

# **GUIDELINES FOR THE CURATION OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL FIELD COLLECTIONS**

**Indiana State Museum & Historic Sites Corporation (ISMHS)**

**2021**



**Indiana State Museum and Historic Sites  
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## Introduction

The ISMHS has the mandate: ***“To Collect, Preserve, and Interpret the Cultural and Natural History of Indiana.”*** Some collections generated from archaeological projects carried out by outside parties (e.g., contract archaeology companies or university field projects) are considered to be an effective means of acquiring important scientifically collected materials from throughout the state of Indiana. The guidelines presented herein reflect federal and state statutes and standards and are designed to allow ISMHS Archaeology to incorporate these incoming archaeological collections into the broader museum collections management system for future research, exhibits, and/or other programming.

The standards discussed in this document have been designed to help ensure the long-term preservation of collections. By adequately preserving these materials, ISMHS can ensure these collections are accessible to future generations of researchers and public. The standards also pertain to all documentation that accompanies the physical objects. Without proper provenience, these objects will be of little value in the future.

Although we have tried to cover a broad spectrum of situations and scenarios with these standards. It is impossible to anticipate or cover everything. Please contact museum staff for consultation with questions or unique situations.

## SECTION 1: Policies and Strategies

Acceptance of collections is granted on a project-by-project basis. Reviewing the description and scope of the project and materials in the *Curation Application Form* and *Preliminary Inventory Form* provides the basis for this assessment. In general, the following are guidelines used in determining whether or not curation with the ISMHS is warranted:

- The ISMHS limits their acquisitions to projects that include recovered artifacts. If no artifacts were recovered or if all materials were returned to the landowner or otherwise discarded, curation at the ISMHS is not warranted. The Indiana Division of Historic Preservation and Archaeology (DHPA) is the primary repository for all archaeological reports.
- The ISMHS does not accept field collections that were not acquired in accordance with state and federal laws.
- Ownership of the collection is transferred to the ISMHS, except for material collected from Federally owned property, which is curated under different loan agreements.
- The ISMHS limits its acquisitions to projects that occur within Indiana or bordering counties. There is potential for special circumstances, and ISMHS will consider other collections on a case-by-case basis.
- Curation space is limited to those collections in which archaeological integrity remains intact. There are exceptions to this addressed on a case-by-case basis, but if the collections have been picked over by another party, including the landowner, ISMHS may pass on the collection.
- The ISMHS does not accept collections that have not been subjected to the appropriate sampling/discard policies as predetermined. Please see *GUIDANCE FOR CULLING INCOMING ARCHAEOLOGICAL COLLECTIONS*.
- **Phase I Projects**

To reduce the amount of incoming material, ISMHS is limiting Phase I collections. Typically, if they meet the criteria outlined below, they will be accepted:

- The Phase I collection is part of a collection including Phase II and/or III materials.
- If the archaeological site will need further investigation as determined by DHPA.
- The site is considered eligible for inclusion in the NRHP or IRHSS.
- The collection contains diagnostic material important for the time-period or geographical area.
- The collection is from a geographical area with little / no archaeological data.

If your collection does not fit these criteria and you feel it may be of importance to future generations, please specify your reasons on the *Curation Application Form*.

You can also contact us to discuss why curation of a particular Phase 1 collection is appropriate.

- **Human Remains**

If a potential incoming collection contains remains or objects that fall under the Native American Graves and Repatriation Act, the museum will work with the depositor and representative nations to ensure the proper care and disposition. ISMHS should be contacted as soon as possible if remains are found. We will work with all parties to seek the most effective route in completing the NAGPRA process.

We will immediately contact any organization that submits collections that include NAGPRA materials that was not disclosed to us. Not revealing that NAGPRA material is present can lead to these remains and/or materials being stored in regular collections unintentionally. Please inform us if there is any possibility of NAGPRA involvement.

