Processing plan template

SUGGESTED TEMPLATE FOR A PROCESSING PLAN

Some of the information you need to provide/think about is exactly the same information that will go into your finding aid. You can and should repurpose this data. Each section below contains questions you need to consider when appropriate.

Collection Title: Papers or Records of… or Additional……

Call Numbers: MC xxx; T-xxx; MP-xx, etc.

OVERVIEW OF CURRENT STATE

Size:
List the size of the collection in both linear feet (should be same as the “beginning size” LF number you enter in the processing spreadsheet) and pieces – 5 cartons, 2 half file boxes, 7 folio folders, etc.

Accession information:
What are the accession numbers?
How many accessions are there?
Is there an obvious order in any/all accessions?
Are some accessions only A/V?
Are there other accessions that have already been processed?

Provenance:
Who is the donor? Are there multiple donors? It’s a good idea to add any other donor information you have learned from the correspondence file.

Did we approach the donor? Did she approach us? Is she dead?

Is there a signed deed of gift? Does the donor want material back?

Restrictions:
Are there restrictions from the deed of gift?

Have you noticed any kind of records during your survey that might be a problem outside of whatever the deed of gift says? [Attorney/client privilege issues in a lawyer’s papers, etc.]

Remember that you will need to document donor-imposed restrictions in the finding aid separately from any restrictions you might want to impose yourself. Restrictions not imposed by donors must be discussed with team leads and sometimes brought to the Access review Panel for discussion.

Biographical Sketch:
You can take this from Hollis if you want, or you can provide a more in-depth bio that is more like a finding aid bio draft.

Make sure to include any information that may be more current than Hollis (e.g. death date).

Also make sure to include information that may be relevant to the materials in the collection. If the person was employed as a biologist, but had a major interest in helping refugees from Bosnia, make sure to mention this (especially if you know there is a lot of correspondence relating to Bosnian war rape victims).

Scope and content:
Create a basic list of what is in the collection. Include all non-paper formats. Think of this as being similar to the first several sentences you will write in your general scope note in the finding aid. You can (and should!) be more detailed about what kinds of material is in the collection when you are suggesting arrangement. You can describe formats but you should also provide a basic intellectual overview.
EXAMPLE: The papers of My Best Friend include travel diaries, family scrapbooks, personal and professional correspondence, photographs, 23 audiotapes and 45 disks.

Appraisal and research strengths:

*Why do we have this material? What does it document?* How does it fit with the Library’s holdings? Which parts of the collection have the most interest for researchers? Are there materials we have received that have little or no research value? Are there other archival collections of material about this person elsewhere? Your answers to these questions should inform your approach to processing: if the collection (or parts of it) will get high use, more intensive description may be warranted.

Existing folders, description, order:

Does any of this exist? Is the material in folders? Are most of the folders titled? Will you use the donor’s titles in the inventory, or put the donor’s titles in quotation marks? Has the donor grouped material in any way you can discern (binders, colored folders, etc.)?

While you may create a container list or basic inventory for your own purposes while surveying, you do not need to include a container list of the collection as it currently is packed in the processing plan. This is also the place to put information about a/v formats that are often tracked separately – are there any? Are they listed in AV/DC Tracker? Does the person/org have a website? Are we already capturing it?

Are there born-digital files? Please take a preliminary look at them (if possible) while surveying the collection. Describe any order, titles, etc. and your thoughts about potential ways to describe and/or provide access. How do the born-digital files relate to the paper files? How do you imagine describing the digital files in the finding aid?

ARRANGEMENT

Propose an arrangement for the collection. Make sure to include the general sizes of each series. Ideally, you should list the series with sizes, and then underneath provide a more complete description of what kinds of materials will go in each series.

LESS IS MORE: Small collections (2 LF and below) may not need any kind of series arrangement, depending on their content.

In the general scope above, you may have said the collection contained correspondence. Here is the place to note that it contains extensive correspondence with Andrea Dworkin. (And you should be that specific). *If you have only popped open the lids of cartons and looked at the folder titles, you are not ready to write a processing plan.*

EXAMPLE:

Series I. Biographical and Personal (4 cartons)

Series II. Diaries (7 cartons)

Series III. Correspondence (12 cartons)

Series IV. Writings (3 cartons, 2 file boxes)

Series V. Photographs (6 cartons, 8 folio boxes)

In this example, each series would be more fully described below. You can also intersperse the series descriptions with the list should you prefer. The description of Series III might include information about the correspondents, rough dates of the correspondence, some topics covered in the letters, etc. as well as information about the physical realities of the series, e.g.: "most filed alphabetically in letterboxes"; "most correspondence is loose"; "all correspondence is in labeled folders"; etc.

Please also give an indication of how material will be arranged in series.

EXAMPLE: Correspondence will be arranged chronologically.

