

Practices in Progress: The State of Reappraisal and Deaccessioning in Archives

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ABSTRACT

In the spring of 2017, the article authors conducted a survey of archival institutions in the United States and Canada regarding current reappraisal and deaccessioning practices. The first of its kind in the United States, the survey gathered quantitative data regarding how, why, and which archival repositories reappraise and deaccession. This article describes the survey method, questions asked, and data collected, and provides an analysis of the results. The authors sought to learn if resources influence these practices; what, if any, policies and guidelines exist locally; how the processes are carried out; how archivists perceive ethical concerns commonly associated with these practices; and what benefits and consequences result from reappraising and deaccessioning. They found that reappraising and deaccessioning are common practices throughout a variety of institutions and result in positive outcomes. However, misunderstanding remains about these practices, and institutions may not always be conducting these practices in an ethical and responsible manner.

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KEY WORDS

Reappraisal, Deaccessioning, Best practices, Collections management, Surveys, Ethics

This article presents the results of a 2017 survey about the practices of reappraisal and deaccessioning in the archival profession in the United States and Canada. Following a literature analysis to contextualize the survey and results, it describes the survey method, questions asked, and data collected, and provides an analysis of the results. The first published survey of its kind in the United States, it sought to gather quantitative data regarding how, why, and which archival repositories reappraise and deaccession. We wanted to learn if staffing, monetary, and other resources have an effect on conducting these practices; why institutions do not make use of these practices; whether local policies and guidelines exist; how the processes are carried out; how archivists perceive ethical concerns commonly associated with these practices; and what benefits and consequences result from reappraising and deaccessioning. The survey generated information on the types of repositories that reappraise and deaccession; what happens to deaccessioned materials; and the influence of the 2012 Society of American Archivists' (SAA) *Guidelines on Reappraisal and Deaccessioning (Guidelines)* on these practices.¹

Literature Analysis and Review

Reappraisal and deaccessioning have been discussed in US and Canadian archival literature steadily since the early 1980s.² These discussions have generally fallen into two camps: practical case studies and discussion of processes to follow when reappraising and deaccessioning materials; and theoretical and ethical discussions regarding the value and potential pitfalls of these practices. Discussions specifically of deaccessioning started in the museum and library literature. While this review will acknowledge some of those discussions, the focus will be mostly on US and Canadian archival professional literature, because a wide body of discussion exists from which to pull and because this literature relates directly to the demographics of those surveyed.

In *The Ethical Archivist*, Elena Danielson provides a framework for two types of practitioners: pragmatists, those who are ready and willing to consider reappraisal and deaccessioning as useful and regular processes in good collections management; and idealists, who are only willing to reappraise and deaccession under unusual, case-by-case bases.³ Following this framework, pragmatists have written much of the archival literature, including both case studies and theoretical and ethical discussions on how and why to reappraise and deaccession. Ethical and philosophical concerns in the literature generally focus on public perception by donors and/or researchers, and the potential loss of public trust; problems of basing reappraisal decisions on past use and questioning predecessors' decision-making; ensuring that reappraisal and deaccessioning practices are transparent, described in policy, and followed; and the selling of deaccessioned materials.

Concerns over relationships with donors and more general concerns about public perception loom large in the field. Danielson, for example, discusses public trust at great length, noting that deaccessioning can be seen as an “ethical failure” by the public.⁴ James O’Toole describes the history and changing usage of the word “permanence”; or rather, the archival field’s move away from that term to discussing materials instead in terms of enduring (potentially nonpermanent) value. Focusing mostly on rare books, Samuel Streit’s 1997 case study explores possible growing divides between special collections and donors due to this changing idea of permanence.⁵

Case studies rarely focus on negative outcomes for donor relations; Sally Griffith’s history of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania is one notable exception. In a lightning round on various reappraisal and deaccessioning scenarios at the 2016 Society of American Archivists’ Annual Meeting, Adriana Cuervo discussed donor-incited deaccessioning, when the institution would have preferred to keep the collection. Expanding the definition of “donor” to include cases of institutional transfers, Caryn Wojcik discusses miscommunication issues with government agencies. She warns that government archives must involve those agencies when reappraising scheduled records.⁶ Other authors, including Todd Daniels-Howell, Laura Uglean Jackson and D. Claudia Thompson, and Mark Greene,⁷ note improved donor relations from reappraisal projects. Daniels-Howell specifically discusses enhanced donor relations from a refined collection development policy.

Karen Benedict in her seminal 1984 article argued against Leonard Rapport’s usefulness criteria as a reason for reappraisal and deaccessioning.⁸ She and a handful of other authors, including Chan May, Mary P. Ledwell, and Sheila Powell, argue that professionals should not second guess the original archivist’s appraisal decision and that using reappraisal as a standard collections management tool will be subject to whim and set a negative precedent.⁹ These authors, the idealists in Danielson’s framework, believe that once materials have been acquired by an archival institution, they therefore have value and should only be deaccessioned under unusual circumstances when necessity arises.¹⁰ Other authors, including most who have written case studies, as well as many who focus on the ethical and theoretical aspects of these practices, instead consider reappraisal and deaccessioning as essential to collections management. These authors, including Leonard Rapport, Mark A. Greene, Maygene Daniels, Menzi L. Behrnd-Klodt, Frank Boles, William L. Jackson, Lawrence Dowler, and Mark Shelstad, among others, argue for transparent decision-making based on collections development and management policies. They also argue that institutions must use reappraisal and deaccessioning to ensure they continue to steward their collections responsibly for the good of the institution’s patrons and donors.¹¹

This is a key point: those who argue in favor of reappraisal and deaccessioning argue in favor of *transparent and documented policies and procedures*. For many of these leaders in the profession, reappraisal and deaccessioning are *good* collection management and of benefit to both donors and researchers when these practices are done in an ethical manner and accomplished through documentation rather than secrecy. A lack of transparency and policy can be due to internal disagreement within an institution. Sally Griffith's discussion of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania points to disagreements between staff and board members, and Tina Lloyd's case study regarding Library and Archives Canada also discusses internal disagreements about reappraisal and deaccessioning, as well as positive outcomes from a project undertaken there despite those disagreements.¹²

Many authors' ethical and theoretical discussions focus specifically on the sale of collection materials, including those of Elena Danielson and Thomas Wilsted. Danielson states that selling collection materials is acceptable, as long as the sale is conducted in an ethical manner, with policies in place beforehand guiding the sale and how proceeds are used. Wilsted, writing in 1993, notes that SAA's *Code of Ethics* does not provide enough substance to handle ethically complicated situations, such as selling collection materials. He suggests institutions develop policies for handling these ethically complex situations, specifically focusing on who should make recommendations and final decisions and how proceeds from sales should be used.¹³ David H. Stam and David Szewcyk discuss how sales should be conducted and monies should be used when selling duplicate rare books.¹⁴ A few case studies, including one by Michael Doyle and another by James Gerencser, provide information about positive experiences in selling deaccessioned materials, as well as documentation about time spent and how proceeds were used.¹⁵

The few surveys examining reappraisal and deaccessioning practices in the archival and related cultural heritage fields have all had 100 or fewer respondents. In 1987–1988, the National Archives of Canada performed an Acquisition Evaluation Study, receiving 100 responses from archival repositories across the nation for a study regarding acquisition practices at the National Archives and in the provinces. Among those respondents, 65% indicated that they had reappraised and deaccessioned, 15% of whom indicated reappraisal and deaccessioning had been backed by policy and procedure. Those who indicated they did not reappraise and deaccession suggested they would not need to if the initial appraisal had been conducted correctly.¹⁶

A 1995 survey conducted by Richard Oram focused solely on rare book deaccessioning. Oram was interested in determining if deaccessioning was becoming more accepted practice. Of 100 US academic repositories that received the survey, 60 responded. Oram found that deaccessioning was becoming both less controversial and more common. Cynthia K. Sauer's 2000 survey of 100 manuscript repositories across the United States, focusing on whether or not institutions

had collection development policies in place, had an 80% response rate. In this survey, one respondent indicated creating a policy to allow for the deaccessioning of collections. While 15 respondents indicated their collections development policies included a section for deaccessioning, other respondents indicated deaccessioning policies existed elsewhere outside the collection development policy.¹⁷

Survey Background—Purpose of the Study

Our objectives for a survey studying reappraisal and deaccessioning in archival repositories in the United States and Canada were multifold. The primary purposes were to learn at a macrolevel how repositories conduct reappraisal and deaccessioning, how common these practices are, and how the archives profession currently perceives reappraisal and deaccessioning. We sought to determine which types of repositories reappraise or deaccession and which do not, and why repositories reappraise and deaccession and why they do not. Additionally, the survey generated quantitative data about the processes involved in reappraisal and deaccessioning, effects on donor relations, transparency regarding deaccessioning decisions, and disposition of deaccessioned materials. The survey asked about the existence of reappraisal and deaccessioning policies; the impact of the Society of American Archivists' *Guidelines*; and benefits and negative effects from reappraising and deaccessioning.

METHODOLOGY

Survey design commenced in February 2017. We formulated mostly multiple choice questions with write-in options. We rejected the use of Likert scales because they would have led to a lengthy survey due to the high number of objectives and options for multiple choice questions. We wanted a representative sample from across the profession, and a long survey would have reduced this probability.

We first looked to the archives professional literature for any previous surveys on reappraisal and deaccessioning. While we did not find any from the archives community, we located two surveys from the museum profession in European countries, as well as the more general surveys discussed above from the United States and Canada.¹⁸ We adopted some questions for our survey, but because the European surveys dealt with museum objects and had different objectives, we chose not to duplicate the studies. The *SAA Guidelines for Reappraisal and Deaccessioning*, itself based on an extensive literature review, provided many of the options for multiple choice answers to questions such as “Why are you reappraising and/or deaccessioning at your institution?” Some responses that the literature cites as unethical or poor practice were deliberately included, such as deaccessioning for

monetary gain or using funds from selling materials for emergencies including budgetary shortfalls. After creating a first draft of the survey, we distributed it for review by 5 colleagues familiar with reappraisal and deaccessioning. Based on their feedback, questions were refined and the survey was finalized.

We administered the survey using the Qualtrics platform. This platform allows for skip and branch logic, so that respondents may bypass individual questions or entire sections depending on their answers to previous questions. We used both these options to reduce survey fatigue and ensure respondents only had to answer questions pertinent to their institutional practices.

The survey ran from March 8 to April 14, 2017. The target population was repositories in the United States and Canada. We advertised widely, sending the survey link to the general Archives and Archivists listserv and the SAA Acquisitions and Appraisal Section listserv. We posted the survey to distribution lists and social media pages, such as Facebook, for regional archival organizations to which we belonged, including the Midwest Archives Conference, the Kansas City Area Archivists, the Society of Rocky Mountain Archivists, and the Society of California Archivists.¹⁹ One reminder was sent to each of these lists and organizations. We also asked SAA section chairs to post an announcement to their respective section distribution lists, but do not know to which groups it was posted.²⁰ A link to the survey also appeared twice in SAA's biweekly "In the Loop" email membership newsletter, and we posted on the New England Archivists' and Northwest Archivists' Facebook pages and in the National Association of Government Archives and Records Administrators (NAGARA) LinkedIn Group.²¹ We extended the survey deadline a week to advertise through the Association of Canadian Archivists' listserv to encourage more Canadian responses (we had asked a colleague to post it on our behalf, which took longer than expected). We do not know exactly how many people or repositories received the survey, but estimate it to be approximately 6,000 individuals based on approximate numbers of subscribers to the various channels. Respondents did not receive any compensation for completing the survey.

