Maine Historical Records Advisory Board

## 2022 Survey of Maine Historical Repositories

Summary

Overview

In the summer and fall of 2022, the Maine Historical Records Advisory Board conducted a survey of records-collecting organizations throughout Maine. MHRAB shared the survey online through social media and cultural listservs, while also directly mailing 160 copies of the survey to historical societies listed on the MSA website. The responses number 99, a roughly 20% survey response.
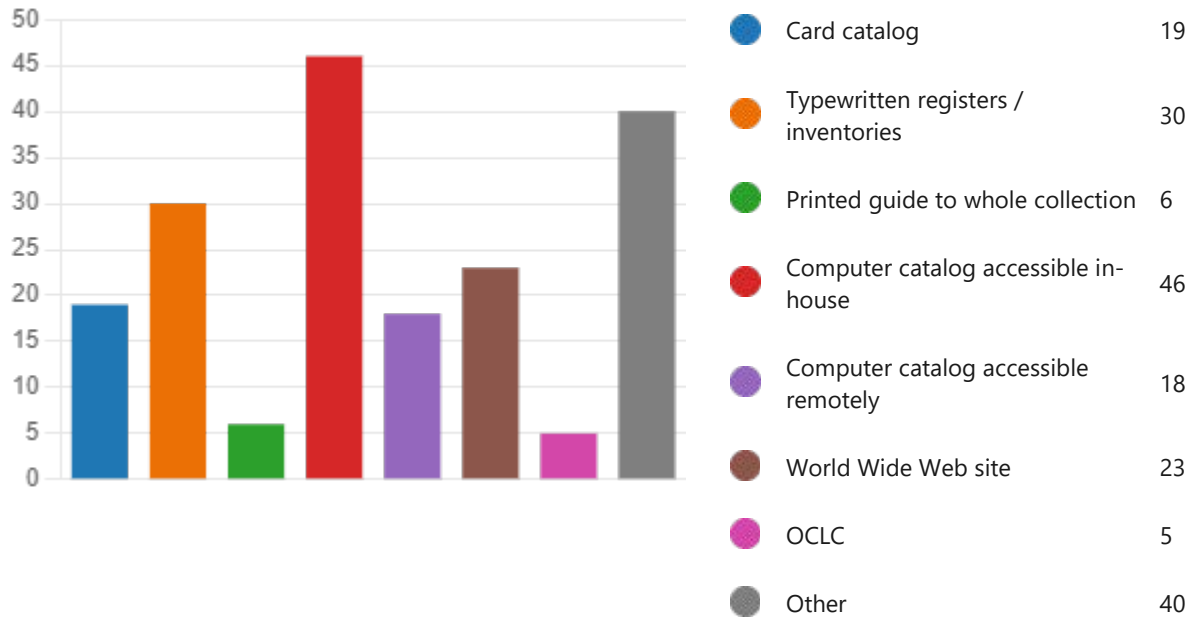
Type of organization:

Majority of respondents were historical societies (60), followed by town offices (17) and Museums (9). Five (5) public libraries responded as well as five (5) college or university. "Other" included: "Congressional Research Library and Museum", "Cultural Heritage Center", and "Historical & Museum"
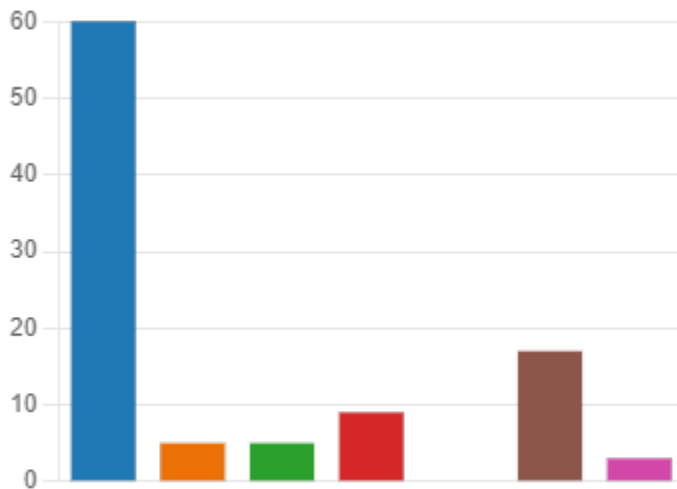
|				
🔵	Historical society	60	🟣 Genealogical society	0
🟠	College or university	5	🟤 Town Office	17
🟢	Public library	5	🟣 Other	3
🔴	Museum	9		

