



National  
Collections  
Program

**2024 - 2029**  
Strategic Plan

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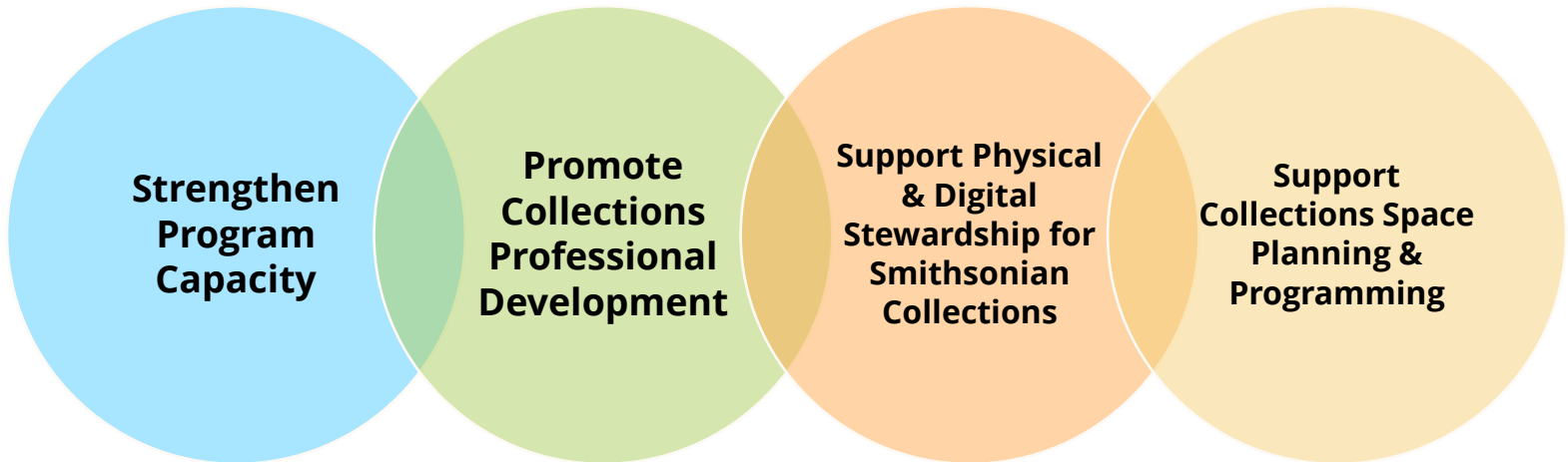


# Introduction

Founded in 1993, the origins of the National Collections Program (NCP) date back to 1880 with the establishment of the Registrar of the United States National Museum. Over time, the programmatic activities and administrative responsibilities for Smithsonian collections management experienced significant changes, transitioning from an active registrarial office to a central administrative office with primary advocacy for Institution-wide collections stewardship issues.

In 2023, NCP celebrated 30 years of stewardship. With NCP leadership, coordination, and support, working closely with staff from across the Institution, the Smithsonian has raised the level of collections stewardship based on sound assessment data, economies of scale, pan-SI initiatives, and prioritized project-driven activities. Smithsonian senior leadership acknowledges that an effective strategy for improving the stewardship and accessibility of its collections depends on a coordinated, interdisciplinary, Institution-wide approach. This coordinated approach is central to carrying out the mission and programmatic goals of NCP and is reflected in several of our current pan-Institutional initiatives, including collections management policies and collections stewardship plans, collections care, collections space planning, collections emergency management, professional development; collections mass-digitization; and sustainable preservation environments.

Building on our past success, this strategic plan serves as a roadmap for the next five years – a plan that instills our collaborative, innovative, and interdisciplinary spirit. To fulfill our mission, vision, and values, we have developed **four** interdependent goals that underscore our strategic priorities.