While the survey received 489 responses, 149 respondents did not continue after the initial demographic questions, and another 17 surveys contained no data. Three hundred and twenty-three surveys were submitted with most or all questions answered, a 66% completion rate. Information discussed in this article will focus on those completed responses. On average, participants took 32 minutes to complete the survey.

We sent a second, follow-up survey by email to 13 participants who reported that their repositories reappraised and/or deaccessioned born-digital materials and provided contact information. We wanted to learn more about how institutions undertake the practice of reappraising and deaccessioning born-digital materials and confirm that the respondents understood the difference between

weeding and deaccessioning. This survey was also administered through Qualtrics and contained 4 multiple choice questions and a free-text comment field (see Appendix B). It was open from November 9, 2017, to November 30, 2017. Twelve people responded and answered all required (multiple choice) questions. Data from this survey is also discussed with the results.²²

Demographics of Respondents

Survey respondents came from a diverse background in geographic location, institutional type and size, and staffing and budgetary situation. Most participants were from the United States, with 34 Canadian archivists responding. The number of Canadian participants was low likely because the survey was distributed to the ACA listserv only 2 weeks before it closed. Survey participants were anonymous unless they volunteered their contact information for possible follow-up questioning. While almost half the respondents were from academic institutions (138 responses, 42.8%), government repositories were also well represented, constituting 14% of total responses, with individuals representing local, state or provincial, and federal government repositories. Religious archives and public libraries each accounted for 8% of the responses (26 and 25 institutions respectively), and museum archives accounted for 22, or 7%, of total responses. Local historical societies or museums and corporate archives each had 15 responses (4%), and nonuniversity research libraries, medical archives, and other types of archival institutions made up the rest of the respondents (12.7%) (see Figure 1).

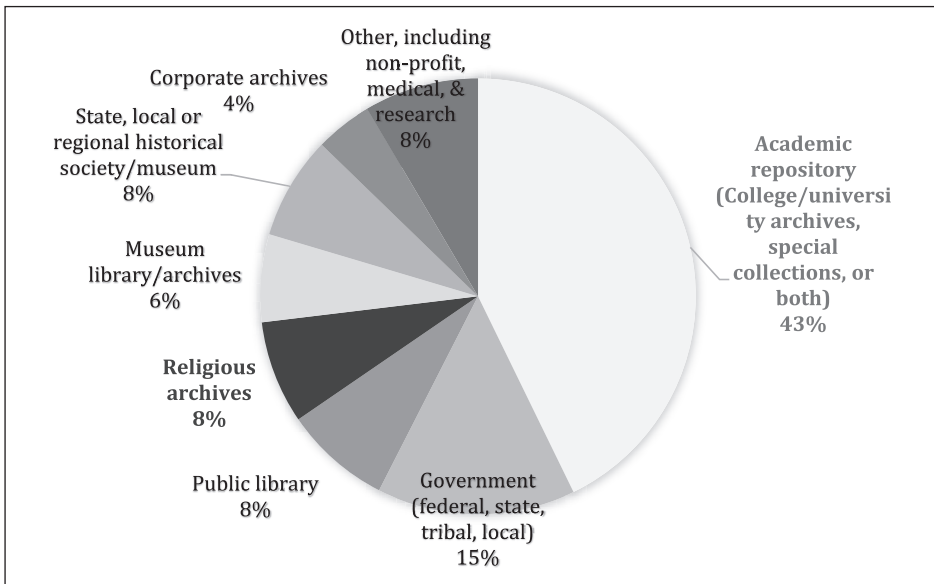


FIGURE 1. Institution type

Most Canadian responses were from Ontario (18 of the 34), and the top 4 states from which US responses came were California (52), Massachusetts, Missouri, and Illinois (all with 18 responses each). According to data available on Proquest Archives Finder, with the exception of California and Massachusetts, which have over 400 and 300 repositories respectively, the number of responses per state or province does not proportionally reflect the number of repositories per state or province. To illustrate, Illinois and Missouri have many fewer archival repositories than other states with lower response rates.²³ For example, the states of Washington and New York have over 200 and 600 repositories, respectively, and yet the response rate from these states was considerably lower (2 and 13 institutions). Numbers may be skewed due to our inability to reach institutions in states and provinces to which we are not professionally connected. There were no responses from a handful of states, Manitoba or Prince Edward Island, or Puerto Rico (see Figure 2).

Which Repositories Reappraise and Deaccession?

Of the 323 responses, 268 individuals answered that they have reappraised and/or deaccessioned at their current institution, 52 answered that they have never reappraised nor deaccessioned, and 13 indicated that they had reappraised and deaccessioned at another institution in which they previously worked. While we recognize that results may be skewed toward institutions that conduct these practices, when advertising the survey, we stressed our interest in responses from institutions that do not reappraise and deaccession to form a more complete picture of these practices in the United States and Canada.

All institution types engage in reappraisal and deaccessioning, with them being most common among local historical repositories (100% of 15 responses) and federal government archives (85%, or 11 out of 13). One hundred and nine out of 138 (79%) academic repositories reappraise or deaccession, with 68% having specifically deaccessioned. Eleven out of 15 corporate archives reappraise, deaccession, or both.

We wished to determine if the size of holdings and how long an institution had been collecting had any impact on whether or not an institution reappraises and deaccessions. The size of an institution's holdings has some relevance to reappraising and deaccessioning (see Table 1). Fifty-one percent of institutions with less than 1,000 linear feet reported to have reappraised and/or deaccessioned, while 80%–89% of institutions with holdings ranging from 1,000 to over 50,000 linear feet said that they reappraise and/or deaccession. Institutions that have been collecting for less than 25 years were less likely

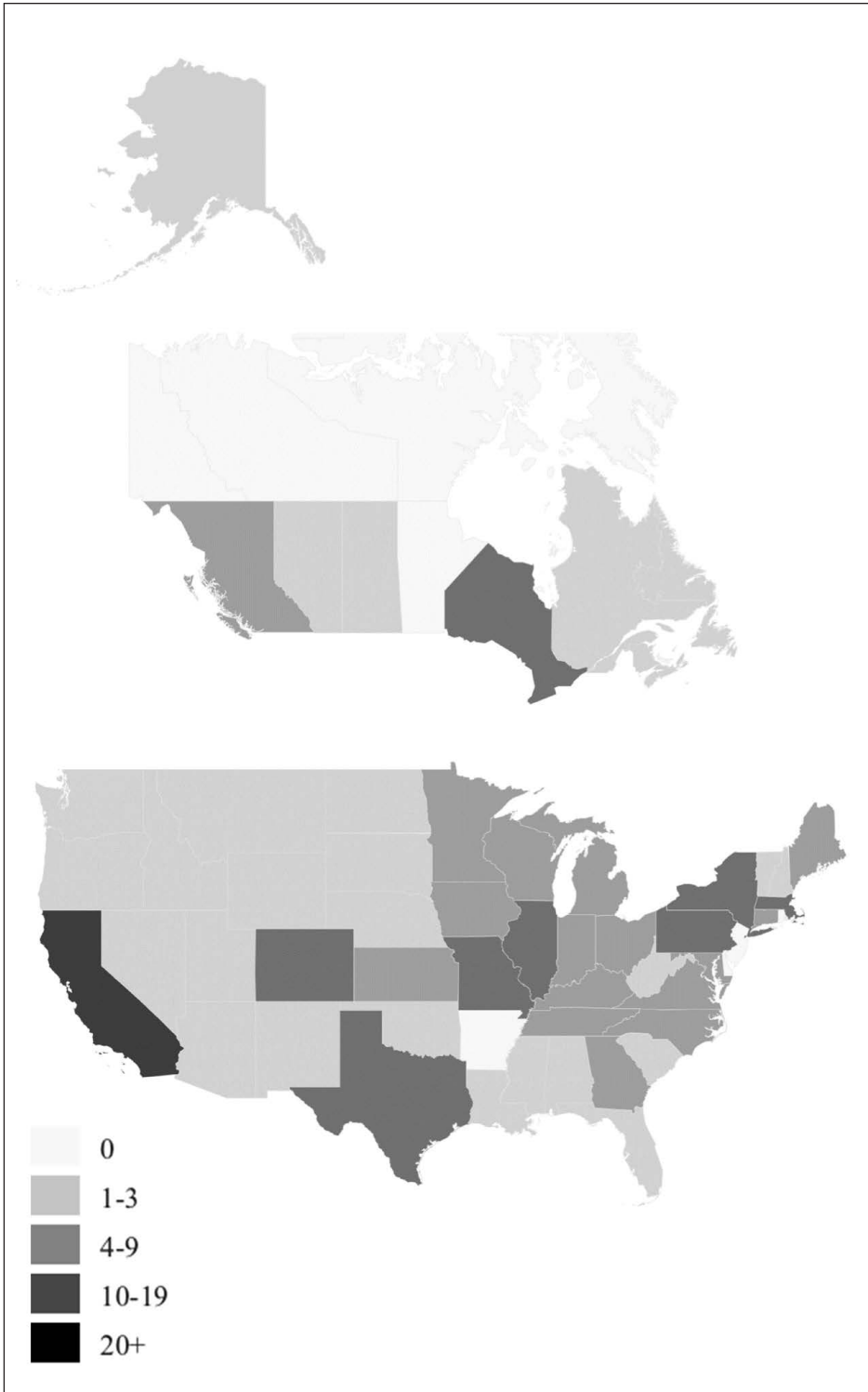


FIGURE 2. Geographic location and number of respondents²⁴

to reappraise and deaccession (see Table 2). For each of these tables, we ran a Pearson Chi-square test to determine statistical significance. The data for each of these tables have a *p* value of .000, indicating statistical significance between the expected and observed frequencies among the categories.

Table 1. Size of Holdings Compared to Reappraisal and Deaccessioning Practices (*p* value: .000)²⁵

Has your institution reappraised and/or deaccessioned?	Less than 1,000 l.f.	1,000–10,000 l.f.	10,000–50,000 l.f.	More than 50,000 l.f.	Don't know
Yes	22	114	67	35	17
No	21	26	9	4	5
Total	43	140	76	39	22

Table 2. Length of Time Collecting Materials Compared to Reappraisal and Deaccessioning Practices (*p* value: .000)²⁶

Has your institution reappraised and/or deaccessioned?	0–25 years	26–75 years	76–150 years	More than 150 years	(blank)	Total
Yes	22	142	66	24	1	255
No	20	27	12	6		65
Total	42	169	78	30	1	320

Resources Needed for Reappraisal and Deaccessioning

As with any other operational activity, resources are required to carry out reappraising and deaccessioning. These resources include money, people, time, and underlying structures that include policies and procedures. We wanted to know if a correlation exists between the amount of resources with which an organization operates and its reappraisal and deaccessioning practices. The survey asked respondents in an open-ended question to provide the annual operating budget of the archives and, in a multiple choice question, the number of full-time employees. While only 54% of respondents provided meaningful budget information, some interesting results appeared. Of the 9 archives with a budget of over \$4 million, 100% have deaccessioned, as opposed to 33% of the 8 repositories with an annual budget less than \$1,000. However, budgets ranging from \$1,000 to \$4 million showed little variation—those with smaller operating budgets were just as likely, if not more so, to deaccession (see Table 3). We analyzed the significance of this data using the Pearson Chi-square Test, which revealed a *p* value of .192 (the differences were not significant enough between expected and perceived values to confirm that operating costs affect whether or not an institution reappraises or deaccessions).