How do you provide access to information about your historical records:

The largest number of respondents indicated they provide access to information about their collection through "other", defined typically as "by request". One respondent noted "We aren't set up for people to access our archives" and another noted "small town and don't have much in terms of records". Others mentioned their records are not organized and accessible. This seems to indicate that a majority of respondents do not have useful and accessible records of their collections and are reliant on staff or volunteer knowledge to access them or assist the public.

●	Card catalog	19
●	Typewritten registers / inventories	30
●	Printed guide to whole collection	6
●	Computer catalog accessible in-house	46
●	Computer catalog accessible remotely	18
●	World Wide Web site	23
●	OCLC	5
●	Other	40

Are any of your collections digitized?

It is interesting that 71% of respondents indicated their collections are digitized, but most respondents also indicated their only access to collections are reliant on the knowledge of staff/volunteers or recorded on typewritten inventories. The leads to questions of *how* the collections are digitized and *if/how* are they accessible?

|		
●	Yes	70
●	No	29
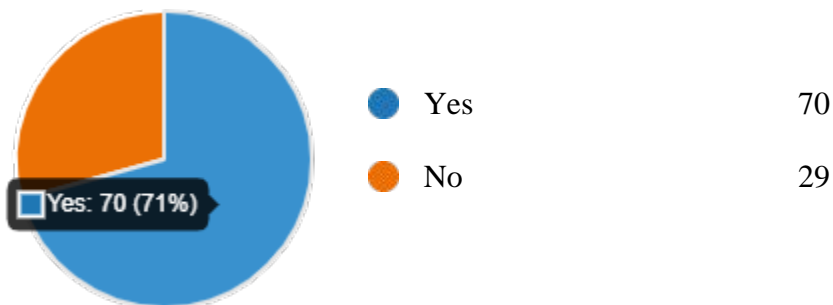
Do you hope to digitize catalog records or collections items within the next 5 years?

The 87% response to plans to digitize records or collections demonstrates a strong interest in this method of work moving forward.

● Yes	86
● No	13

Yes: 86 (87%)

Do you use collections management software? If so, which one?

38% of respondents reported they do not use collections management software, indicating another area for growth. "Other" included: "We are looking for one now", "Catalogit", "Laserfiche", "TRIO", "Filemaker and Odyssey", "Filemaker Pro", and Microsoft products such as "Excel", "Word" or "Access".

|	
● Past Perfect	29
● ArchivesSpace	4
● Do not use one	38
● Other	28

Do not use one: 38 (38%)
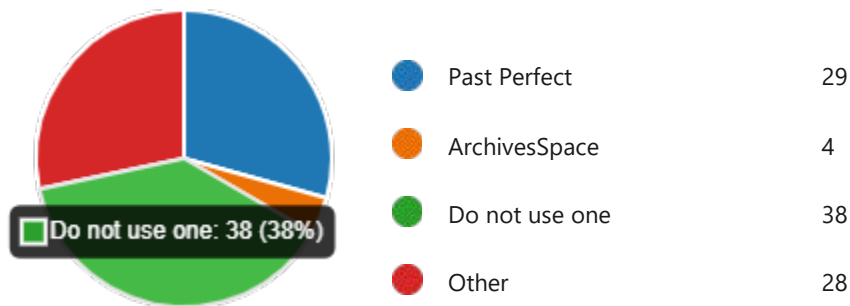
Staff vs. volunteers