Successful achievement of these goals requires a steadfast commitment to working together across disciplines, collecting units, central offices, and external partners. To sustain our support of current and future collections initiatives, NCP must increase its staff and strengthen our subject-matter expertise and capabilities to fulfill the Smithsonian’s commitment to being a trusted source of ethical stewardship and promote just, sustainable, and inclusive strategies and best practices for the care, management, and accessibility of the collections.

To implement our plan, NCP will develop annual tactical plans to achieve and measure the success of new initiatives while providing continuity to existing and ongoing activities.

# Our Mission

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The National Collections Program is dedicated to improving the overall stewardship and management of Smithsonian collections by providing central leadership, policy oversight, strategic planning, and support of Institution-wide collections initiatives for the diverse collecting units.

The NCP serves as a central resource, principal advisor, and dedicated advocate for collections stewardship to Smithsonian senior leadership, collecting unit directors, central service units, and staff on all matters relating to collections management policies, procedures, and best practices. Working with pan-Institutional staff, the NCP advocates for collections care resources and sustainable, equitable collections support, informed by sound collections assessment data.

# Our Vision

## ***Strengthen Collections Stewardship***

Guided by our longstanding commitment to collections stewardship, we will explore new partnerships and initiatives – leveraging our strengths within NCP, across the Smithsonian, and within the profession – to pursue innovative, sustainable, and more inclusive collections stewardship practices.

## ***Foster Collaborations***

All our work cultivates interdisciplinary collaborations and strengthens relationships among Smithsonian staff, across collecting units, central offices, and disciplines, and with external cultural heritage organizations, institutions, and communities.

## ***Empower Staff and Community Partners***

Through active leadership, advocacy, and resource allocation, we will support and inspire creativity, experimentation, and innovation of Smithsonian staff and our external partners to enhance the stewardship of our cultural and scientific heritage.

## ***Leverage the Power of One Smithsonian***

To address our shared collections challenges, we will continue to promote and support collaborative pan-Institutional collections initiatives and projects that benefit the greatest number of collection items and collecting units in an efficient, practical, and transformative way – based on sound data.

## ***Expand Our Impact***

We are committed to enhancing our outreach efforts and engaging new audiences and communities through multiple programs and platforms.

# Our Values

## ***Trust and Integrity***

- Advocate collections care and stewardship priorities at every level of the Institution.
- Develop and maintain positive relationships with critical stakeholders.
- Ensure the office is held to the highest professional and ethical standards.
- Incorporate respect, civility, transparency, and empowerment into all aspects of our activities.
- Serve as trustworthy ambassadors for the collections community to promote innovative and transformative best practices.

## ***Engagement and Collaboration***

- Develop and implement engaging platforms for pan-Institutional partnerships across disciplines and units by leveraging new technologies, digital resources, and approaches.
- Provide content and opportunities across grade levels that highlight the commonalities and threads uniting seemingly disparate units and departments.
- Raise awareness of collections community successes and challenges through regular updates to senior leadership.
- Make connections with cultural heritage and allied partners through collaborative interdisciplinary teams.

## ***Commitment to Diversity and Inclusion***

- Collaborate with the Diversity Office to ensure we provide access to resources and training opportunities so that individuals of all abilities can benefit from the information.
- Recruit, retain, and develop a diverse and inclusive team from across the cultural heritage community.
- Promote and support a culture of open communication, mutual respect, empathy, and meaningful consultation.
- Advocate for equitable resources and support for all collection types.

# Our Goals

Improve and enhance access to and stewardship of Smithsonian collections through interdisciplinary collaboration and prioritizing diversity, equity, access, inclusion, and sustainability in the development and implementation of NCP programs that support the Smithsonian Strategic Plan.

