

## Chapter 8: Preservation Staffing & Activities

*An institution demonstrates preservation awareness and well-integrated conservation policies through a conservation staff if resources allow, or well established relationships with consulting conservation professionals who have expertise in specific material types or issues appropriate to collections.*

–*Position Paper on Conservation and Preservation in Collecting Institutions*, American Institute for Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works, 2002

*Professional responsibilities involving the care of the collections should be assigned to persons with the appropriate knowledge and skill or who are adequately supervised.*

–*ICOM Code of Ethics for Museums*, International Council of Museums, 2004

*Collection care is principally the responsibility of staff members (regardless of job titles) directly involved with specimens and artifacts: curators, collection managers, curatorial assistants, conservators, registrars, preparators, and technical assistants in these areas.*

–*Guidelines for the Care of Natural History Collections*, Society for the Preservation of Natural History Collections, 1998

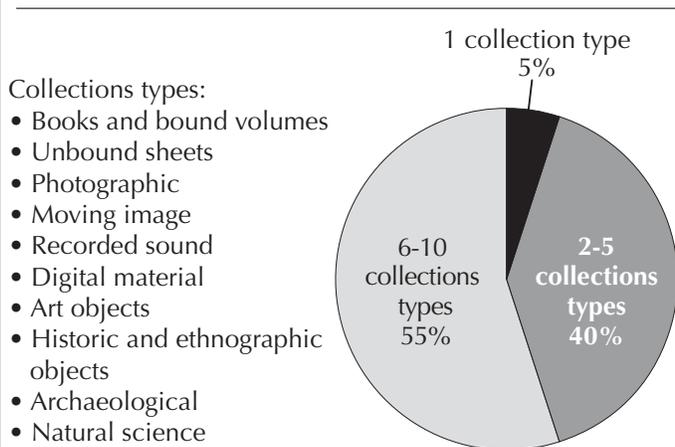
The Heritage Health Index found that more than half of U.S. collecting institutions care for more than six types of collections (figure 8.1); given the diverse needs of collections, it is particularly important to have personnel who devote time to collections care.

Survey question D8 asked institutions about their level of conservation/preservation staffing. Institutions could select as many options as applicable. Only 20% of institutions have paid conservation/preservation staff, whether full-time or part-time (figure 8.2). Instead, most institutions depend on assigning collections care duties to other staff as needed (30%), to volunteers (44%), or to external providers (15%).

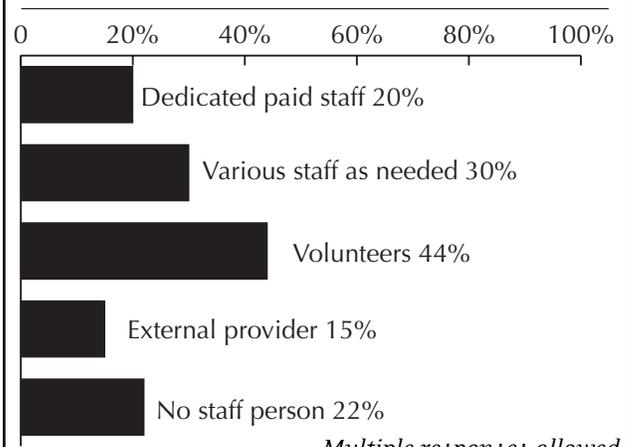
Twenty-two percent of institutions report that no designated staff person has conservation/preservation responsibilities.

Viewed by type of institution, about one-third of archives and archaeological repositories/scientific research collections have paid conservation/preservation staff (figure 8.3). Museums are also above the national average, with 27% having paid staff dedicated to collections care. However, only 12% of libraries and 15% of historical societies have paid conservation/preservation staff. Archives and archaeological repositories/scientific research collections are also least likely to have no designated staff with collections care responsibilities at 5% and 8% respectively, while

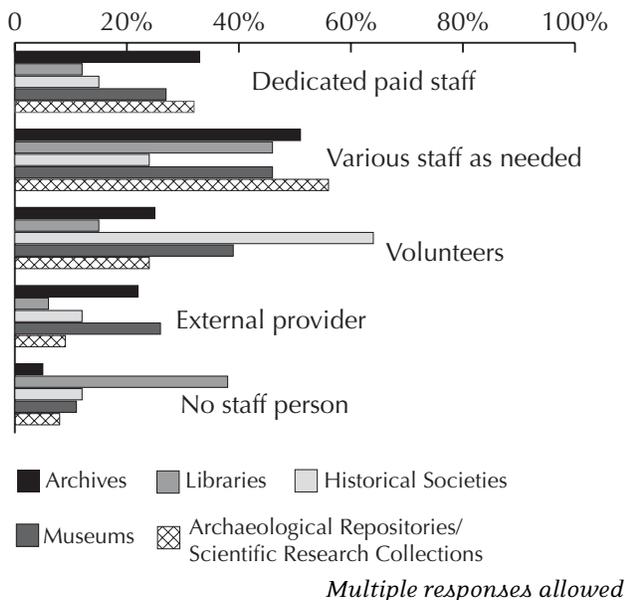
**Fig. 8.1 Most Institutions Care for More than Six Types of Collections**



**Fig. 8.2 Institutions' Staffing for Conservation/Preservation**



**Fig. 8.3 Institutions' Staffing for Conservation/Preservation (by type)**

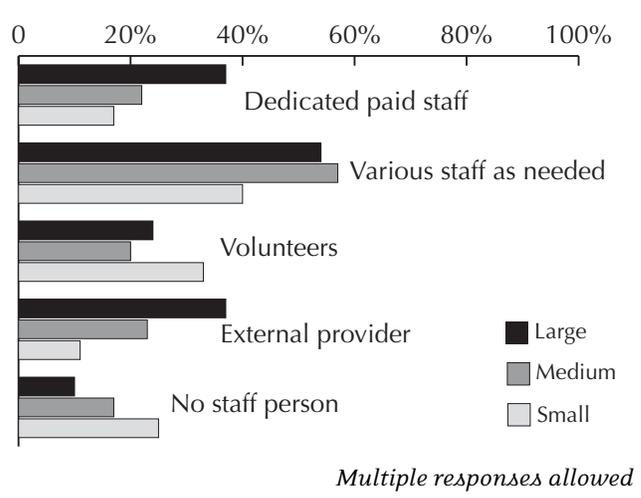


libraries are the most likely not to have staff (38%). Of libraries, only 17% of academic libraries and 22% of independent research libraries have no designated staff, while 45% of public libraries and 39% of special libraries have none. About half of archives, libraries, museums, and archaeological repositories/scientific research collections use various staff to handle collections care duties. Museums are most likely to use external providers for conservation/preservation services (26%). Historical societies are most likely to use volunteers (64%) as part of their personnel for conservation/preservation; 30% of historical societies use only volunteers to cover conservation/preservation duties.

Results relate to size of institution, with larger institutions more likely to have paid staff, have access to other staff, and use external providers, while smaller institutions are more likely to use volunteers or have no staff assigned to conservation/preservation (figure 8.4). Public libraries and special libraries contribute the most toward the 10% of large institutions with no designated staff.

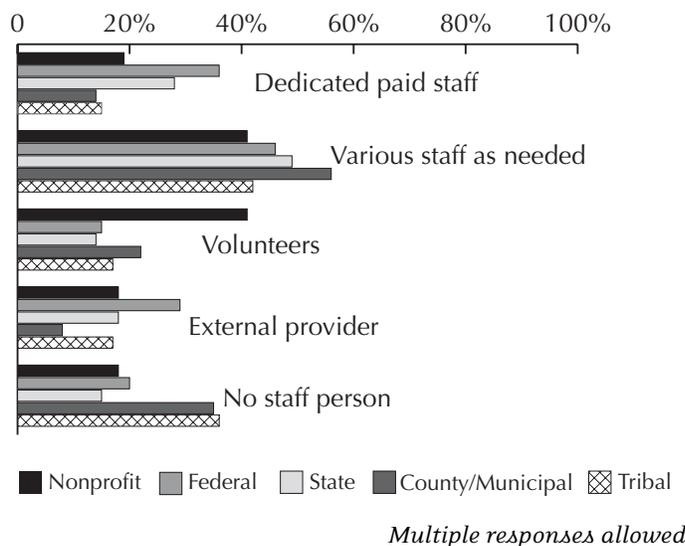
By governance, federal institutions are most likely to have paid conservation/