The number of paid staff reported ranged from zero (0) to 25, with the vast majority listing 0, 1 or 2 staff members. The number of volunteers also ranged from zero (0) to 200+, with several noting "not enough." When asked how many are staff and volunteers are trained professionals, response ranged from zero (0) to twelve (12). This question appeared ambiguous to some without a clear definition of what was defined as "trained professional."
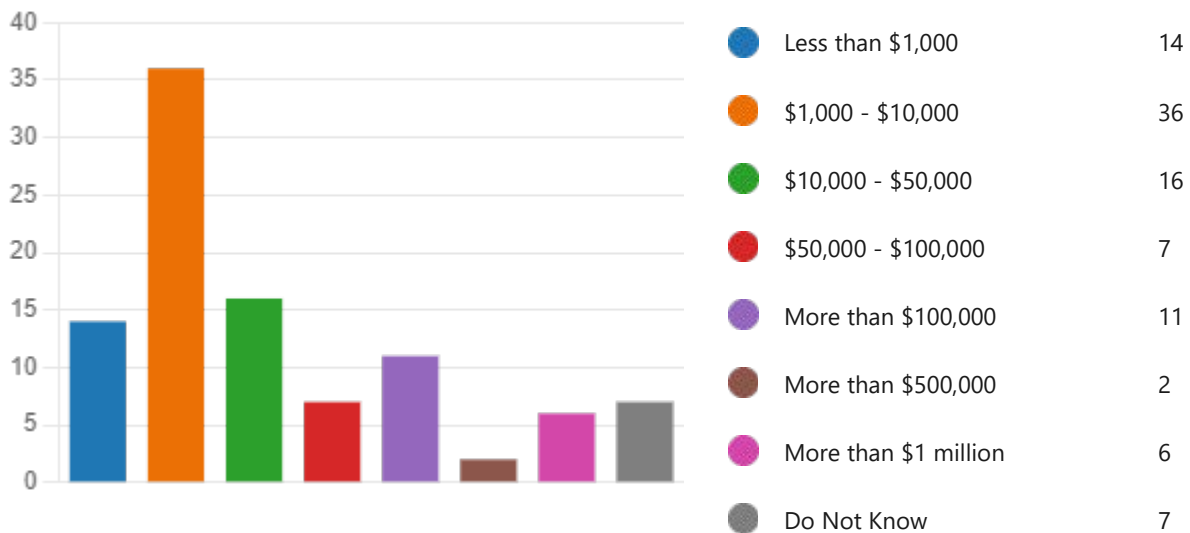
In what areas and levels do your staff and volunteers have the greatest need for training

The areas of "Appraisal and collection development" along with "disaster preparedness" were identified as the two areas that staff and volunteers need the most training, with both records 64.6% at beginner level. The lowest indication of need was in the use of computers/databases.

Archival methods

Use of computers/databases

Appraisal and collection Development

Preservation and conservation methods

Disaster preparedness
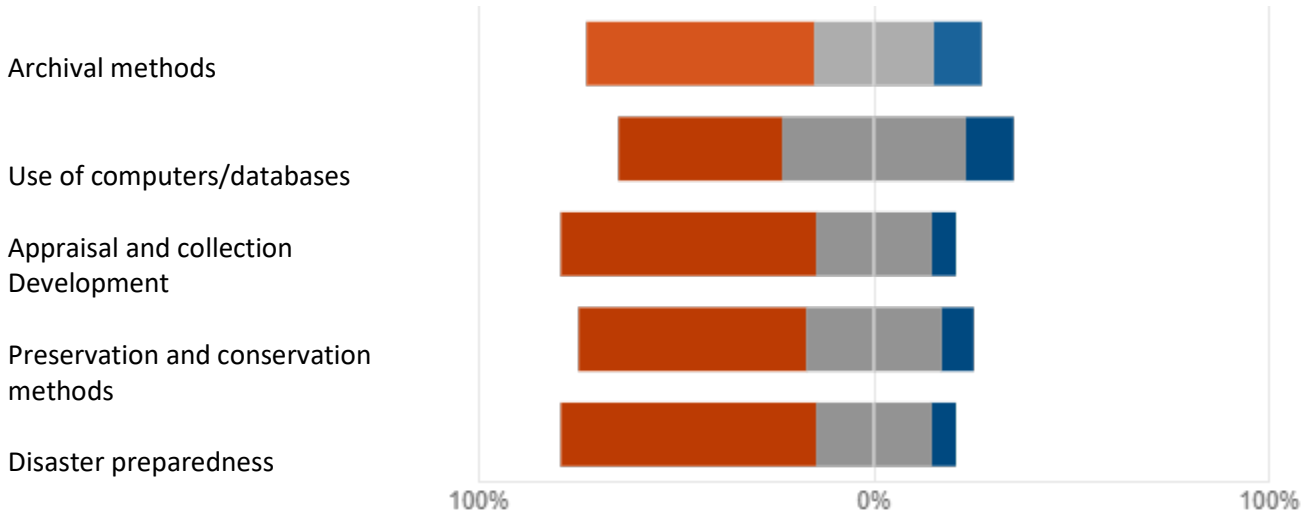
In which of the following categories does your organization's annual spending fall? Selection should include salaries, building maintenance, utilities, devoted to the management, storage and use of collections.