NCP Strategic Goals	Smithsonian Strategic Plan Initiatives
1. Strengthen Program Capacity	7. DEAI 9. Workplace Flexibilities 10. Professional Development 15. Collections Stewardship 18. Sustainability & Resiliency
2. Promote Collections Professional Development	6. New Museums 7. DEAI 10. Professional Development 15. Collections Stewardship 16. Reckoning with Our Racial Past 18. Sustainability & Resiliency 23. Academic Appointments and Internships
3. Support Physical & Digital Stewardship for Smithsonian Collections	1. Digital Strategy 2. Digital Audience and Data 5. Digitization 7. DEAI 8. Enterprise Risk Management 15. Collections Stewardship 16. Reckoning with Our Racial Past 18. Sustainability and Resiliency
4. Support Collections Space Planning & Programming	6. New Museums 8. Enterprise Risk Management 15. Collections Stewardship 18. Sustainability & Resiliency



# Strategic Priorities

## 1. Strengthen Program Capacity

### Key Actions:

- a) Create a succession plan and prepare for the NCP director transition.
- b) Working with the Under Secretaries and OPMB, increase the number of permanent staff and breadth of expertise to fulfill our strategic goals and responsibilities of the office, which is not sustainable with the current staffing levels, particularly in the areas of sustainability, shared stewardship, and ethical returns.
- c) Continue to foster pan-Institutional collaboration and strengthen our impact in the future.
- d) Ensure the availability of financial resources as part of our annual budget request for staff and programming to support workplace flexibility and diversify our candidate pool.
- e) Serve constituents more effectively for existing and new pan-Institutional initiatives by building more capacity.

## 2. Promote Collections Professional Development

### Key Actions:

- a) Develop and implement new sustainable, interdisciplinary strategies and best practices for the preservation environment, collections emergency management, collections care, and shared stewardship among Smithsonian collecting units.
- b) Establish and foster partnerships with cultural heritage agencies and communities regarding collections best practices and collaborative training programs.
- c) Sponsor and support conferences and symposia on collections care and stewardship topics, including shared stewardship and ethical returns, to support continued dialogue on changing traditional practices.
- d) Promote diversity, equity, and inclusion in hiring processes, internship opportunities, and collections stewardship planning through collaborations with OHR, OFI, DO, and collecting units.
- e) Advocate and provide opportunities for communication and interdisciplinary knowledge sharing between Collections staff and their affiliated colleagues.

### 3. Support Physical and Digital Stewardship for Smithsonian Collections

#### Key Actions:

- a) Ensure each SD 600 collecting unit has an up-to-date inventory plan, collections management policy, collections stewardship plan, and a collections emergency management program.
- b) Provide central expertise and coordination for inclusive, equitable, and diverse collections management practices, including accessibility to collections and collections information for all people and implementing shared stewardship and ethical returns.
- c) Continue to provide leadership and strategically leverage central collections care resources (CCI/CCPF) to improve Smithsonian collections stewardship's diversity, equity, inclusion, and access.
- d) Set strategic priorities, funding allocations, and policies informed by annual collections statistics. Support unit mass digitization projects using unit data and assessments in partnership with DPO and ODT.
- e) Explore philanthropic avenues in partnership with central advancement to expand collections stewardship opportunities.

### 4. Support Collections Space Planning and Programming

#### Key Actions:

- a) Evaluate and adopt interdisciplinary guidelines related to sustainable collections care practices and responsible, evidence-based preservation environments. Promote standardized and shared methods for environmental monitoring, reporting, and analysis, as stated in the Smithsonian's *Life on a Sustainable Planet* initiative, which aims to promote evidence-based decision-making, working in concert with local communities, to address the climate crisis.
- b) Collaborate with internal and external partners to develop and support the implementation of procedures and practices for new construction and renovation projects that impact collections, including Pod 6, NMAL, and SAWHM.
- c) Support strategic planning, funding, use, and maintenance of collections space through interdisciplinary partnerships including the Collections Space Committee and the use of the Collections Space System data to set priorities and document progress.
- d) Assist OPDC with the development and implementation of Suitland and Dulles Collections Center master plans and pursue funding strategies with OPMB, OA, and Capital Campaign.
- e) Leverage expertise from OBATS, OCIO, and Collecting Units to support tracking and reporting capabilities, and the sharing of resources in the areas of collections emergency incidents.