*Please Note: If you feel you cannot provide the level of depth necessary for this section without moving or sorting material, discuss with your team lead. The processing plan can be an iterative process, but this requires communication.*

PROCESSING LEVEL and other DESCRIPTION and MPLP issues

The Harvard Joint Processing Guidelines lay out three levels of processing/descriptive work. Familiarize yourself with them. Much of the processing work currently done at Schlesinger is a Level III. We will work toward clearer definitions of how existing Schlesinger practices map to these levels throughout 2018 and 2019.
Generally we describe material at a folder level, and refolder material into acid-free legal-size folders. It's always good as part of the processing plan to consider whether these things need to be done. Did the collection come in all letter-size folders? Could any of the folders be retained?

Think about the kind of description you will create for the collection: if the collection contains multiple diaries and/or correspondence that you are planning to analyze and describe, you'll want to think about creating your detailed description of subject matter in a scope note added at the folder level in your XML document. If you have records of an organization that are better described in the aggregate, you don't need to do this. If you have a large collection, you can consider using different intensities of description for different series. Analyzing these issues/options before processing begins is important.

WORK SUMMARY

Create a work plan: what steps must be taken during processing, and in what order will you do them? Be specific, and especially make sure you think about all the various formats of material in the collection and other library staff you may need to discuss things with.

You should be able to use this work summary as a checklist while processing. For larger collections, it can also be a helpful way to identify tasks that can be done by students. When you're writing this, also think about sequencing. Are there a lot of letters that need to be unfolded or removed from envelopes? If so, you could set this project up first, and then have students do it while you are working on other parts of the collection. If you have a large number of buttons, you could ask a student to search them in the memorabilia database to see which ones are duplicates at the beginning of your workflow. Etc.

Do your best in this section to account for all the steps you will need to take with this specific collection. Some questions to ask while writing this are:

*What kinds of conservation work does the collection need? Will Amanda need to make special housing for anything?*  
*Does A/V material have item records in the database or will I need to make them?*  
*Is there a lot of memorabilia that I will need to enter into that database?*  
*What tasks can I give to a student?*

EXAMPLE

- Sort collection into series  
- Separate printed material and have it searched in Hollis and OCLC by student  
- Refolder and describe Correspondence series (which has most fragile material)  
- Have student start photocopying fragile material while refolding/describing other 3 series.  
- Schedule meeting with Joanne and Diana about Photo series  
- Post-meeting, complete photo foldering and description  
- Complete description of the 20 audiotapes in AV/DC tracker; transform data into EAD and create series in finding aid  
- Assess printed material – what will go directly to Summer, what needs a consult with Marylene, etc.  
- Prepare finding aid

DURATION

Estimate how much time the collection will take to process. An archivist doing high-level descriptive processing (which is usually happening at Schlesinger) must be able to refolder and describe 3 cartons of material a week during periods of active processing in order to reach 80 to 100 linear feet over the course of the year. However, you may feel the collection will take more or less time than this. Explain why in your processing plan. Also take into account any vacations or other activities (exhibits, etc.) you may have that may affect this.

Mainly this section is meant to give the processor and their team lead an idea of when the work may be complete, as well as help plan for any future meetings or check-ins. It is meant to be an estimate, but can also be a way to determine which parts of processing go more or less quickly for each archivist.

It can be a good idea to build timeframes into the above workplan to help you plan your time. For example "Refolder and describe Series I (4 days)." Plotting this out can help you plan your work, as well as assist you in noting what particular tasks take the longest in general for you, or for each specific collection. Being able to plan and then reassess and adjust work timetables is an important project management skill for archivists.

PROCESSING INFO

In 2018, we added a section to the top of our finding aids with some "general" processing practices at the Library. It's included in the finding aid template. Take a look at it and see if you need to edit it for this collection - if the collection contains no financial information, for example, you can delete that part of the processing info paragraph. The goal is to provide more information to a researcher, not to provide information that does not apply to this collection and might be confusing. Discuss with your team lead if necessary.

SUPPLIES

Do you need letter size boxes or folders? Acid-free paper for interleaving? Anything out of the ordinary should be noted. If the collection is large and you need a stamp, make sure to note that.
PRESERVATION
What kinds of things did you notice in your survey? Is there mold? Does anything need special housing? Are there flaking scrapbooks? Is there a lot of fragile material? Feel free to talk with Amanda Hegarty as part of the survey process if you're trying to assess what to do with material, or determine whether you need to preservation photocopy all the fragile paper, etc.

STORAGE
Anything out of the ordinary?
EXAMPLE: Ann Meredith Papers have a large number of crated framed photographs.

PRINTED MATERIAL
Is there any? Is any of it notable for any reason? Is any of it worth keeping and/or tracing ownership because of its importance as being part of the person's library? What kind of holdings does the Library already have of this person/organization? Are there related newsletters? If there is a lot, particularly of an ephemeral form like pamphlets, you could consider asking if it is worth keeping in the collection but cataloging separately (like pamphlets etc.). As of October 2017, we are not going to list books removed from archival collections in a separation form UNLESS there is a reason (outside of tracking each volume in its individual record) to create a list of them to keep with the collection. Is the creator a noted author or collector? IS there a possibility there will be significant research interest in the volumes owned by/sent with the creator? If so, record that here and discuss with your team lead.