Minimal Processing Manual

Hidden Collections Processing Project

Holly Mengel and Courtney Smerz (2009-2012), updated by Christiana Dobrzynski Grippe (2013)

2013-2014

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INTRODUCTION

In 2012, the Philadelphia Area Consortium of Special Collections Libraries (PACSCL) received funding from the Council on Library and Information Resources' "Cataloging Hidden Special Collections and Archives" initiative. This money will support a collaborative project to process and make accessible 46 archival collections in 16 Philadelphia area repositories. The project builds upon and continues work completed during the 2009-2012 PACSCL Hidden Collections Processing Project (over 200 collections processed with an additional 77 legacy finding aids converted to EAD), as well as the PACSCL Survey Initiative (2006-2009), which surveyed and rated some 2000 collections across Philadelphia.

With a goal to reduce archival backlog in Philadelphia repositories, the PACSCL Hidden Collections Processing Projects continue to adapt minimal processing strategies, first introduced by Mark Greene and Dennis Meissner in their 2005 article, "More Product, Less Process: Pragmatically Revamping Traditional Processing Approaches to Deal with Late 20th Century Collections," to accommodate a wider variety of collections. As implied by the article's title, Greene and Meissner presented minimal processing, or MPLP, as a way to quickly and efficiently deal with large collections of 20th century business records. The 2009-2012 PACSCL project team tested the limits of minimal processing, successfully applying its time saving strategies to collections of all types, including personal and family papers, and ranging in date from the 17th to the 21st centuries. The 2013-2014 project team will use a modified approach based on the lessons learned from the predecessor project and continue to document best practices as they are discovered.

The 2013-2014 project team will continue to use the Archivists' Toolkit (AT) to catalog collections and create EAD-encoded finding aids, and train graduate students to complete a majority of the processing work. To this end, project manager, Christiana Dobrzynski Grippe, has modified and augmented the "Archival Boot Camp" originally developed by 2009-2012 project team Holly Mengel (project manager) and Courtney Smerz (project archivist). This three-day intensive training program includes classroom and hands-on instruction in the art and philosophy of minimal processing, *Describing Archives: A Content Standard* (DACS), and the use of the Archivists' Toolkit.

The following manual was produced as part of "Archival Boot Camp." It combines nearly seven years of collaborative work completed by PACSCL projects, including both the survey and minimal processing methodologies. This manual outlines a practical workflow for gaining control of archival backlog, establishing processing priorities and providing access to collections quickly. As Greene and Meissner said of their "More Product, Less Process," this is not a cookie cutter approach. Users are free to adopt or adapt this model in anyway. In fact, during the 2009-2012 PACSCL Hidden Collections Processing Project, this methodology was adapted along the way, as individual collections and repositories demanded. The 2013-2013 PACSCL Project will continue to update and modify this methodology as appropriate.

CHAPTER 1. MINIMAL PROCESSING OR "MPLP"

Archival processing provides greater intellectual and physical access to collections. It promotes preservation and enables good collections management. Generally speaking, during processing, records are appraised, weeded, arranged, described and provided with archival quality housing.

Mark Greene and Dennis Meissner introduced the concept of *minimal processing* in their 2005 article, "More Product, Less Process: Pragmatically Revamping Traditional Processing Approaches to Deal with Late 20th-Century Collections," as an alternative to the more traditional, time intensive approach to processing. Minimal processing, or MPLP, facilitates faster access to collections. It encourages a streamlined approach that does not get bogged down in time consuming processing tasks, such as removing staples or arranging the contents of every folder, arguing that "…good processing is done with a shovel, not with a tweezers." Minimal processing was intended as a way to quickly and efficiently process collections of late 20th-century business or institutional records, and in doing so, reduce the processing backlog created by accruals of those materials and the time intensive nature of traditional processing.

While MPLP was intended for late 20th century collections of business records, the PACSCL Hidden Collections Processing Project team applied minimal processing strategies to collections of all sizes, types and ages.   While not all collections were found to be well-suited to minimal processing, the PACSCL project team determined that a collection's suitability has nothing to do with its age or type. Depending on the collection's original state, including condition and existing arrangement, different combinations of minimal processing strategies can be applied to achieve optimal processing and access within a set (and limited) timeframe.

The following minimal processing guide assumes that processors are working with a surveyed collection, with a processing plan in place. Additionally, the PACSCL Project employed (and encourages) team processing; aspects of the processing program presented here necessitate a team approach.

> *HINT: The key to successful minimal processing is to take advantage of existing information, especially the collection's survey record and processing plan. Processors should use the information provided therein to their advantage.*

> *HINT: Do not get overly absorbed in the collection!*

> *HINT: To save time, processors should take good notes to avoid having to return to reinvestigate topics when writing the finding aid.*

For instructive purposes, PACSCL's minimal processing methodology is divided into six basic steps:

2.1. Familiarize yourself with the collection

2.2. Arrange the collection

2.3. Describe the collection and create the finding aid

2.4. Finalize processing and tie up loose ends

2.5. Proofread your work

2.6. Document your decisions

1.1. FAMILIARIZE YOURSELF WITH THE COLLECTION

EXAMINE EXISTING DESCRIPTIVE DOCUMENTS

The processing plan or packet, which processors will use to get started, should include copies of pertinent administrative and descriptive documents. Processors should take 15-30 minutes to read through the existing documents, which may include an accession record, donor file, collection survey, collection inventory, processing plan, etc. Often there will be a general description of the materials, information regarding the extent of the collection, the types of materials in the collection, and donor information. There may also be notes regarding conservation issues or restrictions on access or use.

Descriptive information may also include preliminary biographical/historical information, a list of relevant name authorities and subjects, or more general information, indicating problems that need to be addressed or that will make processing difficult.

EXAMINE THE PHYSICAL COLLECTION

Do not move anything yet! In this step processors simply review the physical collection, making sure that the entire collection is accounted for.

To start, Processors should count boxes and volumes/items, comparing what they find to what the existing documentation suggests should exist. If there seems to be more or less associated with the physical collection than recorded in the existing documentation, processors should immediately tell their supervisor.

Next, processors should review the existing container labels. There may be useful information regarding container contents, accessions or donors, the type and quantity of materials in the containers, etc. This information may prove helpful in establishing the collection's arrangement.

Next, open containers to review the contents, noting whether existing container labels are accurate. Processors should compare and contrast what they find in the collection with what was identified in the existing descriptive documents. Processors should make note of any discrepancies and make note of additional materials, topics, genres or highlights identified. If anything appears to be missing, processors should contact their supervisor immediately.

Next, identify existing groups of related materials; these groups will likely become the basis for the collection arrangement.

> *Hint: Related materials may not be housed in the same box or even in consecutive boxes.*

> *For example, processors may identify a system of alphabetically or chronologically arranged files in numerous boxes throughout the collection; or processors may notice that records in one or more containers were created or maintained by the same person; or perhaps there are many of a particular type of record.*

Next, place new, temporary labels on boxes, indicating to which group of records the contents appear to belong.

> *Hint: Color coded post-it notes are very useful in this step!*

Next, using the information from the new box labels, establish a list of potential series and subseries into which the collection may be arranged. Compare the list with what was identified in the processing plan. If the two lists match, processors may notify their supervisor that they are ready to move on to the next step. If the lists do not match, processors should notify their supervisor for further discussion.

1.2. ARRANGE THE COLLECTION

An archival collection is typically arranged in two ways: intellectually and physically. The intellectual and physical arrangements represent two distinct ways of organizing archival materials that exist simultaneously.

> *Hint: Arranging an archival collection is not a one-step process. The arrangement will continue to be refined throughout the entire process of processing.*

> *Hint: Though distinctly described on the following pages, the intellectual and physical arrangements are not mutually exclusive. In fact, identifying the intellectual and physical arrangement is frequently completed at the same time.*

Hint: Most, if not all, of the necessary housing and preservation work is completed throughout the process of assigning the intellectual and physical arrangements.

Before moving on to the next step, it is recommended that the collection be closed to research. If exceptions are made, the processing archivist should be made aware of all research use. To completely and efficiently process a collection, the processor(s) must know the location of the **entire** collection for the duration of processing. This is especially important in minimal processing, when there will not be time to reprocess sections of the collection to account for removed or misplaced items due to reference and research. If the collection is heavily used and cannot be closed to researchers, it is not a good candidate for minimal processing. If a collection is heavily used, that is an indication that there is a working system of reference which will be irreparably changed as a result of minimal processing.

IDENTIFY AN INTELLECTUAL ARRANGEMENT

Intellectual arrangement applies to the information contained in an archival collection, and necessitates an understanding of the intellectual relationship(s) between the thousands of disparate papers in a collection. To establish an intellectual arrangement, collections are divided into series and subseries. A series is nothing more than "a group of similar records that are arranged according to a filing system and that are related as the result of being created, received, or used in the same activity" (SAA Glossary). A subseries is simply a series within a series.

Processors working with a processing plan will have a preliminary list of series and subseries, identified during the survey phase. It is not unusual for this list to evolve as processors examine the collection more closely. If processors believe the collection ought to be arranged in a way that deviates from the processing plan, they must consult with their supervisor before moving on to the next step.

Hint: Series and subseries are NOT required in processing. They should be established only as deemed necessary by the contents of the collection.

Hint: Do not overcomplicate the collection's hierarchy. The easiest and most apparent solution is usually the correct one.

Hint: Subseries and sub-subseries should be established ONLY when absolutely necessary. Processors should talk to their supervisor about the creation of subseries and sub-subseries prior to finalizing a collection's arrangement.

Hint for supervisors: The PACSCL Processing Project found that new processors tended to create more series, subseries, and sub-subseries than necessary. This resulted in over-processed collections with complicated hierarchies, making description and research difficult.

Processors should take into consideration the principles of provenance and original order in the establishment of series and subseries.

Hint: Provenance and original order are not mutually exclusive!

Provenance

First, taking into consideration the principle of *provenance (see SAA Glossary)*, identify if more than one person or entity created the collection. Processors may decide to use different creators as a basis for the intellectual arrangement, establishing series named for and containing the different creators' papers.

Hint: Because archival collections usually contain papers created by many people in addition to the predominant creator, do not establish provenance based series unless absolutely warranted—there should be clear evidence of multiple creators that produced records independent from each other.

For example, third party correspondence should not be considered in the creation of a provenance based series. In a majority of cases, third party correspondence will remain with the body of correspondence in which it was originally filed, regardless of the creator. Conversely, several individual bodies of correspondence, each received and/or written by several different people may result in the creation of provenance based series.
Family papers are frequently arranged into provenance based series. The papers produced by the various family members serve as the basis of the collection's overall arrangement.

Original Order

Taking into consideration the principle of *original order (see SAA Glossary)*, processors identify if there are useful, existing groups of related records arranged according a meaningful scheme. Original order, at the intellectual stage, is important because it indicates the way the creator thought about, maintained and used their records. Original order, if it is **both** meaningful and useful, will be retained. Not only is this sound archival processing, but it will make minimal processing even easier! If there is no original order, or the existing original order is not conducive to research, processors will need to impose a new arrangement.

Series and subseries

Taking into consideration the groups of materials identified in the steps above, processors will finalize series and subseries, if applicable. Rearrangement is common sense. For example, if processors identify a hundred folders that contain correspondence, it makes sense to create a series called "Correspondence." It is not always this easy; processors should identify common genres and themes throughout the collection as potential ways to organize the collection's information into series and/or subseries.

Hint: The new, temporary box labels identifying groups of related materials from step 2.1 will be useful at this point.

Hint: It is not uncommon to identify several containers in a collection housing groups of obviously related files that are not physically located together. For example, in one container, processors may identify the beginning of an alphabetically arranged filing system. Several containers later, processors may identify the end of the alphabetically arranged filing system. Intellectually, the materials housed in those containers, though physically separated, belong together.

Hint: Common ways to establish series in archival collections include: Genres groups (types of materials), Topics, Time Frames, Biographical material, Correspondence, Financial records, Government records, Legal documents, Organizational records, School records, etc.

PACSCL minimal processing rule: There should never be an "Oversized" series. Oversize materials should be cataloged according to their intellectual position within the collection, regardless of size or format.

Arranging files within series and/or subseries

If the collection is being processed to the folder level, processors will provide an intellectual arrangement for files, volumes and/or items within series and subseries. Typically, files are arranged alphabetically by title or chronologically by date of creation, but sometimes arrangement can be more complicated. No matter what the arrangement, the intellectual arrangement should evidence the informational relationships identified between the records.

Hint: Folder/volume arrangement will differ between series and subseries and across collections. When assigning an arrangement, processors should take into account the principles of provenance and original order, as well as the types of materials and information identified in the series or subseries.

For example: A loose volume may be intellectually related to a group of files housed in a container. The volume and the files should always remain together, intellectually, despite being housed separately.

Before assigning a final arrangement, it is a good idea to briefly review the contents of the files, provide new housing, as necessary, and create DACS compliant folder/volume titles. Note, too, that a series of completely and consistently labeled files will be easier to physically arrange.

Note: For guidelines for housing and preservation in the minimal processing environment see pages 48-51 of this manual.

Note: How to properly title and label folders will be discussed further in 2.3. Describe the Collection.

IDENTIFY A PHYSICAL ARRANGEMENT

Physical arrangement refers to the physical order of the materials in the collection, how and where they are housed and stored. It is different from the intellectual arrangement, though physical arrangement and intellectual arrangement often mimic one another. Unlike intellectual arrangement, which is determined by the intellectual or informational relationships between records, physical arrangement is determined by the size, shape, type and housing needs of the various records, regardless of the information provided therein.

As mentioned above, for most collections, the physical and intellectual arrangements will mimic each other. Sometimes, however, they will not. This is especially common in collections with special formats, like photographs and audio/visual materials, or oversize materials. In these cases, the special formats or oversized items will usually be housed together, apart from files, so that shelf space and supplies are not wasted, and in cases where special climate control is required.

Note: Materials removed from the main body of the collection due to size, shape, type or housing needs will be described in the proper intellectual order, as though not removed. This will be discussed further in 2.3. Describe the Collection.

Note: How to properly assign container numbers will be discussed in 2.3. Describe the Collection.

Arrange containers

First, processors should rearrange containers and/or file groups in order to bring together series or subseries that were intellectually identified in the previous step, but were not found physically together.

*Hint: This will not destroy original order! In fact, it is likely that this step will **restore** original order that was previously compromised in the process of boxing, storing and transporting the records to the archival repository.*

Hint: During the course of physically arranging a collection, it is common for all necessary rehousing and/or preservation work to be completed. Refer to pages 48-51 for more information on housing and preservation in minimal processing.

Hint: At this point, processors should not worry about separating materials in need of specialty housing due to size, shape, type or housing needs. It will be easier to maintain the

intellectual order of the collection by keeping related materials together at this point. It will also be easier to provide special housing at the end of processing when processors have a better idea of what types of housing are needed.

Arrange folders, volumes and other materials

Next, if the collection is being processed to the folder level, a physical arrangement should be established for files, volumes and other materials, within series and subseries. Whenever possible, all records, no matter the type, should be foldered and housed in containers in order of the intellectual arrangement.

> *PACSCL minimal processing rule: While folders will be assigned a physical arrangement, processors WILL NOT arrange papers within folders. Files should never be spilt or combined, unless done so to conserve supplies or time, or to aid in description.*

For more information, processors should consult the volume *Arranging and Describing Archives* (2005), by Kathleen Roe, for guidance in how to arrange files within series and/or subseries.

Arrange the series and/or subseries

Once series and subseries have been established, and folders, volumes and other items within the series and subseries are arranged, processors should identify a logical arrangement for the series. There are many ways to organize series groups within a collection. For example, series can be arranged by organizational hierarchy, alphabetically by series title, chronologically, in order of informational importance, etc. Prior to finalizing the series arrangement, processors should consult with their supervisor.

Processors can consult the volume *Arranging and Describing Archives* (2005), by Kathleen Roe, for further guidance in how to assign comprehensive collection level arrangement to various types of archival collections.

> *Hint: When deciding on an arrangement for series or subseries and for records within series and subseries, processors should be able to provide a comprehensive explanation of how the records are intellectually arranged and why. If it is not possible to describe the arrangement, it is likely that processors will have to impose order in a different way, to enable greater ease in research. How to properly describe the arrangement of a group of records will be discussed further in the next section, 2.3. Describe the Collection and Create the Finding Aid.*

> *PACSCL minimal processing rule: If a collection houses many types of records, requiring a variety of housing, establishing a system for arranging materials to save shelf space is recommended. One way is to arrange collections in the following order: all record cartons,*

letter and/or legal document cases should be shelved first, with files housed within document cases in proper intellectual order; all oversized and/or custom-made containers should be shelved next, placed in order of size and arranged to maximize shelf space; all volumes should be shelved together, at the end of the collection. Volumes should rest on their tail or back, depending on size and condition.

1.3. DESCRIBE THE COLLECTION AND CREATE THE FINDING AID

Archival collections are described at the collection, series, subseries, folder (folder titles only), and/or item levels, with increasingly detailed information provided at each subordinate level. Different collections and/or different processing scenarios, however, warrant different levels of description. In minimal processing, collection level description, consisting of an abstract, biographical/historical note and a scope and contents note that includes a list of series and/or subseries is usually sufficient. Descriptions for each series and/or subseries and a container inventory or list of folder titles may be added for a more fully described collection. In either case, though researchers encounter collection description in the above listed order, processors compose the collection description in the reverse order, creating folder titles first, then the scope and contents note, then the biographical/historical note and, finally, the abstract.

The PACSCL Processing Project followed DACS (*Describing Archives: A Content Standard*) description rules in the creation of finding aids. Refer to *Describing Archives: A Content Standard* (2004) for additional information on describing archives.

> *Minimal processing reminder: Processors will not spend significant time with any aspect of the collection, so it is important to pay attention to details that are readily available or have been noted in the existing descriptive documents, reviewed in 2.1. Familiarize Yourself With The Collection.*

> *Hint: PACSCL recommends using the* **Archivists' Toolkit** *to collect data and create finding aids. Refer to the PACSCL Project* Guide to The Archivists' Toolkit *for more information.*

TITLING AND LABELING FOLDERS
Creating good folder titles is important in minimal processing –this is often how researchers decide if a collection contains information that makes research worth their time and, sometimes, travel.

Folder titles should be descriptive, but concise and to the point. In minimal processing, PACSCL recommends using existing folder titles, which should only be changed if determined to be inaccurate. Existing folder titles can be enhanced with additional information and/or dates. Processors are advised, however, to enhance titles only in ways that clarify the informational contents of the file.

Hint: Adding subjective descriptive words like "large" or "small" provide no additional subject based information and are usually not helpful to reference archivists or researchers.

Processors are also warned to pay attention to phrasing when constructing folder titles, and to be as accurate as possible. Take a look at the example provided below:

Example: Meeting regarding coal mining in Scranton, Pennsylvania, 1995

Is this a meeting about coal mined in Scranton, Pennsylvania or is it a meeting about coal mining, generally, which was held in Scranton, Pennsylvania? A researcher may be interested in only one of these topics and an unclear title such as this one may mislead, resulting in a researcher wasting time or missing useful information altogether.

It is important that folder labels are informative **and** that they look good. Folder labels should be legible and consistent throughout the **ENTIRE** collection, so that reference archivists and researchers browsing a collection will always know where to find vital information such as the collection name, folder title, date, and box and folder numbers. Properly labeled folders will also ensure that materials are returned to their rightful location within a collection.

*PACSCL minimal processing rule: **EVERY** folder in the collection should have at least the following information on it:*

- *Collection name and/or number, or at least a consistently applied abbreviation of the collection name*
- *Folder title*
- *Dates*
- *Box and folder number*

Reminder: Abbreviations are not acceptable! Processors must write out the words <u>BOX </u>and <u>FOLDER</u>.

Capitalize **ONLY** the first word and proper nouns in folder titles.

Existing adhesive folder labels, common in 20th century collections, should be removed, if possible, and the information transcribed directly onto the folder label tabs.

Hint to supervisor: If supply availability allows, the PACSCL Project recommends refoldering collections.

During the 2009-2012 project, it was determined that refoldering collections was no more time consuming then relabeling existing folders. Though information provided on labels was minimal, refoldered collections were better labeled and easier to use post-processing. Processors were less likely to forget to include pertinent information on folder labels and there were fewer mistakes in data entry.

DATES

Dates are recorded for every level of the collection: collection, series, subseries and folders. In most cases, assigning dates is straightforward -- processors identify the earliest and latest dates of creation for all records within the particular level in question. For example, if a folder houses correspondence written from 1900 to 1905, the folder date will be 1900-1905. Assigning dates to materials can get complicated, however, especially when dealing with copies of original materials. If a folder houses only photocopies of correspondence written from 1900 to 1905, for example, the folder date will be the date the photocopies were made. The date of the original correspondence will be included as part of the title. In this example, the folder title and date may look something like this:

Correspondence, 1900-1905 (photocopies), 2012.

Archivist's Toolkit note: In this case, the date, 2012, will be entered into the "Date expression" field. 1900-1905 will be entered into the title field, together with "Correspondence." For more information about data entry in the Archivists' Toolkit, refer to the PACSCL Hidden Collections Processing Project Guide to The Archivists' Toolkit available on the project website: http://clir.pacscl.org/project-documentation/.

DACS rules for dates

The PACSCL Project followed DACS (*Describing Archives: A Content Standard*, 2004) description rules for formatting dates. In DACS, the year of the document's creation is preeminent—dates are always formatted with the year first, except in the case of estimated dates. Years and months are **NEVER** abbreviated. Examples of how to format dates in various circumstances are provided below:

Inclusive date range

Inclusive dates are used when the contents of a collection, series, subseries or folder were created across a span of years. The inclusive date range includes the earliest identified date and the latest identified date within a collection, series, subseries or folder. For example, a folder that contains several letters written during the years 1849 to 1851 will have an inclusive date range that looks like this:

*1849-1851 (note there are **NO** spaces around the dash)*
***NOT** 1849-51*

*The Archivists' Toolkit data entry tip: Inclusive dates are entered in the two four-digit numeric fields under "Inclusive dates." The dash, separating the beginning and end dates of the span, as shown above, does **not** get entered into the database.*

Accruals

Collections that continue to grow from periodic accruals technically have an open-ended end date, but it should NOT be recorded that way in the finding aid. Processors should treat accruing collections as though the date of the most recent accrual was the end date for the collection.

For example, if the records of Company X are transferred to the archives every five years, the dates of the collection will be updated every five years, after accessioning the most recent accrual. If the archives received the most recent accrual in 2012, and the earliest known date in the collection is 1965, and the latest known date in the collection is 2012, the date would be recorded as such:

> *1965-2012*
> ***NOT** "1965-"OR "1965-(Ongoing)"*

> *The Archivists' Toolkit data entry tip: Accruals should be recorded in the "Inclusive dates" fields.*

Bulk Dates

Bulks dates are used to denote a smaller span of time, within a larger inclusive date range. This is important to note when the majority of records in a collection, series, subseries, or folder fall within a smaller span of time, making the inclusive date range misleading. For example, if a collection's inclusive dates range from 1785 to 1958, but there is only one document from 1785, researchers will want to know that there are not many 18th century records in the collection. The collection dates will look like this:

> *1785-1958, bulk 1916-1958*

> *The Archivists' Toolkit data entry tip: Bulk dates should be recorded in the two four digit numeric fields under "Bulk dates," and used in conjunction with the inclusive date range fields.*

Single Dates/Exact Single Dates:

Single dates are recorded when a record or group of records was produced during a single year and/or on a single day. Single dates should be recorded as follows, note that no punctuation is added to dates and that months are written out and **NEVER** abbreviated:

> *1906*
> *1906 March*
> *1906 March 17*
> *1906 March-August (Note that there is no space around the dash)*
> *1906 March 15-August 31 (Note that there is no space around the dash)*
> ***NOT*** *March 17, 1906*
> ***NOT*** *1906, March 17*
> ***NOT*** *Mar. 17, 1906*
> ***NOT*** *1906 Mar.-Aug.*

> *The Archivists' Toolkit data entry tip: Single dates or exact single dates should be entered into the "Date expression" field, keyed exactly as displayed, including the dash, as in the example of the range of months.*

Significant Gap in Records

Like bulk dates, making note of a significant gap in coverage is important. Taking the example from above, and assuming that there is only one document from 1785 and the rest of records fall within 1916-1958, another way to record the dates for that collection is:

> *1785, 1916-1958*

> *The Archivists' Toolkit data entry tip: This date information should be entered into the "Date Expression" field, keyed exactly as displayed, including the dash that separated the date span 1916-1958. Note that there are no spaces surrounding the dash.*

Estimated Dates

Estimated dates are used when records are not dated, but processors are able to determine an approximate date of creation based on other information in the collection or general knowledge of the subject and/or time period. Estimated dates can be date ranges or single dates, and can be recorded in any of the following ways:

> *approximately 1952-1978*
> *circa 1870-1879*
> *probably 1867*
> *approximately 1867*
> *before 1867*

> *after 1867 January 5*
> *1867 or 1868*
> *1860s*
> *circa 1975 August*
>
> *The Archivists' Toolkit data entry tip: This date information should be entered into the "Date Expression" field, keyed exactly as displayed.*
>
> *PACSCL minimal processing rule: Circa and other words used to denote an approximate date should be written out in full. NEVER as c. or ca., for example.*

No dates

Frequently, records are not dated and there is not enough time or information for processors to assign an estimated date. In such cases, folders, subseries, series and/or collections should be identified as having no date. This information should only be recorded as follows:

> *undated (Note that undated is **not** capitalized)*
> ***NOT** n.d.*

While it is not uncommon for records to be undated, there are several types of records that are RARELY undated, including most financial records, official documents and published materials.

