

INTRODUCTION



Collections are a basic foundation of what the Smithsonian is and does. They quietly underpin many of the exhibitions, research efforts, education programs, and other high-profile activities for which the Institution is known.

Among the Smithsonian’s collections are treasures of inestimable value to science, culture, and the American people — unique biological type specimens, the Hope diamond, original manuscripts by Isaac Newton and Albert Einstein, works of art spanning the range from modern West to ancient East, the Apollo 11 command module, the 1814 Star-Spangled Banner that inspired the US national anthem, the Wright Flyer — the list could go on and on. Stewardship of these treasures is arguably the Smithsonian’s most fundamental responsibility.

The imperative to develop collections was not part of James Smithson’s original bequest, and the 1846 legislation that created the Smithsonian did not spell out the Institution’s collecting mission. Interpretation of the bequest was left to the discretion of the Board of Regents. The Smithsonian’s first Secretary, Joseph Henry, saw collections as a drain on resources better allocated to research, and resisted their accumulation.¹ The emergence of the Smithsonian as a major collector occurred in stages, as a result of decisions made by the Board of Regents, the Congress, subsequent Secretaries, collecting unit directors, donors, curators, and others who shaped the Smithsonian over the years. Thus, collections have largely developed in the absence of any single overarching framework, legal mandate, or vision for the Institution.²

The historic evolution of the Smithsonian’s collections has led to the emergence of certain questions and concerns. What is the role of national collections? Do the collections of the various Smithsonian units fit their current missions? If not, how can these collections be refined? How should the resource needs of collections be balanced against those of other important Institutional functions, such as research, exhibitions, and education? Where will future collections be housed? These concerns have grown in recent years, as some collections have pressed up against the limits of available storage space, personnel, and financial resources.

¹ Henry did not have a problem with collections intended to support research, but he did not want the Smithsonian to become a national “storehouse,” nor did he approve of accumulating collections primarily for exhibition. For a more in-depth discussion, see Appendix A.

² For a detailed discussion of the historical development of Smithsonian collections, see Appendix A.

On numerous occasions in the past, Smithsonian leadership has recognized and addressed such issues — in some cases successfully. The minutes of the Board of Regents make reference to collections throughout the Institution’s history, especially when large acquisitions were being debated, and major Institutional reviews that included examination of collections issues were conducted in 1927, 1946, 1977, and 1993. From time to time, circumstances necessitate a thorough, Institution-wide assessment of the current state of collections, with an eye to informing future policy and operational choices. That is the purpose of this study.

Of necessity, this report presents broad conclusions and recommendations. They do not all apply to every collecting unit and collection at the Smithsonian. The study seeks to identify common issues that affect a number of units, and singles out particular units only in special cases. However, the conclusions and recommendations do offer ideas that all units, regardless of the current state of their collections, can use to assess and improve their collections policies, plans, and processes.

an overview of Smithsonian collections

The Smithsonian Institution has one of the world’s largest collections of artifacts and documents. These collections are held by a number of distinct administrative units, encompassing museums, archives, libraries, and research facilities (called “collecting units” in this report). The following have been designated as official collecting units by the National Collections Program (NCP), which was established in 1987 to gather and maintain consistent data on Smithsonian collections:

Anacostia Museum/Center for African American History and Culture
(AM/CAAHC)
Architectural History and Historic Preservation (AHHP)
Archives of American Art (AAA)
Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage (CFCH)³
Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum (C-HNDM)
Freer and Sackler Galleries of Art (FSG)⁴
Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden (HMSG)
Horticulture Services Division (HSD)
National Air and Space Museum (NASM)
National Museum of African Art (NMAfA)
National Museum of American History (NMAH)
National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI)
National Museum of Natural History (NMNH)
National Portrait Gallery (NPG)
National Postal Museum (NPM)
National Zoological Park (NZP)
Smithsonian American Art Museum (SAAM)
Smithsonian Institution Archives (SIA)
Smithsonian Institution Libraries (SIL)

museum collections

According to NCP figures for FY2002, Smithsonian museum collections contained over 143.5 million objects; archive collections (in both museums and archives

³ CFCH holds both object and archival collections, but reports only the latter to NCP.

