

Collections Care Resource Guide For Small Cultural/Historical Museums

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Framing the Problem

The roles of the volunteers in small museums and all-volunteer organizations are vital to keeping these organizations afloat. Limited resources, lack of funding, and high staff turnover are daily barriers that small organizations face.

As someone who has worked and volunteered in collections at small museums, I can attest to the limitations of training volunteers in collections management. In 2016, 4Culture released a survey of heritage organizations in King County. The study uncovered a critical absence of volunteers trained in collections management. These same organizations claimed that professional development was not a primary concern for their organization (Howes, 2019). The study proposed that numerous heritage organizations fail to provide adequate funding for volunteers working in collections. Howes suggests that these findings could indicate the “state of funding for small organizations, which often are underfunded and dependent on unpaid labor for the majority of their operations” (Howes, 2019).

Without a better understanding of collections management, volunteers can not properly care for these objects. An all-volunteer organization would need to hire a collections contractor to help with collections management. Due to various constraints, smaller institutions that rely on volunteers face various barriers to effectively handle and care for collections.

Purpose & Impact

The purpose of this project was to develop an accessible collections care toolkit/resource guide for volunteers working at small historical and cultural museums.

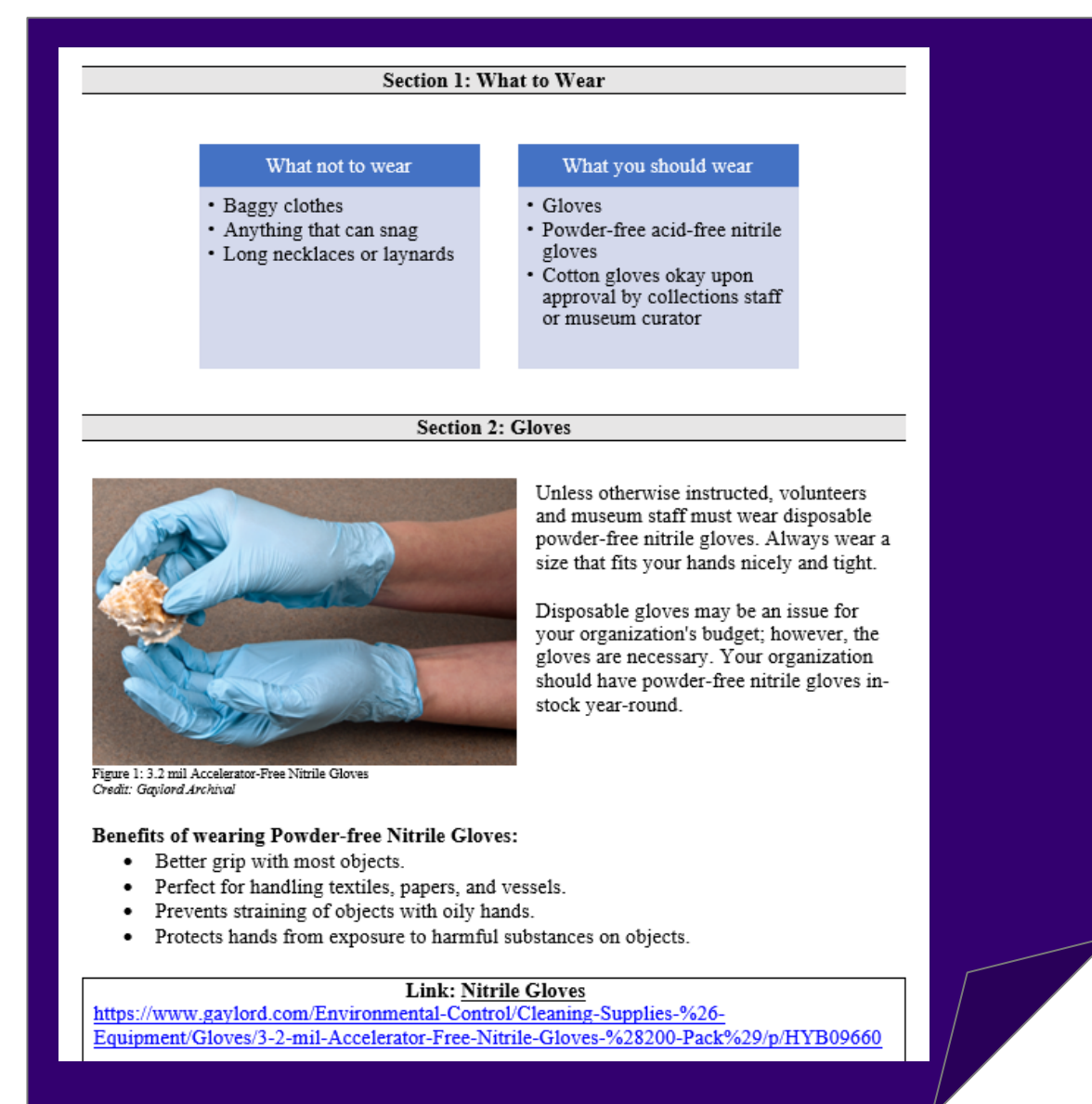
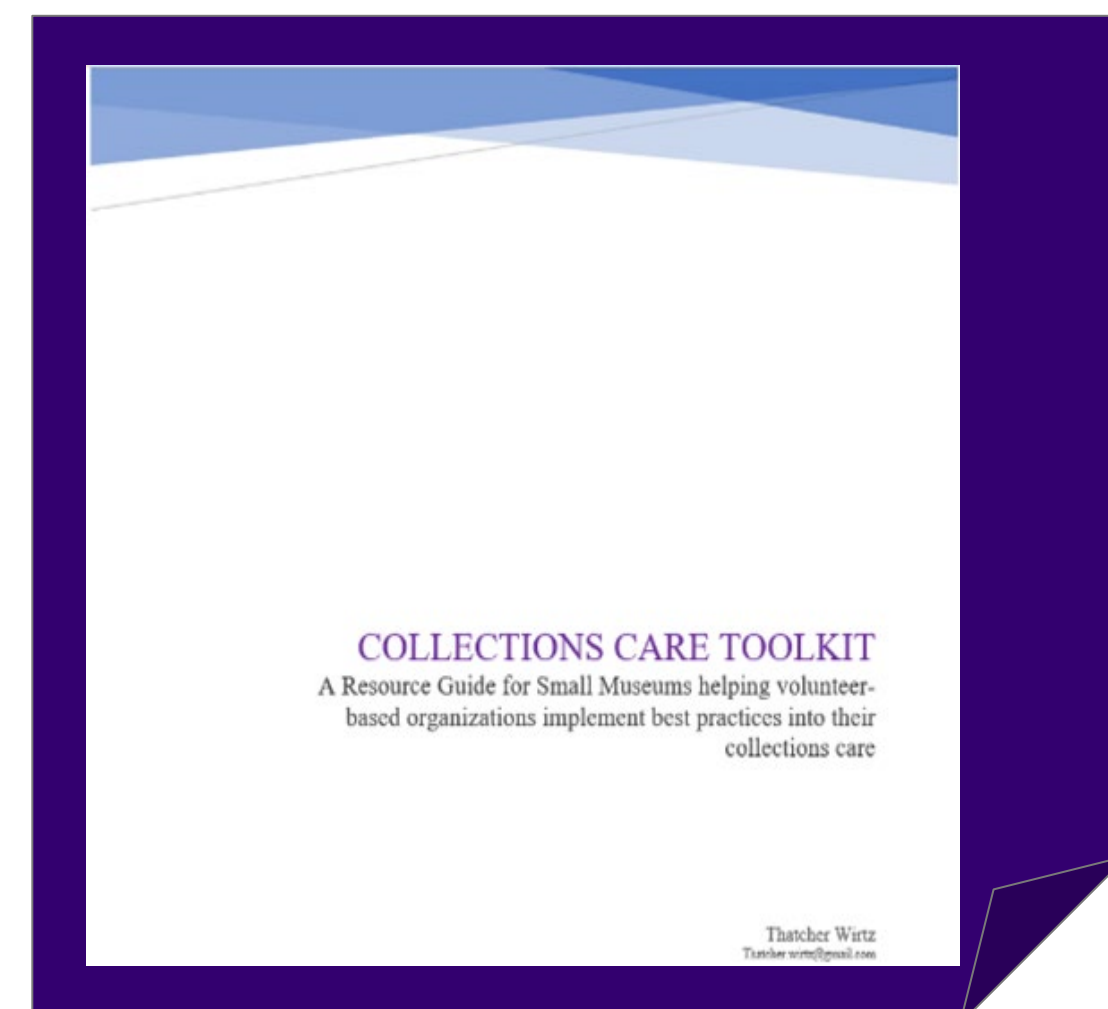
Through this toolkit, volunteers without professional collections training can apply best practices and act as stewards to museum objects. They will have access to information which provides answers to rudimentary collections care questions. The hope is that by furthering their knowledge, volunteers will be inspired to continue their contribution to museum work.



Photo 1.3. Fading on textile exposed to too much light. (Photo by Scott Carrlee). (n.d), color photograph. From Legutko-Catlin, C., and Klinger S. *Stewardship: Collections and Historic Preservation (Small Museum Toolkit)*. Alta Mira Press, 2012, p.21. Credit: Carrle, Legutko-Catlin, C., and Klinger S.

Process/Deliverables

This project resulted in a collections care toolkit/resource guide that serves as a how-to guide regarding basic concepts of collections care 101, and provides credible links to free videos, documents, handbooks, etc. for users seeking further information on certain topics such as methods for storing textiles and proper object handling.



Textile Storage

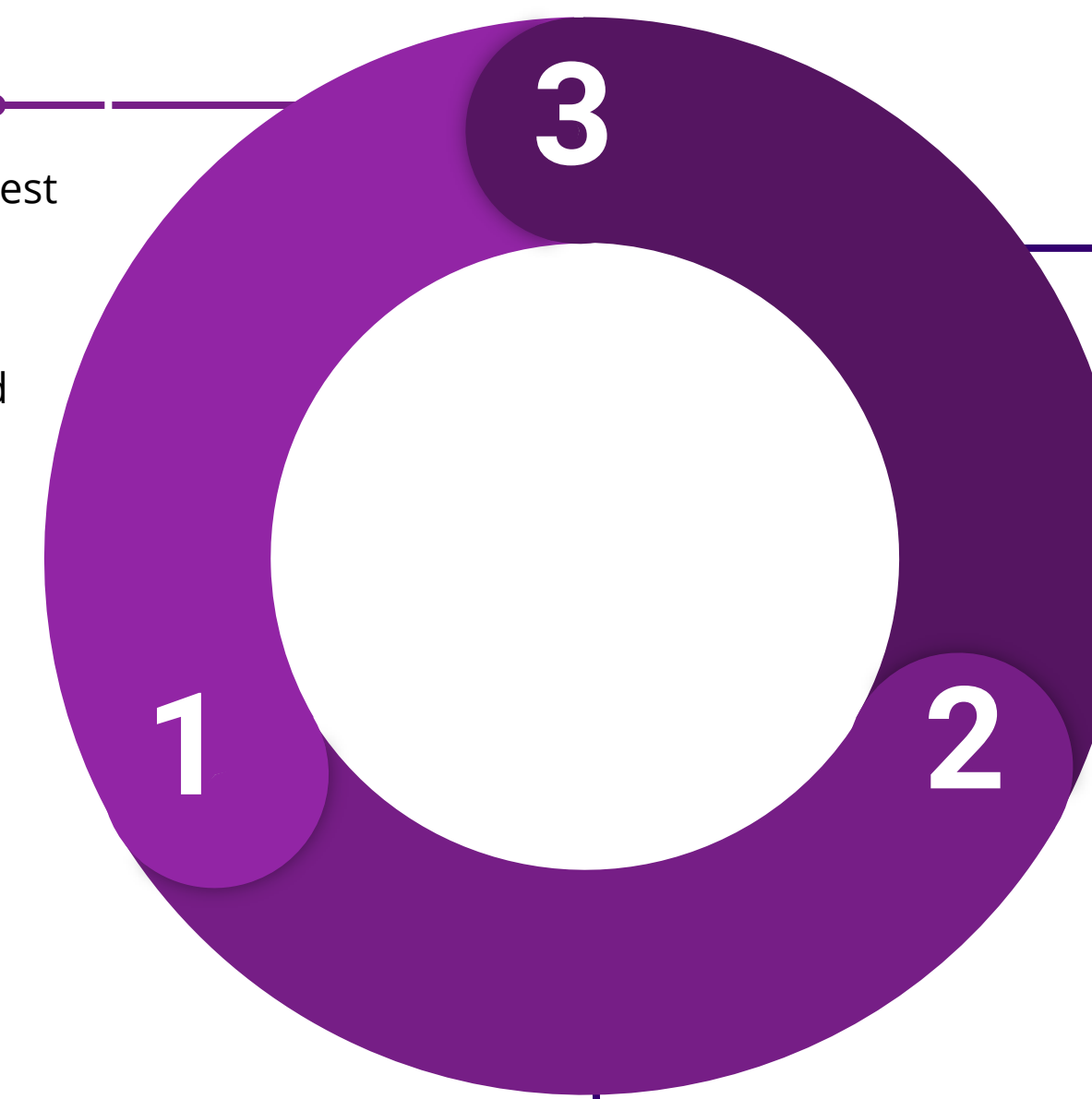


Western Australian Museum (2017). *Textile storage* [video]. YouTube. Retrieved May 18, 2022, from <https://manual.museum.wa.gov.au/textile-storage>

Project Development

Research

1. Review of best practices
2. Source materials
3. Correspond with WaMa members



Distribution of Materials

1. Make Collections Management Toolkit PDF available through the Washington Museum Association webpage
2. Oversee adoption of Collections Management Toolkit by Washington Museum Association

Toolkit/Resource Guide Development

1. Define content/subject matter of Toolkit
2. Prototype
3. Feedback from Collections Manager
4. Finalize Collections Care Toolkit
5. Deliver Collections Care Toolkit

Next Steps

The following provide recommendations for the continuation of this project:

- Make toolkit available on WaMa as well as common search engines.
- Obtain feedback on this toolkit's use and suggestions for expansion and improvement.
- Expand or build from this toolkit by filling in gaps.
- Conduct evaluation with collections staff to understand key concerns in volunteer and training development.

Key References

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