> *The Archivists' Toolkit data entry tip: "undated" should be entered into the "Date expression" field.*
>
> *The Archivists' Toolkit data entry tip: If the date is serving as a title of a series, subseries or folder, the dates should still be entered into the appropriate date fields; the title field should be left empty.*
>
> *PACSCL minimal processing rule: "undated" should always be recorded when materials are not dated. This way reference archivists and researchers can be sure that a date does not exist, rather than that a date was not assigned.*

Quaker dates

Many Philadelphia collections were created by Quakers, who used a different dating system and calendar. Quakers did not start their year in January or call months by their Julian calendar names. The first month of the year was called 1st month, the second month of the year was called 2nd month, and so on. For minimal processing, processors should not attempt to translate Quaker dates, though a note should be included in the scope and contents note. They should be made DACS compliant and recorded in the finding aid as such:

> *1835 1ˢᵗ month 4ᵗʰ day,*
> *1835 1ˢᵗ month*
>
> *The Archivists' Toolkit data entry tip: Quaker dates should be recorded in the "Date expression" field.*

ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

Even in minimal processing, processors are advised to avoid abbreviations. Few are absolutely standardized and it is easy to use several different abbreviations for the same word interchangeably, making research in an online environment difficult.

Acronyms, on the other hand, are often important to include. However, acronyms must be fully introduced prior to use. Researchers using an online finding aid are less likely to read a finding aid from start to finish. If an acronym is not introduced in each section of the finding aid, researchers are likely to miss the introduction of the acronym if it is not in the part of the collection in which they are interested. This can be problematic, as many acronyms are used by different organizations, depending on the subject and geographic region, resulting in researchers being misled. For example, the acronym SEPTA is used by at least two very different organizations. Philadelphians understand SEPTA to refer to the South Eastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority. In Northport, NY, SEPTA is short for Special Education Parent Teacher Association.

> *PACSCL minimal processing rule: Abbreviations are never to be used.*
>
> *PACSCL minimal processing rule: Acronyms must be fully introduced in each descriptive element of the finding aid. For example, if the collection is about the organization, Outdoor Advertising of America (OAA), it should be introduced as such in the abstract, biographical/historical note, scope and contents note, <u>and</u> in each series' inventory or folder list.*
>
> *PACSCL minimal processing rule: Archival acronyms are not to be used; few researchers are versed in archival terminology.*

THE WORD MISCELLANEOUS

The word miscellaneous is a dirty word in archival description! Processors are advised to avoid the use of miscellaneous and other similar words, like assorted, various, etc., but sometimes it is the only way to describe a folder or series full of random, unrelated papers.

> *Hint: Anytime you use the term "miscellaneous", include a description of at least the type(s) of material included in the folder or series and/or dates. For example, titling a folder "Miscellaneous financial records, 1900-1905" is much more helpful than titling the same folder "Miscellaneous records."*

FINDING AID NOTES: Scope and contents note, biographical/historical note, and abstract

Finding aids typically contain the following descriptive notes: abstract, biographical/historical note, collection level scope and contents note and, when necessary, scope and contents notes for each series and/or subseries. Notes contextualize the collection, detailing its importance and uniqueness. Notes are also used by researchers to determine a collection's usefulness to their research.

> *Hint: Review existing descriptive documents before you begin. Existing descriptive information may be repurposed or used as a starting point for more in depth research and writing. Sometimes little revision or addition is necessary.*

If you use other publications to create notes, be sure to cite the source using the *Chicago Manual of Style.*

Scope and contents note
The scope and contents note is a narrative description about the contents of the collection. It is a place to discuss collection highlights, obvious gaps in records, or unique perspectives on topics presented in the collection. Collection information should be provided in complete sentences and should be organized in the same order as the collection's intellectual arrangement.

> *Hint: It is impossible to describe everything, so do not try. Focus on the most important information.*

In every scope note, *at least* the following information should be included:

- o An introductory sentence that clearly states the primary creator(s) of the collection and the collection type, i.e. personal papers, business records, etc.
- o A brief summary of the primary subjects documented in the collection
- o Types of materials found in the collection (genres or documentary forms) such as minutes, diaries, reports, water colors, documentaries
- o Functions or activities resulting in the creation of the records
- o Date spans of the collection

> *PACSCL minimal processing description rule relating to dates: Decades are written without an apostrophe: 1920s; in the narrative flow of notes, use normal date order, such as July 22, 2009; when describing a span of dates within the narrative flow of notes, "from 1800 to 1900" is the preferred format, NEVER: 1945-1947 or 1945-47.*

- o How the collection may be useful to researchers and why (this is really the highlights section)

- How the collection is arranged
- A list of all Series and Subseries, if applicable, with date spans
- If applicable, brief descriptions of the contents of each series

The scope and contents note is formulaic, and can be organized into four basic parts:

1. Describe the contents of the collection broadly. Include the types of materials present, the main subjects covered in the collection, as well as date ranges. If one or two topic(s)/subject(s)/person(s) represent the bulk of the collection, that should be noted too.

2. Immediately following the broad description of the collection, within the context of a sentence, list the number of series, titles and date spans.

   PACSCL minimal processing rule: Series should be listed in order of the collection's intellectual arrangement.

   PACSCL minimal processing rule: Always place quotes around the name of the series within the context of the scope and contents note.

3. Looking at series individually, describe each briefly, mentioning date ranges, highlights, gaps in the records, arrangement and any unique perspectives offered.

   PACSCL minimal processing rule: Series should be described in an order that reflects the collection's intellectual arrangement.

4. Lastly, describe how the collection fits within the more general context of history and how this collection will be useful to researchers. Collection processors inevitably become the authority of the contents of the collection and are best able to speak to the usefulness of the collection.

   Hint: If processors have never written a scope and contents note before, take advantage of the scope and contents note worksheet to get started. A printable version is available on the PACSCL Project website: http://clir.pacscl.org/project-documentation/.

For more detailed information on writing scope and contents notes, refer to *Arranging and Describing Archives* (2005), by Kathleen Roe, and *Describing Archives: A Content Standard* (2004).

Biographical/Historical note

The biographical/historical note provides important historical context. It is about the subject of the collection, *USUALLY,* the creator, who may be a person, institution or business. Sometimes, the creator of a collection is a collector, and then the biographical/historical note focuses on the subject of the collection with *some* information provided about the creator. The biographical/historical note should cover the general scope of the person, institution or business, but it should *focus* on the aspect of the person, institution or business that is reflected in the collection and provide context for the era and geographic location in which the creator lived or operated.

> *Hint to supervisors: During the PACSCL Project, a biographical/historical note iss written for each collection by the project manager or archivist and included in the collection's processing packet. Processors are asked to enhance the note when additional information became available as a result of processing.*

Every biographical or historical note should include some or all of the following information:

- o Name: this may include titles, married names, aliases, pseudonyms, common or popular names and acronyms (if an institution or business), and changes of name
- o Geographic Location(s): birthplace, place of business, etc.
- o Birth/Death Dates (as exact as possible) OR Business operation dates

> *Hint: Birth and death dates are almost always different from the collection dates, as the collection may document only a fraction of a person's life or a business's operation.*

- o Education: where and when was the person educated, what degrees were earned, etc.
- o Type of business conducted by the person, institution or company.
- o What the person, institution or company is known for, or why the person, institution or company is important? How do they fit into the general context of history?
- o Relationships (parentage, marriage, business partners, etc.) found in the collection.

