural science material, followed by geology, insect, mammal, and bird specimens.
- Project-related research drives most use, followed by information for visitors as a distant second reason. Use for maintenance and repair information accounts for a large segment of collections use (presumably park records and photographs).

We have discovered some interesting reasons why park staff do not use collections. Remember, anything over 10% is statistically significant:

- 45% don't know what types of collections are available;
- 32% don't know where the collections are located in the park; and
- 23% don't know who can get them into the collections.

It appears that the collections are a well-kept secret in most parks.

Park staff had some specific ideas on what was needed to improve the way collections were managed:

- 57% suggested providing a listing of what was in the collections;
- 42% suggested providing a finding aid to the collections;
- 27% suggested providing on-line services to support research;
- 22% suggested providing professional staff to manage the collections;
- 22% wanted remote computer access to the collections; and
- 19% wanted to combine the museum collections with the library.

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These figures provide a good cross-check to the section on why collections were not being used. The implication is that we may solve the former by instituting the latter—which are just the kind of results you are looking for in a survey.

The evaluative section of the survey documented the value the staff ascribes to the management and use of archival, library, and museum collections in NPS.

- 85% think collections should be used to document park resources;
- 83% think there is value in parks maintaining these collections for use;
- 83% think the park collections should contain copies of all studies and reports done about the park;
- 78% think that the collections serve as an “institutional memory” for the park;
- 67% believe the collections should be consulted for information prior to beginning resource management projects; and
- 65% believe that park visitor centers should exhibit more material from park collections.

The implications documented here are overwhelming. It is apparent that park staff thinks the collections should document the park resources, should be maintained for study and use, and should be exhibited more to the public.

### Conclusion

Over the past several years the survey has proved a useful tool in documenting the needs of park collections management, particularly in the Pacific West Region. It has provided park staff with a method to make their needs concerning archival, library, and museum collections known to park management. Moreover, it has given those of us involved in planning for these resources the ability to define and quantify those needs in an efficient manner. The survey also allows us to document and quantify the value the park staff ascribes to these resources. In turn, this knowledge should allow park management to better allocate available resources to collections preservation and management.

*The compiled 17-park survey is appended below.*

# Museums and Collections

## SECTION I

These first questions will help us determine use patterns for museum, archives, and library collections. For the purpose of this survey, a "visit" to the collections also includes verbal, telephone and e-mail requests for information that would require the Collections Manager to find and communicate that information to you.

1. Do you use the park library? **250** No **310** Yes

If yes, about how many times in the past year? **4,872 (15.5 visits average)**

2. Do you use the park collections/archives? **300** No **257** Yes

If yes, about how many times in the past year? **3,433 (13 visits average)**

3. Do you use non-NPS collections or archives? **375** No **173** Yes

If yes, about how many times in the past year? **1,402 (8 visits average)**

4. What parts of the collections/archives do you use (check as many as apply):

(% from number of responses divided by 257 positive responses from #2, above)

- |   |                  |   |                  |
|---|------------------|---|------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Historic Archives  | <b>141 (55%)</b> | <input type="checkbox"/> Administrative Records     | <b>104 (40%)</b> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Photo Collections  | <b>212 (82%)</b> | <input type="checkbox"/> Historic Collection        | <b>87 (34%)</b>  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Archeological Collection   | <b>77 (30%)</b>  | <input type="checkbox"/> Ethnological Collection    | <b>37 (14%)</b>  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Herbarium  | <b>64 (25%)</b>  | <input type="checkbox"/> Paleontological Collection | <b>20 (07%)</b>  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Insect Collection  | <b>29 (11%)</b>  | <input type="checkbox"/> Geological Collection      | <b>39 (15%)</b>  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Mammal Collection  | <b>33 (13%)</b>  | <input type="checkbox"/> Bird Collection            | <b>30 (12%)</b>  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Resource Management Records (such as building files, natural resources studies, archeological excavations reports) | <b>143 (56%)</b> |   |                  |

5. What are the primary reasons you use the collections (check as many as apply):

(% from number of responses divided by 257 positive responses from #2, above)

