

**FILES, FIELDS, & SCHEDULES
IN AN ART MUSEUM ARCHIVE**

The Case for Redescribing Legacy Records

Jenna Stout, Saint Louis Art Museum

BACKGROUND



BACKLOG

Over decade of processing backlog



FUNCTION

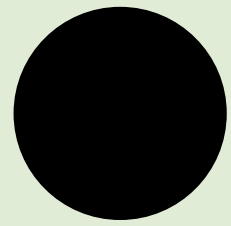
Hybrid records center and archives



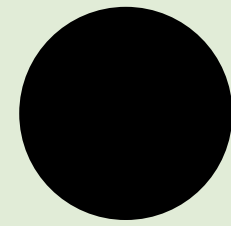
REPORTS

Preservation Needs Assessment; Diversity Study; Critical Cataloging Guidelines

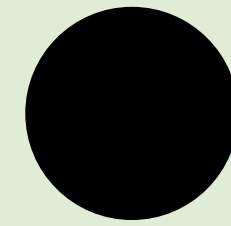
LEGACY FINDING AIDS & CATALOG RECORDS



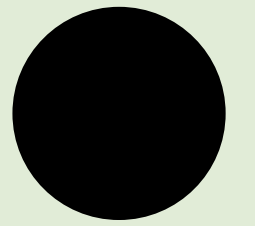
May contain descriptive terms that are harmful, outdated, and offensive (e.g. LC Subject Headings)



Legacy terms may hold a place in museum history (e.g. department name; exhibition title)