For more information on writing biographical/historical notes, refer to *Arranging and Describing Archives* (2005), by Kathleen Roe, and *Describing Archives: A Content Standard* (2004).

Abstract
The abstract is a brief and tidy statement that sums up the collection. It includes the most basic and essential information from the biographical/historical note and the scope and contents note. It serves as the primary gateway to the collection, and is usually included in the collection's MARC record.

> *Hint: Though the abstract is the first descriptive element encountered by a researcher, the abstract should be written last. The easiest way to compose the abstract is to combine the*

first paragraph of the biographical/historical note and the first paragraph of the collection level scope and contents note.

The abstract should describe the collection in a few sentences, which should include the following information:

- o Who or what the collection is about
- o Date span of the collection
- o What types of records are housed in the collection
- o Be sure to reference important subjects, names and/or keywords

For more information on writing abstracts, refer to refer to *Arranging and Describing Archives* (2005), by Kathleen Roe, and *Describing Archives: A Content Standard* (2004).

BOX AND FOLDER NUMBERS

Every box (or container), folder, volume and/or loose item in the collection should receive a number. Folders, volumes or items housed within a box or container must be labeled with **_BOTH_** a box number and folder/volume/item number. It is unacceptable to skip this step.

> *Hint: To avoid numbering the collection multiple times, do not assign box and/or folder numbers until the collection is fully processed, as the order of series and/or folders will likely change over the course of processing.*

> *Hint: Prior to assigning numbers to any part of the collection, processors should ensure that all boxes in the collection are adequately stuffed. Boxes should be full, so that folders support each other and do not slouch, but should not be so full that it is difficult to remove or refile folders.*

> *Hint: Throughout processing, processors can prep folders with "box" and "folder," written in the proper location on the folder tab. This will make the process of recording box and folder numbers at the end of processing significantly less time consuming.*

Box numbers

Boxes should be numbered consecutively from 1 to however many boxes there are in the collection, including any and all oversize or custom built boxes. Box numbers should be assigned in the order in which boxes sit on the shelf. Assign numbers to oversize or custom built containers *AFTER* they are placed on the shelf in an order that makes sense in regard to their size and shape – making sure that boxes are arranged to minimize use of shelf space. Box numbers should be prominently and consistently marked on box labels.

*PACSCL minimal processing rule: Oversize boxes should be assigned a regular number, starting with whatever number follows the last numbered document case in a collection. For example, if the last document case is number 10, the first oversize or custom box will be number 11. Oversize boxes are **NEVER** assigned a separate numbering scheme or called "Oversized" as part of their box number.*

Folder numbers

Folders should be numbered within boxes, with **both** the box and folder numbers clearly and consistently recorded on the folder tab throughout the entire collection.

PACSCL minimal processing rule: New box and folder numbers assigned during processing should be easily identifiable; existing numbering schemes should be erased or clearly noted as having been superseded.

PACSCL minimal processing rule: When recording the box and folder number on folder tabs, processors should write out BOX and FOLDER on each folder tab. The words box and folder may NOT be abbreviated in any way.

PACSCL minimal processing rule: No matter the size, shape or contents of a box, folders should be consecutively numbered from 1 to however many folders there are in a box, with each box starting with a new folder 1.

Volume numbers

All loose or individually boxed volume(s) (only those that are not otherwise housed) should be shelved together, after the last box in the collection. Volume(s) should be shelved on their tails, backs or spines, depending on size and condition. Volumes resting on their tails or spines should be arranged in intellectual order on shelves. Volumes resting on their backs should be shelved in size order, with the largest volume on the bottom. Only after volumes are placed in order on the shelf, can they be assigned numbers. Volumes should be numbered from 1 to however many volumes there are in the collection. Numbers should be recorded prominently and consistently on each volume(s)'s bookmark label.

Item numbers

Occasionally collections house loose items (only those **not** housed in a box), which should be shelved and numbered in the same manner as volumes. Items should be numbered from 1 to however many items there are in the collection.

COMPLETING THE FINDING AID and other DATA ENTRY TIPS

Depending on the level to which a collection is processed, processors will bring together the abstract, biographical/historical note, scope and contents note and/or a collection inventory, or box and folder

list, among other descriptive elements, to create a finding aid. The PACSCL Project uses The Archivists' Toolkit to collect descriptive information and create finding aids, and publishes the finding aids in a custom-built online finding aid repository (findingaids.pacscl.org). It is not necessary to use the Archivist's Toolkit to create finding aids. Depending on an institution's available IT support, processors may prefer to simply create a document using MS Word, for example, which can be published online as a simple pdf document.

> *The Archivists' Toolkit note: If the Archivists' Toolkit is being used to collect data and to create the finding aid, PACSCL recommends waiting to complete data entry until the entire collection is processed, and box and folder numbers have been both assigned AND recorded on folder labels. Currently, the process of entering box and folder number data into the database is a cumbersome, time-consuming task. The "Rapid Date Entry" function is a good timesaver, but in order to take full advantage, requires that all folder data be finalized prior to data entry. Refer to PACSCL Project* Guide to the Archivists' Toolkit *for more information.*

Additional finding aid notes

In addition to the abstract, biographical/historical note, scope and contents note, and collection inventory, PACSCL finding aids may also include:

Language of the materials note: This note tells researchers and reference archivists what language(s) are present in the collection.

> *The Archivists' Toolkit note: The Archivists' Toolkit requires that the predominant language in the collection be identified at the collection level basic description screen. The "Language of the materials" note is only necessary, then, if the collection contains large bodies of material in more than one language. For more information, refer to the PACSCL Project* Guide to The Archivists' Toolkit.

Conditions governing access note: This note lets researchers know whether they can have access to a collection. The PACSCL Project uses the following access notes for all collections processed during the project, unless otherwise directed by the host repository:

> *This collection is open for research use.*

> *OR*

> *[Series/Boxes] of this collection are open for research use. However, [series/box/folder] is restricted until [date]. Please contact the [Name of the archives] for additional information.*

Conditions governing use note: Many collections are made available for research, even though copyright restrictions dictate how the materials or information contained therein may be used. The PACSCL Project uses the following "Conditions governing use" note for all collections processed during the project, unless otherwise directed by the host repository:

> *Copyright restrictions may apply. Please contact the [Name of the archives] with requests for copying and for authorization to publish, quote or reproduce the material.*

Immediate source of acquisition note: This note contains information on from where and how the repository received the collection. The PACSCL Project uses the following formats for the custodial history note, unless otherwise directed by the host repository:

> *Gift of [Name of person/institution], [Year of Gift]*
> *Received from [Name of person/institution], [Year of acquisition]*
> *Purchased from [Name of person/institution], [Year of purchase]*
> *Purchased, [Year of purchase]*

Separated materials note: Depending on available shelf space, special housing and/or environmental needs, collections are sometimes stored in multiple locations within a repository. The separated materials note contains information on which materials were separated from the main body of the collection, if any, and why.

Related archival materials note: Few single archival collections represent the extent of materials available on a given topic. Often, there are companion collections within a particular repository's holdings and sometimes several different repositories house related collections. The PACSCL Hidden Collections Processing Project uses the following format to list related archival materials, unless otherwise directed by the host repository:

> *At [name of archival repository]: [Full name of related collection, including collection dates, if known].*

Preferred citation note: The "Preferred citation" note alerts researchers to the holding repository's preferred method of citing sources. The citation note should collect and format information that enables repository staff to easily find and retrieve referenced materials. The PACSCL Project uses the following format for the preferred citation note unless otherwise directed by the host repository:

> *[Description and date of item], [Box/folder number (Because this is minimal processing, processors may choose NOT to include the box/folder number, especially in cases where additional processing work is highly recommended)], [Collection name and/or number and date(s)], [Holding repository name].*

Processing information note: The "Processing information" note is a free format field, where processors may include a variety of information regarding the processing of a collection. The PACSCL Project utilizes this note in two ways: (1) to give credit to and thank the funder, (2) to describe any unusual circumstances which effected processing in any way.

NAME and SUBJECT AUTHORITIES

Like in library cataloging, name, subject and genre (record type) authorities are identified for archival collections. The PACSCL Project recommends using only authorized headings from the Library of Congress and/or the Art and Architecture Thesaurus. Occasionally, it is necessary to create names, but that should be done only when absolutely necessary.