⁴ Consisting of the Freer Gallery of Art and the Arthur M. Sackler Gallery; they are administered as a single unit, although their collections are reported separately.

unattached to museums) included about 163.9 million items, plus almost 6.9 million feet of film;⁵ and library collections comprised almost 1.5 million volumes.

This accounting of collections at the Smithsonian is incomplete, for two reasons. First, designated collecting units hold some collections that they are not required to report to NCP, such as some objects and lots that are pending accession. Second, several Smithsonian research units that are *not* officially designated collecting units — such as the Smithsonian Center for Materials Research and Education (SCMRE), Smithsonian Astrophysical Observatory (SAO), and Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute (STRI) — also hold collections.⁶

Among the museums, NMNH dominates the object count, with 88 percent of the Smithsonian's total museum object collections, or nearly 126 million of the objects reported to NCP (Table 1). Other collecting units that hold particularly large numbers of objects are NPM (about 13.4 million) and NMAH (about 3.2 million).⁷ By contrast, the smallest units, such as AM/CAAHC, NZP, and the Sackler Gallery, have collections of just a few thousand objects. As a group, the art museums, with the exception of C-HNDM, tend to have relatively small collections.

The objects in Smithsonian collections come in all sizes and descriptions. The high object counts at NMNH and NPM reflect the nature of these units' collections: at NPM, millions of postage stamps push up the total; at NMNH, several collections consist of huge numbers of tiny specimens — the entomology collections, for example, include some 1.5 million mosquitoes. On the other hand, NMNH's largest specimens — such as its blue whale skeleton and the 8-ton, 13-foot African bush elephant that greets visitors at the museum's Mall entrance — are among the most imposing objects in the Smithsonian's collections. Objects in the NMAH collections

⁵ Different archives report their holdings to NCP using different units of measurement — linear feet, cubic feet, and items. NCP converts feet into items using the conversion factor 1 linear/cubic foot = 2,000 items. Most archive holdings were reported by the units in terms of linear or cubic feet — 81,769 linear/cubic feet in FY2002, excluding linear feet of film — and subsequently converted that measure to an approximate item count.

⁶ OP&A conducted a survey in FY2000 that provided some insight into the magnitude and composition of unreported collections. Most collecting units provided updated information in FY2003.

⁷ As of this writing, NPM is taking steps to deaccession and dispose of 7.3 million revenue stamps — over half its collection.

Table 1. Size of Smithsonian Museum Object Collections, FY2002

Content area and museum	Number of objects
Natural sciences	
National Museum of Natural History	125,808,600
Horticulture Services Division (living plants)	9,900
National Zoological Park	2,700
Cultural history	
National Postal Museum	13,358,400
National Museum of American History	3,176,700
National Museum of the American Indian	779,300
National Air and Space Museum	45,000
Horticulture Services Division (artifacts)	34,100
Anacostia Museum/Center for African American History and Culture	7,700
Office of Architectural History and Historic Preservation	3,200
Art	
Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum	203,100
Smithsonian American Art Museum	39,300
Freer Gallery of Art	28,300
National Portrait Gallery	18,900
Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden	11,500
National Museum of African Art	8,200
Arthur M. Sackler Gallery	3,800
<i>Source:</i> Smithsonian Institution, Smithsonian Institution Archives, National Collections Program (2003c).	
<i>Note:</i> Numbers are rounded to the nearest 100.	

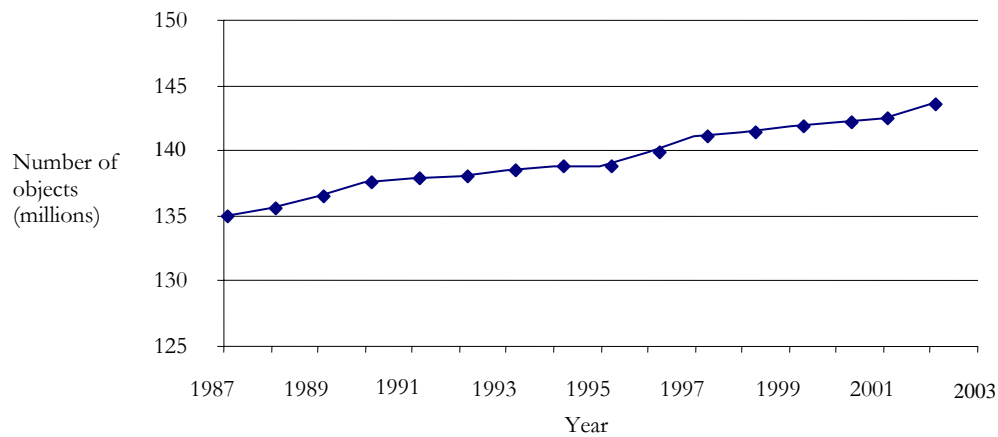
also span the full range in size, from coins to the 189-ton, 92-foot “1401 Steam Locomotive” railway engine. By contrast, NASM’s collections, including hundreds of air- and spacecraft, contain a high percentage of very large items; this is one reason why NASM’s physical facilities are comparable in size to those of NMNH and NMAH, even though the number of NASM’s objects (about 45,000) is not. NZP collections are, of course, unique among Smithsonian units in that they consist primarily of living animals.

The Smithsonian's collections are highly valuable, and many are irreplaceable. But they are not all valuable in the same way. Many items from the art collections — such as those at HMSG or SAAM — would fetch high prices at auction, in addition to their value to scholars and connoisseurs as examples of particular artistic styles or artists' work. Other collections have no market value in the conventional sense, but are highly useful for scientific research, some of which may have important practical implications — consider, for example, NMNH's mosquitoes, which have proven an invaluable asset for recent research on the West Nile virus. Other collections objects have enormous symbolic or historical value, such as the Star-Spangled Banner or the top hat worn by Abraham Lincoln on the night of his assassination. The value of still other objects, such as NZP's endangered species or certain artifacts in NMNH's anthropology and NMAI's collections, lies in their contribution to preserving disappearing aspects of the planet's natural or cultural heritage. Some items make for fine exhibitions that appeal to the general public, such as the Space Shuttle, Benny Goodman's trumpet, and the scarecrow from *The Wizard of Oz*. Others are not appropriate for exhibition at all, but may be of great interest to scholars — such as archival documents or biological type collections that enable scientists to identify examples of particular species.

Smithsonian museum collections have grown at a modest rate during the past 15 years.⁸ From FY1987 to FY2002, objects in the museums' collections went from 135.1 million to 143.5 million, or an average increase of 0.56 million objects (about 0.4 percent) per year (Figure 1).⁹ If growth continues at the same rate, by FY2010 the total number of objects in museum collections will number 148.0 million, and by 2020, 153.6 million.

⁸ Inattention to reporting, changes in reporting categories, and the lack of a central office to collect data from the units make quantitative analysis before 1987 difficult. Also, NMAH and NMNH inventoried their collections in the 1980s, and the results radically affected the numbers being used up to that time.

⁹ Even disregarding acquisitions and disposals, the count of collections objects changes every year, as objects formerly accessioned as lots are catalogued to more accurately reflect their actual numbers, objects are regrouped into lots, and inventory counts locate objects. The numbers given here incorporate both increases and decreases due to such adjustments.

Figure 1. Growth of Smithsonian Museum Object Collections, FY1987-2002

Source: Smithsonian Institution, Smithsonian Institution Archives, National Collections Program (2003c). The data incorporate inventory adjustments.