The largest number, 36, of respondents recorded an annual spending budget of between $1,000 and $10,000. Only six (6) have a budget of more than $1million while 7 responded that they did not know.

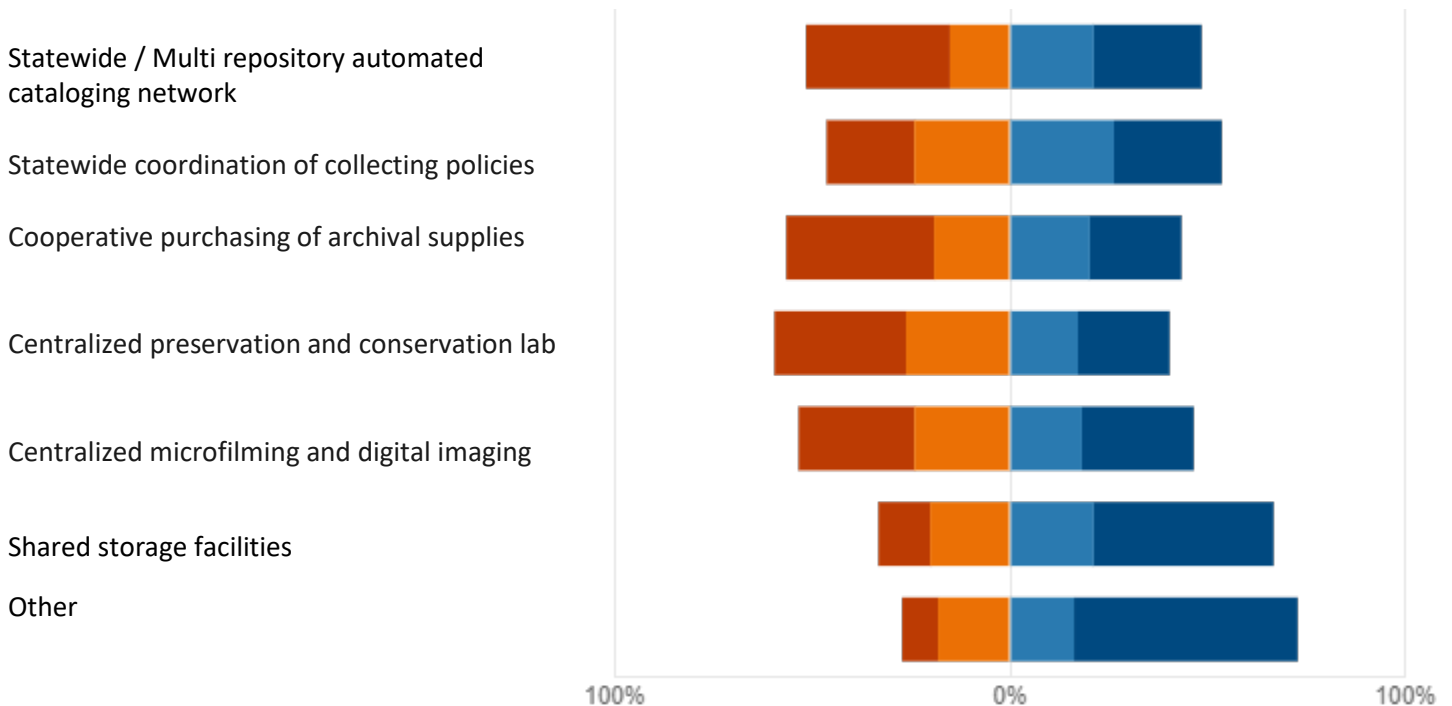| Category	Count
Less than $1,000	14
$1,000 - $10,000	36
$10,000 - $50,000	16
$50,000 - $100,000	7
More than $100,000	11
More than $500,000	2
More than $1 million	6
Do Not Know	7

During the last three years, has the funding (excluding grants) for your historical records program?