> *Hint: This is minimal processing. Do not identify more authorities than are necessary to bring attention to the most important people and subjects represented in the collection. The PACSCL Project recommends identifying between five and ten names, subjects and genres combined.*

1.4. FINALIZE PROCESSING, TIE UP LOOSE ENDS

There are always loose ends at the end of a processing project, and they are always different. Here are some things to keep in mind:

MISPLACED RECORDS/FILES

Processors should inspect their work area, as well as the collection's original storage location, making certain that all files, volumes, items and boxes of records have been accounted for, processed and returned to their proper location within the collection.

Processors should go back to the collection's existing documentation, especially the survey and processing plan, to ensure that all records were included in processing. Processors should consult with repository staff as well as their supervisor if they discover material not accounted for in their arrangement and finding aid.

DATES

After processing, it is common for a collection's inclusive and/or bulk dates to change (remember, surveyors spent only an hour or two with the collection). Processors, should review their collection inventory, or folder list, and make sure that the inclusive and/or bulk dates recorded at the collection, series and/or subseries levels reflect the earliest and latest dates identified in the folder list.

CONTENT CONNECTIVITY

Processors should review the finding aid, making sure the collection is described accurately, and that information provided in the various components of the finding aid is compatible and consistent. For example, if series dates are provided in the collection level scope and contents note, the dates should match the dates provided at the series level, and match the dates connected to folders within the series.

AUTHORITIES

Having reviewed the collection in greater detail, processors are usually equipped to determine what name and subject authorities are appropriate for a collection. The existing list of authorities, identified during the survey, should be amended and/or expanded, as necessary, to better represent the contents of the collection.

BOX AND FOLDER NUMBERS

It is easy to make mistakes in assigning box and folder numbers, when working quickly! Processors should count the number of folders in each box in the collection, making sure that the folder count matches what was recorded in the finding aid.

> *Hint: Verifying the accuracy of box and folder numbers can be completed during data entry. After completely entering each box, processors should count the folders in the box and compare the number of folders to the number recorded on the last physical folder as well as in the finding aid.*

COLLECTION EXTENT

Though the collection was measured during the survey, it likely grew or shrunk during processing. Once a collection is completely processed and shelved, processors should re-measure the collection in 2 ways:

Calculate the linear footage
There are many ways to calculate linear feet. It is most important to institute a repository-wide standard for measuring linear feet.

> *Hint: Linear feet and shelf feet **are not** the same thing.*

> *PACSCL Minimal Processing rule: Processors should measure linear feet, by measuring each container and volume in the direction papers are stacked.*

> *For example, a standard document case will measure 5.5 inches or .45 linear feet. A large flat box will usually measure 3 inches or .25 linear feet, though it may measure significantly more in shelf feet. Likewise, volumes should be measured across the text block, including the*

*front and back cover. Processors should take the total number of inches and divide by 12 to
calculate the linear feet.*

*The Archivists' Toolkit note: Linear feet should be recorded on the collection level "Basic
Description" screen, entering data into the "Extent number" fields.*

Container/Volume/Item count

Processors should count and record the number of containers, loose volumes and items in the
collection. Foldered and boxed volume(s) and/or item(s) should **NOT** be counted separately as part
of the volume(s) and/or item(s) count.

*The Archivists' Toolkit note: This information should be recorded on the collection level Basic
Description screen, under extent in the container summary field.*

LABLES

A processed collection should be fully and permanently labeled. All temporary labels used to facilitate
processing should be discarded.

PACSCL Minimal processing rule: Collections are NEVER to be left with temporary labels!

Box labels

The PACSCL Hidden Collections Processing Project deferred to labeling standards and preferences
established by the various host repositories, but recommends that box labels include at least the
following information:

- FULL collection title and dates
- Collection number, if applicable
- Box number

Box label text should be centered and formatting should be consistent throughout the entire run of
labels. Labels should be placed on boxes consistently throughout collection.

Hint: The PACSCL Project recommends using adhesive labels, measuring 3 1/3 by 4 inches.

Volume labels

Loose volumes should be labeled and numbered individually. The PACSCL Project deferred to
labeling standards and preferences established by the various host repositories, but recommends
volume labels include at least:

- o   Full collection title and dates
- o   Collection number, if applicable
- o   Volume title and date(s)
- o   Volume number

> *Hint: The PACSCL Hidden Collections Processing Project recommends using acid free card stock to create book marks to identify volumes.*

1.5. PROOFREAD THE FINDING AID

As in all writing, the information provided in a finished finding aid should be clear and concise, and free of error. In addition to correcting spelling and grammatical errors throughout the entire finding aid, processors should review the abstract, biographical/historical note, scope and contents notes, and the collection inventory for clarity and accuracy in description. Processors are advised to look out for inconsistencies in formatting, punctuation and/or terminology. Finally, processors should identify any aspects of the collection that are not adequately described, return to the collection for review and provide additional descriptive information as necessary.

> *Hint: Remember this is minimal processing. You cannot provide full details for everything. Return to the collection for additional information only when an obvious lack of information or error in description compromises the effectiveness of the finding aid.*

During the PACSCL Project, finding aids went through four rounds of editing:

1. Peer review: Processing team members review each other's contributions to the finding aid. Finding aids are reviewed for accuracy in descriptive content, and spelling and grammatical errors. Processors make necessary changes and corrections.

2. Project archivist review: The project archivist reviews the finding aid for spelling and grammatical errors, accuracy in description and general readability, and provides critique to processors. Processors make necessary changes and corrections.

3. Project manager review: After the project archivist's edits are addressed, the project manager reviews the finding aid for spelling and grammatical errors, accuracy in description, and readability, offering a final critique to processors. Processors make necessary changes and corrections.

4. Host repository staff review: Repository representative provides final review of the finding aid prior to giving permission to publish on the PACSCL Finding Aid Site (findingaids.pacscl.org). Project staff make necessary changes and corrections.

Editing Finding aids produced in the Archivists' Toolkit

Editing finding aids produced in the Archivists' Toolkit is currently not a streamlined process, but the PACSCL Hidden Collections Processing Project Team developed a functional workflow.

The Archivists' Toolkit note: The newest version of the database is equipped with spell check; however, the PACSCL Project did not have the opportunity to test this utility.

To edit the finding aid, processors should complete the following steps:

1. Make sure that all series, subseries and files are assigned the appropriate level in the database. Refer to the PACSCL Project *Guide to the Archivists' Toolkit*, for more information.

2. Refer to the PACSCL Project *Guide to the Archivists' Toolkit,* and follow instructions for creating an HTML report.

3. Copy and paste the entire html document (or portions there-of) into a MS Word document (MS Word 2003 works best).

4. Run spell check, paying close attention to proper and place names, and make appropriate corrections.

    The Archivists' Toolkit Hint: Be sure to make changes in the Archivists' Toolkit. DO NOT make changes to the MS Word document!

5. Create a new HTML report, and repeat the editing process identified above, making certain that changes are reflected in the finding aid and that no new mistakes were created in the editing process.

1.6. Processing Worksheets

In minimal processing, there is always more work to be done! The PACSCL Project developed a series of worksheets to collect data on processing progress, as well as to identify unresolved preservation issues and to make recommendations for future digitization and/or exhibition work. Together, the information collected on the worksheets enabled the project team to track progress, identify the successes and failures of minimal processing, and to provide useful collection related information for future collections' management and planning.

Hint: Transferring data collected on worksheets to a MS Excel spreadsheet enables better data analysis and cross-collection comparison.

Hint: Documentation of processing provides valuable information about a collection for future archivists and processors.

PROCESSING WORKSHEET

At the end of every day, processors should fill out the "Processing Worksheet," especially the "Daily Log of Processing Activities," located on page 2 of the worksheet. The daily log collects the number of hours devoted to different processing activities, including arrangement and description, editing finding aids and writing blog posts. Certain fields on page 1 should be filled out at the beginning of processing, while other fields should be filled out at the end of processing. Page 1 also collects post processing summary data, taken from the Daily Log of Processing Activities. The Processing Worksheet collects narrative, anecdotal information on the successes and failures of minimal processing and the use of the Archivists' Toolkit. A printable version of this document is available on the project website: http://clir.pacscl.org/project-documentation/.

PRESERVATION WORKSHEET

In minimal processing there is little time for preservation work, but that does not mean processors should ignore preservation issues. The "Preservation Worksheet" enables processors to identify issue(s) that are prevalent in the collection, where to find those materials within the collection, and to reflect on how severe they believe the issue(s) to be. A printable version of this document is available on the project website: http://clir.pacscl.org/project-documentation/.