Table 3. Annual Operating Budgets and Reappraisal and Deaccessioning Practices (*p* value: .192)²⁷

Has your institution reappraised or deaccessioned?	\$0–\$999	\$1,000–\$9,999	\$10,000–\$50,000	\$50,000–\$100K	\$100K–\$500K	\$500K–\$1M	\$1M–4M	\$4M+
Yes	3	6	15	30	51	14	6	9
No	4	2	6	13	12	3	1	0
Total	7	8	21	43	63	17	7	9

Some authors have indicated that reappraisal and deaccessioning activities are personnel-intensive, requiring dedicated time from full-time employees (FTE).²⁸ Sixty-one percent of institutions with less than 1 FTE reported to reappraise and deaccession compared to 90% of institutions with 7 to 10 FTE. Data from the survey show an upward trend that repositories with more employees are more likely to reappraise and deaccession (see Table 4). The Pearson Chi-square Test revealed a *p* value of .02, indicating statistical significance. While FTE and staff time are clearly factors, that over half of institutions with limited staffing have found the resources to reappraise and/or deaccession could imply that limited resources are not an impediment to these practices, which may not be as resource-intensive as is commonly believed; or that the need is so great for these institutions that they prioritize finding the necessary resources. Nonetheless, some institutions refrain from reappraisal and deaccessioning due to the amount of time the process takes. One reason given by 28 of the 52 respondents who indicated their institutions did not reappraise and deaccession was a lack of time (see Figure 3). Several open-ended responses indicated the lack of time for anything more than the basics of processing, reference, and other routine archival duties. One individual discussed high staff turnover, an issue that can easily slow down both day-to-day activities and special projects.²⁹ As another respondent put it, “I have been trying to initiate some reappraisal and deaccessioning at my institution, but limited staffing makes it difficult to

Table 4. Number of FTE Employees and Reappraisal and Deaccessioning Practices (*p* value: .02)³¹

Has your institution reappraised or deaccessioned?	Number of FTE					
	0–0.9	1	2–3	4–6	7–10	11+
Yes	21	51	74	43	27	39
No	13	17	20	5	3	7
Total	34	68	94	48	30	46

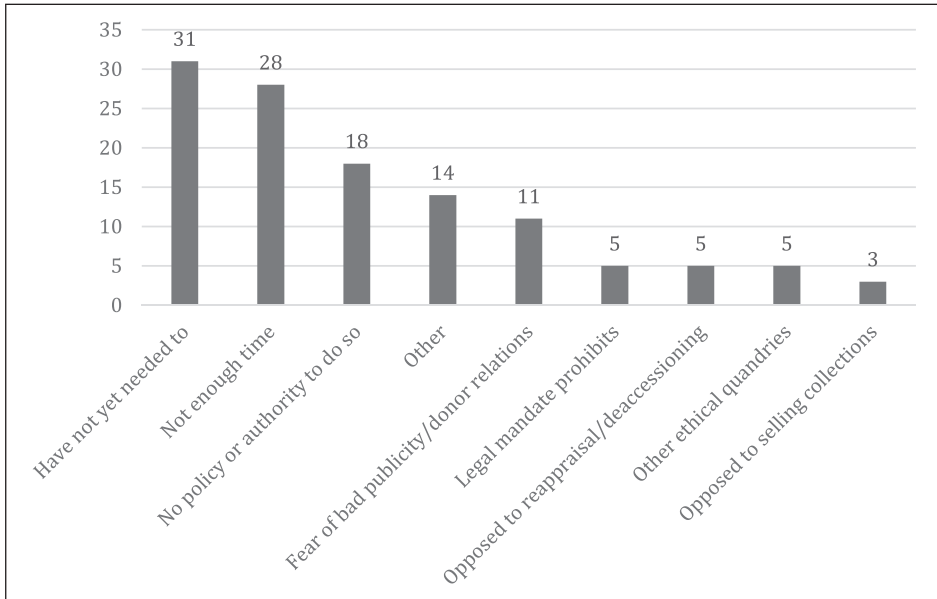


FIGURE 3. Reasons not to reappraise and deaccession

carry out.... All of the members of my library's staff agree that we should deaccession some of our collections but actually finding the time to do so is difficult, particularly when we could be devoting that time to processing our backlog."³⁰

Policies and Guidelines

The SAA *Guidelines* recommend having policies in place prior to reappraising and/or deaccessioning any collection material.³² Although a small majority of institutions engaging in reappraisal and deaccessioning have written policies to guide these practices, 41% of institutions conduct reappraisal and/or deaccessioning without internal written guidelines. One individual described:

We have found the SAA guidelines to be a very useful tool when deaccessioning. When we first asked to deaccession materials some thirty years ago, we were met with staunch opposition from library administration. We still resist drawing up our own deaccessioning policy as it is likely to be rejected or amended to death. It's far easier to point to SAA documents that approve of the concept and provide measures for insuring that nothing untoward happens. This seems to satisfy most administrators.³³

A lack of internal policy could mean some repositories are making decisions about what to keep and not keep without clear guidelines and workflows, which can lead to inconsistent, inefficient, and undocumented decisions. For other institutions, not having the authority or a procedure in place may be a barrier to implementing reappraisal and deaccessioning. Eighteen responses

from those who do not reappraise and deaccession indicated they do not have a policy or the authority to employ these practices. Some open-ended responses revealed that while procedures exist for rare books, museum items, or other collecting areas within larger institutions, those procedures may not be relevant or useful for archival collections.³⁴

We were interested to see if we could determine whether institutions have been reappraising and deaccessioning more in the past five years since the release of SAA's *Guidelines for Reappraisal and Deaccessioning*, which is meant to make these procedures more accepted practice within the profession and to help in developing local policies. While the survey shows a definite increase in reappraisal and deaccessioning practices in the past five years,³⁵ it is not conclusive that the publication of the *Guidelines* influenced this increase. When combining all 3 answers that indicated an institution may have used the *Guidelines* to help develop or refine its local procedures,³⁶ and comparing this number to those not using the *Guidelines* at all, institutions were slightly more likely to indicate they had used the SAA *Guidelines*, except for those respondents stating their institutions had been reappraising and deaccessioning for 30 years or more (see Table 5). A Pearson Chi-square test for this data shows that the differences among categories are insignificant. One hundred and nine responses—43% of the 255 responses to the question—indicated they did not use the SAA *Guidelines* at all. Forty-one responses (42%) of those who recently began reappraising and deaccessioning stated they do not use the *Guidelines*, possibly meaning that the recent increase in these procedures may simply be an indication that repositories have seen an increased need to reappraise and deaccession. Recent publications, discussions, and education on reappraisal and deaccessioning (although not the *Guidelines* specifically) may also be influencing an uptick in these practices.³⁷ The existence of an SAA-approved standard on reappraisal and deaccessioning has possibly increased the belief among professionals that the practices are acceptable. We did not ask if survey participants knew about the existence of the *Guidelines*, only whether they had used them or not.

Table 5. Use of the SAA *Guidelines* Compared to How Long an Institution Has Been Reappraising and Deaccessioning (*p* value: .718)³⁸

Did your institution use the SAA Guidelines?	How long has your institution reappraised and deaccessioned?				
	5 years or less	6–10 years	11–30 years	More than 30 years	Don't know
Yes	56	31	25	8	25
No	41	18	19	10	21
Total	97	49	44	18	46

Deaccessioning or Weeding?

In an unintended outcome of the survey, the data indicate that respondents may have been thinking about weeding rather than deaccessioning when answering questions. When weeding, a full reappraisal is typically not carried out; instead, individuals make quick decisions about removal for a small amount of material, and the collection overall will be kept by the repository. We sought to investigate reappraisal and deaccessioning of substantive amounts of material, such as entire series or collections. The survey introduction clarified this to distinguish deaccessioning entire series or collections that have already been accessioned (and sometimes processed) from the practice of weeding that may occur during accessioning or processing. The SAA definition of *deaccessioning*, “the process by which an archives, museum, or library permanently removes accessioned materials from its holdings,” does not clarify distinctions between deaccessioning and weeding, though the two definitions are not linked in the *Glossary of Archival Records and Terminology*.³⁹ The International Organization for Standardization (ISO) 5127 definitions for withdrawal, weeding, and deaccessioning also do not make clear distinctions between these three activities.⁴⁰ Vague definitions could confuse practitioners. In open-ended responses, some respondents discussed removing duplicates, nonrecord copies, empty boxes and envelopes in which materials had been received, blank letterhead, and other routine processing decisions.⁴¹ These decisions reflect weeding, not deaccessioning. Additionally, 22 respondents stated that they do not reappraise before deaccessioning; we wonder if these respondents are in fact weeding rather than deaccessioning.

A quarter of respondents indicated their institutions reappraise and/or deaccession born-digital formats, a higher percentage than we anticipated when institutions are just beginning to systematically process and provide access to born-digital materials.⁴² Based on the open-ended responses, we wondered if, rather than deaccessioning born-digital materials, repositories are actually weeding duplicate and out-of-scope digital materials from collections. Twelve people completed the second, follow-up survey on reappraising and deaccessioning born-digital materials described earlier in the methodology section (see Appendix B for the survey instrument). Despite the small pool, some interesting results came forth. When asked when during the archives life cycle they typically reappraise born-digital materials, survey respondents most frequently selected “during processing” (7 responses). “During accessioning” and “After accessioning, before processing” were each selected 5 times (respondents could select all applicable answers). Out of 12, 9 answered that they have deaccessioned external media (the examples provided in the survey included hard drives, floppy disks, CDs, and USBs), although 7 responses indicated deaccessioning files in a digital repository, presumably postprocessing. Yet, the comments included statements about

deaccessioning duplicates and mistakenly sent files, which largely conforms to analog acts of weeding during processing. (One comment mentioned “out-of-scope” materials.)⁴³ However, when asked, “Do you think weeding and deaccessioning are synonymous?” 10 out of 12 said definitely not. One individual clarified, “If I were tossing a duplicate or something that was not archival, it would be weeding. Deaccessioning is about getting rid of things that may have once been deemed to be archival.”⁴⁴ Answers to this follow-up survey point further to confusion in the profession about the distinctions between weeding and deaccessioning.

Procedures for Reappraisal and Deaccessioning

While reappraising and deaccessioning comprise core activities that include reviewing ownership documentation and collection contents, each institution accomplishes these procedures differently to accommodate institutional needs and resources. The 258 survey respondents who indicated their institutions reappraise and/or deaccession were asked a series of questions about how their institutions follow these procedures and what happens to deaccessioned materials.

