

## **Curation**

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### **Current Situation**

Curation of excavated archaeological artifacts (and the lack thereof) has been a growing concern nationwide since the 1970s. Shortages of curation space and funding for continued care of collections and oversight have resulted in an overwhelming number of uncurated collections. An informal survey of 29 repositories in California undertaken in 2006 revealed that available curation space in California is very limited.

- Only 5 repositories of the 29 surveyed are currently accepting collections.
  - Three of these repositories accept only self-generated or federal collections.
  - One repository accepts CRM-generated collections for quiet storage.
  - One repository accepts CRM-generated collections and offers full curation.
- There is inadequate space for existing collections and the problem continues to compound.

The survey also reveals that true curation is not uniformly achieved throughout California. Few CRM-generated collections are curated. True curation means that collections are cared for in an appropriate environment, managed so that they are accessible and used for continued scientific research, cultural applications and educational programs available to the general public. Current practices by the 29 repositories in California ranging from “dead storage” to “available to archeology students” are called curation.

### **Ideal Situation**

The ideal situation is to treat excavated artifacts as cultural resources, where they are curated and available for scientific research, cultural applications and educational programs.

- Existing archaeological collections in substandard storage are brought into curation.

- All future archaeological collections generated from every data recovery project conducted in compliance with state or federal laws, codes and regulations are curated in a qualified repository.
- Qualified repositories with adequate space for existing and future collections are located throughout California.

## How to Bridge the Gap

Using the [State of California's Guidelines for the Curation of Archaeological Collections, 1993](#) as a guide, the following measurable and accountable archaeological curation objectives are achievable in two years:

- Define the Extent of the Curation Crisis. The number of uncurated archaeological collections (and associated records) excavated as a result of cultural resource mitigation laws needs to be quantified. This includes collections held by archaeologists, local jurisdictions, museums and universities where curation is inadequate for the continued preservation of the artifacts. An estimation of the funding necessary to bring uncurated collections and associated documents into curation needs to be made to characterize the financial implications of the problem.
- Mandate Curation Plans. Devise a plan to fund curation for existing collections. Mandate a curation plan, including a budget for curation, for every data recovery project conducted in compliance with state or federal laws, codes and regulations; or, reserve curation funding if repositories do not yet exist in that area.
- Educate the Stakeholders. Educate archaeologists, property developers and responsible public agency officials regarding their ethical and legal responsibilities to curate as part of a project's environmental evaluation. Educate the public about the potential loss of important historical and cultural resources if collections are not properly curated.
- Increase Curation Capacity Statewide. Identify existing qualified curation facilities, using existing Guidelines for the Curation of Archeological Collections, 1993. Develop a plan for establishing curation repositories in underserved regions. Seek diversified funding to ensure the continued curation of collections in perpetuity