The current overall growth rate of Smithsonian museum collections is low by historical standards. This is a consequence of the slow growth of NMNH collections, which, as noted, constitute 88 percent of all reported museum object collections. When aggregated by museum type, the natural science object collections grew 6 percent over the 15 years between FY1987 and FY2002; the cultural history collections by 10 percent; and the art collections by 20 percent. However, some of the growth in the cultural history collections over this period was the result of the addition of NMAI collections in 1990. (Growth in cultural history collections over the 12-year period from FY1990 to FY2002 — that is, after the NMAI collections were added — was just under 5 percent.) The relatively fast growth of art collections does not have an appreciable effect on overall Smithsonian collections growth, because the art collections are relatively small. However, from the perspective of the individual art museums, high rates of growth could have a major impact on needs for staff and physical resources (such as collections storage space) in the future.

There was considerable variation in the growth rates of individual museums during the 1987-2002 period. The small collections of the Sackler Gallery and AM/CAAHC had the highest growth — 122 percent and 70 percent, respectively. By contrast, three units actually saw decreases in the size of their collections: the modest decline at HMSG (8 percent) stood in contrast to the relatively high rates of growth at most of the other art museums, while at NZP and HSD, collections were substantially smaller in FY2002 than in FY1987.

Many Smithsonian interviewees stressed that the rate of collections growth is not uniform over time. For example, significant growth occurs when a museum acquires a substantial collection, although the time required to accession such collections can even out the rate of acquisition reported to NCP. The 1999 gift of Dr. Paul Singer's collection of 5,000 Chinese objects, for instance, was a significant addition to the Sackler Gallery's collection; staff estimated it would take five years to accession these items. Conversely, the Board of Regents has approved NPM plans to deaccession and dispose of 7.3 million revenue stamps over the coming years, which will drastically reduce the size of that museum's collections.

If FY1987-2002 growth trends continue, the following will result:

- Natural science collections (almost 126 million objects in FY2002) will grow to 130 million objects in FY2010 and 135 million objects in FY2020;
- Art collections (313,000 objects in FY2002) will number 332,000 objects in FY2010 and 357,000 objects in FY2020; and
- Cultural history collections (17.4 million objects in FY2002) will increase to 18 million objects in FY2010 and over 19 million objects in FY2020.¹⁰

¹⁰ These projections do not account for NPM's revenue stamp deaccessions, the timing of which is not known.

Such projections should, however, be regarded with caution. Not only do projections vary on the basis of the time period from which extrapolations are made, but the non-uniform character of growth—or contraction—at individual units over time renders such predictions tenuous.

archive and library collections

As of FY2002, the Smithsonian Institution had 13 officially designated archives and one library system that reported collections to NCP. Of these, three were independent units — SIA, AAA, and SIL — and the rest were parts of museums. SIL and most of the Smithsonian’s archives collect materials to provide intellectual support for Smithsonian and external researchers, as well as for the Institution’s public programs. SIA’s mission is to preserve records of the Smithsonian’s own history.

In the aggregate, the archives hold business papers and records; personal journals, papers, and manuscripts; drawings; oral histories; organizational papers, records, and documents; media materials such as photographs and films; and other special collections. The holdings of the various archives, however, differ in size, subject matter, and rate of growth. In terms of the number of items, SIA had the largest archival holdings in FY2002 — over 48.5 million items¹¹ — while HSD’s archives contained only 88,860 items. SIL had almost 1.5 million volumes (Table 2).

In terms of content and subject matter, the holdings of the various libraries and archives are very diverse. AAA’s holdings include the letters of noted artists, often illustrated with the correspondent’s own drawings. The Eliot Elisofon Photographic Archives at NMAfA consist primarily of photographic negatives and film, the Human Studies Film Archives at NMNH, mainly of original film and video materials. NASM’s archives hold documentary materials pertaining to air and space,

¹¹ Converted from holdings reported in feet, using the NCP conversion factor 1 linear/cubic foot = 2,000 items.

including technical drawings, photographs, and film. SIA's holdings include the Smithsonian collection, containing possibly the first documented appearance of the name "Smithsonian Institution" on paper, alongside what is believed to be Smithsonian's handwriting.

