Chapter 1 Video Transcript
PLANNING FOR YOUR ARCHIVAL COLLECTION

Welcome to Chapter 1: Planning for Your Archival Collection. In this chapter, we're going to talk about a number of planning questions. The decisions you make as you think about these questions will have implications for each of the subsequent steps of building your collection, so this is a really key chapter to spend some time with. Taking the time now will make it more likely that your later steps go much more smoothly.

Some of the questions need to be sorted out here at the start of your effort; others can be tackled later, but we think it's helpful for you to know about them now, and we'll offer guidance along the way about which questions need a decision now vs. later. You can expect that your thinking will evolve about some of these questions, depending on your circumstances and how your collection takes shape, and that's a normal part of the process. We'll go through these planning questions in this video, and you can also find them in the Resource PDF that accompanies this chapter.

And who should be involved in your planning? These planning questions are helpful whether you're working solo on this effort, or if you have a small group of people working together on this. Our field testers found it valuable to have a small team thinking together about the planning, so if you can assemble another person or several other people to work with you, all the better. But if that's not possible for you, you can still make good use of these materials.

This chapter is intended to lay out many of the pieces of the big puzzle of putting together your collection, to provide an aerial view at the start, so that you can decide where to focus as you build your collection. So, while there are many questions to consider, you can determine how big or small to make this project. Here's what one of our field testers said:

> *One of the questions was, why are you doing this? Or what's your goal or point or something? And we're like, yeah, why are we doing this? Because it seemed like a good idea over a beer one night. It is a big project. And sometimes I look at the scope, oh my gosh, we're just on chapter one. Oh my God, there's so much more to do. And I think there's so much else going on in my life. But I also realize it's as big or as small a project as we choose to make it. We don't have a deadline, you know, a firm deadline. So just sort of keep that in mind, keep it in scope, define our scope and then go from there.*

Determining the purpose of your archival collection

So, let's begin. The first question to consider is: **why do you want to create this collection?** Being clear about your purpose for this project will help guide other subsequent decisions.

One of the purposes that might be really important to you is preservation. You want to preserve a record of your group's existence, its activities, and its impact in the world. For instance, in the Overview, we talked about wanting to preserve dances performed by older generations or preserving what is special and distinctive about your group to pass to younger members of the team.

Another purpose that may be really important to you is **access**. There may be someone in your organization who stores all the memorabilia or images or stories of your group's history, but you and your organization want more people to have access to that material. Or you may be a group that has been around for several decades, and your historical material is scattered around the homes of various members. You may be looking to bring it together and have it live together in one location, so people can more easily get at it when they need it.

Another purpose that may be really important to you is **education**. You may want to create a collection in the hope that others can learn from your organization's experiences or its history. For instance, in the Overview, we talked about wanting to share your group's repertoire with others so people could learn more about this type of song or dance.

And it may well be a combination of several or all of these reasons! Here's what several dance team members told us:

> D: What I want is a story of the team for the next generation. We are at a pivotal moment. As the founders of the team are getting a little long in the tooth–or gray in the beard in this case–we know that this is a point in our history when we're going to lose the continuity and some of the excitement and some of the things that have come before, and some of the inspiration for the next generation. And we also have a crop of new dancers who really look like they're going to own it.

> J: I mean, we still have the same foreman–Dave S has been the foreman since Day 1, so, you know, that provides a lot of the continuity.

> D: But one of his goals is to be able to step aside at some day, at some point in the future, which is why this kind of archiving and history and story–to prepare the team for the future, you have to give the story of the past and not the history or not the strict, you

know, date-history of the past, but the story of the past. And that's really what I'm trying to get out of this.

Invariably, as you think about why you want to create this collection, you'll also be thinking about *who* you're creating it for. Is it primarily for the use of your team or your organization? Or do you want the broader outside world to be able to see and use what's in your collection? If you imagine this collection completed and it's now 10 years after its completion, who are the kinds of people who might be interested in seeing what's there? And how might they be using it?

> Spend some time thinking about the questions: **why are you creating this collection, and who is it for? Who do you intend as the audience for it?** These are questions that's good to sort out early on in your process, so spend some time with these.