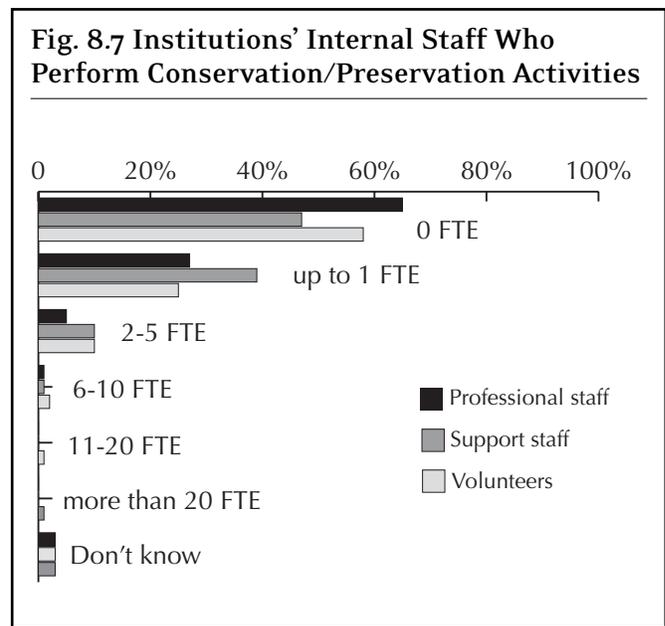
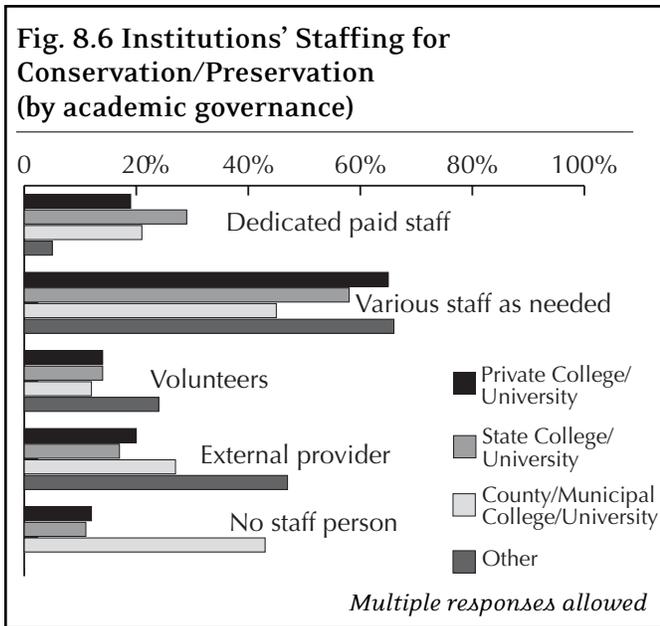
**Fig. 8.4 Institutions' Staffing for Conservation/Preservation (by size)**



preservation staff (36%), followed by state institutions (28%) (figure 8.5). County/municipal and tribal-governed institutions are most likely to have no staff assigned to conservation/preservation (35% and 36% respectively). These figures include academic institutions (Methodology, p. 20), but viewing academic institutions alone shows that state college/universities are the most likely to have paid conservation/preservation staff and county/municipal college/universities are most likely to have no staff. These figures

**Fig. 8.5 Institutions' Staffing for Conservation/Preservation (by governance)**





influence the data by overall governance (figure 8.6). Of all the variables, including type and size, academic institutions are more likely to use various staff as needed for conservation/preservation.

The second survey question about preservation staffing (D9) asked institutions to indicate the number of internal staff and volunteers who perform conservation/preservation activities. Institutions were to record human resources devoted to collections care using full-time equivalent (FTE), which is equal to a worker who works year-round for an average of 40 hours a week. The online version of the survey included an FTE calculator to assist respondents with this calculation. Institutions were to include all workers and volunteers including temporary, part-time, seasonal, work study, and intern help. Staffing was divided into three categories: professional conservation/preservation staff, support conservation/preservation staff, and volunteers. Respondents were given the choice of six answer choices that included ranges of numbers (Appendix F, p. 5).

“Professional staff” was intentionally not defined to allow institutions to define it most appropriately for their institutions. Instead, examples of professional staff, including preservation administrators, conservators, and research scientists, were given. For example, at a natural science museum, a collections manager

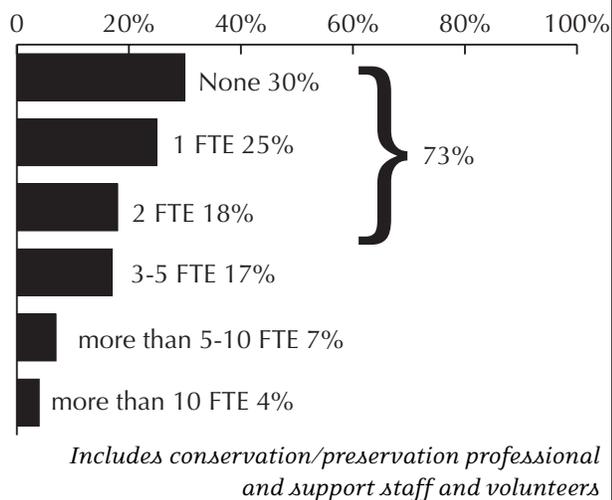
could be considered professional conservation/preservation staff, but at an art museum, this position could be considered support staff. Sixty-five percent of institutions responded that they had no professional conservation/preservation staff (figure 8.7). Only slightly more than a quarter (27%) have up to one full-time equivalent staff person; only 5% have 2-5 FTEs; 1% have 6-10 FTEs; and less than 1% have more than 11 full-time equivalent internal professional conservation/preservation staff.

Support conservation/preservation staff includes collections care assistants, technical assistants, and collections handlers; again the term was not rigidly defined so institutions could define it for themselves. Fewer than half of institutions (47%) have no FTE support staff; 39% have up to one FTE; 10% have 2-5 FTEs; 1% have 6-10 FTEs; and fewer than 1% have more than 11 full-time equivalent internal support conservation/preservation staff (figure 8.7).

There are no volunteers involved with conservation and preservation activities at 58% of collecting institutions. One-quarter use up to one FTE volunteer: only 10% use 2-5 FTEs; 2% use 6-10 FTEs; 1% uses 11-20 FTEs; and 1% use more than 20 full-time equivalent volunteers. In all three staffing categories, 3% of institutions replied “don’t know.”

Averaging all three responses together, using midpoints for the ranges 2-5, 6-10, and 11-20 and

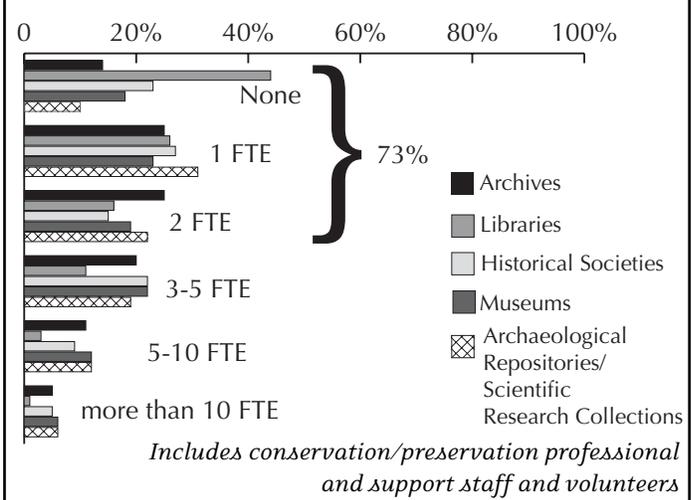
**Fig. 8.8 Average Number of Internal Staff Who Perform Conservation/Preservation Activities**