# Appendices

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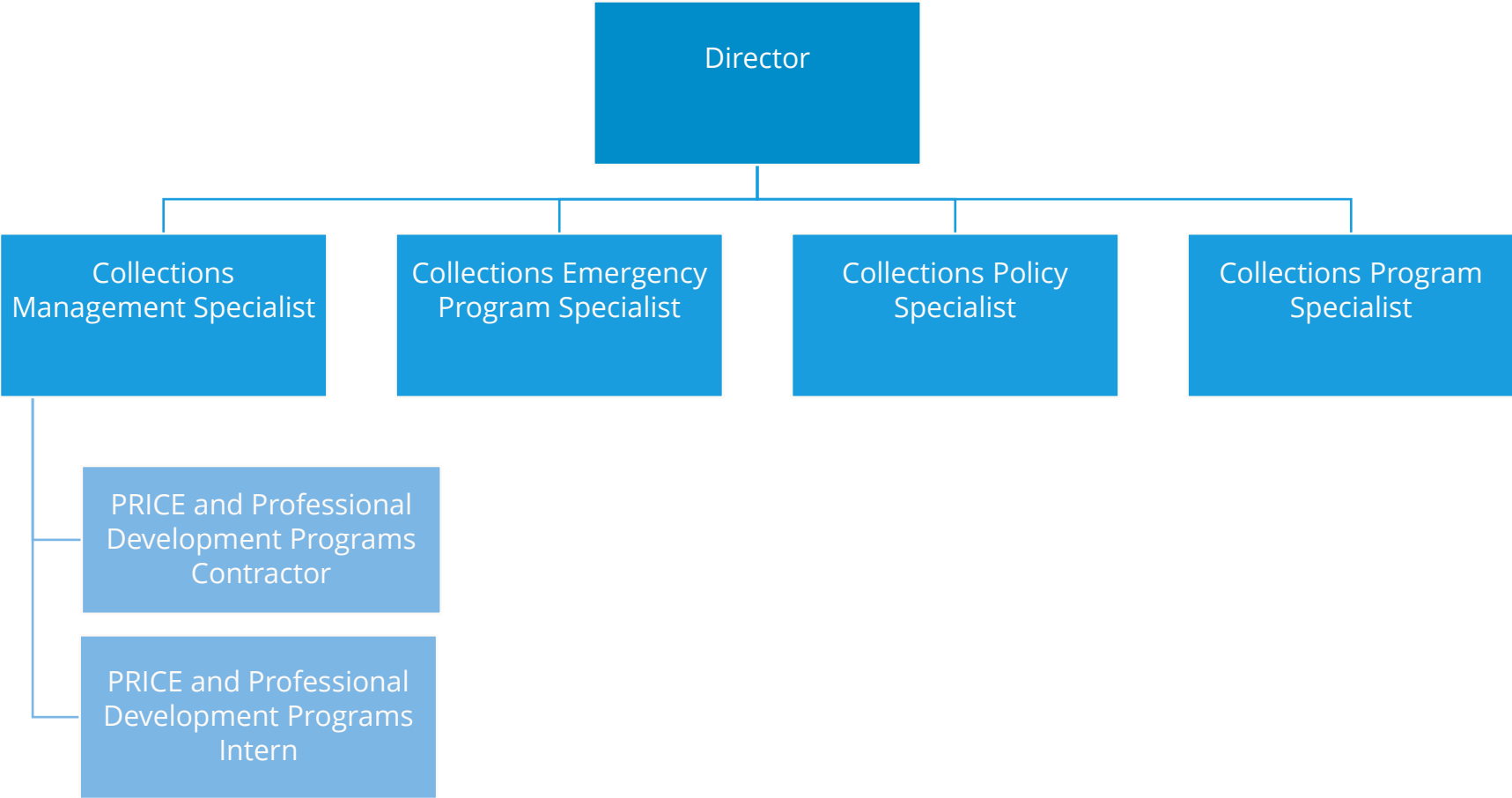
**Appendix 1** – Current NCP Organizational Chart

