



Article: Effective Advocacy and Partnerships: Lessons Learned from Global Photograph Preservation Initiatives

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Effective Advocacy and Partnerships: Lessons Learned from Global Photograph Preservation Initiatives

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Bertrand Lavédrine, Paul Messier and Tram Vo**

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For nearly two centuries, the emergence and ascendancy of photography have sparked exchange and linked societies around the globe. In the nineteenth century in particular, photographs brought peoples of other cultures into one's living room and permitted glimpses of landscapes and cityscapes beyond imagining. Photographic images continue to this day to be highly valued across cultural, religious, ethnic, and socioeconomic divides. From Benin to Beirut, Bogota, Beijing, and Boston, photograph collections worldwide have an astonishing capacity to connect humanity and strengthen cultural identity. Photography is recognized as an art form, but in addition, these visual materials can promote reconciliation, enhance creative traditions, encourage societal improvements, foster exchange in countries where literacy remains low, and spark remembrance and appreciation where cultural heritage is endangered or lost.

Today, photograph preservation serves as a stimulus for broader community, enlightened policy-making, economic development, and an incentive for smaller nations whose cultural identity may be threatened. As global societies suffer from increased and near catastrophic economic and other crises, the need to preserve their tangible and intangible heritage is elevated. And while often underfunded, memory projects of all kinds are mounting in numbers, with many cultural leaders fully committed to their cause.

Photographic collections are essential documents of our history and cultural identity, yet these holdings are often at risk, located as they are in storage environments with inadequate controls to temper the effects of a broad spectrum of climatic conditions – from temperate desert to unrelenting monsoon. High relative humidity and temperature conditions, mold, insects, pollutants, poor storage enclosures, and indelicate handling practices all represent invasive agents of deterioration and are universal. The need to preserve born-digital and reformatted collections further dilutes attention and resources to care for irreplaceable originals. Accelerating the urgency are the recurrence and cost of natural disasters globally. Tsunamis and hurricanes underscore the vulnerability of cultural institutions in areas at or near sea level, while tornadoes, mudslides, floods, and earthquakes devastate collections in all regions of the world. Human conflict internationally can be a final source of devastation and destruction. We must work in partnership to promote the vital importance of emergency planning and the ongoing need for better coordinated response worldwide, especially within the developing world, where photographic collections are threatened by neglect and immediate degradation.

As photograph conservation professionals, we have the capacity, and indeed the responsibility, to engage with others and to serve as global ambassadors connecting projects to resources while promoting shared decision-making and cost-effective, indigenous solutions. We must use

emerging technologies to establish innovative platforms for multi-lingual networking and focus on on-the-ground training while building new collaborative partnerships worldwide. Our work – in association with others – makes photographic collections of all kinds accessible now and in the future.

Lessons learned from the study of photograph preservation projects are invaluable. Initiatives over the past 5 years involving two countries or more are charted at <http://goo.gl/maps/UL5S7>. This evolving Google map¹ documents a wide range of photograph preservation activities, including collection assessments, training programs, workshops, courses, and collaborative scientific investigation. Data gathered outline the type of project, participants, goal, time frame, and funders, and may be used to assess progress and identify opportunities. An investment by the European Union, for example, has strengthened applied research in this region. Educational projects, from workshops to webinars and hybrid models, serve as educational models that can be repeated and copied to populate numerous cultural centers, as they should and must. However, many projects remain uncharted, and entire continents of the world – such as Africa, Asia, and South America – are underserved.²

While best practices in photograph preservation continue to evolve, a study of many successful projects worldwide reveal the following essentials for success:

- Connect preservation initiatives to broader efforts in energy, environment, and economic development. People connect around emergency response and recovery. (Prior planning and emergency mitigation, however, are vital to prevent catastrophic loss.)
- Projects promoting reconciliation and shared understanding resonate with many and may garner increased attention and resources. Peace-building projects are powerful and link beautifully with the preservation of shared photographic heritage.
- Identify regional partners with a track record for leadership, creative thinking, advocacy, and capacity building.
- Sustained interaction is essential to building lasting and effective professional and personal networks centered on trust and shared understanding. Use e-mail, social media, and voice over internet (VOI) systems where available to control costs and ensure regular contact.
- Limitations on global travel mandate effective use of new communication tools and technologies. Many interesting and effective platforms for information exchange are available for use in many parts of the globe.
- Engage local and regional decision makers to ensure that they are connected to preservation project development and implementation as soon as possible.
- Build visibility through effective public relations and marketing. Document clearly the project significance and need. Establish value in preserving both tangible and intangible

heritage. Use cultural heritage and its care as a symbol for an engaged and empowered society.

- Share goals and establish a short- and long-term implementation time frame. Ensure this plan is well communicated to others. Do not operate in isolation.
- Photograph preservation training and curriculum development require time and careful attention to project realities. Focus on strong education and skill development to better ensure project sustainability and enhanced impact. Train-the-trainer or continuous learning initiatives are typically more effective than traditional workshops and seminars. Recorded webinars have merit as powerful educational tools – and this delivery system may allow for more direct translation into other languages.
- Deliverables must be measurable, requiring concrete expectations and outcomes. Many funders demand accountability. Project assessment is essential.