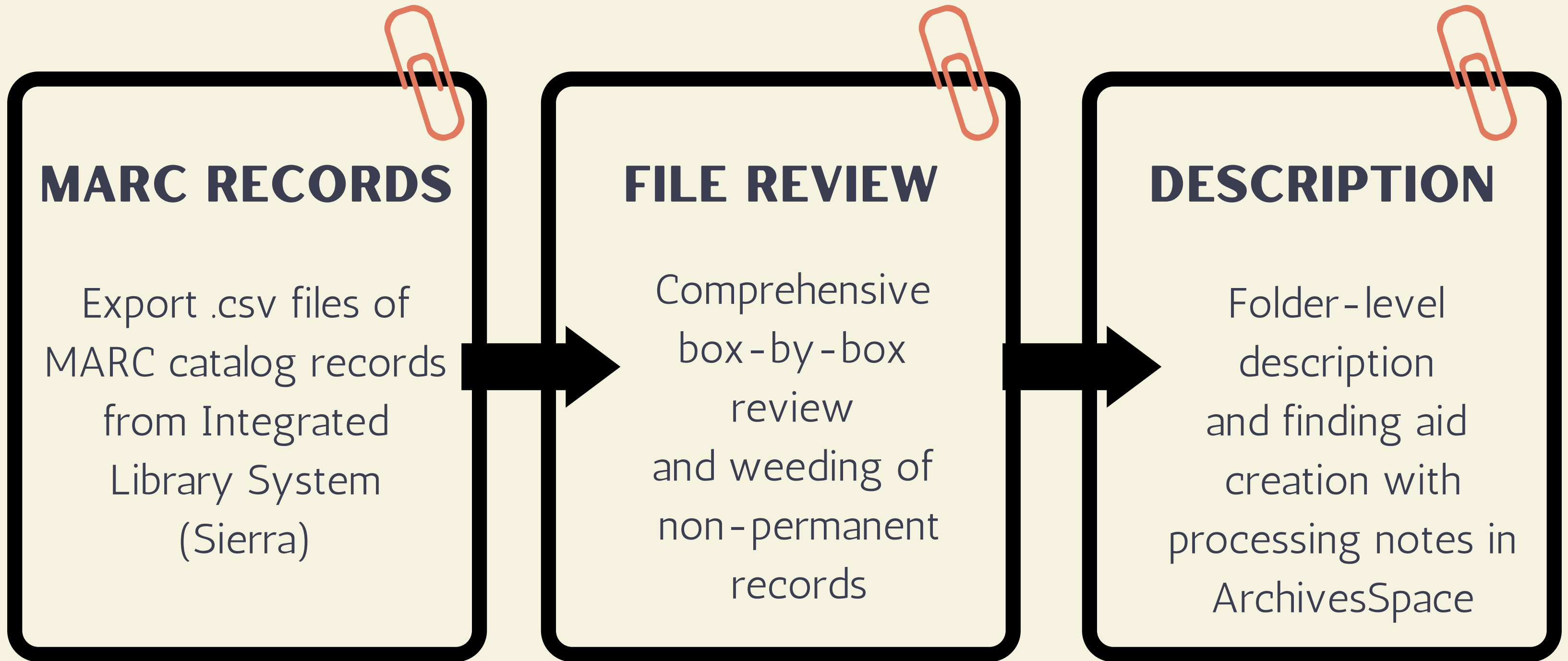


Need to create access points for enhanced discoverability of archival materials



Need to address outdated subject terminology, vague, or nonexistent descriptions

SAMPLE WORKFLOW



PRIORITIZING DEPARTMENTAL RECORDS

CONSIDERATIONS

Supplies and Space

Staffing Levels

ArchivesSpace Implementation

Education Department
Centennial Anniversary (2023)



CUBIC FOOTAGE

Starting Footage

188.69 cubic ft
(147 record carton boxes)

Ending Footage

106.77 cubic ft
(288 letter document boxes)

EDUCATION IN THE GALLERIES



Original caption: *Education Department, Demonstration*

- Early focus on bringing schoolchildren to Art Hill
- Statistical reports note school names, geographical locations (city vs. county), and demographics
- 1920s–1930s: Majority of students visiting from wealthier white suburbs
- Museum may have had free admission, but access and social barriers were in place

EXTENSION WORK



Original caption: *Education Department – School Exhibition, 1962*

- Impact of World War II
- 1942-1966: Program to carry art directly into high schools
- Library displays of smaller objects deemed to have educational value
- Putting to work material from the Museum's storage that was not exhibited in the galleries
- Long-lasting impact of classifying certain objects as study items

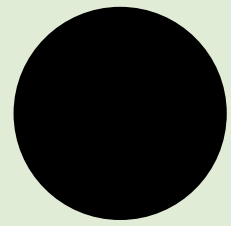
THE PHOTOGRAPH FILE COLLECTION



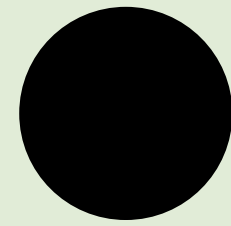
Original caption: *Banneker Group children listen as volunteer guide Mrs. B.F. Smith tells how people in George Washington's day lived.*

- Historic separation of photographs, negatives, slides, and other visual materials from correspondence records
- Centralized, artificial collection called the Photograph File
- Contributed to a loss of context and metadata for many materials
- Lack of inclusive description in historic captions
 - Banneker Project (1964) Documentation

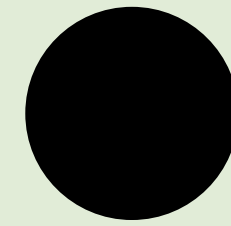
SIFTING THROUGH ADMINISTRATIVE RECORDS



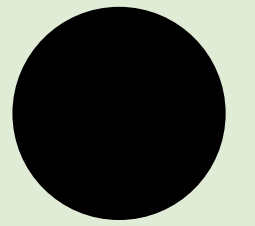
Evaluating
file-naming
conventions in
legacy records
(e.g. general files)



Acknowledging the
Archivist's active
role in shaping an
institutional
repository



Identifying
collecting gaps
in the archival
record



Reframing the
names associated
with certain
records
(e.g. typist initials)

REFINING RECORDS MANAGEMENT



SCHEDULE REVIEWS

Ensuring that record retention requirements reflect institutional activities and comply with regulatory requirements



TRAINING SESSIONS

Incorporating records management into the onboarding process; periodic check-in points to facilitate transfers



OFFBOARDING

Working directly with staff members during the period before their departure to ensure permanent files are archived

NEXT STEPS

- Revisiting suppressed MARC records in new library services platform (FOLIO)
- Streamlining inclusive archival description with recordkeepers across the institution
- Reviewing historical records for typist reference initials on administrative records
- Documenting the stories of craft workers employed at the art museum

CONTACT THE ARCHIVES

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