30 for “more than 20,” 30% of institutions do not have any internal staff who perform conservation/preservation activities (figure 8.8); 25% have one full-time equivalent; 18% have two full-time equivalent staff members, whether they be conservation/professionals, support staff, volunteers, or some combination of the three. Seventeen percent have 3-5 FTEs; 7% have more than 5 but less than 10 FTEs; and only 4% have more than 10 FTEs. Overall, almost three-quarters of institutions have fewer than two full-time equivalent staff members with conservation/preservation responsibilities. At institutions that have internal conservation/preservation staff (professional, support, or volunteers), 36% have one FTE; 25% have two FTEs; 24% have 3-5 FTEs; 11% have more than 5 but less than 10; and only 4% have more than 10 FTEs.

Figure 8.9 shows the average by type of institution. Libraries are most likely to have no internal staff (44%), followed by historical societies (23%), museums (18%), archives (14%), and archaeological repositories/scientific research collections (10%). Results are fairly even across institutions that have 1 FTE, with museums at the lowest (23%) and archaeological repositories/scientific research collections at the highest (31%) percentage. Results remain balanced in the 3-5 and less than five and more than 10 categories, with the exception of libraries—about 10% lower than other

**Fig. 8.9 Average Number of Internal Staff Who Perform Conservation/Preservation Activities (by type)**



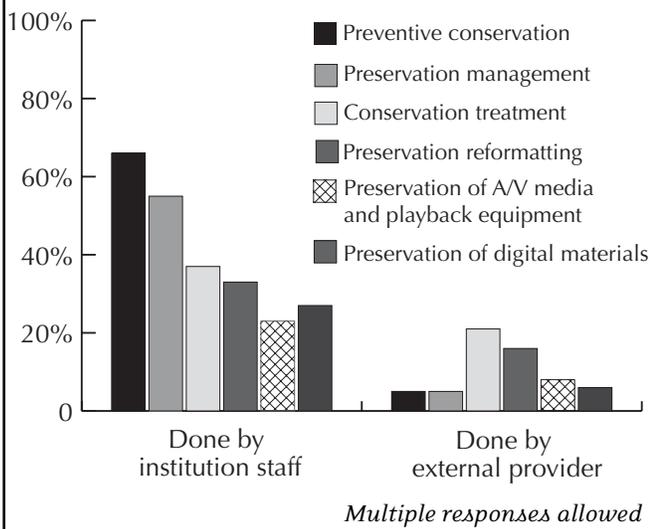
institutions in both cases. Only 1% of libraries have more than 10 FTEs, compared with about 5% of other institutions.

Institutions were asked to report whether their conservation/preservation program included any of six types of activities:

- preventive conservation (e.g., housekeeping, holdings maintenance, re-housing, environmental monitoring)
- preservation management (e.g., administration, planning, assessment)
- conservation treatment (e.g., repair, mass deacidification, specimen preparation)
- preservation reformatting (e.g., preservation photocopying, microfilming)
- preservation of audio-visual media and playback equipment (e.g., preservation copies of media, maintaining equipment)
- preservation of digital materials and electronic records collections (e.g., migrating data to current software).

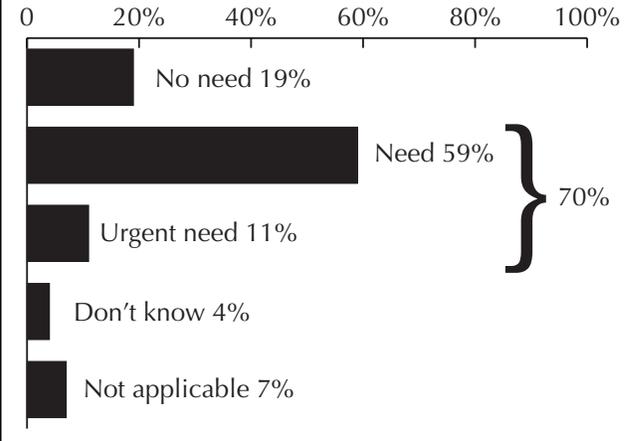
Respondents could indicate that the activity was done by institution staff; done by external providers; not done currently, but planned; not done; or not applicable. Preventive conservation is mostly likely to be done by internal staff at 66%, followed by preservation management at 55%, conservation treatment at 37%, preservation reformatting at 33%, preservation of digital materials at 27%, and preservation of audio-visu-