We cannot achieve all of these goals alone. Nor would we want to. Collaborative partnerships are essential to our progress as we work to document, analyze, and preserve photographic materials worldwide. These relationships may reveal new insights not easily predicted and rewards often impossible to fully imagine or appreciate. To be successful they require:

- Mutual respect and understanding among all partnering individuals and institutions
- Awareness of and respect for cultural differences and motivations
- Various perspectives, skills, and talents with full representation for all and inclusion of differing institutions
- Flexibility and willingness to always learn from each other
- Flexibility to adjust experience and standards based on local conditions and resources
- Open and frequent communication via conference call or email where available
- Shared vision and common mission
- Competent leadership
- Sufficient funds and time
- An implementation team

Weak institutional assets, discomfort with risk, poor follow-through, and limited accountability will deter progress. And while funding may be only one component of this equation, it is typically essential. Project monies must be invested wisely but without hesitation to ensure momentum and sustainability. Funding proposals should be well integrated within themes such

as cultural diversity or identity, intercultural dialogue, global cooperation, and cultural access. In addition to the more traditional arts and humanities grants, science and technology funding streams and strategies that may further advance an understanding of photographic materials and their vulnerabilities must be pursued. Review targeted agency and foundation websites, past awards, and annual reports; assess application procedures; and reach out to program officers for additional insight and guidance. In doing so, document why the proposed preservation initiative is important, what will be accomplished, when these activities will take place, and how the proposed partners are best positioned to lead and sustain these activities. Consult *Collaboration and Fundraising: Preservation of Photographic Materials* by Dr. Maria Gonzalez as an essential resource for future photograph preservation projects worldwide and to accompany the Google Map.³

While money is important, people are crucial. Only individuals will have a passion and a commitment to advancing shared knowledge and advocacy.⁴ Find those people and partner with them! As projects develop, one must always NETWORK and:

- Be open to all challenges.
- Be proactive with cultural heritage leaders.
- Be resourceful and positive – be a change maker not a problem creator.
- Focus on education and dissemination. Develop new portals, wikis, and webinars.
- Offer engaging public presentations on the preservation of family photographic treasures at all project venues.
- Develop a track record of collaboration.
- Share knowledge by reaching out using social media.
- Leverage community engagement and involve many constituencies at all times.
- Join IIC and ICOM-CC, and follow the work of ICCROM and UNESCO.
- Consider Fulbright opportunities.
- Offer TED-like talks internationally, and connect to global agendas of all kinds.

The loss of our photographic heritage is felt by all. Whether housed in museums, libraries, archives, news agencies, archeological repositories, or private dwellings, photographic collections worldwide are at risk. We hope the tools, resources, and guidelines provided here will catalyze and strengthen collaborative efforts to engage communities in the preservation of these materials for the enrichment of our world now and in the future.

Notes

1. This Google map is a work in progress. Any projects connecting two or more countries are welcome to be represented. Please organize your project information according to the format below along with your project's web link if available, and email this information to Debra Hess Norris (dhnorris@art-sci.udel.edu) or Megan Kirschenbaum (meganjane123@gmail.com).

Example Format

1. Location (city/country)
 2. Project Title
 3. Type of Project (preventive care or education and training or treatment and documentation or research and analysis)
 4. Engagement Dates
 5. Collaborator (agencies, institutions, etc.)
 6. Funders (if relevant)
 7. Project's Primary Goal (one sentence or so only)
2. For greater discussion on selected global projects see *From Russia to Laos: Building Global Partnerships To Preserve Photographic Heritage* by Debra Hess Norris, Martin Jürgens, Nora Kennedy, Bertrand Lavédrine, and Paul Messier, *Conservation Perspectives, The GCI Newsletter*. 27.1 (Spring 2012).
http://www.getty.edu/conservation/publications_resources/newsletters/27_1/feature.html
 3. See the following: http://www.connectingtocollections.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/Collaboration_and_Fundraising_for_Preservation_of_Photographic_Materials.pdf.
 4. See the following publications for useful suggestions and best practices for general collections care advocacy. Much of this information applies to photographic holdings.

Heritage Preservation. Capitalize on Collections Care To Increase Support, Generate Contributions and Donations, Increase Membership and Support, and Stimulate Earned Income. Washington DC: Heritage Preservation, Inc. 2003.

Heritage Preservation. A Public Trust at Risk: The Heritage Health Index Report on the State of America's Collections. Washington D.C.: Heritage Preservation, Inc. 2005. Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS), *Connecting to Collections* initiative, National Commission for Culture and the Arts. Also see recorded webinars at the Connecting to Collections Online Community (<http://www.heritagepreservation.org/c2c/>) which include many sessions addressing various aspects of advocacy: (<http://www.connectingtocollections.org/topic/recordings/>).

There are a myriad of excellent books on effective collaboration, including these two classics: *Principle-Centered Leadership* by Stephen R. Covey (1991) and *The Visionary Leader* by Bob Wall, Robert Solum and Mark Sobol (1992).

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