## **SECTION 2: Establishing a Curation Agreement**

### **SUBMIT THE AGREEMENT FORM AND CURATION APPLICATION FORM**

The curation agreement begins with submission of the Agreement, Application and Preliminary Inventory Forms to the ISMHS. All forms should be completed for each individual project and should be as detailed as possible. These must be signed and mailed (or emailed) or otherwise delivered to the ISMHS at the address provided below in Section 7. Important things to remember about these forms:

- In the *ISMHS Curation Agreement Form*, the name listed as the party responsible for the project will assume responsibility for ensuring that the collection meets the standards set forth in this handbook.
- The *ISMHS Curation Agreement Form* acknowledges that **ownership of the material is being transferred to the ISMHS.**
- The Application Form establishes that one ISMHS catalog number is granted for each individual project as identified by a project report. In other words, ISMHS catalog numbers are associated with larger projects rather than individual site numbers (see Section 3, below).
- In the Application Form, the possibility of NAGPRA involvement should be outlined (if applicable). Further communication will be required to establish ISMHS responsibility and to begin or continue the process of working with tribal officers as soon as possible (if applicable).

Upon receiving these forms, the ISMHS will review the information provided and if accepted, will generate a catalog number for the project and fax, email or mail a copy of the Application back to the Depositor with the assigned catalog number.

## **THE CATALOG NUMBER**

Once the ISMHS agrees to curate the material, a three-part catalog number will be assigned to the Depositor. This number takes the following form: 71.19.457.1.1. The first two numbers are given to every contract project, and the third is specific to the requested project. The fourth and fifth digits refer to a specific site number or field sample and an artifact specific number, respectively. For example;

71 = ISMHS facility

19 = ISMHS, Department of Contract Archaeology

457 = the specific project number given out by the ISMHS

1 = the number associated with a particular site number or field sample

1 = artifact specific number

## **LETTER OF INTENT (IF APPLICABLE)**

A letter showing that the Depositor has located and established an agreement with a curation facility may be required by DHPA prior to archaeological investigation. In this situation, you must submit an *Intent to Curate* form to the ISMHS. This request must give the following information:

- The name of the responsible party (the Depositor) or government agency doing the work
- A brief description of the project
- The UTM designation of the project
- An estimation of the amount of material that will be recovered
- Estimated amount of storage space required for objects and documents

With this information, the ISMHS will send to the Depositor a Letter of Intent to Curate, which can be submitted to DHPA. This letter will not serve as a blanket acceptance of all recovered material. Please see Section 3 for acceptable specimen to retain.

## **SECTION 3: PREPARING COLLECTIONS FOR CURATION**

This section outlines the procedures for processing archaeological material. Once a catalog number has been assigned, the material can be processed. It is expected that all material brought to the ISMHS be processed prior to delivery and “shelf-ready.” This includes washing, analyzing, and cataloguing the material. Unless otherwise pre-arranged with ISMHS collections management, the following criteria must be met. Non-compliance can result in the addition of charges placed upon the Depositor.

In addition, in order to ensure that curation standards can be met for the collection, the ISMHS requires that incoming projects have been subjected to a discard policy. Please read the ISMHS *GUIDANCE FOR CULLING INCOMING ARCHAEOLOGICAL COLLECTIONS*. Be sure to follow DHPA’s standards for documenting culled/sampled material and have all discarded materials documented accordingly in your submission.

## ARTIFACT CLEANING

All artifacts should be cleaned unless this will harm the object or result in the loss of potential data. In general, all artifacts recovered from field projects should be cleaned.

- Clean all material remains using appropriate nondestructive techniques. Artifacts not cleaned because of the potential loss of data must be individually identified, justified, and sealed in plastic bags with acid free paper labels.
- Artifacts must be completely dry prior to being sealed in plastic bags.
- Identify and separate material remains in need of ongoing restoration, conservation, or special storage. If preservation/restoration was performed, documentation of the techniques used must be submitted to the ISMHS.

\*Please see note under **Conservation** (below) regarding mending vessels.

## ARTIFACT LABELING

Artifacts must be labeled in such a way that the site and intra-site provenience data are retrievable. This must be done in an archival-stable manner. All specimens should be catalogued to the fullest extent with the appropriate catalog number.