Reappraisal can be done when the need arises or as a regular, planned project. Most respondents—186 of the 255 who answered the question—indicated they have reappraised on an ad hoc or as-needed basis, rather than regularly and systematically. Only 14 respondents indicated they regularly reappraise, though an additional 55 individuals stated they reappraise both regularly and on an ad hoc basis. While institutions are reappraising and deaccessioning, these practices are still not part of regular activities in the same way that processing and reference are. This could explain why many repositories do not have reappraisal and deaccessioning policies. Some individuals who reappraise and deaccession sporadically raised concerns about the lack of systematic reappraisal and deaccessioning leading to “haphazard” and “inconsistent” decision-making,⁴⁵ a point made by many authors in the literature. As one individual stated, “Our repository definitely would benefit from a project to systematically identify accessions with deferred appraisal challenges, and then take appropriate action. Because we also have sparse ownership documentation for many of our accessions acquired prior to the 1990s, that adds to the challenge.”⁴⁶

The person or persons making a final reappraisal decision is an important factor in the process; this person or set of persons can streamline or hinder a reappraisal workflow. The SAA *Guidelines* reiterate throughout that reappraisal decisions are a shared responsibility,⁴⁷ yet responses to this survey question indicate individuals are making these decisions largely on their own. For 76% of institutions, an individual archivist or curator makes the final decision about a reappraisal question; it is unclear whether these individuals consult others before doing so. As one individual wrote, “. . . these decisions aren’t made by committee, they are made

by one person. I often wish her decisions were vetted at a higher administrative level.”⁴⁸ Decisions made by a single individual in a vacuum potentially put the institution at risk. This can also lead to more inconsistency, as individuals making isolated decisions may not keep detailed records about the outcome and how they arrived at the decision. This high percentage of individual decision-making is consistent across repositories, regardless of staff size. Nearly 79% of repositories with 3 or fewer employees make individual decisions, compared with 72% of repositories with 4 or more employees. Whether or not the circumstances allow for decisions by committee, usually 1 person is responsible for determining what remains in an institution’s holdings and what does not.

The next likely decision-maker is administration or management (93 responses, or 36%), a group of individuals who may or may not know the institution’s collections as intimately as archivists or curators, or much about archival appraisal. How much information these groups receive from archivists and curators who work daily with the collections to make their deaccessioning decisions is unclear. Twenty-one responses (8%) stated the board of directors, another group of individuals who may not be versed in archival appraisal theory, makes these decisions. Sixty-two responses, 24%, indicated a collections or acquisitions committee makes deaccessioning decisions, while 16 responses (6%) indicated a committee specifically dedicated to reappraisal and deaccessioning makes these decisions. Standing committees are more likely to document their discussions and final decisions and keep the procedure transparent, at least internally to staff (see Figure 4).⁴⁹

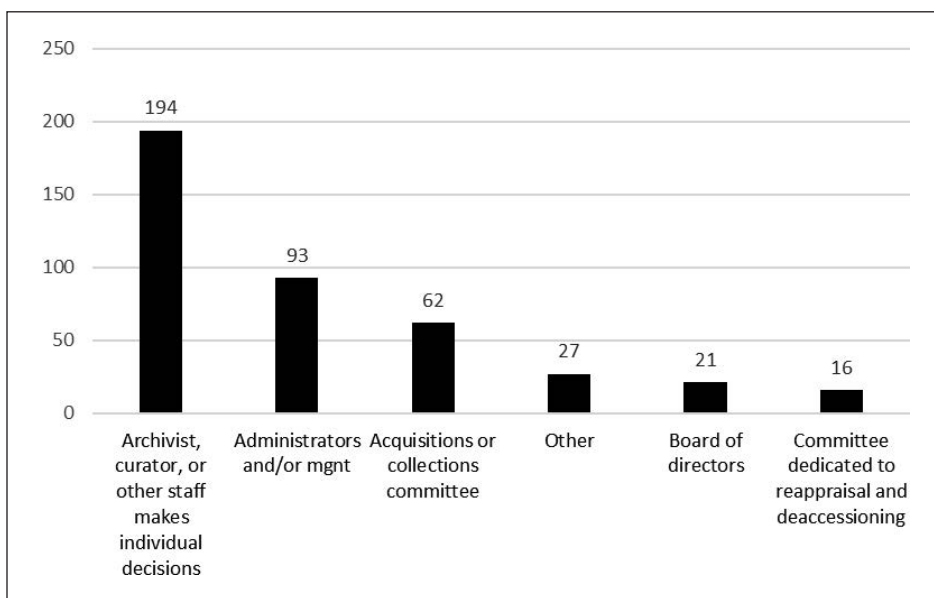


FIGURE 4. Who makes the decision to deaccession?

Responses to the question “What happens to deaccessioned material?” indicate that institutions use a variety of methods to dispose of materials, including transfer to another archival institution for research purposes, transfer to non-archival institutions for nonresearch purposes, returning to the donor, destruction, and sale (see Figure 5). The disposition of deaccessioned archival materials often makes the practice a responsible one or a controversial one. Transfer to another institution for research or archival purposes is the preferred disposition according to many authors. It keeps the materials in the public trust and builds positive relationships between repositories.⁵⁰ Two hundred and two respondents said that they have transferred materials to another repository for research or archival purposes. However, individuals overwhelmingly indicated they do not follow up to see if the other institution has provided access to these collections. As one individual stated,

Some collections I've demanded in the transfer agreement that the materials be made public permanently (most prominently with a large collection that was moved to a more geographically and culturally appropriate institution at the donor's request, but which, unfortunately, went to a private institution). In most other cases I allow the receiving institution (since I'm usually only deaccessioning to other public archives) to determine how they wish to handle access or to potentially dispose of the materials themselves.⁵¹

Although most archivists do not have the time for more responsibilities, not following up with other institutions may contribute to collections lingering in backlogs. An expectation that the collection will be at least minimally processed (i.e., have a collection-level online finding aid) and made available to researchers

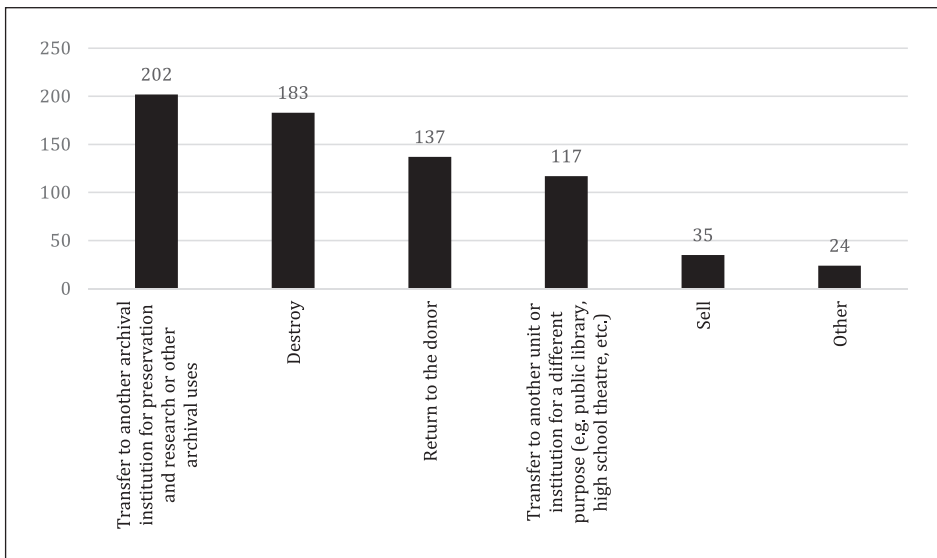


FIGURE 5. What does your institution do with deaccessioned material?

may lead to a more favorable perspective in the profession regarding deaccessioning. With a trend in the archival profession toward minimal and iterative processing and recognizing our commitment to donors and their papers, this expectation is not unreasonable.⁵² Perhaps recognizing this responsibility, survey responses indicate that most transferring institutions provide what documentation they have about deaccessioned collections, including copies of donor/accession files, container lists, and finding aids if the collection had been processed.

One hundred and eighty-three repositories have destroyed deaccessioned materials, indicating that institutions have few qualms about throwing away materials that are institutionally out-of-scope, duplicative, sensitive, confidential, or otherwise inaccessible to the public. One individual wrote, "While our deaccession policy recommends transferring materials to another institution whenever possible . . . we have never had occasion to do this, mostly due to the specialized nature of our collection. . . . Far more often, deaccession decisions have led to the destruction of materials."⁵³ Destruction is sometimes the best or most likely option for disposition. This includes born-digital files; 10 individuals in the follow-up survey on born-digital reappraisal and deaccessioning indicated they destroy files not being kept. Five responses also indicated they return digital files to the donor, and four institutions transfer to another, more appropriate repository.

Some open-ended responses appear to indicate respondents think destruction is the only outcome of deaccessioning. When responding to why his or her institution does not reappraise and deaccession, one individual stated, "[I am t]roubled by [the] concept of potentially trashing a collection which was taken in because it has merit but which no longer fits the revised collecting policy of the repository." Individuals and institutions with these concerns should remember that "Deaccessioning does not always mean destruction," as another individual wrote.⁵⁴

ETHICAL CONCERNS: SELLING COLLECTION MATERIALS

Selling collection materials is one of the main ethical concerns archivists have about deaccessioning. While the simple act of removing collection materials can cause controversy among an institution's stakeholders, more typically, controversy arises in the public sphere specifically when materials are sold.⁵⁵ Many archives are reluctant to sell because of shocking headlines; some cannot sell materials due to institutional policy, legal mandate, or deeds of gift; and much of what archives deaccession has little or no market value. Only 14% of survey participants have sold deaccessioned materials. Most of these individuals indicated their institution uses proceeds from sales to purchase new materials or

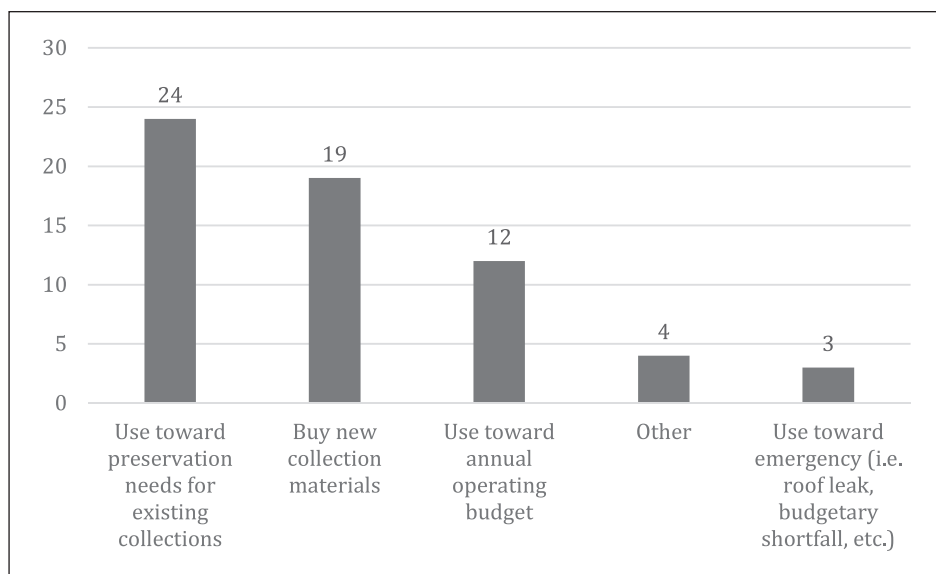


FIGURE 6. How does your institution use proceeds from sales?

