

PACSCL/CLIR “Hidden Collections” Project

Determining if your collection is a good candidate for minimal processing:

Q: Is the collection in folders and reasonably well labeled?

A: If your collection is already in folders, it is a good indication that the collection is a good candidate for minimal processing. If you look a little further and find that there is no logical reason for the materials to be in the folders, then reconsider.

If your collection is not in folders, it does not mean that it cannot work for minimal processing. If you can easily see materials that fit together, the collection may work very well.

Q: Does the collection have any sort of original order?

A: If your collection has logical and obvious original order, minimal processing should help make the collection quickly accessible, even if the type of material requires more work in the future.

If your collection does not have any discernable original order, it is probably not a good candidate for minimal processing.

Q: Are there multiple creators of the collection? If yes, are their papers easily distinguishable?

A: Multiple creators is one of the largest problems with family papers—there are often so many contributors to a collection and due to family names repeating across generations, it is frequently very difficult to distinguish one creator from another. Generally, we do not consider family paper collections to be good candidates for minimal processing, but there are always exceptions. During the survey process, see if you can tell how many creators you have and how easy it is to quickly determine which papers belong to a particular creator. If you cannot do this in less than an hour, your collection probably should not be minimally processed.

Q: If your collection is an “artificial collection,” is it cohesive?

A: Artificial collections can be terrific or terrible collections for minimal processing. If the collection includes materials that are organized chronologically or alphabetically, it is probably a great collection for minimal processing. If you have a collection that has no real discernable order, it is probably not a great candidate. If your collection is pulled from many other collections or includes many facets of a topic, it probably should not be minimally processed.

Q: How much of the collection is handwritten versus typed? If it is handwritten, is it legible?

A: If you cannot, quickly, determine who created the materials, to whom the materials were addressed or who received the materials, and you have to struggle to discover what type of records they are, the collection should not be minimally processed. If most of the collection is legible and you have only a few documents that require more time, then the collection still may be a good candidate for minimal processing.

Q: Based upon your survey/processing plan, how much work needs to be done to make the collection truly accessible to the type of researchers the collection is most likely to attract?

A: This is a question that requires knowledge of your most common researchers to be answered well. When looking at the collection, determine how your researchers could use the collection. If the type of material needs to be described at the item level, you should not consider minimal processing. If you think that researchers will be able find the material via an on-line finding aid with either series or folder level description, you may want to consider minimally processing for quicker access, even if further processing will be achieved later.

Q: What is the final product you are hoping to obtain?

A: If you are expecting a beautifully arranged collection with no paper clips, staples or rubber bands; all items unfolded; and all items arranged within acid free folders; minimal processing is probably not the desired method. However, you can determine the levels of “minimal” that suit you, your staff, and researchers. You can easily remove all paper clips, but leave staples in; you can unfold all the items in the folder, but not arrange them; and you can choose to re-fold everything in acid free folders (although, this project has found that foldering and labeling collections is one of the more time consuming tasks in processing).

If providing access to your collections is your primary “product,” minimal processing may be a good method to achieve this goal. Minimal processing, ideally, is only a first step in processing; however, realistically speaking, it is likely that most minimally processed collections will not receive further treatment.

These collections are probably good candidates for minimal processing:



These collections are probably not good candidates for minimal processing:

