

Assessing the Significance of Your Collections

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69TH ANNUAL LLHSM
CONFERENCE

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Agenda

A plug for the VHRP

Preparatory work

Defining terminology

Assessment models

Discussion

The Vermont Historical Records Program

Our mission is to improve public access to and engagement with Vermont historical records and to facilitate collaborative efforts among Vermont's historical records repositories.

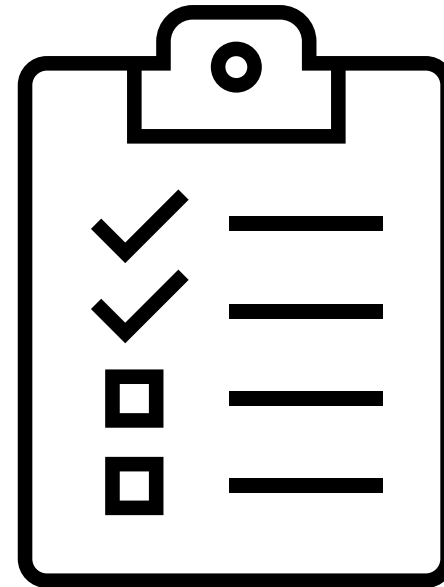
<https://sos.vermont.gov/vsara/partner/>

Some activities of the VHRP

- Conduct onsite assessments
- Provide guidance and assistance
- Connect organizations that want to collaborate on state or regional initiatives
- Teach workshops and facilitate trainings
- Support digitization projects and share our mobile digitization unit
- Loan dataloggers to track temperature and humidity of collection spaces

Assessing Significance: Preparatory Work

- ❑ Shift your organizational focus from stuff to people
- ❑ Have a clearly defined mission
- ❑ Have a (poetic) collecting scope



Ready to assess significance?

Tiering:

| | Tier 1 | Tier 2 | Tier 3 | Tier 4 | Tier 5 |
|--------------|---|---|---|--|--|
| significance | Very Significant to Oysterponds; Strong provenance (like a local makers mark) | Significant historical value to Oysterponds; moderate provenance to area (owned by a chain of local people/strong ties) | Historical value to location in Oysterponds; limited provenance (plausible but tenuous tie) | Historical value to other locations - no Oysterponds connection other than donor | Limited or no historical value; limited or no provenance |

Preparatory Work: Defining Significance

Significance

The meaning or import of something; Importance, consequence (OED)

Implies a quality or character that should mark a thing as important but that is not self-evident and may or may not be recognized. (Merriam-Webster)





**So how do
you
determine if
something is
significant?**

**Identify types
of value AND
what is of
value to your
organization**

Some types of value

Historical value

- The value of an object or collection to support research in the history of people and the world

Archival value

- Ongoing usefulness or significance of records, based on the administrative, legal, fiscal, evidential, or historical information they contain, justifying their continued preservation

Research value

- What topics can be explored through this object or collection? And is there great depth and breadth of documentation of that topic?

Some more types of value

Associational value

- The usefulness or significance of an object or collection based on its relationship to an individual, family, organization, place, or event

Exhibit value

- The object has a high visual interest, usually implies is in good condition

Monetary Value

- The fair market value of the object or collection

| | | | | | | |
|----------------------|--------------------|---------------------|------------------|-----------------|-----------------|-------------------|
| Administrative value | Aesthetic value | Artifactual value | Continuing value | Enduring value | Ephemeral value | Evidential value |
| Fiscal value | Genealogical value | Informational value | Intrinsic value | Legal value | Long-term value | Operational value |
| | Permanent value | Primary value | Reference value | Secondary value | Symbolic value | |

(Archivists, especially, may consider all sorts of value)

What else is of value to your organization?

Possibly...

Provenance – Ownership – Chain of Custody

Stories known or that *could be known* about the object

Maintaining relationships with local families

**Additional
values you
might consider**

Uniqueness

Replaceability

Pause.

**Ask WHY you value
what you value.**

**AND what is of
value to your
community**

Ready to assess significance NOW?

Yes, if you can identify...

- What type or types of value you are using to determine significance,
- How you are defining that value or values,
- How you are weighting them in relation to each other (if there is more than one),
- And how you are expressing the gradual diminishment of “significance” in your assessment tool.

Vermont State Archives & Records Administration

VERMONT ARCHIVAL RECORDS STANDARD Pursuant to 3 V.S.A. § 117, the Vermont State Archives and Records Administration (VSARA) identifies the following records as having continuing value to the State of Vermont and therefore shall be appraised as archival.

4. Records providing evidence of the **significant** effects of agency programs and actions on individuals, communities, and the man-made and natural resources of the State.

“Significant” means programs and actions that have a **noticeable, measurable, or critical effect** on the individuals, communities, and the manmade and natural resources the agency serves.

https://sos.vermont.gov/media/uygbm5ns/vermont_archivalrecordsstandard_eff20071228.pdf

**Alternatively,
avoid the term
“significance”
altogether!**

Historical Society of Pennsylvania: Research Value Rating

Research Value questions:

- How frequently over the past five years have researchers sought materials on topics substantially documented in a particular collection?
- To what extent do emerging research agendas address other topics documented in a collection?
- How rare is a collection's documentation of a particular topic?
- How extensive is that documentation?
- How deep or detailed is the documentation?

Research Value Rating Defined

A collection is considered valuable to researchers to the extent that it includes relatively rare, extensive, or detailed information on topics that have received considerable prior attention, are gaining currency, or have apparent potential to attract significant researcher interest.

A topic may be of very high, high, moderate, slight, or negligible interest. The intrinsic interest of the collection itself may also count as a topic.

Depending on the rarity, extensiveness, and detail of a body of material, the documentation on a topic may be very rich, rich, moderately rich, incidentally valuable, or slight.

The Research Value Rating is determined by adding the ratings of the topics best or most substantially represented in each collection to the ratings of the quality of documentation on those topics in the collection.

The Research Value Rating Scale

| <u>Interest Ranking</u> | <u>Value Scale</u> | <u>Quality of Documentation Ranking</u> |
|-------------------------|--------------------|---|
| very high | 5 | very rich |
| high | 4 | rich |
| moderate | 3 | moderately rich |
| slight | 2 | incidentally valuable |
| negligible | 1 | slight |

The sum of the Interest Ranking and the Quality of Documentation Ranking can range from a high of “10” to a low of “2” on the Research Value Rating (RVR) scale.

Photocopies will have an interest point deducted. They might also lose a DQ point if surveyors feel that there has been a loss of content. We typically don't know where the original of a transcript is or who transcribed it, and it will have both an interest and a DQ point deducted. It may gain that interest point back if the transcript itself has intrinsic value. It may gain back the DQ point if it is known that the original is lost or otherwise inaccessible to the public.

VHS grading system – with points

Grade A: Kept without question. Objects with known Vermont histories that tell compelling stories and are in exhibitable condition.

Points assigned for:

Vermont History

- 90-60 points with Vermont story/connection
- 0 points if it doesn't have a Vermont story/connection

Condition

- 5 to 10 points.
- Points are subtracted for objects in poor/destroyed condition

Extra Credit

- 5 points for rarity
- 20 points in an object contributes to telling the stories of a disenfranchised or underrepresented group.

Try to make this subjective process of determining significance as collaborative and concrete as possible

- Identify what your organization and your community value.
- Identify which values and characteristics you wish to consider when assessing your collections.
- Decide on a tiering or grading or rating schema.
- Define those values generally and specifically for each tier, grade, or rating.

In sum...

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