Fortunately, Maine's records collecting organizations appeared to have weathered the pandemic economy alright, with 68% reporting their funding as stable over the last years. 73% reported they expect their funding to remain stable over the next three years as well.

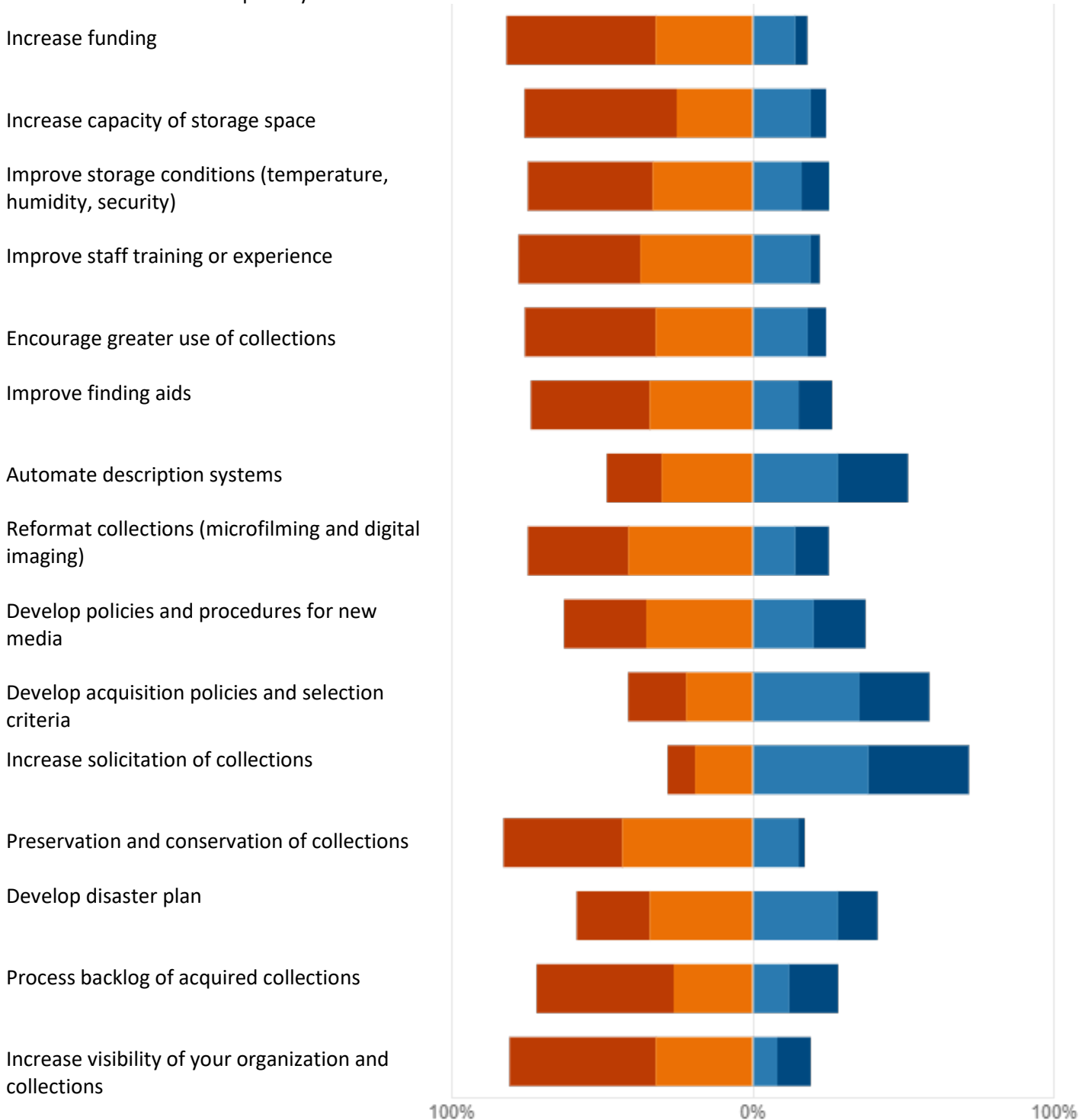|	
● Decreased	17
● Remained stable	67
● Increased	15