Table 2. Size of Smithsonian Archives/Library Collections, FY2002

Unit	Number of items
Smithsonian Institution Archives	48,558,000
Archives of American Art	30,208,000
Archives Center, NMAH	23,802,000
National Air and Space Archives, NASM	21,798,000
CFCH (Ralph Rinzler Folklife Archives and Collections)	18,210,000
National Anthropological Archives, NMNH	16,504,000
Human Studies Film Archives, NMNH ^a	6,892,575
Center for Electronic Research and Outreach Services, NPG	2,784,000
FSG Archives	1,802,000
Smithsonian Institution Libraries ^b	1,491,818
Eliot Elisofon Photographic Archives, NMAfA	296,417
HSD (Archives of American Gardens)	88,860
NMAI Archive and Photo Archive	n.a.
Charles Wilson Peale Papers, NPG	n.a.

Source: Smithsonian Institution, Smithsonian Institution Archives, National Collections Program (2003c).

Note: Different archives report their holdings to NCP using different units of measurement — linear feet, cubic feet, and items. The OP&A study team converted linear and cubic feet into an approximate number of items, using the NCP conversion formula 1 linear/cubic foot = 2,000 items.

a. HSFA holding are expressed in terms of linear feet of film.

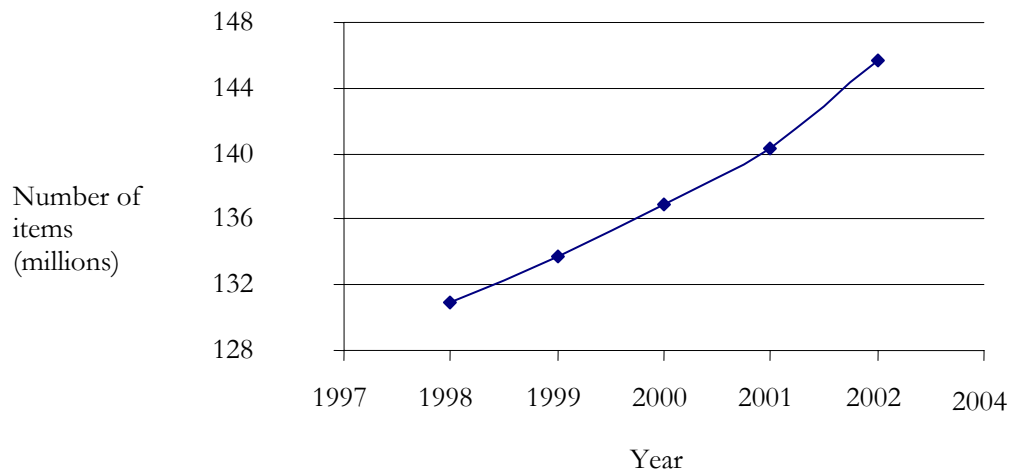
b. SIL holdings are expressed in terms of volumes.

n.a. Not available.

As with Smithsonian museum objects, the value of the archival and library holdings varies along several dimensions. For example, SMCRE’s archives contain records of its research; AAA preserves the correspondence of famous American artists; and SIL’s holdings run the gamut from standard reference books to rare 15th century editions from the world’s first printing presses.

Between FY1998 and FY2002, archive and library collections grew from 131 million to 146 million items, for an average annual growth rate of 3 million items, or about 3 percent (Figure 2).¹² If collections continue to grow at this rate, by FY2010 the number of items would reach 175 million items, and by FY2020, 212 million items.

Figure 2. Growth of Items in Smithsonian Archive Collections, FY1998-2002



Source: Smithsonian Institution, Smithsonian Institution Archives, National Collections Program (2003c).