**Appendix 2** – Proposed NCP Organizational Chart

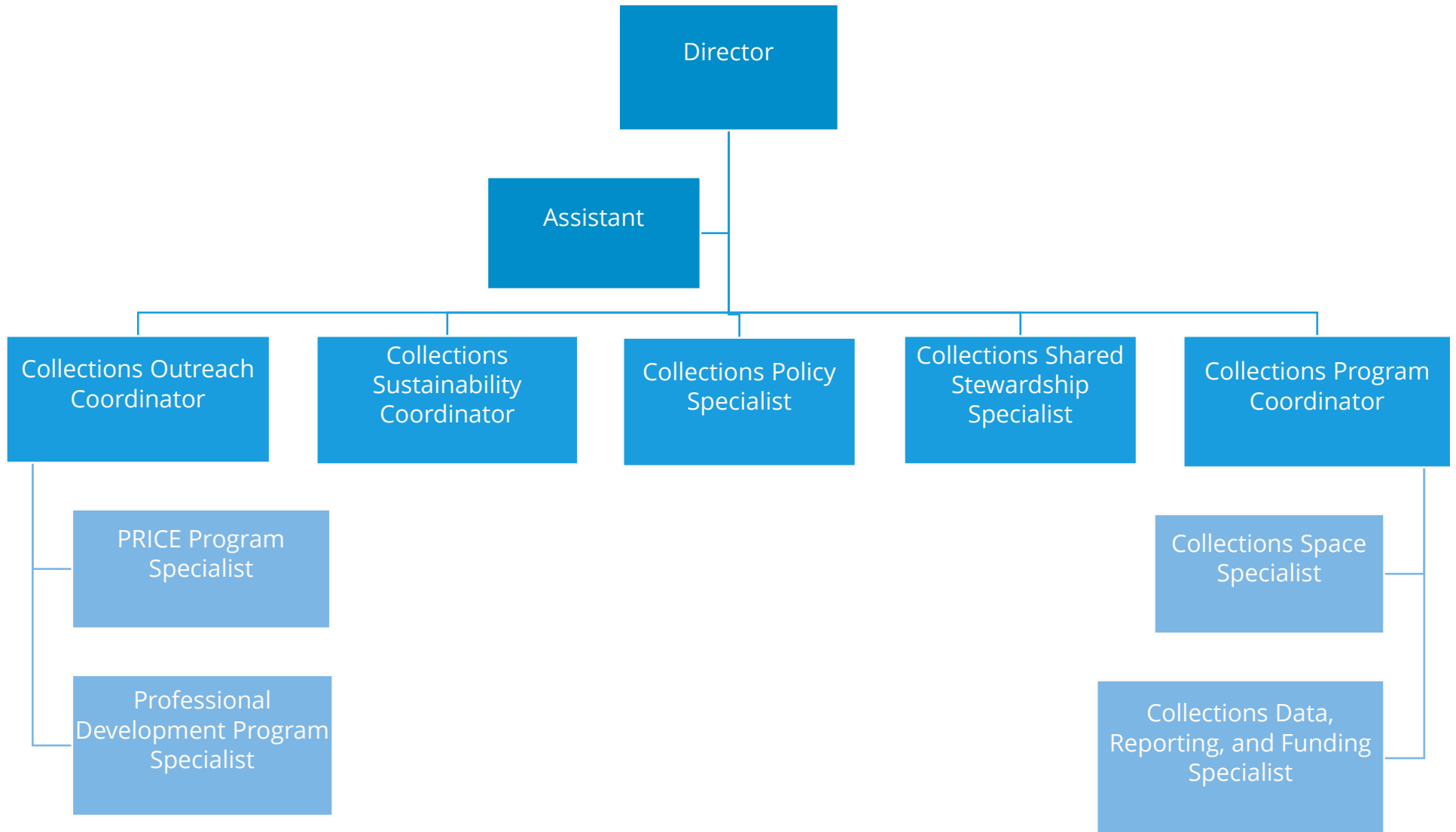
**Appendix 3** – Glossary



**Appendix 1 - Current NCP Organizational Chart**



## Appendix 2 – Proposed NCP Organizational Chart



## Appendix 3 – Glossary

*This list of terms may need further definition.*

**Collections emergency/incident:** Any potential or actual event, whether natural, technological, or human-caused, that threatens SD 600 collections, associated assets/equipment, information, operations, and/or the environment and that requires immediate responsive action to protect against the potential or actual consequences of the event.

**Collections item:** Smithsonian collections holdings are guided by [SD 600, Collections Management](#), and approved unit Collections Management Policies, and include museum, archives, and library collections. Collections include items (referred to here as “collection items”) acquired for access, non-accessioned, supplementary, study, or research collections, provided the items are acquired, preserved, and maintained for public exhibition, education, or research.

**Collections Digitization Reporting System (CDRS):** In collaboration with the Digitization Program Office (DPO), the National Collections Program co-administers the Collections and Digitization Reporting System (CDRS) to facilitate coordinated, central of high-level collections data across the Institution. The information gathered annually through CDRS contextualizes collections to aid in setting priorities, inform unit collections stewardship planning, and measure progress towards providing standards of care and access to collections. CDRS is also the primary data-gathering source for the Smithsonian’s annual collections statistics, which documents acquisitions, deaccessions, loans, reference inquiries, and visitors to collections in storage.

**Collections Space System (CSS):** Partnering with the Office of Planning, Design and Construction (OPDC), the National Collections Program co-administers the Collections Space System (CSS) to collect data on existing collections space conditions across the Institution. Data gathered by the CSS documents the physical state of collections space through the categories of construction, environment, storage equipment, fire safety, and security to inform short and long-term facilities capital, real estate, and collections care projects.

