

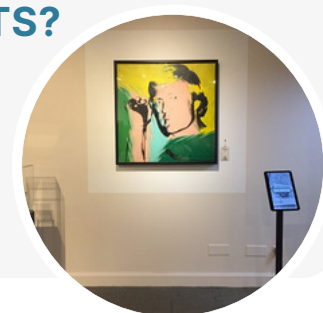


A GUIDE TO PRESERVATION IN EXHIBITS

Documentary Heritage and Preservation Services for New York

HOW DO WE PRIORITIZE PRESERVATION IN EXHIBITS?

Keeping preservation top of mind while creating exhibits means balancing public access with the long-term care of collections. By planning ahead and using safe, stable display methods, institutions can minimize risks and avoid costly conservation needs. This approach not only protects fragile objects but also builds trust and credibility, ensuring the sustainability of collections for the future.



1. PLAN AHEAD

- Create an exhibition policy with clear criteria for object selection, handling, environmental guidelines, and safe display materials.
- Assess each object's readiness by evaluating fragility, prior damage, and sensitivity; plan rotation schedules as needed.
 - Budget realistically by prioritizing conservation, environmental protection, and display materials, while exploring cost-saving options like repurposed cases, DIY mounts, and grants.
- Document thoroughly using condition reports, loan agreements, accession records, photographs, and conservation history.



2. DESIGN EXHIBITS FOR PRESERVATION

- Use reproductions of fragile materials like photos and paper to reduce risk while preserving originals in storage.
- Provide proper support with archival-quality mounts, cradles, hangers, or magnets to keep objects stable and safe.
- Select safe materials that are archival, non-acidic, and free from off-gassing or harmful adhesives.
- Follow a timeline for planning, design, and installation to ensure careful preparation and reduce last-minute risks.





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3. DIY AND BUDGET-FRIENDLY DISPLAY SOLUTIONS

- Build custom mounts with safe materials like Ethafoam, Mylar, matboard, or museum board.
- Repurpose existing exhibit cases or vitrines by adding UV protection, muslin linings, and proper ventilation.
- Shop affordably for mounts such as jewelry stands, acrylic risers, easels, shadowboxes, or sports display cases.
- Always confirm materials are archival-safe and won't off-gas or damage objects.



4. BEST PRACTICES FOR OBJECT SAFETY

- Limit light exposure with LED bulbs, UV filters, rotation schedules, and light monitoring tools.
- Stabilize temperature and humidity around 65–70°F and 40–50% RH, using silica gel and passive controls.
- Reduce pollutants by avoiding off-gassing materials, using HEPA vacuums for dust removal, and keeping cleaning sprays away from objects.
- Handle objects safely with gloves or clean hands as appropriate, using carts, trays, and full support.
- Secure the exhibit by locking cases, roping off vulnerable areas, and maintaining updated security and emergency plans.



AFTER an exhibit concludes, rotate objects back into storage and establish a regular schedule for future rotations to reduce wear from display. Carefully document any condition changes that occurred while objects were on view, noting even minor shifts. Store custom mounts safely so they can be reused in later exhibitions, saving both time and resources. Finally, take time to evaluate what worked well and what could be improved, updating your exhibition plans to strengthen preservation practices for the future.



Additional Resources

- DHPSNY webinar: [Preservation in Exhibits](#).
- DHPSNY resource page: [Preservation in Exhibits](#).
- National Park Service: [Using Museum Collections in Exhibits](#).