The aggregate rate hides significant variations in growth at individual units, with some increasing in excess of 3 percent a year, and others stagnating or declining. For example, the holdings of the Human Studies Film Archives at NMNH grew at an

¹² This calculation does not include the archival holdings of the Human Studies Film Archives at NMNH (because its unit of measurement is linear feet of film), NMAI, CFCH, or the Charles Wilson Peale Papers at NPG (because the latter three units did not provide data over this time period).

average rate of about 5 percent annually for the period FY1998-2002, in part because it acquired more than 1 million feet of film in FY2001. By contrast, FSG's archival holdings decreased, because it deaccessioned 350,000 items in FY2000.

When considering these projections for the archives, several factors need to be considered. First, the projections are based on only five years of data, because data were not available for all units over a longer period. Second, the rate of growth hides significant variations in particular years. (For example, SIL showed negligible growth over the period under examination, except between FY2000 and FY2001, when it took over the libraries of FSG, HMSG, and SAAM/NPG.) And third, the projections assume no major changes in the internal and external factors that prevailed in FY1998-2002.

organizational structure of collections management

Overall, collecting units have primary responsibility for carrying out collections management functions. But how they do so is strongly influenced by the central Smithsonian administration and external professional associations. The Board of Regents, Office of Management and Budget, and the Congress also exercise strong influence on larger issues that come to their attention.¹³

At most of the museums, the curatorial/scientific research office has overall responsibility for collections management. At SIL, AAA, and SIA, collections management responsibilities are split between two offices that report directly to the unit director.¹⁴ Most decisions concerning acquisitions and disposals, stewardship and conservation, physical and electronic access, and loans are made at the unit level. Accountability for collections management at this level rests with the unit

¹³ For a detailed overview of the organizational aspects of collections management, see Appendix B.

¹⁴ Division of Management and Technical Services and Division of Research Services at SIL; Assistant Director for Archival Programs and Curator of Manuscripts at AAA; and Technical Services Division and Archives Division at SIA.

directors, although day-to-day responsibility is delegated to senior managers who report to the director.

The central Smithsonian administration is involved in collections management in five primary areas:

- **General Institutional policy on collections management**, which is formulated by the Secretary with the assistance of NCP, subject to general guidelines set by the Board of Regents. The primary policy statement governing collections management at the Institutional level is Smithsonian Directive 600 Collections Management (SD 600), which was last revised in 2001. NCP's SD 600 Implementation Manual, which existed in draft form at the time the research phase of this study was completed, provides technical guidance, advice, and information to assist collecting units in achieving the standards and implementing the policies set forth in SD 600.

- **Issuance of collections-related strategic objectives**, primarily through the Secretary's five-year strategic plans, with which collecting units must align their individual plans. These are issued on a rolling annual basis.

- **Review of acquisitions and disposals** with unusual features (high cost, political sensitivity, and so on), which is undertaken by the Under Secretaries, Secretary, and Board of Regents as required.

- **Collections reporting**, which involves the units' annual submission to NCP of data on the size and status of collections; recent collections transactions; units' compliance with central (and their own) collections policies; and problems with policy implementation.¹⁵ Financial data on collections are reported by the units to NCP (for acquisitions and

¹⁵ Each year, NCP issues two reports based on information obtained from the units: a statistical summary of the size, growth, and use of the national collections (along with text on key collections developments); and a report on the status of collections management that reviews accomplishments and problems.

disposals) and to the Office of the Chief Financial Officer (for overall collections-related expenditures).

- **Enforcing accountability for units' performance** against Smithsonian policies, standards, and strategic objectives. Unit directors are accountable to the Under Secretaries, who in turn are accountable to the Secretary. NCP supports the oversight role of the central administration by reviewing the units' self-reported data.¹⁶

A number of pan-Institutional offices provide collections management support to the collecting units and central administration. For example:

- NCP has a number of additional collections-related tasks beyond those noted above, such as supporting the development and implementation of the units' own collections management policies, plans, and procedures; reviewing unit policies for consistency with central policy; disseminating information; conducting training; and advocating for central support of collections management functions.
- The Office of the Chief Information Officer (OCIO) has been the focal point for the planning and development of information technology (IT) systems at the Smithsonian — including the main computerized collections information system (CIS) at each unit.
- The Office of Facilities Engineering and Operations (OFEO) is responsible for the operation, maintenance, renovation, and construction of most Smithsonian facilities, including space for collections-related activities such as storage and exhibitions.

