A GUIDE TO PROCESSING PLANS

Documentary Heritage and Preservation Services for New York

WHAT IS A PROCESSING PLAN?

A preliminary guide for staff or volunteers who are processing collections. The plan provides an overview of any given collection and a structure for understanding the amount of work needed to efficiently and effectively process a collection.

TERMS

Archival processing
noun

The arrangement, description, and housing of archival materials for storage and use by patrons; preserve materials and make them accessible; maintain context and facilitate discovery.

Finding aid
noun

A tool that facilitates discovery of information within a collection. Finding aids give you the context about a collection; a communication tool to standardize information about archival materials.

WHY WOULD YOU WANT A PROCESSING PLAN?

- Saves time and adds efficiency to processing collections
- Provides a clearer understanding of the timeline needed to process a collection
- Supports accurate resource allocation of staff/volunteer time and required materials
- Encourages critical thinking about the collection, its materials, and how to organize it for researchers
- Allows for more input from support team and stakeholders; creates internal documentation of processing decisions
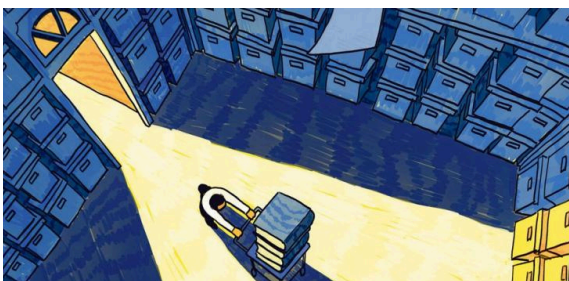
KEY POINTS to Remember About The Plan

1. It should stay flexible
2. It is a guiding tool for arrangements, not prescriptive
3. It can help identify the scope of work and labor involved
4. It should consider the format for archival description output
5. It is a basis for more archival transparency

New York State Archives

New York State Library
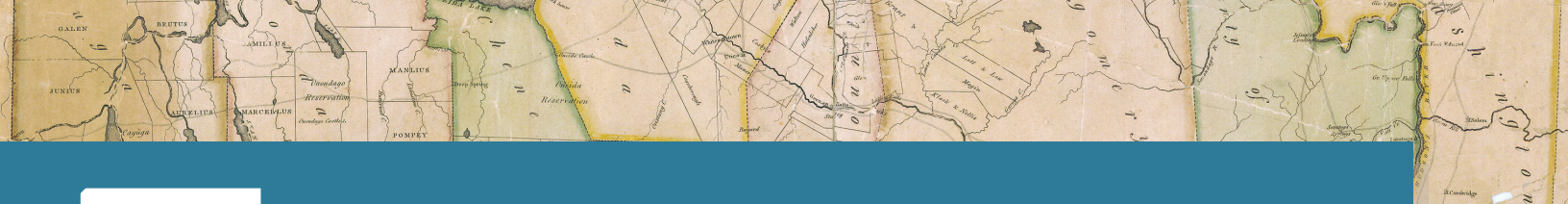
A GUIDE TO PROCESSING PLANS

Documentary Heritage and Preservation Services for New York

HOW TO WRITE AND USE A PROCESSING PLAN

- **Conduct** preliminary research; includes both administrative info about the management of the collection, and biographical/historical info about a collection's creator and topic(s)

- **Capture** information for these comprehensive parts of a processing plan:
  - Overview of the collection's basic data (scope, time period, size)
  - Appraisal: research strengths and any other archival values
  - Level of processing for the collection (collection, series, folder)

- **Propose** the collection's arrangement

- **Describe** any preservation needs; issues, housing, formats, treatment
  - Estimate supplies
  - Anticipate time needed to process in full

- **Make** a detailed list of next steps and use this work plan as a checklist during actual processing activities

After the Processing Work is Accomplished...

- **Assess** how the actual work aligned with your processing plan (or didn't)
- **Record** additional decisions made during processing
- **Maintain** copies of the plan with key admin documentation about the collection

Templates and Resources

- DHPSNY webinar: **The Process of Processing: Creating and Implementing Processing Plans.**
- The Women and Leadership Archives, Loyola University Chicago. *Processing Plans: The Treasure Maps of Archives.* December 22, 2015.
- Harvard Wiki. Schlesinger Library Collection Services: Manuscript Processing Manual and Procedures, **Processing plan template** and **Harvard University Special Collections and Archives Joint Processing Guidelines.**
- NYU Libraries, Archival Collections Management: Arrangement and Description. **Processing Plan Template.**

New York State Archives

New York State Library