1. All material, including faunal material, that can be labeled, should be labeled. Care should be taken to avoid labeling specimens in areas necessary for attribute analysis.
2. Specimens too small to be individually numbered are to be placed in a labeled, glass or archival plastic vial, plastic bag, or gelatin capsule. To ensure against loss of provenience and analysis grouping, the label in or on the container should specify that the material remains are not individually labeled.
3. Textiles, some leathers, and basketry should be marked with a sewn-on piece of cotton twill tape on which the number has been typed using a carbon ribbon. Any items that cannot be marked must have a stiff, acid-free card stock or fabric tag affixed.
4. Material not appropriate for individual labeling (floral remains, C-14 samples, soil samples) should be stored in suitable containers with a labeled mylar strip or acid-free cardstock tag placed inside.
5. For **most** materials (e.g., lithics, ceramics, wood, and glass), catalog numbers should be applied with permanent dark ink (India Ink) or permanent white ink between two layers of B-72 (Acryloid B-72). **Clear fingernail polish is NOT acceptable.** If white ink is unavailable, white gesso may be substituted for the first layer. **‘White-out’ is unacceptable.**
6. Pens used to catalog material should have an ultra-fine tip. Most metal tipped pens, such as Rapidoliners, work well and produce dark, easy-to-read numbers. Felt pens, such as Pigma pens, are too light. Calligraphy pens, -carefully applied, are acceptable (... and do not clog with white ink).

7. Plastic items and porous leather items are marked with semi-permanent ink only. While this can allow the numbers to come off, the solute in lacquer may damage some plastics and leather. These items should also be tagged with an acid-free cardstock tag.
8. Bulk un-diagnostic material such as flat glass and body sherds (if not discarded), as well as unmodified flakes from the same provenience that are bagged together can be given the 10% rule where only 10% of the contents need to be physically inked.

## **BAGGING/BOXING**

The most suitable artifact storage container currently available is the polyethylene, 4 mil zip-lock-style bag. Large polyethylene bags with plastic-coated twist ties may prove preferable to zip-lock-style bags **for heavy or bulky materials only**. Paper bags, staples and other metal fastenings are not acceptable. Use archival plastic or acid-free cardboard containers in addition to plastic bags when appropriate for protection of fragile remains.

In order to clearly define all material from specific projects, it is important to bag artifacts in a manner that will facilitate any possible future inquiries/research. ISMHS will not accept boxes of loose artifact bags that have not been adequately grouped together. Generally, artifacts should be bagged according to artifact type and provenience using the following guidelines:

1. Artifacts of the same type and provenience can be placed in the same bag together with an artifact tag. Next, all material from the same site should be gathered in larger bags. These site bags should be clearly marked by catalog number and by site-bag number. For example;

71.19.353.??  
Site 12 Ma 648  
Bag ? of ?

Once material is combined by site, the material can be combined by project. For smaller projects, this can be done by placing the site bags into larger bags clearly tagged by catalog number. For example,

71.19.353  
Bag ? of ?

2. It is possible to box numerous projects together to save space, but the bags and the box must be clearly labeled.
3. Artifact tags need to include the following information;
  - project number
  - site number
  - date
  - provenience data
  - analytical group (and/or artifact ID)
  - number of specimens.
4. Diagnostic artifacts should be in separate bags. Also, it is recommended that bones within a provenience unit be bagged separately by zoological class to prevent or reduce

the crushing of fragile remains.

5. Unless otherwise discussed with ISM Collections Management, boxes used for housing bagged materials must be new, sturdy, acid-free, and of uniform size 15”x12.5”x10” (approximately 1.1 cubic foot). **Each box should not exceed thirty (30) pounds in weight.**
6. Please label each box with the following information:
  - a. State Site Number
  - b. ISMHS Catalog Number
  - c. Project Name
  - d. Box Contents
  - e. Box Number (1 of X)
7. ISMHS does not store unprocessed flotation samples. If needed, arrangements can be made to use the museum’s flotation machine. If soil samples need to be curated, please provide detailed information on the sample’s importance and reason for long-term storage. If soil samples will be retained, we will recommend the best storage methods based upon future use.
8. Specialized storage for fragile or oversized objects. If you have objects that may need special storage considerations or space for oversized objects, please contact the museum for guidance for proper long-term storage solutions.