¹⁶ NCP has no responsibility for following up on deficiencies. For the most part, monitoring and accountability are based on the units' self-reported data. As noted in Chapter 4, the Inspector General used to audit limited aspects of collections management, but has not done so for several years, pending re-issuance of updated collections management policy.

Collections management at the Smithsonian is also influenced by external actors, particularly the Congress and professional associations. The Congress has the authority to enact legislation adding new museums to the Institution (such as the future African-American museum), and to designate a Smithsonian unit as the national collecting agent for a particular purpose — for example, NMNH has been designated the repository for federal natural history collections, and NMAH for 9/11 artifacts. In addition, congressional appropriations make up the bulk of the funding for collections management activities, although trust funds account for most purchased acquisitions.

Finally, Smithsonian units draw on collections management guidance and standards issued by professional museum, library, and archives associations, as well as the accounting standards for collections issued by the Financial Accounting Standards Board (FASB). Notably, the American Association of Museums (AAM) promotes standards of museum practice through its accreditation program and *Code of Ethics for Museums*. Other discipline-specific professional organizations include the Association of Art Museum Directors (AAMD), American Association for State and Local History (AASLH), Association of Systematics Collections (ASC), American Zoo and Aquarium Association (AZA), American Library Association (ALA), and Society of American Archivists (SAA).

study background

study origins

In the fall of 2000, Secretary Lawrence Small asked the Office of Policy and Analysis (OP&A) to conduct a study of Smithsonian collections. The purpose of the study was to gather information, reach conclusions, and offer recommendations that

would support sound collections management and policy in areas such as the role of collections at a “national” institution, access to collections by researchers and the general public, stewardship and collections care, collections development, and planning for the future within the context of tight resources. Specifically, the Secretary was concerned that certain problems in the management of Smithsonian collections had been accumulating over many years or even decades, and that a thorough, ground-up review was required as a prerequisite for thoughtfully addressing some of these longstanding issues.

In a speech before the Smithsonian Institution Council (SIC)¹⁷ meeting in October 2003, whose main focus was Smithsonian collections, the Secretary summarized the key collections issues facing the Institution today:

- ⌘ How do we best continue our stewardship of the treasures we currently hold, assuring that they are well-preserved, well-documented, and accessible to our different publics and to future generations, in the face of economic restrictions?
- ⌘ How do we ensure that our collections serve the Smithsonian’s role as a national institution?
- ⌘ How do we prioritize among museums?
- ⌘ How do we decide what we should be acquiring in all of the disciplines represented at the Smithsonian?
- ⌘ Are we employing best practices in refining collections?

¹⁷ The SIC is an advisory board, composed principally of individuals from the academic and cultural arenas such as artists, critics, museum directors, professors, media experts, philosophers, and writers. Former Secretary S. Dillon Ripley created the SIC to review and debate topics embracing the entire Institution.

- How do we balance the needs of collections against other demands for resources?
- How can our units increase external support for collections? Are there external sources beyond the federal system to support them?

The OP&A study addressed all these questions, as well as others relating to the issues of how the Smithsonian has carried out its collections responsibilities in the recent past, and how it might change its approach in the future.

Similar questions have been raised at the Smithsonian for decades. For example, in 1995, the Commission on the Future of the Smithsonian Institution focused on like matters. It probed issues such as what the Institution should collect in the future; where the Smithsonian should keep its collections; what the consequences of greater use of offsite storage might be; and whether resources were adequate to maintain collections in good condition.

methodology

The OP&A study team completed the data collection and analysis for this study in the summer of 2003.¹⁸ The analyses and data in the report are based on the following sources:

- Quantitative data:
 - ✦ NCP reports for the period FY1987-2002, which include standardized data obtained from the individual officially designated collecting units.

