DEVELOPING A PRIORITY LIST FOR RECOVERY

Each library and/or collection unit must establish its own priority list of materials for recovery after a disaster. Do not try to establish item-by-item lists, but instead think in terms of call number classifications, record groups or series, etc., taking into consideration ALL format types. An exception should be made for the “treasures” of the collection. Lists should contain the exact location of all priority materials; including a layout map of the collection area is helpful. This list should be reviewed annually.

Your preservation representative will be holding sessions with area curators and librarians responsible for collections to assist with creating priority lists. It is a lot of work, but consider: this priority list will also assist in preparation of an emergency, such as the approach of a hurricane, or preparation for renovation. Priority collections can be identified immediately and staff can act quickly to prevent damage or loss. You should consult standing collections policies and procedures in the Library; there may be content that will assist you in making an informed decision. Consultation with subject specialists is also highly recommended; a task force for creating these priority lists may be helpful. You will have an opportunity to do this in these sessions with your preservation representative.

The factors below will help you start thinking about prioritization of your collections in case of an emergency.

WEIGHING FACTORS

The following is a list of factors to consider when “weighing in” your collections, defined with examples and further considerations (if applicable):

VITAL RECORDS
- Definition: Records and materials that are essential to collections operations and recovery
- Examples: Shelf list, acquisitions records, archival records (whether paper or electronic in format)
- Consider: Creating microfilm/ digital copies of these records and keeping a copy offsite

IMPORTANCE
- Definition: The importance to and extent of use by your readers should be of primary consideration, but weighed against the availability of replacements.
- Examples: Materials that are most often used and those that support the fundamental mission of the collection

AVAILABILITY OF REPLACEMENTS
- Definition: Materials that are still readily available or easily replaceable
- Examples: Recent publications

COST
- Generally, will the cost of replacement be more than the salvage cost? One crate of wet books costs about $300 to freeze dry is a good rule of thumb to go by for this purpose,
keeping in mind that one crate can hold 10-12 books at most. The cost will go up for special material, such as vellum/parchment. Remember that replacement costs will include not only purchase price, but also the costs in ordering, processing, and preparing items for the shelf.

**MONETARY VALUE**

- Consider: Are these collections high in dollar value? This can be difficult to determine, since dollar values cannot be placed on some collections. This is why this factor is not a stand-alone consideration, but one that is considered with other factors such as archival value, importance to the overall collection, etc.

**SCHOLARLY VALUE**

- Consider: Are certain collections or subject areas particularly strong in your institution? Which materials are of high value for research? Is the collection of special value to your library and/or the surrounding area communities?

**LEVEL OF INVENTORY CONTROL/CATALOGING**

- Examples: Books in acquisitions departments; gift books; newly-acquired collections
- Consider: If there is a loss in this area, there is no complete list of the collections. This should be a high priority area for recovery. This is assuming that these are materials that the institution is planning on adding to the collection.

**COLLECTION TOOLS**

- Definition: Materials that prove what items are in your collection.
- Examples: Bibliographic records, card catalogs or shelf lists, finding aids, registers, and accession records.
- Consider: Operations will be easier to restore if this information is readily accessible. An offsite copy (in paper or digital) of such records is extremely important.

**ORGANIZATIONAL RECORDS**

- Definition: Not vital records by definition, but records that would make restart of operations easier.
- Examples: Contract and legal papers, financial and accounting information, contact lists (donors, members, clients, bookdealers, etc.)

**ARTIFACTUAL OR INTRINSIC VALUE**

- Definition: Artifacts that have value in their own right as objects in which surrogates (facsimiles, photocopies, etc.) would be inadequate.
- Examples: Items owned by persons of note, only known copy of the item nationally/internationally
FORMAT
- Definition: Some formats are more difficult to recover than others; energies may be better spent on materials that are more easily salvageable. This factor should be considered in combination with some of the other factors listed here.
- Examples: Films and negatives may be irretrievable after a fire; books with coated paper may block (stick together) after water damage.
- Consider: Making copies of important negatives and films, and store them offsite.

OWNERSHIP
- Definition: Items not directly owned by the library
- Examples: Loaned materials or materials received on approval
- Consider: These may be a top priority since they belong to someone else

ASSIGNING PRIORITIES

After weighing the above factors, decide which collection groups overall are high, medium, and low priority. Weight each part of the collection according to the criteria below, assigning a number of points (for example 1 to 10) for each. Then set priorities based on point totals for each collection area. You may also choose to make combined judgments based on these guidelines:

HIGH PRIORITY (1)
- Materials used most frequently and/or extensively by readers
- Vital records for which no back-up copy exists
- Materials that cannot be replaced and are most important to your collection (according to pre-determined criteria)
- Collection tools and other materials that are critical to ongoing operations

MEDIUM PRIORITY (2)
- Important materials that could be replaced, but cost of replacement would exceed cost of salvage

LOW PRIORITY (3)
- Materials that can be replaced in the original or some other format
- Materials that have a high monetary value, but low value by other measures

In the event of a disaster, keep in mind that no matter what priorities you set, some materials will not be salvageable, and/or not “worth the effort” to salvage. For example, volumes with coated paper (journals, yearbooks) that are beginning to “block” may not be recoverable or may not be warranted by their value in the collection.