



Archaeological Collection Sampling and Discard Protocols

Project # 16-789

Background:

The large quantities of material collected from archaeological sites in the United States has adversely affected the DoD by increasing the need for storage space, and rising curation fees and associated costs. The volume of curated materials is such that some repositories are no longer able to accept collections, or have been forced to raise curation fees and adopt restrictions on what materials they can accept. Potential solutions include adopting no-collection strategies in the field where appropriate, field sampling, and pre-accession discard of redundant materials in the lab. Beyond reducing the volume of what is accessioned for permanent curation, efforts to allow for post-accession discard are under way. Concerns related to no-collection field work, pre-accession discard, and post-accession discard include whether no- or limited-collection field studies are reliable and produce information adequate for decision making. Likewise, the practice of pre-accession discard raises questions about the research validity of resulting samples, and whether non-research heritage concerns have been adequately addressed. Lastly, there has been relatively little examination of how materials discarded from archaeological labs or curation facilities should be disposed.

Objective:

The intent is to develop guidance on how to slow the growth in volume of materials requiring long-term curation and allow for future efficient management of collections of undetermined, little or no research potential. Guidance is given to relate collection management plans to associated project research designs. These guidelines should be distributed to DoD cultural resources subject matter experts and cultural resources managers for implementation. The best practices presented would be implemented at the time of collection by the archaeologists who conducted the fieldwork. This will help reduce collection size in a well-documented fashion and help make future de-accessioning more efficient.

Summary of Approach:

The approach to the project:

- Reviewed SHPO collection, major repository curation standards, DoD, Army, Air Force, Navy, and Marine Corps instructions and guidelines, and the existing literature on sampling and discard

practices to identify current best practices for the management of artifacts of little or no anticipated research value.

- Discusses categories of artifacts most likely to warrant sampling and discard.
- Presents the results of a survey of cultural resources management firms about current actual practice.

Benefit:

The space needed at DoD curation facilities and the fees required for storage at state, university or other third-party curation facilities represents a significant burden for DoD cultural resources management. Evolving practices in archaeology are aimed at reducing the volume of curated material, but have raised issues concerning how these practices affect the ability of agencies to obtain the information they need to make appropriate management decisions. DoD installations can use the information in this report to understand current practices in their region, as well as the benefits and shortcomings associated with them. This will allow during project planning phases for selection of the most efficient collection methodologies. Implemented correctly, this may reduce costs and storage space needs while generating the information the installation needs to make management decisions.

Accomplishments:

This project provides a review and summary of federal and state guidelines for reducing the volume of curated material. It discusses best practices for determining a sampling strategy, and methods to clearly document what was done. Procedures for and issues associated with destruction, de-accessioning for educational purposes, on-site burial, discard in landfill, or other alternatives for final disposition in keeping with the intentions of the regulatory revisions are explored. Survey data discuss current actual practice in the United States. It presents Procedures and standards for documenting and packaging collections developed for the identified classes of potentially disposable material responsive to the ultimate proposed disposition. This project concludes with best practices for in-field artifact sampling, pre-accession discard, and future potential post-accession discard.

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