- |  |                 |   |                  |
|--|-----------------|---|------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Administrative Research                   | <b>81 (32%)</b> | <input type="checkbox"/> Project Research               | <b>198 (77%)</b> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Develop Summer Programs                   | <b>53 (21%)</b> | <input type="checkbox"/> Comparative Studies            | <b>43 (17%)</b>  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Maintenance/Repair Information            | <b>61 (24%)</b> | <input type="checkbox"/> Historic Structure Information | <b>62 (24%)</b>  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Publication                               | <b>49 (19%)</b> | <input type="checkbox"/> Information for visitors       | <b>133 (52%)</b> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Exhibit/Programs                          | <b>42 (25%)</b> |   |                  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Environmental Impact/Remediation Research | <b>48 (19%)</b> |   |                  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please list):                      |                 |   |                  |

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### SECTION II

We realize there might be many different reasons park staff do not make use of the museum, archives, or library collections in their work, and it may well be possible to fix some of the situations if we know what to look for. Your open and honest response to this question would be appreciated.

6. What are the primary reasons you **do not** use the collections (check as many as apply):

- |  |                  |   |
|--|------------------|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Don't know where the collections/archives are located       | <b>181 (32%)</b> |   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Don't know what types of collections are available          | <b>251 (45%)</b> |   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Don't know how to find the collections I need               | <b>149 (27%)</b> |   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Don't know who can get me into the collections              | <b>127 (23%)</b> |   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> There is no place to look at/study the collections/archives | <b>80 (14%)</b>  |   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> There are no supporting archives (reports, maps, photos)    | <b>37 (06%)</b>  |   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> The collections don't have the items I need                 | <b>34 (06%)</b>  |   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> The collections are not relevant to my job                  | <b>142 (25%)</b> |   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> There is no place to work <b>52 (09%)</b>                   |                  | <input type="checkbox"/> No wet laboratory <b>19 (03%)</b>    |
| The collections not physically accessible <b>72 (13%)</b>                            |                  | no dry laboratory <b>19 (03%)</b>                             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Not electronically accessible <b>102 (18%)</b>              |                  | <input type="checkbox"/> No preparation area <b>15 (03%)</b>  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> There is no supporting library <b>25 (04%)</b>              |                  | <input type="checkbox"/> No study area <b>28 (05%)</b>        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> There is no computer printer <b>14 (03%)</b>                |                  | <input type="checkbox"/> No copy machine <b>21 (04%)</b>      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Collections are not organized <b>41 (07%)</b>               |                  | No one to let me in <b>30 (05%)</b>                           |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Not open on a regular schedule <b>65 (12%)</b>              |                  | <input type="checkbox"/> The staff is not friendly <b>n/a</b> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> There is no one to help me find things <b>39 (07%)</b>      |                  | <input type="checkbox"/> The staff is not helpful <b>n/a</b>  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Collections are too far away from where I work.             |                  | <b>35 (11%)</b>   |

(% based on number of responses to each question divided by 559, the total number of respondents to the survey)

## Museums and Collections

### SECTION III

There is always room for improvement. We are looking for some general trends and areas that may require innovation and shifts in the way museum, archives and library collections are managed. Again, your open and honest response to this question would be appreciated.