**Fig. 8.10 What Institutions' Conservation/Preservation Program Includes**



al materials at 23% (figure 8.10). Conservation treatment is done by external providers at 21% of institutions. External providers are next most likely to be used for preservation reformatting (16%) and preservation of audio-visual media (8%). Preservation of digital material has the highest percentage of “not done currently, but planned” at 12%, but between 9% and 11% of the remaining activities are also planned, with the exception of preventive conservation (5%). Between one-quarter and one-third of institutions are not involved in these preservation activities, again with the exception of preventive conservation, which is not done at 18% of institutions.

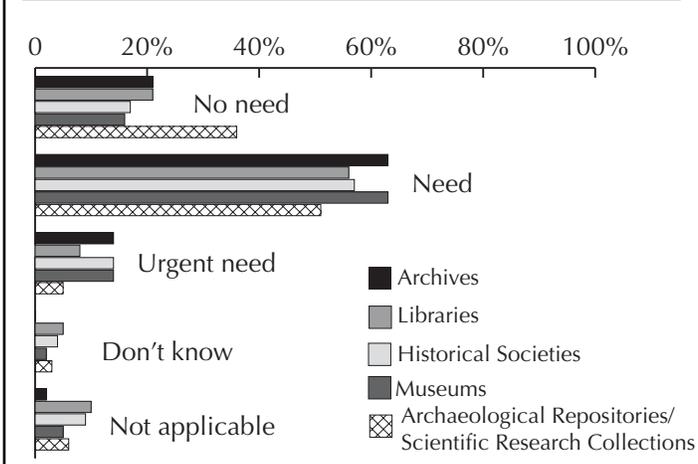
**Fig. 8.11 Institutions' Need for Staff Training**



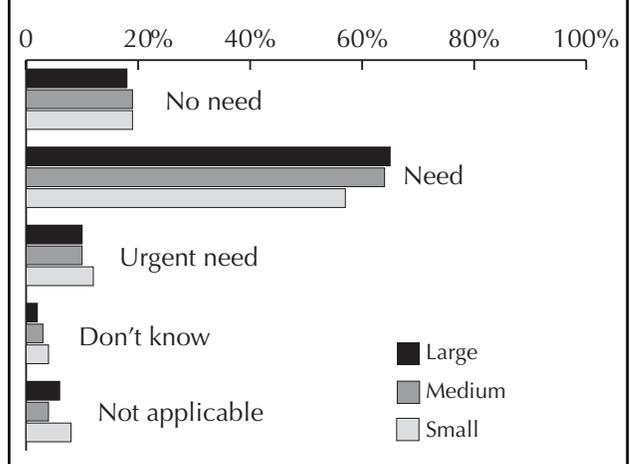
Staff training for conservation and preservation is needed at 59% of institutions and urgently needed at 11% of institutions, resulting in a combined need figure of 70%, more than any other need cited by institutions (figure 8.11). This need is fairly balanced across types of institutions (figure 8.12), with archives and museums having the most need responses (63%) and archives, historical societies, and museums having the highest urgent need responses at 14% each. Results by size are also about equal, with more large and medium-sized institutions citing a need and slightly more small institutions citing an urgent need (12%) (figure 8.13).