Determining what you want in your collection

Next, let's talk about three closely related questions:

- **What kinds of physical material do I want to include in this collection, or accept as donations to this collection?**
- **What kinds of digital files do I want to include, or accept as donations?**
- **If I don't already have this material, how will I go about acquiring it all?**

When people think of archival material, they often think first about **images**–photos, slides or video. So, think about whether you want to collect both physical and digital photos. There are trade-off's here. Physical photos take a little more work and care to store properly (something we'll talk more about in Chapter 4). However, the alternative is to scan them and that takes a great deal of time if you have a lot of photos. In addition, if anything ever happens to your scanned photo files, you'll want the physical original in your possession to make new digital copies. In terms of video, if you include physical video tapes, you'll need a place to store them that is protected from the extremes of temperature and humidity. So, it may sound easier to just collect digital photos or video. In some ways, it is, but it will require that you have plenty of digital storage space, as these files can get very large, and the ongoing care of digital files takes a lot of attention. So, there's no right answer; it's up to you for what you want to include.

In considering documents, we'd like to make a distinction between **printed materials** and **written documents** as two different categories. Printed materials include things that have been published elsewhere, such as posters, fliers, advertising material, press releases, or newspaper

clippings. For archiving purposes, we'll define written documents as original, unpublished creations such as letters, notes from meetings, administrative records, reports, written reflections from people in your organization, or emails.

ARCHIVING NOTES

If you are hoping to give your collection to an established archival organization, it's good to know that these types of organizations typically are sometimes reluctant to accept material that has been published elsewhere. Why? In these organizations, the space to store physical material and digital files is at a premium as is the person-power to do the work to prepare the materials, so they tend to prioritize original material that cannot be found elsewhere. However, in some instances, you can make a case for including that material either because it is hard to find elsewhere, or because it is scattered in many locations and your collection brings it easily together.

So, think about whether you want to include written documents and printed materials in your collection. Storing physical paper is fairly straightforward, and many people are already familiar with various ways to store digital PDF files. But again, in Chapter 4, we'll talk a little bit more about ways to store them with long-term preservation in mind.

> *In our experience, we chose not to include a number of newspaper articles that provided information about upcoming dance-outs for a Morris team, because that information could be found in other places in the collection, or in the archive to those newspapers as well. However, in May 1981, an article was published in Smithsonian Magazine about the Marlboro Morris Ale. Because this article was published in a widely read national magazine, and included professionally done photos, we decided to include that in the collection.*

You'll need to consider whether you want to include **physical items** in your collection. Do you have t-shirts or name buttons from an event? Any physical souvenirs of the organization? Do you want to keep an example of costumes or kit that the team wore at various times in its existence? Physical items can be a little trickier to store long-term; they're not complicated to box up and save, but depending on what they are, boxes can get bulky, and you'll just need the space to store them somewhere.

You'll also need to think about what kinds of **digital files** to accept. Here, it's important to know that there are digital formats that are better and worse for archival purposes. Any file format that is the least compressed is best as a master copy to keep in your archival collection. If you don't know what "compressed files" means, that's OK; to help guide you here, we've provided a PDF of preferred archival digital formats. You can also look up this information online. And we'll review this information in more depth in later chapters.

Do you want to create or collect **recorded conversations** from people in your organization? In our case, this was a priority in the creation of the festival's archival collection; what the organizing committee most wanted preserved were people's stories and memories of the Marlboro Morris Ale. Because recorded conversations are such a special kind of thing to collect, we devote all of Chapter 3 to what you need to know about gathering your own recordings.

Finally, **how do you want to go about acquiring all this material for your collection?** You may already have a lot of historical material for your organization and want to collect other stray pieces that you know are out there. Or you may be starting from scratch. Or anywhere in between. In any of these cases, you can decide to take a more proactive approach or a less proactive approach. You can take a more proactive approach by identifying people in your community who might donate material to you and seek them out. Or you can take a less proactive approach by simply issuing an invitation to your community to come to you with material they would like to donate. Or perhaps a bit of both. In our experience, we did a bit of both but found that we had to lean a bit more heavily on proactively seeking people out and approaching them about donating material.