for preservation/conservation needs of materials remaining in their holdings (see Figure 6). This is the procedure recommended by both the American Alliance of Museums (AAM) and the American Association of State and Local History (AASLH)⁵⁶ (the archives profession, both in the United States and Canada, currently does not advise how proceeds from sales of deaccessioned materials should be used). The *Guidelines* specifically state that repositories should not reappraise and deaccession for the purpose of raising money. Only 3 people selected “monetary gain” as a reason for deaccessioning. Twelve respondents indicated their institutions use proceeds from sales as part of their annual budgets, and 3 respondents indicated proceeds have been used toward emergency situations, such as roof leaks or budgetary shortfalls. The SAA *Guidelines* and the museum community advise against using funds from the sale of deaccessioned materials for emergencies or shortfalls in standard operating budgets,⁵⁷ yet the archivists in charge of collections may not have a say in how funds from sold collection materials are used. One individual stated, “I could not get the board of directors to agree that any proceeds from deaccessioned items that have been sold should go toward collection care (which the museum is badly in need of). Instead, the money is used for budget shortfalls, against my judgment and international codes of ethics.”⁵⁸

ETHICAL CONCERNS: RELATIONSHIPS WITH DONORS, ADMINISTRATORS, RESEARCHERS, STAFF

Typical reasons not to reappraise and deaccession stem from potential ramifications regarding relationships between an institution and its donors

and researchers, and relationships within an institution between staff and administration. As one open-ended response stated, “I think that the *potential* effects on public perception/donor relations discourage reappraisal and deaccessioning, as does lack of time to spend beyond regular appraisal, accessioning, and processing” [emphasis added]; this respondent also stated that his or her institutional work culture is more likely to “embrace the potential usefulness of material” rather than deaccession it. At the same time, one individual who had reappraised and deaccessioned at a former institution admitted hesitancy to do so at his or her current institution because of a lack of familiarity with the community using the collections, as well as uncertainty about the new institution’s administrative support of potentially controversial decisions. Wishing to refrain from any reappraisal decision-making until becoming more familiar with research use over time and with administration is ethically sound practice.⁵⁹ Of the 65 respondents who indicated their current institutions do not reappraise and deaccession, including the 13 respondents who reappraised and deaccessioned at previous institutions, over 67% indicated they think their current institutions *should* implement reappraisal and deaccessioning. This may hint that, within institutions, disagreement exists about these collection management practices. One individual stated deaccessioning had become highly politicized at his or her institution due to disagreement among administrators about collection policy; another noted that some administrators want immediate deaccessioning without reappraisal, while much of the administration does not even wish to discuss the topic.⁶⁰

Responses indicate that donors are generally involved with or know about the transfer of collections to other institutions. Most repositories reported that they notify donors either prior to or after transferring collections to other institutions. To the question, “Do you notify the donor after you have transferred a collection,” 46 respondents selected “Other” and wrote comments in the open-text field. Common remarks included that all or most donors of deaccessioned collections are deceased (14 responses); contacting the donor depends on if donor information exists or if the gift agreement stipulates that the donor be contacted (10 responses); repositories only contact donors if alive (6 responses); and contacting donors is not an issue because none exist or it is an institutional archives (4 responses). Only 24 individuals observed they had seen a negative effect on donor relations due to reappraisal and deaccessioning. Perhaps as important, 15 individuals indicated they had seen negative perceptions from their own administration, pointing again to internal disagreements within organizations about these practices. For those individuals and institutions reluctant to deaccession due to concerns about donor relations, one individual’s response may be reassuring:

When I perform a deaccession of a collection, I always inform the donor why it is being deaccessioned. My predecessor did not have a written mission statement or collection policy and I explain to them why the collection no longer fits. I also explain my process for finding a repository that is better suited to the parameters of the collection. Thus far, when I take the time to explain and show how their materials benefit being in a repository better suited to their materials, they all are on board.⁶¹

The survey data confirm what others have claimed, that deaccessioning does not necessarily harm donor relations.⁶² In fact, involving the donor when possible can open communication lines to better understanding between the donor and the institution.

Transparent or Obscured Decision-Making

Overwhelmingly, institutions are reappraising and deaccessioning behind closed doors—217 out of the total 243 responses to this question revealed they do not publicize that they deaccession. Additionally, only 14% of respondents who have written reappraisal and deaccessioning policies publish them online. Given the recommendation in the *Guidelines* that repositories divulge their deaccessioning practices, these data indicate that the profession as a whole should be more transparent about these practices.⁶³ The *Guidelines* argue that because reappraising and deaccessioning contribute to good collections management, advising constituents and stakeholders that materials may be deaccessioned from an institution's holdings is perfectly acceptable. This transparency may lead to the resolution of the problems that most concern archivists regarding donor relations and researchers' needs. This does not appear to be the actual perception of most archivists or repositories. The few institutions announcing that they deaccession divide between those that publicize widely (through finding aids, meeting minutes as public records, newsletters, and deeds of gift); and those that publicize internally to staff, faculty on campus, and other parties more directly (see Figure 7). Having publicly available policies about which *all* staff are knowledgeable can help institutions in both the appraisal and reappraisal processes. One individual discussed administrators and development officers insisting the archives take collections of minimal research value in the hope of future monetary gains that often do not materialize. This person continued, "I think it calls for publicly available collection development policies that also include statements about reappraisal and deaccessioning, as well as transparency about how the process works."⁶⁴

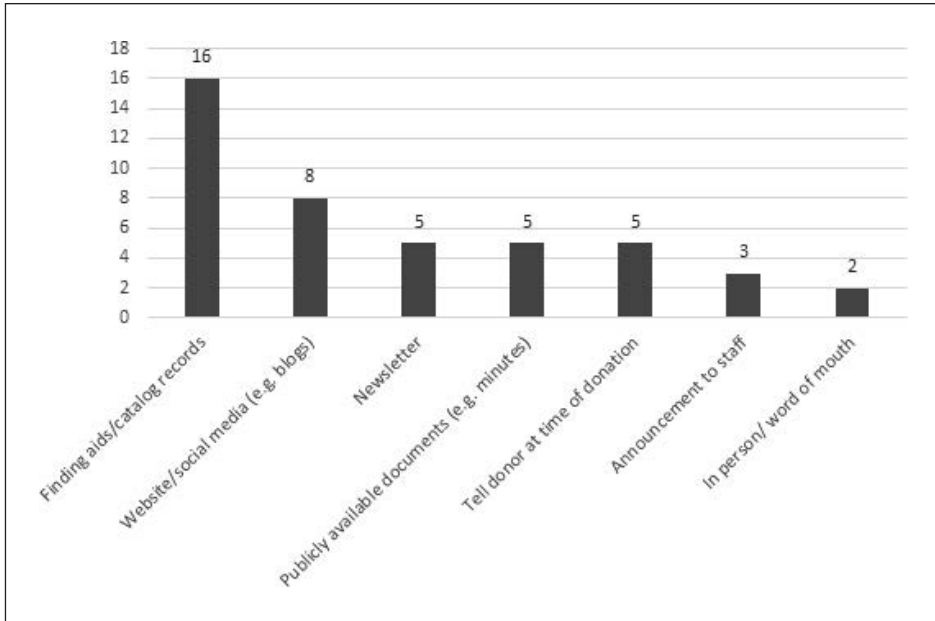


FIGURE 7. How do you publicize that your institution has deaccessioned?

Outcomes and Impacts of Reappraisal and Deaccessioning

What positive and negative outcomes have respondents seen from acts of reappraisal and deaccessioning? Why do these institutions continue to reappraise and deaccession? Two-hundred and thirty-nine survey participants selected the top 3 reasons why they reappraise and/or deaccession (see Figure 8). The overall top 3 reasons are finding out-of-scope materials (197 responses); to create collections storage space (153 responses); and to implement changes to a collecting policy (130 responses). Unsurprisingly, nearly three-quarters of respondents reappraise or deaccession because they have found out-of-scope material; this is the essence of reappraisal and deaccessioning. Deaccessioning to create space can raise some ethical concerns if space need is the only criterion used when determining whether a collection should be deaccessioned or not; however, no respondents selected only “to create collections storage space.” Deaccessioning to address the issue of maxed-out storage capacity is a form of crisis management. Rather than solving a space problem by creating other storage areas, deaccessioning solely to create space may mean that valuable, useful collections are removed from access; this would be similar to selling materials to address a budget crisis. Nonetheless, in our own experience, criteria for selecting which collections, records series, or other aggregated materials to reappraise include the amount of space taken, with priorities for reappraisal given to larger aggregates of material. Space savings

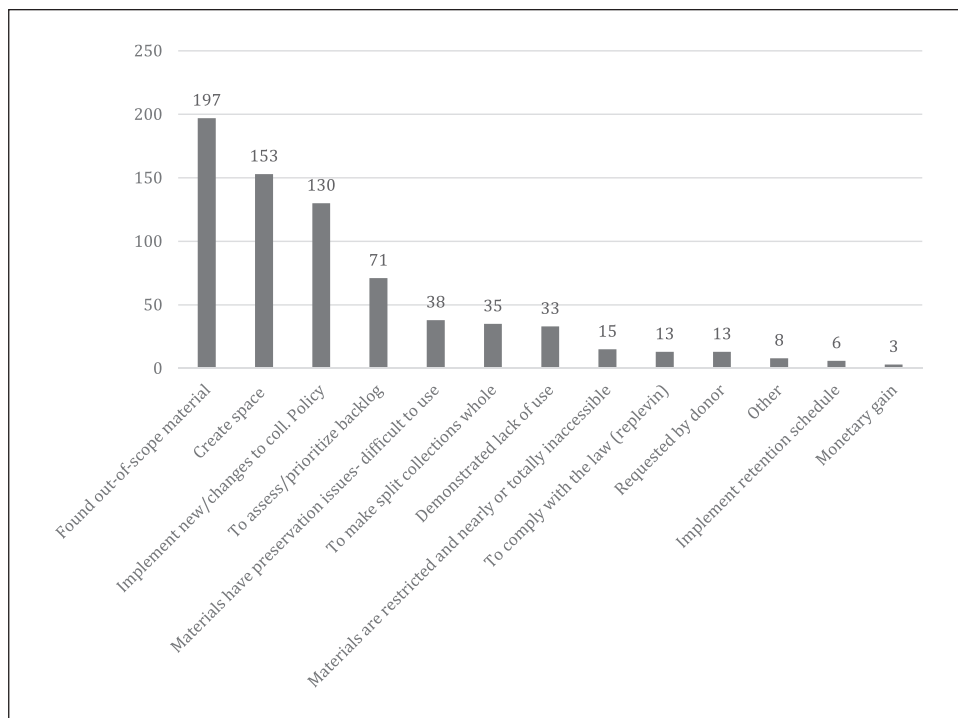


FIGURE 8. Why is your institution reappraising and/or deaccessioning? ⁶⁶

is a natural benefit of deaccessioning, and one valued by archivists and administrators alike.⁶⁵

The top 2 benefits of reappraisal and deaccessioning, almost equally, found in this survey were more focused collecting scope and more collections storage space (185 and 182 responses each). The top third benefit selected was improved overall access to collections (119 responses), with a prioritized backlog not far behind (103 responses). Among the “other” responses, 4 people mentioned that deaccessioning generates good will and support for other archival repositories, a benefit when institutions transfer out-of-scope collections to a more appropriate institution.⁶⁷ One individual described a project in which stakeholders helped archives staff reappraise collections received by the institution prior to the 1980s:

This occasionally slow and tedious process helped free up some needed space and helped draw attention to the valuable records by removing some unnecessary clutter. More than that though it was a very positive experience for most of the representatives who went on to become advocates for the importance of the archives. . . . What was odd for me is that by making people destroy history, the archives received a major public relations boost on campus and has benefited significantly.⁶⁸

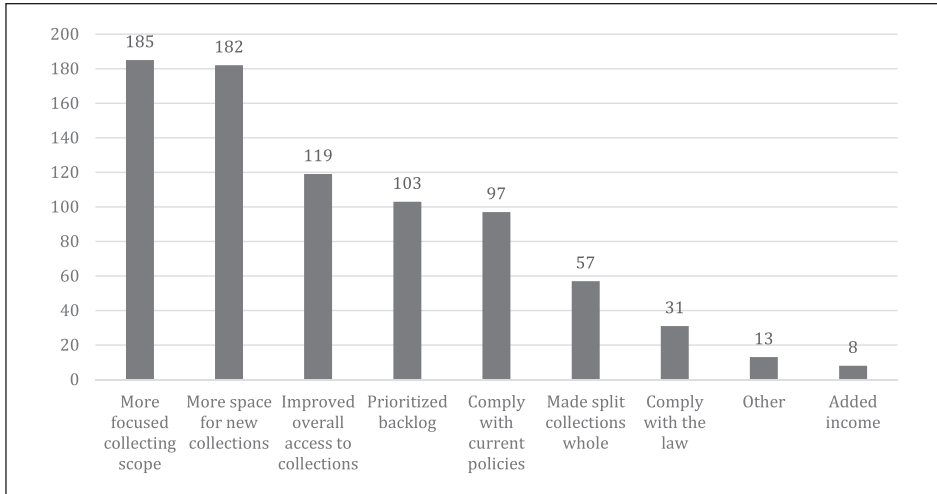


FIGURE 9. What benefits have you seen from reappraising and/or deaccessioning?

Based on survey responses, the most beneficial elements of deaccessioning are more active collections management and creation of additional storage space for materials that better fit an institution's collecting scope and researchers' needs (see Figure 9). Deaccessioning can strengthen institutional holdings.

Out of 110 people responding to the question "What negative effects have you seen from reappraising and deaccessioning?" 18 individuals indicated they had seen no negative consequences. Most negative consequences, either selected from the available choices or written in, were negative perceptions by the public or staff (see Figure 10). Several people also commented upon the time it takes to reappraise and deaccession. Only 2 people commented that researchers were upset or annoyed to learn that collections had been deaccessioned. We find it

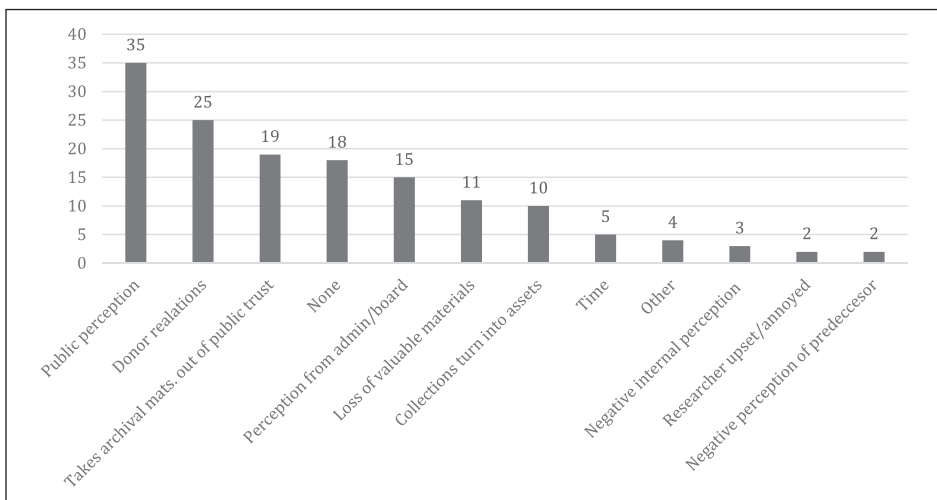


FIGURE 10. What negative effects have you seen from deaccessioning?

telling that 239 respondents took the time to think about the benefits their institutions have seen from reappraisal and deaccessioning, while only 110 wished to describe the negative effects.

Areas for Further Research

Without previous aggregated data, it is difficult to know precisely how much these practices have changed and why. Data from this survey should serve as a benchmark for future research and insights about reappraisal and deaccessioning, including how the practices have changed and are perceived in the profession in Canada and the United States. The data are available through the University of Kansas ScholarWorks institutional repository.⁶⁹ Other areas could benefit from further research, some of which were noted by survey respondents. These include investigating how much time reappraisal and deaccessioning takes—both staff time and the length of time from the start of a reappraisal process through the end of the deaccessioning phase; as well as documentation about reappraisal and deaccessioning of born-digital materials and how these practices may differ from analog materials.

Professional Call to Action

We suggest several avenues the profession as a whole should consider to continue making reappraisal and deaccessioning acceptable and ethical professional practice. Reappraising and deaccessioning on a regular basis, rather than as the need arises, could help change the perspective that reappraisal and deaccessioning are to be feared. It could also help ensure these processes are systematic and more standardized at an institution, increasing consistent and sound decision-making rather than decision-making without reference to precedent. Educating staff and the public about these practices could help make them more transparent—so that archives can be matter-of-fact about them, rather than secretive and ashamed. SAA, perhaps through its technical subcommittee overseeing the *Guidelines*, can work on making the *Guidelines* more widely known and continue educating the profession about what deaccessioning is and is not, and that deaccessioning does not always lead solely to destruction. Additionally, the profession should expect that transferred collections will not be transferred from one backlog to another, but that repositories will at least provide minimal online description and access to collections they agree to take from deaccessioning institutions. All of these improvements would help to change the perspective that deaccessioning is something to fear and instead allow deaccessioning to become part of responsible, ethical collections management practices.

Conclusion

The survey results described in this article echo the ethical and practical concerns raised in the professional literature, as well as confirming positive experiences found in many of the case studies. Institutions in 2017 continued to grapple with issues discussed in the literature over the past thirty-five years, including lack of policy, concerns about donor relations, and how to ethically dispose of deaccessioned materials. At the same time, the survey results provide a more nuanced understanding of tensions about these practices and procedural issues within institutions.

While the majority of survey participants indicated their institutions reappraise and deaccession—much as the literature accepts reappraisal and deaccessioning as necessary acts—both quantitative and qualitative data indicate that concerns about ensuring these are ethical, standardized, and accepted practices remain relevant. For example, the lack of written documentation at many institutions—as well as the lack of transparency about reappraisal and deaccessioning with institutions' constituents—are major causes for concern. Archival professionals should be honest with donors, researchers, and internally within their institutions about these practices, and they must document how these decisions are made. As noted by survey respondents and in the literature, too often professionals do not know what decisions were made and why in an original appraisal decision; the field should not continue that practice when reappraising. Additionally, misunderstanding exists about what deaccessioning involves, including conflating weeding with deaccessioning and equating deaccessioning solely with destruction. Disagreement also continues within archival organizations about appropriate procedures and practices. Data from this survey indicate an opportunity for more acceptance, improvement, and agreement in the profession about what these practices entail. This can only happen when reappraisal and deaccessioning are viewed as regular and favorable parts of collections management practices, which can only happen when they are conducted ethically and transparently.

Data from the survey also reflect much that has been written in the literature regarding positive outcomes from using these processes. While finding time and other needed resources can be a burden—and sometimes are why institutions have not conducted reappraisal and deaccessioning—institutions report a reduction in collections that do not fit their collecting scope and improved access for all collections remaining at their institutions. At the same time, few respondents mentioned problems with donors or researchers, and some in fact noted improved relationships from taking on these activities.

Reappraising and deaccessioning are practices in progress. While no collections management practice is entirely perfect—people will take short cuts,

deviate from standards, and ultimately follow procedures that work for their institutions—the more ethically, responsibly, and transparently that reappraisal and deaccessioning are accomplished, the better archival collections will be managed for the service of donors, researchers, and future professionals stewarding these collections.

Appendix A: Survey Introduction and Questions

This survey aims to gather information about the reappraisal and deaccessioning practices of archival organizations in the United States and Canada.

For the purposes of this survey, “archival organizations” is an umbrella term meaning any organization that manages archives and manuscript collections. Even if your organization does not reappraise or deaccession, please fill out this survey. This data will provide the authors of this survey with collective and analytical information regarding archival reappraisal and deaccessioning. It may be used for and disseminated in presentations, posters, and/or publications.

Throughout this survey, “archival materials” includes records, manuscripts, and other unpublished primary source documents that are typically acquired by an archives or special collections repository. Reappraisal, as defined by the Society of American Archivists (SAA) glossary, is “the process of identifying materials that no longer merit preservation and that are candidates for deaccessioning.” Deaccessioning, as defined by the SAA glossary, is “the process by which an archives, museum, or library permanently removes accessioned materials from its holdings.” In both instances we are interested in the reappraisal and deaccessioning of a substantive amount of a collection—a series or more of material—rather than the weeding that normally goes into processing a collection.

This survey is anonymous, unless you choose to provide your contact information for follow-up questions. Please address any questions and comments to the authors of this survey [contact information removed].

1. What is your institutional type?

- Academic repository (College/university archives, special collections, or both)
- Corporate archives
- Federal government
- Local government (county, city, etc.)
- Local or regional historical society/museum
- Medical archives
- Museum archives or museum library and archives
- Non-university research library
- Other non-profit archives
- Public library
- Religious archives
- State historical society
- State or Provincial Archives and/or Library
- Tribal government agency or tribal archives
- Other: _____

2. Where is your institution located?
[Presented participants with a dropdown list of fifty US states; Washington, DC; Puerto Rico; ten Canadian provinces, or outside the United States and Canada.]
3. How long has your institution been acquiring archival collections?
 - 0–25 years
 - 26–75 years
 - 76–150 years
 - More than 150 years
4. How many full-time equivalent (FTE) staff, professional or not, employed in your repository work directly with archival collections or perform archival functions (i.e. appraisal, acquisitions, processing, reference, outreach, etc.)?
 - 0–0.9
 - 1
 - 2–3
 - 4–6
 - 7–10
 - 11+
5. What is the total annual operating budget (including salaries) for your institution's archives administration? (Please use numbers only.)
[free-text field]
6. What is your total archival holdings? (Analog materials only; please treat cubic footage similarly to linear footage.)
 - Less than 1000 linear feet
 - 1,000–10,000 linear feet
 - 10,000–50,000 linear feet
 - More than 50,000 linear feet
 - Don't know
7. Does your institution have a written policy regarding reappraisal and deaccessioning?
 - Yes
 - No
 - Don't know
 - Information about reappraisal and deaccessioning procedures is located in other documentation: _____
8. If yes, is this information available online?
 - Yes
 - No
 - Intranet only (for staff)