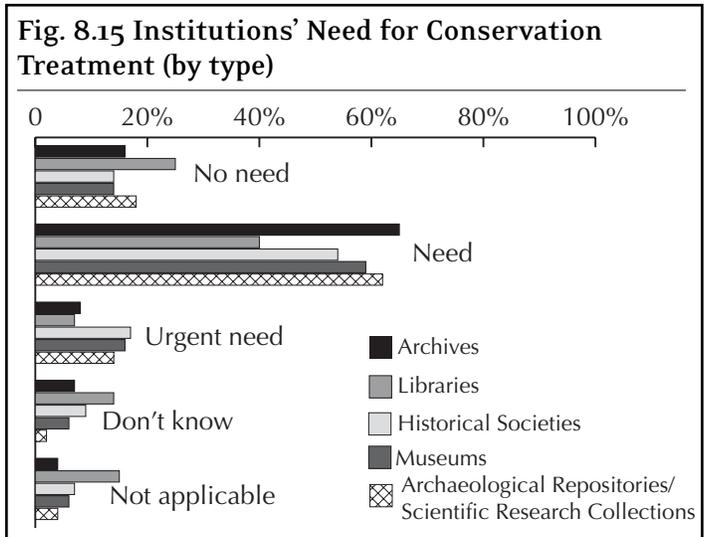
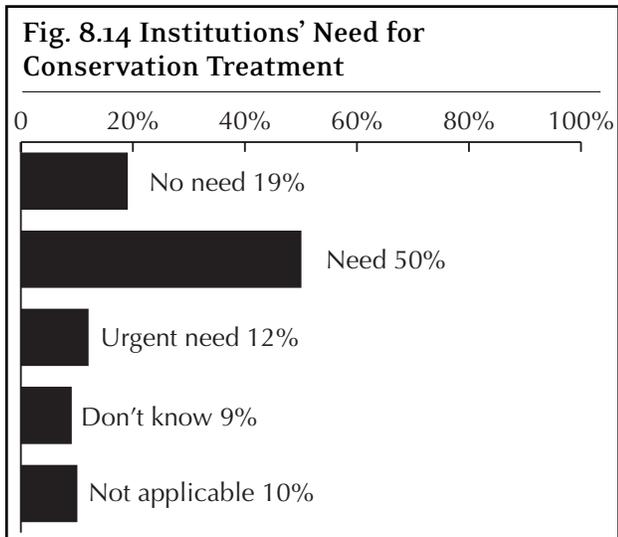
Urgent need for staff training correlates with average size of internal staff for conservation/preservation, with more institutions citing an urgent need for training if they have fewer staff.

**Fig. 8.12 Institutions' Need for Staff Training (by type)**



**Fig. 8.13 Institutions' Need for Staff Training (by size)**





For example, 29% of institutions with an urgent need for staff training have no internal staff; 24% of institutions with an urgent need for staff training have 1 full-time equivalent staff; 19% with an urgent need have 2 FTEs; 17% with an urgent need have 3-5 FTEs; 8% with an urgent need have less than five but more than 10 FTEs; and 4% with an urgent need for staff training have more than 10 FTEs. The trend is the same when considering only institutions that have internal staff.

One-third of institutions report some (31%) or significant (2%) damage to collections due to prior treatment or restoration. While this damage may have occurred before an item entered the institution that currently holds it, it underscores the importance of using trained conservators to undertake treatment projects. It also indicates that a percentage of collections in need may require specialized treatment to ameliorate previous repair.

Half of all institutions have a need and 12% have an urgent need for conservation treatment (figure 8.14). By institutional type, archives have the greatest need at 65%; historical societies have the greatest urgent need at 17%, followed

closely by museums at 16% and archaeological repositories/scientific research collections at 14% (figure 8.15). One-fifth of art museums have an urgent need for conservation treatment, more than any other specific type.

The services of a professional conservator would be required to address the problems of items described here and elsewhere in this report as being in urgent need. Not every institution has the resources to have a professional conservator on staff, but in these cases, institutions can call upon conservators in private practice and at regional conservation centers for assistance.

For more routine preventive conservation activities, institutions can take advantage of training opportunities (a list is provided on the Resources page of [www.heritagehealthindex.org](http://www.heritagehealthindex.org)). Such training is necessary to ensure that staff know the fundamentals in collections handling, storage, environmental monitoring, and other basic preservation activities. Most problems identified by Heritage Health Index data could be reversed if every institution had adequate staff for preservation. At a minimum, every collecting institution should have a dedicated staff person who addresses collections care issues.

### Recommendation

Every institution must assign responsibility for caring for collections to members of its staff.