DIGITIZATION/EXHIBITION WORKSHEET

Like preservation, minimal processing allows little time for digitization or exhibition. The "Digitization /Exhibition Worksheet" allows processors the opportunity to highlight records in the collection they believe to be particularly worthy of digital reproduction and/or exhibition. The information provided on this worksheet will ideally provide repository staff with ideas for future digitization/exhibition work, or for planning larger grant funded initiatives. A printable version of this document is available on the project website: http://www.pacscl.org/project-documentation/

RESEARCH VALUE RATING WORKSHEET

Collections are assigned a Research Value Rating, or RVR, during the survey. After processing, processors should return to the survey's Research Value Rating, from Chapter 1, to reassess the collection. The process of reassessing the collection will aid in collection description, and validate the survey's rating. A printable version of this document is available on the project website: http://clir.pacscl.org/project-documentation/.

CHECKLIST

An established checklist ensures that every task is completed and that all collections receive the same level of attention. When processors are confident that all processing work is completed, they should

review the "Processors' Checklist," physically checking off each item as they determine the task to be complete. A printable version of this document is available on the project website: http://clir.pacscl.org/project-documentation/.

MEETING WITH SUPERVISOR
Ideally, processors will meet and work with their supervisor throughout processing. Even so, a post-processing meeting should be scheduled to discuss processing the collection, the completed finding aid and data collected on the worksheets.

CHAPTER 2. MINIMAL PROCESSING's IMPACT ON "TRADITIONAL" PROCESSING ACTIVITIES

The decision to minimally process a collection will impact the level to which "traditional" processing activities are completed, and repositories must decide for each collection what sacrifices are worth the savings in time and other resources. How a collection is housed, the extent to which preservation work is performed, and appraisal and weeding activities, will be limited. Additionally, processors' will not have time to scrutinize collections to identify all sensitive material in a collection and assign restrictions.

2.1. HOUSING AND PRESERVATION IN MINIMAL PROCESSING

Housing and preservation work in minimal processing is limited, and contingent on collection needs, the type and amount of supplies available, and time. During the PACSCL Project, housing and preservation work differed between collections and from repository to repository. The PACSCL Project guidelines for housing were adapted from the Historical Society of Pennsylvania's guidelines for housing archival records in minimal processing. The project guidelines are outlined on pages 50-51 of this manual.

PACSCL minimal processing housing and preservation rules:

Boxes/containers (record cartons and/or document cases)
Collections should be transferred to acid free, archival quality containers (not necessarily new!).

> *Hint to supervisors: If ordering new document cases, the PACSCL Project recommends always using legal size document cases, regardless of whether or not papers are predominantly legal size. This will avoid having to treat the inevitable periodic legal size record like oversize material.*

Record cartons should be loaded in the legal direction, regardless of folder size. Record cartons should all be loaded consistently, so that when shelved, the folders within face the same direction from one record carton to another. (Reference archivists will thank you!)

Containers should be packed tight, so that folders support each other and do not slouch.

Hint: If a container is packed to the point of distortion, or if it is difficult to remove or insert files, the container is overstuffed. If files can move around or are sagging within the container, then it is understuffed.

Folders

Folders will be replaced as supply availability allows.

*Hint to supervisors: Though Greene and Meissner recommend replacing only **damaged** folders, during the 2009-2012 PACSCL Project, it was observed that refoldering collections was no more time consuming than relabeling existing folders. It was also observed that refoldering collections result in greater accuracy in numbering as well as in the transcription of data into the Archivists' Toolkit. Refoldered collections were also found to be easier to use.*

Hint to supervisors: If ordering new folders, and the collection will be housed in record cartons or legal size document cases, the PACSCL Project recommends always using legal size folders, regardless of whether or not papers are predominantly legal size. This will avoid having to treat the inevitable periodic legal size record like oversize material.

Oversize material and special formats

Oversize material and special formats will be foldered as necessary and housed in appropriate containers. These containers should be shelved immediately following the group of predominant containers in the collection (usually record cartons or letter- or legal-size document cases, for example).

Flat or oversize boxes filled with different-sized folders should be loaded from largest to smallest, with the largest folders on the bottom.

Flat or oversize boxes filled with files of the same size, should be loaded in intellectual order.

Oversize containers should be arranged on the shelf to minimize use of shelf space.

*Hint: Processors should **NOT** assign box numbers to oversize or special format containers until after they are situated on the shelf in their final order. This is discussed further in 2.3. Describe the Collection.*

Volumes

During the 2009-2012 PACSCL project, volumes were handled differently at different repositories. In most cases, the PACSCL project recommends that volumes that fit into the predominant container used to house the collection (usually letter- or legal-size document cases, for example) should be

foldered and housed in the container, spine down, in its proper intellectual location, even if there are other volumes in the collection.

Volumes that do not fit into the predominant container used in the collection should be shelved together, after all of the containers, including oversize containers. Volumes should sit on their tail or back, depending on size and condition. Volumes shelved standing on their tails should be shelved in intellectual order. Volumes shelved on their backs can be stacked in size order, from largest on the bottom to smallest on the top.

For loose volumes, processors will use book marks to record vital information, including the name of the collection, title of the volume, and date(s) of the volume. The bookmark should also prominently display the volume number. Further information on labeling volumes is discussed in 2.3. Describe the Collection.

Preservation Worksheet
Though little preservation work will be completed, processors should fill out the PACSCL Project *Preservation Worksheet*, to identify preservation issues not addressed during processing. A printable version of this document is available on the project website: http://clir.pacscl.org/project-documentation/.

Other PACSCL minimal processing preservation rules
Use only pencil while working on a collection.
Do **NOT** unfold papers within folders.
Do **NOT** remove papers clips or other metal fasteners, unless they impede processors' ability to properly identify documents or are immediately damaging material.
DO remove rubber bands.

Guidelines for housing archival records in minimal processing
The PACSCL Project uses the following guidelines for handling records not readily conducive to minimal processing, as written by Greene and Meissner. They are based on suggestions from Matthew Lyons and Cary Majewicz at the Historical Society of Pennsylvania:

Situation	Recommendations
Non archival box	Transfer contents and label information to archival box.
Box too heavy to lift	Subdivide into two or more boxes, if possible.
Non archival folder	If folder is damaged or doesn't fit in a document box, transfer contents and label to archival folder without any additional work to contents. If folder is overstuffed, divide into two and note on new folders that contents were originally in one folder. (To label a continuation of folders use 1:2 and 2:2). Otherwise, keep as is.

Volumes	Place one or more volumes in standard box if they will fit and be adequately supported, especially if volumes are damaged or have soft covers. Keep clearly related volumes together if possible. If the repository stores volumes directly onto shelf, make brief tabs for each volume, including collection name or number, volume type, and dates. Any volumes with detached covers and/or spines should be tied with book tape.
Unfoldered bundle of papers	For each bundle: untie and put into one folder without sorting or other work on contents. If folder is overstuffed, divide into two. If bundle is labeled or brief description can be quickly gleaned, label folder accordingly. Otherwise, look at records and make the best guess possible based on a brief examination.
Pile of loose papers (in box or on shelf)	Group papers and place in folders, keeping groups of adjacent, related materials together if possible. If brief description can be quickly gleaned (e.g. prevailing recipient, approx. date range), label folder accordingly. Otherwise, look at records and make the best guess possible based on a brief examination.
Volume needs repair	Note on Preservation worksheet or follow repository procedures.
Cased photos, glass negatives or slides, other fragile items	Wrap in tissue if not adequately protected against normal handling. Flag, note on Preservation worksheet, or follow repository procedures.
Mold, possible nitrate film	Follow repository procedures for isolating materials and note on Preservation worksheet.
Live bugs	Follow repository procedures for isolating.
Sensitive materials that are candidates for restriction for legal privacy reasons (e.g. medical or student records, personnel or case files)	Follow repository procedures for physically and intellectually identifying restricted material. If an entire series must be restricted, use note fields in the Archivists' Toolkit (see PACSCL's Guide to the Archivists' Toolkit).
Obvious large cache of duplicates	This type of duplication is usually only found in 20th century institutional or corporate materials. Remove in accordance with local records management policy and/or local staff instruction. General policy, keep two clean copies and any annotated copies, destroy the rest.
Three-ring binder	Remove pages, transfer to folder(s).
Post-bound volume	Leave as is unless damaged.
Artifacts	Follow repository procedures for storing and cataloging artifacts. General policy, catalog artifacts intellectually, but box in containers apart from textual records physically stored at the end of the collection.