## **CONSERVATION**

Objects should be ready for long-term storage. Depending upon the context, deterioration/condition, and the research/exhibit value, select objects may need special conservation treatment. A professional conservator should perform the evaluations and, when appropriate, treat the objects with the recommended conservation. ISMHS has a staff conservator and natural history preparator who can provide some technical assistance or assist in finding the right qualified person/institution.

\* Please avoid adhering ceramic and glass vessels together. Contact ISMHS for further information if light reconstruction is necessary. Never use regular glue or cellulose nitrate (docu-cement), and do not apply anything on unconsolidated breaks for low fired ceramics. Please bag all vessel “fits” together by vessel number.

## **SECTION 4: PREPARING DOCUMENTATION FOR CURATION**

This section outlines the documentation needed for each project. Records submitted for curation with collections must be sufficient to document the project, the site, the UTM designations, and its collection for future analysis and interpretation. **The following materials are required with submission of the material.**

## DOCUMENTATION REGARDING OWNERSHIP

For curation, ISMHS accepts archaeological material on the condition that ownership of the material will be transferred to ISMHS. The only exception to this is in regards to federally owned and administered collections in which ISMHS does not take ownership of the material.

1. Paperwork for Federally owned material: *A Memorandum of Understanding for Federally Owned and Administered Archaeological Collections* will be generated. This memorandum has been written in compliance with 36 CFR Part 79 and initiates an agreement in which ISMHS curates but does not take ownership of the archaeological material.
2. Paperwork for all other projects: A signed form or letter giving legal transfer of property from the landowner to the Depositor or ISMHS needs to be submitted to the ISMHS. This is often already part of the forms used by researchers/companies to access properties and acquire the resultant material. Our *ISMHS Curation Agreement Form* outlines the transfer of ownership from the Depositor to the ISMHS, but the documentation (showing transfer from the landowner) is also important. The ISMHS should be notified immediately if material is to be returned to landowner.

## REQUIRED HARD COPIES

- One spiral bound copy of the final report on 20lb bond archival (acid free) paper is required. This must include color images and graphs.
- All original copies of field notes, maps etc. If the project was paperless and field forms and maps are digital, please contact us to ensure we are able open/read the data files you are using.
- A loose copy of provenience (FS) and artifact catalogues.
- If film was used, both prints and negatives in proper archival sleeves and binders.
- Treatments Statements indicating which objects reserved special conservation treatments and a copy of their treatment records. If objects need special treatment, please provide a list of those objects. Unstable objects may be refused.
- Copies of all original reports from outside contracted studies and their results (C<sup>14</sup>, pollen analysis, etc.).

## REQUIRED DIGITAL COPIES

Please use archival quality CDs for all digital records. Additional documentation is required in digital format and all items are required regardless of project size:

- A digital copy of the final report (please ensure the digital version contains all data tables, color photos, etc. as the final version submitted to DHPA).
- Artifact and provenience catalogues separate from the report in either Excel or Access. **Do not use any word-processing document tables as catalogs.** Database formats allow for needed data manipulation such as sorting and counting. Digital catalogues must have the same number of decimal places throughout the number sequence to allow for sorting and rearranging data.
- Site location log which should include the UTM for all sites present in the project area. This is required even if there is only one site present. These UTM points should include a description of the location of the point (i.e.: center of well cistern).
- Photos and photo logs; all photos should be .tiff files.

- Scanned copies of all field notes and other accompanying paperwork.
- Scanned copies of all original reports from outside contracted studies and their results (C<sup>14</sup>, pollen analysis, etc.).

## SECTION 5: SUBMITTING PROJECTS & COLLECTIONS

This section outlines the procedures for submitting material and payment to the ISMHS. As soon as a catalog number is generated by the ISMHS for a project, that number enters the central database for the museum and is tracked. It is therefore imperative that the ISMHS maintain accurate records concerning the progress of projects that are outstanding.