It can be tempting to try to collect a great deal of material so we have one really important piece of advice we can offer you here early in the process: your archival collection does not have to be exhaustive. It does not have to include every photo or handout or poster or video that was ever created or–perhaps more importantly–that people will want to give you! It's OK to start small, see how it goes with one part of your collection, and choose to add more of your material later to your collection. For example, if you're an organization that already has a bunch of material collected and sitting somewhere in a member's home, you can choose one part of your collection, such as your photos or your videos, and go through the steps just with that material. Then as you get to know the process, you can decide at a later time to do another part of your collection, such as all your written documents. You get to decide how to make this process workable for you and your situation.

At the same time, you may certainly decide to set your aspirations high, and that's just fine. We'll try to guide you in finding the balance for what's doable for your situation as we get further into the process.

So, spend some time thinking about the questions: **What kinds of physical material will I gather for this collection, or accept as donations to this collection? What kinds of digital files will I accept? How will I go about acquiring this material for the collection?** While it's good to think about these questions now, we've found that this is very likely a place where your thinking will evolve over time. Once you start actually doing the steps to build your collection,

you'll get a clearer sense of what you want, and how much you can handle. So, you don't have to settle on final decisions at this point; just give yourself a starting point.

Will you accept loans as well as donations?

The next question to consider is whether you will you accept loans as well as donations. Sometimes people are willing to loan material to you but not donate it permanently to your collection. There are big trade-offs to consider with this question. On the one hand, a loan of some material may allow you to have something very special in your collection. However, you will need to protect it carefully and keep track of the owner–or the owner's descendants–in case they would like it returned to them. You'll also need to keep careful track of exactly which parts of your collection are loans vs. permanent donations.

ARCHIVING NOTES It's also important to know that, if you would like to pass on your collection to a professional archival organization, they generally do not accept any loans. Why? Because the time and effort that goes into all the work to make material ready for the public to use is significant. It's not considered worth the time and expense to do that for material that the donor can come claim and take back at any time.

So, consider the question: **Will you accept loans as well as donations?** This is a good question to figure out early on in your process, so that when you get to the steps in Chapter 2, you'll know what to tell your potential donors of material.

Do you want any donated material to be organized by the donor before you receive it?

Some donors of material like to organize it before handing it over, but for others, having to organize it first will create an insurmountable barrier, and you'll never receive some really wonderful artifacts for your collection. You'll need to consider how easy you want to make it for people to donate material to you, how much time you'll have to go through it once you receive it, and how much you and your team enjoy doing the organizing. (It's actually a fun way to see what's in a box of material or a folder of digital files that someone has given you!)

So, make a decision now in this chapter about the question: **Do you want any donated material to be organized by the donor before you receive it?** so that you can be ready to communicate that to anyone who wants to donate material.

Determining how to involve your community in this project

So next, let's talk about how to involve your community in this project. One of the first things to think about is how you will let your community know about this project.

One of the key lessons we learned in this process was the importance of communicating with your community about your archival project, particularly if you are seeking donations of historic material from them.

> *In our example, we needed to explain to them many of the same things we're asking you to think about here:*
>
> - *Why were we creating this collection? Who was it for?*
> - *What would be in it?*
> - *How could they donate material if they were interested in doing so?*
> - *How would they be able to access the collection once it was ready?*
>
> *In addition, we needed to use a variety of means to tell them, and we needed to tell them more than once. We made announcements at our festival every year for the 4 years before our big 50th anniversary. We talked to friends individually as we were touring together at the festival. We created a YouTube video that provided information about the questions above, and then–as we started to have material in the collection–an additional YouTube video that showed a short montage of the different kinds of things we were collecting. We put information on the festival website. Over time, people started becoming more familiar with our project and approaching us about donating material.*

This is also a topic on which, in our experience, we found our thinking evolving over time. We would try one means of getting the word out to our community and see how it went. If it was successful, we would plan to do it again. If it fell flat, we'd think about a different way to get our message out.

> So, **how will you communicate to your community about this project?** This is not something you have to settle at this point in time, but it's certainly valuable to start thinking about it now.

Determining the scope of your project

By now, you may be starting to get a sense of the many tasks that are involved in pulling together your archival collection, so you may be starting to wonder how much time this might need. So, next, we'll talk about two closely related questions:

- **How much time will I need to build my archival collection,** and
- **Who will work on the project?**

Unfortunately, the answer to the question "How much time will I need to build my archival collection?" is: It depends. And it depends on several things.

1) It depends on how much material you collect.

The decision of what to include in your collection–and how much to include in your collection– is definitely up to you, and if you are collecting from your community, you do not have to accept everything that people want to give you. For example, you may not want people to give you ALL of their great photos of your team's history; instead, you might decide to ask people to select their best 10 or 20 or even 50 photos or slides and donate those. You can choose to set limits on how much material people give you, just to keep the task more manageable for you. Your collection can be full and complete without being exhaustive.

And you can set different limits for different kinds of materials. For example, you may want to prioritize visual images in your collection, so you set higher limits for numbers of photos, slides and videos you'll accept, and lower limits for written documents.

2) It depends on how much time you have available to devote to this.

In the Overview, we showed you the big-picture graphic of the various steps in building an archival collection. This can take some time, and we encourage you not to set too ambitious a schedule for yourself. It helps to take months, even a couple years, to pull this all together, because it gives your community more time to become aware of what you're doing, and to begin to participate in it. And unless you're doing this full-time, you'll need the time to work at it gradually and collect enough material to establish the collection you'd like to have.

> *As an example, in the festival collection that we built, we wanted to include the vast photo collection of a very talented amateur photographer. While we wanted all of them, we knew we did not have the time or person-power to organize and label all of them. Our compromise was to keep a selection of them–and it was still a large selection–and then to organize the photos by year, then within that, by different teams that attended*

in that year. We could do that much without making ourselves crazy, and it seemed like a reasonable level of organization to make the photos easier for people to access. Deciding what to keep is often filled with decisions about trade-offs and compromises, and you are in the best position to determine what will work for your situation.

3) It depends on how many people are working on creating your archival collection.

If you're fortunate enough to have more than one person working on creating the collection, or organizing what you already have, there are some different roles that you can consider assigning to people to help move the project along.

Here's our suggestion of one way you might divide up the work:

- Put one or two people in the role of talking to your community and gathering material for the collection. It helps to have at least one clear "point-person" to whom people can go if they want to donate some material to you.

- Put someone in charge of overseeing the progress of steps in the spreadsheet that we'll be familiarizing you with in these materials. This is a great role for your team member who likes to work with information and is good at chasing down and keeping track of all the small details.

- If you can pull in a person or a couple people to help with labeling and creating the searchable information for the various things in your collection, that's really valuable. We can tell you from experience that the most time-intensive part of this entire process is the creation of all the searchable data for each item or file that needs to be attached to it, so that people can find things in your collection. Having several people who can help with this will make this part of the process move along.

- If you decide to record personal stories, you'll want to provide some way for people with hearing impairments to enjoy the recordings as well, so consider either creating a transcript or captioning your recordings and videos. In our work, we opted for transcripts because they can also serve as a useful tool for quickly searching through recorded conversations. However, the process of creating transcripts is another very time-consuming part of the process. Even using transcription software, we found that we needed approximately 4 hours of transcription work for every 1 hour of recording that we generated. Assigning a volunteer or two to work on creating your transcripts can be a useful way to delegate some of the work and can easily happen after your collection is created.

If you are going to be working on this project solo, we strongly encourage you to find at least 1-2 other people who can work alongside you, at least for parts of the process. And if that's not possible, then do what you can as a solo act. Many great archival collections get created over time, not all at once, and you can certainly make a dent in creating your collection, even if you can't do all the steps from start to finish.

One possible source of help for this can be found at your local college or university, if you live near one. Institutions that have degrees in history, library science, public history, or oral history may have interested graduate students who need to complete an internship related to some aspect of archival work.

It may be impossible to really determine how much time you want this process to take, because there are so many unknowns. However, at this early stage, it's useful to have an awareness that your decisions of what to collect, how to collect it, and how to provide access will have an impact on how much time you end up devoting to this project.

> The decision that IS important to make at this time is the question of **who will be working on this project**. Getting those people involved as early in the process as you can will be a benefit in the long run.