Audio-visual materials	Identify formats if possible.

2.2. APPRAISAL and WEEDING COLLECTIONS IN MINIMAL PROCESSING

Appraisal and weeding are great ways to reduce the size of a collection; however, such activities can be time consuming and may require expert advice. The time needed to significantly reduce the size of a collection using either of these methods should be considered.

Appraisal is possibly the most difficult task in processing. Due to the nature of the project, the PACSCL Project team does **NOT** engage in appraisal activities. Unless identified by the holding repository, no part of any collection iss discarded based on its enduring value during the PACSCL Hidden Collections Processing Project.

Weeding collections, though often an effective way to reduce the size of a collection, can sometimes be time consuming. In minimal processing, processors are advised to weed collections only in cases of obvious, large caches of duplicate materials.

> *PACSCL minimal processing rule: When weeding duplicate records from a collection, processors should keep 2 clean copies, plus all annotated copies. Follow house rules for discarding weeded records.*

2.3. RESTRICTING MATERIALS IN MINIMAL PROCESSING

According to the Society of American Archivists, "archivists may place restriction on access for the protection of privacy or confidentiality of information in the records." However, according to Mark Greene, "imposing restrictions where neither law nor donor wishes demand is a danger." While it is often important to restrict records to protect the privacy of the record(s)'s creator or third parties, it is also important to remember the primary role of the archivist—to provide access to information and to enable accountability.

> *PACSCL Minimal Processing rule: If a collection houses sensitive or restricted material, PACSCL includes a collection level note in the finding aid, alerting researchers to the restrictions, stating:*

> Some materials in [full collection name] are restricted. Please contact [the name of the holding repository] for more information.

> *In addition, folders containing restricted items are noted at the folder level, both on the physical folder and in the finding aid. Folder titles include this notation at the end:*

> [RESTRICTED]

Social Security Numbers

In most 20th century collections, processors will encounter *Social Security Numbers*, which, if attached to living individuals, are problematic. Social Security was not instituted until 1935, however, so they are not an issue in collections pre-1935. Social security numbers are also never reused. If processors can prove that an individual is deceased, their social security number does not need to be a concern.

Other sensitive Issues

What is considered *sensitive* will vary between collections and repositories. Consider the following as potentially, but not necessarily, sensitive topics: Native American topics, court records that are not official, board minutes that are not official or are recent, field notes in anthropological or archeological collections, to name a few. Please review the following chart, *Sensitive Materials Processing Guidelines Overview*, produced by the University of North Caroline at Chapel Hill, which identifies sensitive issues and proposes solutions on how to handle them.

Sensitive Materials Processing Guidelines Overview		
Category	Item	Comment
Student Records	Report Cards	Always check for SSN: mandatory restriction if person is still alive and SSN is recorded. If donor or donor's family: no restriction necessary
	Transcripts	Always check for SSN: mandatory restriction if person is still alive and SSN is recorded. If donor or donor's family: no restriction necessary
	Papers with grades	If donor or donor's family: no restriction necessary. If NOT donor or donor's family: restrict for 70 years
	Tests with grades	If donor or donor's family: no restriction necessary. If NOT donor or donor's family: restrict for 70 years
	Letters of recommendation	No restriction necessary.
	Miscellaneous student records/materials	Always check for SSN: mandatory restriction if person is still alive and SSN is recorded. Restrictions may be necessary if material identifies 3rd party individuals and includes evaluation of any kind; the records need not be official institutional records governed by FERPA to warrant a privacy restriction.
Refereed Journal Records	Refereed journal correspondence and writings	If donor's own work, no restriction. Discard if donor was the referee.
Refereed Grant Records	Refereed grant proposals	If donor's own work, no restriction. Discard if donor was the referee.
Financial Material	Salary information	If donor, no restriction necessary. If donor's family, consult donor about restriction. If unrelated 34d paper, leave open.
	Charitable giving/potential	If donor, no restriction necessary. If donor's family, consult donor about restriction. If unrelated 34d

		paper, leave open.
	Banking, investments, insurance	If donor, no restriction necessary. If donor's family, consult donor about restriction. If unrelated 34d paper, leave open.
	Income tax records	Always check for SSN: mandatory restriction if person is still alive and SSN is recorded. If donor, no restriction necessary. If donor's family, consult donor about restriction. If unrelated 3rd party, leave open.
Medical/Health Related Materials	Medical bills	Always check for SSN: mandatory restriction if person is still alive and SSN is recorded.
	Health Insurance correspondence	Always check for SSN: mandatory restriction if person is still alive and SSN is recorded. If person represented is still alive, consider restriction for conditions relating to mental or reproductive health.
	Medical correspondence	Always check for SSN: mandatory restriction if person is still alive and SSN is recorded. If person represented is still alive, consider restriction for conditions relating to mental or reproductive health.
	Physician journals	If end date is more than 70 years old, then no restriction is necessary. If end date is less than 70 years and individual patients and ailments are identified, restrict for 70 years from end date.
	Patient files	Restrict for 70 years from end date.
Legal Material	Court materials	Public records: no restriction necessary
	Legal case files	If donor's personal case file(s), no restriction necessary. If donor's family personal case file(s), consult donor for restriction. If lawyer's case files, restrict for 70 years.
Business Materials	Business administrative files	Restrict at donor's request only.
	Pay stubs	Always check for SSN: mandatory restriction if person is still alive and SSN is recorded; otherwise, no restriction necessary.
	Job applications	Always check for SSN: mandatory restriction if person is still alive and SSN is recorded; otherwise, no restriction necessary.
	Resumes	No restriction necessary.
	Employee records	Always check for SSN: mandatory restriction if person is still alive and SSN is recorded; otherwise, no restriction necessary.
	Grievance files	Restrict for 70 years.
Other Sensitive Content	Sexual activity	If content is explicit AND 3rd parties are identified restrict until death of person(s) represented.
	Sexual identity	If 3rd parties are identified restrict until death of person(s) represented.
	Drug use	If content is explicit AND 3rd parties are identified restrict until death of person(s) represented.
	Mental health concerns	If donor, consider restriction. If donor's family or 3rd

		party, consider restriction until death of persons represented.
	Reproductive health concerns	If donor, consider restriction. If donor's family or 3rd party, consider restriction until death of persons represented.
	Marital discord	If donor, consider restriction. If donor's family or 3rd party, consider restriction until death of persons represented.

CHAPTER 3. PROMOTE THE COLLECTION, POST THE FINDING AID

BLOG POST

The PACSCL Project maintained a blog (clir.pacscl.org), for regular reporting on project progress and to provide immediate access to processed collections prior to finding aid approval. All project staff contributed to the blog, as well as occasional repository staff and training attendees. Throughout the project, blogs provided an opportunity for the collection (or the processor(s)'s favorite part of the collection) to stand out. Processors were also encouraged to use the blog as a platform to discuss the pros and cons of minimal processing and the Archivists' Toolkit.

> *Hint: Free software is available, enabling repositories without extensive IT support to share their collections in this manner. The PACSCL Project built its website and blog using WordPress web publishing software.*

POST THE FINDING AID

The PACSCL Project developed a shared EAD repository, where finding aids from all twenty-three participating repositories are available and cross-repository searching is possible (findingaids.pacscl.org).

 Even without a specially designed finding aids site, repositories can publish their finding aids online. Increasingly, online searches guide researchers to collections, making the availability of the finding aid online all the more important. A MS Word document can be easily converted to pdf format and published online.

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PACSCL/CLIR Processing Levels

Level	Description	Arrangement	Preservation
Collection Level Processing	Collection level record in EAD (at least DACS single level minimum); no action taken other than the creation of the collection level record.	As is	Rehouse only if unserviceable in current housing. Check for mold, pests, and nitrate film
Series Level Processing	Collection Level Record and finding aid with series/subseries list. Described at the series/subseries level with information about their location in boxes.	Put series and boxes and/or volumes into rough order.	Replace damaged boxes; house items or folders found loose on shelf; tie up damaged and/or unboxed volumes with book tape Check for mold, pests, and nitrate film.
Folder Level Processing	Collection Level Record and finding aid with folder list.	Put series and folders or volumes in order within boxes. DO NOT order material within folders.	All unbound materials should be in archival boxes in order to arrange series groupings; refoldering into archival folders is recommended if resources allow; tie up damaged volumes or place in boxes Check for mold, pests and nitrate film.