### WHEN TO TURN THE MATERIAL OVER TO ISMHS

It is expected that material be delivered to the ISMHS **no more than 30 days** after the project report has been accepted by the Indiana Division of Historic Preservation and Archaeology. Exceptions to this will only exist upon prior consent from the ISMHS. All collections are subject to monitoring to ensure that projects are being submitted to the ISMHS in a timely fashion. Collections not submitted in a timely fashion will be addressed by the ISMHS and the Depositor. If there is no resolve, the ISMHS will report delinquencies to DHPA.

### DELIVERY

Material should be delivered in person to the ISMHS at a pre-arranged meeting time. It is also possible to have material shipped to the museum, but the material must be adequately packed and marked as fragile for shipment. All shipping charges and insurance responsibilities are the sole responsibility of the Depositor.

### COST

In most instances, the cost of curation is \$400.00 per box (15"x12.5"x10"). If project submissions do not meet the standards outlined in this handbook, the ISMHS will charge an additional \$30.00 for each hour it takes the ISMHS to complete processing the material.

ISMHS current cost of curation schedule is as follows:

- \$400.00 per cubic foot of material, including documentation for all projects on privately owned properties.
- \$400.00 per cubic foot of material, including documentation for all projects on federally owned properties. This fee is the fee for the term of the loan and will be reapplied (charged) / or re-negotiated with a new loan term.
- All collections consisting of ½ box or less will be charged \$200.00.
- No charge for project materials from ISMHS administered properties.
- \$250.00 per cubic foot of material, including documentation, for project material from properties owned/administered by other state agencies.

\*At the discretion of the Director of Archaeology, other arrangements can be negotiated (e.g., for long-term projects) or waived\*

## **BILLING**

Once ISMHS has inventoried a project, an invoice is generated and sent to the Depositor. This bill should be paid upon receipt. Checks must be made out to **The Indiana State Museum and Historic Sites Corporation** and include the invoice number written on the remittance line of the check.

## **ANNUAL AUDITS**

ISMHS will conduct an annual audit of outstanding projects. Depositors will receive a list of any projects still outstanding within the ISMHS system. Depositors will be requested to provide an update for all outstanding projects with estimated timetables for completion.

## **SECTION 6: USE OF COLLECTION**

### **RESEARCH:**

The ISMHS welcomes the use of its collections for both research and interpretation by qualified individuals and institutions. Collections may be used in house, or by loan agreement depending upon the needs of the researcher and the condition of the collection. Inquiries can be made to the Director of Archaeology. Researchers will need to complete a *Request for Access to ISMHS Collections* form prior to visiting. These will be provided upon request.

Researchers must abide by ISHMS use, right, and photography policies. Special permission must be given to reproduce any object(s) from the collection. All displayed or reproduced objects must be credited to Indiana State Museum and Historic Sites. A copy of any publication resulting from the use of the collections must be deposited with the ISMHS.

ISMHS reserves the right to deny requests based on bona fide reasons deemed to be in the interest of the collections and/or the museum.

### **DISPOSITION:**

As the ISMHS assumes ownership and care of collections, it will use best practices in the long-term storage of collections. To properly care for these materials, collections may be repackaged, receive conservation treatments, and be subjected to a culling process.

## SECTION 7: CONTACT/SHIPPING INFORMATION

For Research and Loan Requests:

Michele Greenan, Director of Archaeology  
317-473-0836  
mgreenan@indianamuseum.org

For Curation Agreements, Collection Drop-off, Billing and General Questions:

Gail Brown, Archaeology Specialist and Services Coordinator  
317-234-7803  
gbrown@indianamuseum.org

Shipping and mailing address:

Indiana State Museum and Historic Sites Corporation  
c/o Gail Brown  
650 West Washington Street  
Indianapolis, IN 46204

Indiana State Museum loading dock:

(for material drop off – arrangements must be made with ISMHS staff prior to delivery)  
712 Wabash St.  
Indianapolis, IN 46204