Determining how the collection will live on

Depending on the age of your organization, you may have physical material in your collection, or you may only have digital files, or you may have both. So, this is the time to think about where those parts of your collection will eventually each live. We'll talk here about the questions:

- **Where will the collection live, once it's created?** and
- **How will people be able to access the collection?**

Earlier in your planning, we asked you to think about who this collection is for, and that thinking is very relevant here. For instance, if the collection is just for your dance team or your organization, then perhaps it could live at the home of one of your team members. People on the team know where it is and can come to that team member's home if they want to get at the collection. Or if your team already has a website, some of the material could live there. However, if you want the broader music community to have access to it, then finding a home that is more publicly accessible is important. These days, it's fairly easy to set up online access to the digital part of your collection, but finding a good home for the physical part can be

trickier. Would a local historical society be the right home for it? Does your library have a Local History room in which it might live? Is there an official archival repository at a college or university for which your collection would be appropriate? What potential homes for your collection do you want to start exploring at this early stage of your collecting?

Related to that is the question of how people will be able to access the digital side of your collection. It's often tempting to plan to digitize everything that is not already digital, and to have your entire collection available online for your audience. One of the key lessons we learned in this process was that this is not always feasible, and it helps to prioritize what will be available online for your audience. For example, we wanted to have all parts of our festival's collection available online. However, when faced with the prospect of scanning hundreds of pages of organizing committee notes AND posters AND physical photos AND correspondence, we realized we didn't have the time or capacity to digitize all of that. So, we prioritized, and any material that was not digitized would be listed as part of the collection in our online "table of contents" as part of the collection but "not digitized." That way, our audience would know what was included in the collection, but that, in order to see those items, they would need to physically go to where they were stored.

Another option to just letting people know the material exists is to designate someone from your organization to oversee the collection; if someone wants to see an item that's not digitized, they can contact your point person and request a digital copy.

> So, start thinking about these questions: **Where will the collection live, once it's created?** and **How will people be able to access it? If I can't digitize everything physical that I receive or gather, what will get priority? What will I choose not to digitize?** You don't need to make a final decision at this point regarding digitization; it will become clearer to you as you get further in this process. However, starting sooner rather than later to identify where you collection will eventually live is a wise idea.

Once the archival collection is created and stored somewhere, it's tempting to think you're finally done! However, there are a few things you can do to ensure that your collection remains usable into the future. So, let's talk next about the question: **How should I care for the collection once it's created?**

- Particularly if you want to continue to add material to your collection, someone will need to be the point-person to whom new donations are given. That someone needs to understand the conversations that need to happen with new donors, and how to store, organize and preserve the material.

- In order for your audience to be able to open up digital files, someone needs to make sure that they are updated to newer formats as needed. For instance, once upon a time, WordPerfect documents were the norm. Those have given way to Word documents in various updated versions, and now to PDF as the standard for text documents.

- For any digital material, if online links break, someone will need to be responsible for updating and maintaining them.

- Someone needs to be responsible for adding to the "metadata" or the searchable information about both your digital files and your physical items, so that people can find what they're looking for. For example, you collect some older photos of your Morris team dancing from 30 years ago, but you can't remember the names of everyone in the photo, so you list the names of the people you do know. As people see the photo, they volunteer more information about who is in the photo; you'll need someone in charge of collecting and updating that information.

- Keep in mind that when you create an archival collection, you're trying to create something with an indefinitely long lifespan. It helps to have someone who checks on the physical items every so often to make sure they are being stored in a stable condition, free from mold, humidity, water damage, and rodents or other pests. One of the advantages of donating your collection to a professional archive is that it will get that kind of care.

> The decision about **who will be the caretaker or caretakers of your collection** does not need to be settled at this time, but it's helpful to be thinking about who will do so once it's completed. It's great if you can have those people involved during the creation of the collection, so they feel invested in its care.

Alright! That's a lot to think about at the start here, and we hope it doesn't make the project feel too daunting. The good news here is you can do as much or as little as you and your organization have time and capacity for, and whatever you do, there will be more of a historical record left behind than if you did nothing. So, no matter the scope of your effort, you will have contributed something valuable to the greater historical record. And archival collections can be--and often are--created in stages over time.

With that, you're ready to dive into the start of Chapter 2. Look for the introduction video for Chapter 2 and start there.