Remained stable: 67 (68%)
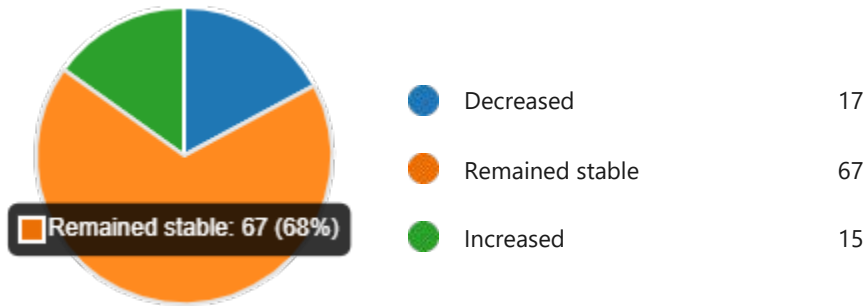
Select a 'useful' rating for each option below relating to cooperative efforts to your organization or institution:

When asked what would be most useful, organizations indicated cooperative purchasing of archival supplies would be most useful to them (37.4% very useful), followed by a State/Multi-repository automated cataloging network. Shared storage was identified as only of some use.

Statewide / Multi repository automated cataloging network

Statewide coordination of collecting policies

Cooperative purchasing of archival supplies

Centralized preservation and conservation lab

Centralized microfilming and digital imaging

Shared storage facilities

Other

100%   0%   100%

Select a priority for each option below for improving the management of your historical records and making them available for use:

When asked to rank priorities for improving management of historical records, increasing the capacity of storage space received the strongest indication as a major need (50.5%), followed by increased funding (49.5%), then increased visibility of your organization and collections (48.5%). The need to increase solicitation of collection was viewed as the lowest priority.

Increase funding

Increase capacity of storage space

Improve storage conditions (temperature, humidity, security)

Improve staff training or experience

Encourage greater use of collections

Improve finding aids

Automate description systems

Reformat collections (microfilming and digital imaging)

Develop policies and procedures for new media

Develop acquisition policies and selection criteria

Increase solicitation of collections

Preservation and conservation of collections

Develop disaster plan

Process backlog of acquired collections

Increase visibility of your organization and collections

100%   0%   100%

Where do you go for advice and assistance concerning your historical records, list names of all that apply: *(Example: (State government agency) Maine State Archives; (Historical records advisory board) Maine Historical Records Advisory Board - MHRAB)*

Respondents indicated they go to a variety of sources for information and assistance. Many of the responses depending on what type of organization was responding. Historical societies or museums indicated reaching out to the Maine State Archives, Maine Historical Society, Northeast Document Conservation Center, the American Association of State and Local History. Town offices looked to Kofile for preservation management, the Maine State Vital Records office, or the Maine State Archives. Libraries and colleges sought guidance from the Maine state Library or Society of American Archivists. Local organizations also sought advice from other, similar local organizations.

What is the most pressing problem for your organization?

When asked for narrative response for their most pressing problems, response varied widely but did fall within a few identifiable themes. They are:

- Time
- Resources (defined as tools, supplies, and funding)
- Staffing or volunteer help
- Climate controlled storage space

According to the responses, available volunteers appear to be aging out and organizations are having difficult attracting new volunteers. Funding and getting collections organized and recorded in some way is a pressing need for most of the small organizations. The lack of volunteers and space was emphasized repeatedly. One respondent also noted:

"Large organizations want to be helpful, but they do not understand our situation. I have completed multiple surveys of this type - and I may have already completed this one. Sorry if this is a duplicate. The questions on this survey - and the other ones I have completed - do not fit our circumstances, so it is difficult to provide an answer that will be useful to you. I hope you are communicating with the other organizations who are putting out similar surveys. I will hazard a guess that 80% of the repositories in Maine are in the same situation that we are. I have never been invited to contribute - nor has anyone else that I know of - to the development of these surveys so that the questions more accurately reflect the majority of repositories. For example, in question 5, I have no idea what OCLC is."