¹⁸ Some major developments since the completion of the main research phase of this study are noted in the report.

- ✘ An OP&A survey that collected FY2000 data. In addition to routine collections management information, this survey asked for information on categories of collections not reported to NCP, such as collections pending accession; objects in temporary custody; objects held for professional study; federal deposits; and collections at units not officially designated as collecting units.

- ✘ A second, more limited, OP&A survey, designed to bring the OP&A data up-to-date through FY2003.¹⁹ This survey requested updated information on selected collections issues, including accessibility, development, care, documentation, and storage.

∞ Qualitative data:

- ✘ The study team conducted more than 150 interviews and group discussions with both Smithsonian and non-Smithsonian personnel. (See Appendix C for a listing of interviews and sites visited.) It conducted seminars and workshops, and toured collections sites at the Smithsonian and elsewhere. Because OP&A assured interviewees of confidentiality, this report does not contain names or references that would identify specific interviewees, unless their comments were clearly in the public domain or the interviewee granted permission.

- ✘ Interview questions focused on issues such as the alignment of each unit's collections and mission; the effects of resource constraints; prioritization of activities within the unit; stewardship responsibilities; use and access; and the role of the central Smithsonian administration.

¹⁹ Some units did not submit an update and others provided figures for FY2002, not FY2003.

- The OP&A study team attended formal presentations, and participated in informal discussions, at a number of professional meetings, such as the National Science Collections Alliance annual meeting in 2002; the fourth Conference on Partnership Opportunities for Federally Associated Collections in 2002; and the American Association of Museums' Collections Forum in 2002.

- The study team conducted an extensive literature review of published and unpublished documents pertaining to collections issues, including internal Smithsonian documents. A bibliography appears in Appendix D.

In addition to internal OP&A reviews, at least one Smithsonian staff member familiar with specific areas of collections management reviewed each of the main chapters of the study.

organization of the report

The balance of this report is organized into seven chapters. Chapters 2 through 6 discuss a series of general collections issues, from the perspectives of both the Smithsonian and the larger museum/archive/library communities. Each chapter contains findings from the research and conclusions based upon those findings.

- Chapter 2, “National Collections,” discusses the definition and role of “national” collections, and sets the stage for the more detailed discussions of collections issues that follow.

- Chapter 3, “Collections Use and Access,” addresses the following questions: Who are the main users of Smithsonian collections? To what uses are collections put? What are the main channels of access to

Smithsonian collections, and what are the barriers to access? And how are rapid developments in information technology affecting access?

- Chapter 4, “Stewardship,” investigates how collections are (and should be) inventoried, stored, conserved, and otherwise cared for, and asks whether Smithsonian collecting units meet reasonable expectations for stewardship.
- Chapter 5, “Acquisition and Disposal,” examines philosophies, policies, and procedures, both internal and external, for acquiring and disposing of collection materials.
- Chapter 6, “Collections Resources,” looks at the financial, human, and other resources available for the management and care of Smithsonian collections. It examines current and future collections needs and the resources necessary to achieve them.
- The next two chapters present overall conclusions and recommendations that follow from the previous analysis.
- Chapter 7, “Overall Conclusions,” discusses the main issues of concern in Smithsonian collections management, as identified by the OP&A study team. It builds upon the findings and conclusions of the previous chapters.
- Chapter 8, “Recommendations,” provides OP&A’s recommendations for improving collections management, derived from the findings and discussions of the previous chapters.

The report concludes with a series of appendices that provide detailed background information on the history and composition of Smithsonian collections; elaborate upon the study’s sources, methodology, data, and findings; and further discuss some current collections issues mentioned in the report.