**Incidents:** These are unplanned and often referred to as “emergencies” or “disasters,” as defined in [NPS Museum Handbook Chapter 10, page 81](#).

**Inventory:** An itemized listing of collection items, groups, or lots that identifies the current physical location of each item, group, or lot; the process of physically locating all or a selection of items for which the museum is responsible; and appropriate information to facilitate research, collections management, security, and access, as defined in SD 600.

**Preparedness:** A FEMA term referring to a phase that includes planning, training, and educational activities for events that cannot be mitigated.

**Preparedness & Response in Collections Emergencies (PRICE) Team:** A team managed out of the National Collections Program office. They serve as a leadership committee to strengthen and support unit-level and pan-Institutional collections emergency policy, procedures, training, and logistics.

**Preservation:** The protection and stabilization of collections, as well as their associated information, through a coordinated set of activities aimed at minimizing chemical, physical, and biological deterioration and damage and preventing loss of intellectual, aesthetic, and monetary value. Preservation is an ongoing process with the goal of making collections available for current and future use, as defined in SD 600; related terms are stewardship, collections care, and preventive conservation.

**Recovery (short-term and long-term):** During the recovery period, regular operations and activities have resumed, but collection areas and collection items may require conservation care and treatment. The recovery periods from a disaster can be short or prolonged and could be at little to no financial cost to the institution or extremely expensive.

**Response:** A FEMA term for a phase that occurs in the immediate aftermath of a disaster. During the response phase, business and other operations do not function normally. Personal safety and well-being in an emergency and the duration of the response phase depend on the level of preparedness.

**Smithsonian Directive (SD) 600, *Collections Management*:** SD 600 is the principal policy document guiding Smithsonian collections management. As the Smithsonian's collections management policy, SD 600 guides collections stewardship to ensure proper management, preservation, and use of the Institution's collections and items in its care and custody.