7. What could the collections/archives do to be more useful to you (check as many as apply):

- |  |                  |
|--|------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Move collections/archives to a more central location  | <b>74 (13%)</b>  |
| Suggestions: <b>Consider development of “branch” collections located at points of use.</b>   |                  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Open collections/archives different or longer days and hours  | <b>87 (16%)</b>  |
| Suggestions: <b>Consider staggered days/hours of operations</b>  |                  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Provide a listing of what is in the collections   | <b>317 (57%)</b> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Provide a finding aid to the collections  | <b>232 (42%)</b> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Combine museum collections with archives  | <b>91 (16%)</b>  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Combine museum collections with library   | <b>107 (19%)</b> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Provide a work area   | <b>82 (15%)</b>  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Wet lab <b>25 (04%)</b> <input type="checkbox"/> Dry lab <b>37 (06%)</b> <input type="checkbox"/> Other: <b>20 (04%)</b>      |                  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Provide a computer hook up  | <b>75 ( )</b>    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Printer <b>43 (08%)</b> <input type="checkbox"/> Copy machine <b>48 (09%)</b> <input type="checkbox"/> Other: <b>13 (02%)</b> |                  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Provide on-line services to support research  | <b>151 (27%)</b> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Provide professional staff to organize and work on collections  | <b>124 (22%)</b> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Organize existing collections   | <b>101 (19%)</b> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Organize existing collections in a different manner   | <b>25 (04%)</b>  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Provide professional staff to assist with access to collections   | <b>114 (20%)</b> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Provide remote computer access to collections/archives  | <b>125 (22%)</b> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Provide the type of collections I need  | <b>16 (03%)</b>  |
| Suggestions:   |                  |

(% based on number of responses to each question divided by 559, the total number of respondents to the survey)

## Museums and Collections

### SECTION IV

We are interested in your general and overall impressions regarding the value and use of museum, archives, and library collections within the NPS.

8. Please indicate the intensity of your opinion by circling one letter for each statement below.

A	U	D	A = Agree   U = Uncertain   D = Disagree
85%	6%	2%	Museum collections and archives should be used to document park resources.
10%	14%	68%	Park collections and archives are of no value to me in the completion of my job.
67%	17%	11%	Park archives, collections and libraries need professional management and care.
67%	27%	1%	Park collections and archives should be consulted prior to beginning resource management projects.
57%	22%	15%	Park collections and archives should be more available for park staff use.
60%	23%	7%	Park museum collections and archives are primary resources for the park.
54%	27%	10%	The best use for park collections is reference and research.
43%	42%	8%	Park collections would be more useable if combined with the archives and library.
26%	55%	13%	There is not enough emphasis on natural materials in park collections.
4%	15%	74%	Parks should not be expending staff, time and funding on museum collections.
83%	11%	1%	Park archives should contain copies of all studies and reports done about the park.
17%	50%	27%	There is not enough emphasis on cultural material in park collections.
2%	8%	83%	There is no value in parks maintaining park museum collections or archives.
78%	14%	1%	Park collections and archives serve as the "institutional memory" of the park.
65%	20%	8%	Park Visitor Centers should exhibit more material from the park collections.
5%	32%	56%	Funds spent on museum collections and archives would be better spent on preservation of other park resources.

(% based upon number of responses in each category divided by 559, or total number of respondents to the survey)

# Museums and Collections

## SECTION V

In order to assure a well represented response from a cross section of park staff, we would appreciate a minimum amount of demographic information.

Number of years in the NPS **11 average**

Number of years at current park **6 average**

Number of park units you have served in **3 average**

Current position (optional) **Administration: 71 Interpretation: 62 Maintenance: 50 Ranger: 79  
Resource Management: 81 other and/or not recorded:**

**216**

Number of years in current position **4 average**

Are you currently:

Permanent staff **315**  Term/Seasonal/Temporary staff **216** not recorded: **28**

Please estimate the time you spent responding to this survey: **10 minuetns average**

### Parks Surveyed:

<b>Redwood National &amp; State Parks</b>	<b>Mount Rainier National Park</b>
<b>Bents Old Fort National Historic Site</b>	<b>Whiskeytown National Recreation Area</b>
<b>Hopwell Culture National Historical Park</b>	<b>Olympic National Park</b>
<b>Cabrillo National Monument</b>	<b>Hawaii Volcanoes National Park</b>
<b>USS Arizona Memorial</b>	<b>Great Basin National Park</b>
<b>Mesa Verde National Park</b>	<b>Lassen Volcanic National Park</b>
<b>Hagerman Fossil Beds National Monument</b>	
<b>Southeast Utah Group</b>	
<b>Arches National Monument</b>	
<b>Canyonlands National Park</b>	
<b>Hovenweep National Monument</b>	
<b>Natural Bridges National Monument</b>	

Total Number of Survey Forms Distributed:.....1,143

Total Number of Survey Forms Returned:..... 559

Response Rate..... 48%