9. Has your institution carried out reappraisal and/or deaccessioning of archival material?
- Yes
 - No
 - Have reappraised, have not deaccessioned
 - Have deaccessioned, did not reappraise beforehand
 - My current institution does not, but I have reappraised and deaccessioned at other institutions
10. If not, why? (Check all that apply.)
- Legal mandate prohibits deaccessioning
 - Have not yet needed to do so
 - Not enough time
 - No policy or authority to initiate/guide the process
 - Opposed to reappraisal and deaccessioning
 - Opposed to selling collections
 - Fear of bad publicity and/or damaging donor relationships
 - Other ethical quandaries with reappraisal and deaccessioning: _____
 - Other: _____
11. Even though your institution does not reappraise and deaccession, do you have collections you think should be reappraised and potentially deaccessioned?
- Yes
 - No
12. Why are you reappraising and/or deaccessioning at your institution? (Please check your top 3 reasons.)
- To create collections storage space
 - To implement or adjust to changes in collecting policy/collecting focus(es)
 - Found out-of-scope materials
 - Demonstrated lack of use by researchers
 - Collection materials are so heavily restricted as to be nearly or totally inaccessible
 - Collection materials have preservation issues making use and management difficult
 - To make split collections whole
 - Monetary gain
 - To assess and prioritize processing backlog(s)
 - To comply with the law (e.g. replevin)
 - Requested by donor
 - Other: _____

13. Do you regularly reappraise archival materials, or do you reappraise on an ad hoc basis?
- Regularly
 - Ad hoc
 - Both, as needed
14. Do you reappraise and/or deaccession born-digital archival materials?
- Yes
 - No
 - Don't know
15. When did your institution start reappraising and deaccessioning archival materials?
- 5 years ago or less
 - 6–10 years ago
 - 11–30 years ago
 - More than 30 years ago
 - Don't know
16. Does your institution refer to the SAA guidelines on reappraisal and deaccessioning when performing these actions?
- Yes
 - No
 - Did when developing local procedures
 - For certain tasks: _____
17. Who makes the decision to deaccession individual collections? (Check all that apply.)
- An acquisitions or collections committee
 - Committee dedicated to reappraisal and deaccessioning
 - Archivist, curator, or other professional staff person makes individual decisions
 - Administrators and/or management
 - Board of directors
 - Other: _____
18. What does your institution do with deaccessioned materials? (Check all that apply.)
- Transfer to another archival institution for preservation and research or other archival uses
 - Transfer to another unit or institution for a different purpose (i.e. to public library, circulating stacks, community or high school theatre, etc.)
 - Sell
 - Return to the donor

- Destroy
- Other _____
19. If you sell materials, how does your institution use proceeds from the sales? (Check all that apply.)
- Buy new collection materials
- Use toward preservation needs for existing collections
- Use toward annual operating budget
- Use toward emergency (i.e. roof leak, budgetary shortfall, etc.)
- Other: _____
20. Does your institution follow any guidelines about selling collection materials? (Check all that apply.)
- AAM or other professional code of ethics or guidelines
- Institutional code of ethics and/or guidelines
- State and/or federal law
- None of the above
- Other: _____
21. When transferring archival materials to another archival institution, what documentation do you send to the other institution? (Check all that apply.)
- Copies of donor file/accession records
- Copy of finding aid
- Directions to OCLC catalog record, copy of MARC record if available
- Copy of container list if available
- None of the above
- Other: _____
22. Do you track if the other institution makes the collection available?
- Yes
- No
- Don't know
23. Do you notify the donor after you have transferred a collection?
- Yes
- No
- Notified donor prior to transfer
- Other: _____
24. Do you publicize in any way that your institution deaccessions?
- Yes
- No
25. If yes, how have you announced or publicized the fact that your institution has deaccessioned? (Check all that apply.)
- Website/social media (e.g. blogs, etc.)

- Finding aids/catalog records
 - Newsletter
 - Other: _____
26. What benefits have you seen from reappraising and deaccessioning at your institution? (Check all that apply.)
- Improved overall access to collections
 - Made split collections whole
 - Prioritized backlog
 - Complying with the law
 - Complying with current policies
 - More focused collecting scope
 - Added income
 - More space for new collections
 - Other: _____
27. What negative effects have you seen from reappraising and deaccessioning at your institution? (Check all that apply.)
- Negative affect on donor relations
 - Negative perception from public
 - Negative perception from administration/board of directors
 - Loss of valuable materials
 - Turned collection materials into assets
 - Taking archival materials out of the public trust
 - Other: _____
28. If you have anything you would like to add about reappraisal and deaccessioning, please feel free to comment here:
- [free-text field]
29. If you are willing to be contacted for a possible follow-up survey or interview, please provide your name and email address:
- [free-text field]

Appendix B: Introduction and Questions for Second, Follow-up Survey on Reappraising and Deaccessioning Born-Digital Materials

[Email sent to participants]

Dear Survey Participant,

I'm writing because several months ago you took a survey about reappraisal and deaccessioning practices in archives. In it, you provided your contact information for follow-up questions. We are finishing our analysis of the results and want to ask you a few more questions because you selected "yes" to the question, "Do you reappraise and/or deaccession born-digital archival materials?" We've created a very brief (5 question) follow-up survey that should take no more than 5 minutes to complete. We would be grateful if you are able to respond to the questions by November 30, 2017. Thank you for your time and interest in this research.

Access the follow-up survey here: [URL to Qualtrics survey]

1. At what point in the archival life-cycle do you TYPICALLY reappraise born digital material? (select all that apply)
 - During accessioning
 - After accessioning, before processing
 - During processing
 - After it has been processed and made available
 - Other: [free-text field]
 - I have not reappraised born digital materials
 - I am unsure what my institution does
2. When you deaccession born-digital material, what are you disposing of? (select all that apply)
 - External media carriers such as hard drives, floppy disks, CDs, USBs
 - Files stored in a digital repository or dark archive
 - Other: [free-text field]
 - I have not deaccessioned born digital materials
 - I am unsure what my institution does
3. If you're deaccessioning born-digital material, what do you do with it? (select all that apply)
 - Transfer it (give digital files or media to another archival repository)
 - Destroy it (delete files or throw away media)
 - Return it to the donor
 - Sell it
 - Other: [free-text field]

4. Do you think that deaccessioning and weeding are synonymous?
- Definitely yes
 - Probably yes
 - Probably not
 - Definitely not
5. If you have further thoughts or opinions about reappraising and deaccessioning born-digital materials, please share them here.
- [free-text field]

NOTES

- ¹ The preliminary results of the survey described in this article were presented at the SAA Research Forum Poster session in Portland, Oregon, August 2017. We wish to thank those who provided comments during the session, as well as our colleagues who reviewed the initial survey questions and provided feedback. The poster is available at https://www2.archivists.org/sites/all/files/Huggard_Jackson_The%20State%20of%20Reappraisal%20&%20Deaccessioning%20in%20Archives.pdf.
- ² Very few authors in the archival profession were writing before Leonard Rapport's 1981 "No Grandfather Clause: Reappraising Accessioned Records," *American Archivist* 44, no. 2 (1981): 143–50, <https://doi.org/10.17723/aarc.44.2.b274w3126t430h52>. Those who do touch upon reappraisal and deaccessioning include Ruth B. Bordin and Robert B. Warner, *The Modern Manuscript Library* (New York: Scarecrow Press, 1966); Edward C. Kemp, *Manuscript Solicitation for Libraries, Special Collections, Museums and Archives* (Littleton, CO: Libraries Unlimited, Inc., 1978), 65–66; Francis X. Blouin, "A New Perspective on the Appraisal of Business Records: A Review," *American Archivist* 42, no. 3 (1979): 312–20, <https://doi.org/10.17723/aarc.42.3.v7m7332674306321>.
- ³ Elena Danielson, *The Ethical Archivist* (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 2010).
- ⁴ Danielson, *Ethical Archivist*, 88.
- ⁵ James O'Toole, "On the Idea of Permanence," *American Archivist* 52, no. 1 (1989): 10–25, <https://doi.org/10.17723/aarc.52.1.3x85283576r43387>; Samuel Streit, "Going, Going, Gone: Case Studies in Library Deaccessioning," *Rare Books and Manuscript Librarianship* 12 (1997): 21–28, <https://doi.org/10.5860/rbml.12.1.139>.
- ⁶ Sally Griffith, *Serving History in a Changing World: The Historical Society of Pennsylvania in the Twentieth Century* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001); Adriana Cuervo, "True Confessions: Reappraising and Deaccessioning" (presentation, Society of American Archivists Annual Meeting, Atlanta, GA, 2016); Caryn Wojcik, "Appraisal, Reappraisal, and Deaccessioning," *Archival Issues* 27, no. 2 (2002): 151–60.
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- ¹⁰ Danielson, *Ethical Archivist*, 92–94.
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- ¹³ Danielson, *Ethical Archivist*; Thomas Wilsted, “Observations on the Ethics of Collecting Archives and Manuscripts,” *Provenance* 11, nos. 1–2 (1993): 25–38.
- ¹⁴ David H. Stam, “‘Prove All Things: Hold Fast That Which is Good’: Deaccessioning and Research Libraries,” *College and Research Libraries* 43, no. 1 (1982): 5–13, https://doi.org/10.5860/crl_43_01_5; David Szewczyk, “Library Deaccessioning: A Dealer’s Perspective,” *Rare Books and Manuscripts Librarianship* 12, no. 1 (1997): 30–33, <https://doi.org/10.5860/rbml.12.1.140>.
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- ¹⁸ Minna Sarantola-Weiss and Emilia Västi, “Deaccessioning: Sharing Experiences from Finland,” trans. Jüri Kokkonen (Helsinki: Finnish Museums Association, 2016, http://www.museoliitto.fi/doc/verkkojulkaisut/Deaccessioning_Sharing_Experiences_from_Finland.pdf); Dieuwertje Wijmsmuller, *Deaccessioning & Disposal in Europe 2008–2017: A Research on Possibilities and Attitudes Across the European Member States* (January 2017), <https://www.museumsanddeaccessioning.com/wp-content/uploads/Deaccessioning-disposal-Europe-2008-2017-D.-Wijmsmuller.pdf>.
- ¹⁹ We also contacted the Society of Southwest Archivists and the Mid-Atlantic Regional Archives Conference and asked them to post about the survey on our behalf.
- ²⁰ These sections included Museum Archives; Local Government Archives; and Native American Archives.
- ²¹ “In the Loop,” Society of American Archivists, March 15 and 29, 2017, <https://www2.archivists.org/intheloop/archive>.
- ²² All data from this survey are available at Marcella Huggard and Laura Uglean Jackson, “Reappraising and Deaccessioning Practices in the United States and Canada (Dataset)” (October 2018), <http://hdl.handle.net/1808/26973>.
- ²³ “Archive Finder,” ProQuest, <http://archives.chadwyck.com/marketing/index.jsp>.
- ²⁴ Hawaii had no responses and is not included in this map. The authors wish to thank Charlie Huggard for his assistance in creating this map.
- ²⁵ For the purpose of simplifying the data and analysis of them, we categorized the answers “Have reappraised, have not deaccessioned” and “Have deaccessioned, did not reappraise beforehand” as a “Yes” answer; similarly, “My current institution does not, but I have reappraised and deaccessioned at other institutions” was categorized as a “No” answer.
- ²⁶ For the purpose of simplifying the data and analysis of them, we categorized the answers “Have reappraised, have not deaccessioned” and “Have deaccessioned, did not reappraise beforehand” as a “Yes” answer; similarly, “My current institution does not, but I have reappraised and deaccessioned at other institutions” was categorized as a “No” answer.
- ²⁷ For the purpose of simplifying the data and analysis of them, we categorized the answers “Have reappraised, have not deaccessioned” and “Have deaccessioned, did not reappraise beforehand” as a “Yes” answer; similarly, “My current institution does not, but I have reappraised and deaccessioned at other institutions” was categorized as a “No” answer.
- ²⁸ For discussions on resources needed to reappraise and deaccession, see for example Gerencser, “Reappraisal and Deaccessioning,” 163; Lloyd, “From Projects to Policy,” 71; Todd, “Reappraisal of

