OUT OF SPACE?????

It almost goes without saying that no matter how big or how small your council or how big or small your history collection, space is always a problem. The problem is usually that there is never enough space!

Simply acquiring more space is often not an option for many of us because of physical and fiscal constraints. When you are faced with the problem of too much “stuff” and not enough space, your committee might try implementing some of the following recommendations to address the problem:

**Compare your collection policy to your inventory. Be ruthless in culling!**
In managing our history collection, we all tend to 1) keep what was already there when we arrived, 2) take into the collection whatever is offered to us, and 3) never make the time to “cull” the collection. When space becomes an issue, it’s time to act!

- Declare a temporary moratorium on taking items into the collection.
- Take a look at your collection policy and compare it to the items you have in your collection. (Note: if you have neither a collection policy nor inventory of your items, you need to work on getting both.)
- Identify and pull out items in the collection that are not covered in your collection policy. Determine why you have them. Are they relevant to your area and/or the purpose of your collection? If not, they should be considered for deaccession or discard.
- Do you have too many of any item? Remember, a council collection does not have to have every version of every historic uniform or a copy of every Girl Scouts of the USA publication. Again, think of the purpose of the council collection and how it’s used. Focus on items related to your council. Consider “extra” or “superfluous” items for deaccession or discard.
- **Be ruthless in this culling procedure!** If the committee finds itself saying things like, “Well, maybe we’ll use it someday in an exhibit,” it’s almost certain you should deaccession. Ask questions such as: What exhibit? When? Will you remember you have it? Won’t you be able to find/borrow something like it if and when the future exhibit becomes a reality?
- Develop very firm, specific procedures for accepting/not accepting items into the collection. These are based on your collection policy. Be sure to train those
who will most likely be in a position to receive items—such as a receptionist—to be able to refuse items, if need be.

- Schedule a **periodic review** of your collection using these same procedures for appraising and culling listed above.

**Shelve It, If You Can**

- Shelving can be the most economical and most efficient way of storing collection items.
- The best way to store items—if possible—is to store like items together in like-size boxes (preferably acid-free), with clear, specific labels, on shelves with labels facing front. Removing items from the original mail boxes or bags they were received in and reboxing is advised. This cuts down on irregular sizes and untidiness.
- **Industrial type shelving of galvanized steel is most efficient.** It is sturdy, there are no gasses to off-set, its open structure allows air to circulate around and between boxes, it can be built to fit any size room, any width, any height, any length, and it is relatively inexpensive.
- **Contact local retail stores or warehouses (or look it up on the Internet) for their vendor** for this type of shelving. Consider going in together with another council in your area for bulk, discounted purchase.
- **High density, movable shelving is a more expensive option, but useful.** This is shelving that eliminates space between rows of shelves. In so doing, a greater volume of records or items can be stored in minimal, reduced space. When you need something on a shelf, you just have to open up the units by manually cranking or pushing a button which uses electricity to separate shelves. High density, movable shelving can be constructed to meet any size space. The floor beneath the shelving does have to be reinforced so that it can bear the increased weight density. This kind of shelving is ideal for archival records and items that are not accessed as frequently as current records.

**Place Collection Items Somewhere Else**

- **Off-site storage** could be an option if you have culled all you can, just don’t have any more room and don’t see the situation changing. There are many companies that provide storage for records and boxes of items, including archival records specialists. Costs vary depending on the type of storage and the services—archival storage specialists usually being the most expensive. Look into these and talk with others who have used them. Ask questions about not only costs of storage, but reputation, the exact location and physical condition of the storage area, arrangements and costs for pulling items back when you need them, etc.
  You could also consider sharing costs of storage space with another council or organization in your area.
- Consider **donating items** from your collection to a neighboring council. Find out if a council in your area/state could use some of your “superfluous” items for their collection.
- Consider **donating part of your collection** to a local museum or historical society. In this way, a selection of materials will be available for research needs
and your council can concentrate on using its collection for program activities, exhibits, etc.


- No matter what your situation presently, do the best you can with what you have and concentrate on using your collection in ways that will be favorably noticed. Once you have proved the value of the council’s history collection, you may be able to negotiate additional space. Or, you may be lucky enough to be asked about your space requirements if the council moves to a new location.
- Even if you don’t see the possibility in the near future of more space, in addition to using the current space in an efficient manner, plan for the future. Be ready when the opportunity presents itself to outline your desired space and equipment needs. Figure out square footage for storing items, desired locations to protect items, etc. Don’t be afraid to ask for everything reasonable. You may get it! You do have to prove that you have given the issue some thought, however, and are ready to rationalize and support your request.