- Congressional Records at the Minnesota Historical Society: A Case Study,” *Archival Issues* 23, no. 1 (1998): 35–40; Helmut M. Knies, “Reappraising and Reaccessioning Wisconsin State Government Records: An Agency-Wide Approach,” *Archival Issues* 30, no. 1 (2006): 35–43.
- ²⁹ Respondent 2atY9ksBeJTaDjF, Huggard and Jackson, “Reappraising and Deaccessioning Practices.”
- ³⁰ Respondent 2uCyhYb4epkWa3C, Huggard and Jackson, “Reappraising and Deaccessioning Practices.”
- ³¹ For the purpose of simplifying the data and analysis of them, we categorized the answers “Have reappraised, have not deaccessioned” and “Have deaccessioned, did not reappraise beforehand” as a “Yes” answer; similarly, “My current institution does not, but I have reappraised and deaccessioned at other institutions” was categorized as a “No” answer.
- ³² Society of American Archivists Reappraisal and Deaccessioning Development and Review Team (SAA-RDDRT), *Guidelines for Reappraisal and Deaccessioning* (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 2012), 9–10.
- ³³ Respondent 2SisAf9XC2DAoLm, Huggard and Jackson, “Reappraising and Deaccessioning Practices.”
- ³⁴ Respondents 23V40S3uEcNrSXX and 2wL8wJbbb9z0tnT, Huggard and Jackson, “Reappraising and Deaccessioning Practices.”
- ³⁵ See results from question 15 in the survey data, Huggard and Jackson, “Reappraising and Deaccessioning Practices.” Ninety-seven of the 254 respondents to this question indicated their institutions began reappraising and deaccessioning in the past five years or less.
- ³⁶ There were 4 possible answers to the question, “Does your institution refer to the SAA Guidelines on Reappraisal and deaccessioning when performing these procedures?”: Yes, No, Did when developing local procedures; and For certain tasks, which had a write-in option.
- ³⁷ For example, Carrie Hintz, Reappraisal and Deaccessioning of Public Library Archival Collections webinar, September 14, 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=70EUO1_A5iE.
- ³⁸ For the purpose of simplifying the data and analysis of them, we categorized the answers “Have reappraised, have not deaccessioned” and “Have deaccessioned, did not reappraise beforehand” as a “Yes” answer; similarly, “My current institution does not, but I have reappraised and deaccessioned at other institutions” was categorized as a “No” answer.
- ³⁹ Richard Pearce-Moses, s.v. “deaccessioning,” *Glossary of Archival and Records Terminology* (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 2017), <https://www2.archivists.org/glossary/terms/d/deaccessioning>. Weeding, as described in the same glossary, is “the process of identifying and removing unwanted materials from a larger body of materials” (<https://www2.archivists.org/glossary/terms/w/weeding>). An updated definition for “deaccessioning” from SAA, not yet part of the glossary, still does not clarify distinctions between deaccessioning and weeding. See SAA, “Word of the Week,” <https://us3.campaign-archive.com/?u=56c4cfbec1ee5b2a284e7e9d6&id=31f1dee642>.
- ⁴⁰ International Organization for Standardization ISO/TC 46, Information and Documentation Committee, “ISO 5127:2017(en): Information and Documentation—Foundation and Vocabulary,” 2017, <https://www.iso.org/obp/ui/#iso:std:iso:5127:ed-2:v1:en>.
- ⁴¹ For example, respondents YPvveCFusixjUlz, 2xQM3QEnBPxLv1O, RUojuJHr9fZy0I9, CfbDIZgBA4DhknX, Huggard and Jackson, “Reappraising and Deaccessioning Practices.”
- ⁴² Little documentation currently exists in the literature regarding reappraisal and deaccessioning of born-digital materials; Geoff Huth’s “Appraising Digital Records” in *Appraisal and Acquisition Strategies*, ed. Michael Shallcross and Christopher J. Prom (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 2016) very briefly mentions reappraisal and deaccessioning and simply states institutions should consider reappraisal as a normal part of the archives life cycle.
- ⁴³ Respondent 2Po2riQoznbNONz, Huggard and Jackson, “Reappraising and Deaccessioning Practices.”
- ⁴⁴ Respondent r2d3H5DQtHMHgv7, Huggard and Jackson, “Reappraising and Deaccessioning Practices.”
- ⁴⁵ For example, respondents rkTPNgqqQYQzO7L and 1gkFO2ensOKjpUK, Huggard and Jackson, “Reappraising and Deaccessioning Practices.”
- ⁴⁶ Respondent rkTPNgqqQYQzO7L, Huggard and Jackson, “Reappraising and Deaccessioning Practices.” Richard Haas also discusses lack of information from the original appraisal in his

- article "Collection Reappraisal: The Experience at the University of Cincinnati," *American Archivist* 47, no. 1 (1984): 51–54, <https://doi.org/10.17723/aarc.47.1.t1476206695m7170>.
- ⁴⁷ SAA-RDDRT, *Guidelines for Reappraisal and Deaccessioning*, 7, 10, 13.
- ⁴⁸ Respondent 3pEA2Y9snXzvFtf, Huggard and Jackson, "Reappraising and Deaccessioning Practices."
- ⁴⁹ Gerencser, "Reappraisal and Deaccessioning," 157, 159; Marcella (Wiget) Huggard, "Macro (Re)Appraisal: Does This Really Need to Come to the State Archives?," Society of American Archivists Government Records Section Case Studies (March 2016), <http://files.archivists.org/pubs/GovtRecordsCaseStudies/CASE-1-MacroReappraisal.pdf>.
- ⁵⁰ Charlotte Brown, "Deaccessioning for the Greater Good," *Wilson Library Bulletin* 61 (April 1987): 22–24; Sauer, "Doing the Best We Can?"; Jackson and Thompson, "But You Promised."
- ⁵¹ Respondent 1eY9ikgH0IF8ymL, Huggard and Jackson, "Reappraising and Deaccessioning Practices."
- ⁵² Principle 9 in the revised Statement of Principles to *Describing Archives: A Content Standard*, under revision from feedback at the time of publication, specifically states that each collection within a repository should have an archival description.
- ⁵³ Respondent 1DjdNH0TIhwjvh2, Huggard and Jackson, "Reappraising and Deaccessioning Practices."
- ⁵⁴ Respondents PRv3NQWKHojmOdz and RQzi360OQb5TqE1, Huggard and Jackson, "Reappraising and Deaccessioning Practices."
- ⁵⁵ Major controversies surrounding the sale of materials have typically appeared in the news regarding art museums; see, for some examples from the past 35 years, Grace Glueck, "Coast Museum May Sell Art," *New York Times*, October 24, 1986; Lee Rosenbaum, "For Sale: Our Permanent Collection," *New York Times*, November 2, 2005; Alan Rich, "Trading Up: Why 'Deaccession' Has Become a Dirty Word," *Chicago Tribune*, September 6, 1990; Sebastian Smee, "Hawk This Gem? Unconscionable," *Boston Globe*, January 28, 2009; and Erica Butler, "Deaccessioning: A Controversial Issue," *Currency and Culture* (blog), October 6, 2010, <http://currencyofculture.journalism.cuny.edu/2010/10/06/deaccessioning-a-controversial-issue>. Libraries and archival institutions do sometimes find themselves in the news for deaccessioning or even weeding decisions that do not involve sales, such as when investigative reporter Paul Brodeur demanded that the New York Public Library return his collection of papers after it requested that he pick up materials staff had weeded from the collection, discussed in Michael Barbaro, "In Elite Library Archives, a Dispute Over a Trove," *New York*, April 22, 2011. Nicholson Baker wrote an entire book about libraries deaccessioning print newspapers and books, even though these institutions were keeping other, potentially more preservable formats, in *Double Fold: Libraries and the Assault on Paper* (London: Vintage, 2002).
- ⁵⁶ American Alliance of Museums, "Code of Ethics for Museums," adopted 1991, amended 2000, <http://www.aam-us.org/resources/ethics-standards-and-best-practices/code-of-ethics>; American Association for State and Local History, "AASLH Statement of Professional Standards and Ethics," updated February 2017, <http://web.archive.org/web/20180524050110/http://download.aaslh.org/Council/2017+Statement+of+Professional+Standards+and+Ethics.pdf>.
- ⁵⁷ SAA-RDDRT, *Guidelines for Reappraisal and Deaccessioning*, 15–16; American Association of Museums, "Code of Ethics for Museums."
- ⁵⁸ Respondent 1NgNcQYhmH1K0w9, Huggard and Jackson, "Reappraising and Deaccessioning Practices."
- ⁵⁹ Respondents Pv6cbHwHbEMLGQ9 and 1dEbbeemER95u6A, Huggard and Jackson, "Reappraising and Deaccessioning Practices."
- ⁶⁰ Respondents 1Ccet7sM7A2amNb and 8cWmqdkdVgyKnXX, Huggard and Jackson, "Reappraising and Deaccessioning Practices." Sally Griffith's *Serving History* discusses tensions between staff and the board of directors regarding deaccessioning policy and procedure in great detail.
- ⁶¹ Respondent plstVXgKIVEM1BT, Huggard and Jackson, "Reappraising and Deaccessioning Practices."
- ⁶² Thompson and Uglean Jackson, "But You Promised," 680; Daniels-Howell, "Reappraisal of Congressional Records," 38.
- ⁶³ SAA-RDDRT, *Guidelines for Reappraisal and Deaccessioning*, 7, 17. Other recent surveys of the field indicate institutions generally are not making their policies transparent. See, for example, the Society of American Archivists Acquisition and Appraisal Section, *Collection Development Policy*

Survey (2016–2017), https://www2.archivists.org/sites/all/files/aasection_collection_development_policy_2016survey.pdf; Sauer, “Doing the Best We Can?”

⁶⁴ Respondent 29s10gVQAqCTyM1, Huggard and Jackson, “Reappraising and Deaccessioning Practices.”

⁶⁵ Haas, “Collection Reappraisal,” 52; Uglean Jackson and Thompson, “But You Promised,” 679.

⁶⁶ Thirty people wrote in an answer under “other.” Sixteen of those answers were incorporated into the existing options, and “Implement retention schedule” was added as another option that was not originally included in the possible answers.

⁶⁷ Sauer, “Doing the Best We Can?”

⁶⁸ Respondent 31hJWylrshZNGTW, Huggard and Jackson, “Reappraising and Deaccessioning Practices.”

⁶⁹ Huggard and Jackson, “Reappraising and Deaccessioning Practices.”

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