ABSTRACT

Title of Thesis:	COLLECTING WITH CARE: COLLABORATIVE COLLECTION STRATEGIES AND THE CRM CURATION CRISIS IN THE PACIFIC NORTHWEST
	Jordan Leigh Haddad, Master of Professional Studies, 2026
Thesis Directed By:	Dr .Matthew Palus, Department of Anthropology, Cultural and Heritage Resources Management

Archaeological repositories face long-recognized pressures from the accumulation of CRM-generated collections, including storage limitations, underprocessed materials, and long-term stewardship burdens. These pressures reflect not only logistical problems, but also inherited assumptions about archaeological objects as scientific data that should be collected and curated indefinitely. This thesis explores how preservation professionals view the feasibility and need for collaborative collection strategies, and whether they see them as a way to improve stewardship and address the curation crisis. The project draws on decolonizing, Indigenous, and community archaeologies to question archaeologists' default authority over material culture. To assess professional perspectives, this study uses an exploratory survey of preservation professionals regarding collaborative collection strategies, no-collection approaches, selective retention, and perceived feasibility. The project initially aimed for national reach but ended up being framed within the Pacific Northwest. Responses suggest that collaborative collection strategies are needed in the field of CRM and may help address the curation crisis through better stewardship, though the specifics of collection policies will need to be addressed on a project-by-project basis.

The thesis contributes to CRM practice by reframing collection policies as early-stage stewardship tools rather than after-the-fact repository problems.

COLLECTING WITH CARE: COLLABORATIVE COLLECTION STRATEGIES AND THE CRM CURATION CRISIS IN THE PACIFIC NORTHWEST

by

Jordan Leigh Haddad

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Advisory Committee:
Dr. Matthew M. Palus, Chair
Dr. George N. Hambrecht
Dr. Kathryn Lafrenz Samuels

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Preface

When I started this program, I knew that I wanted my thesis to address some aspect of the curation crisis. I have been working in the Pacific Northwest for the past nine years, living in Portland, Oregon, and working for a small firm a short drive across the state border carved by the Columbia River in Vancouver, Washington, where our work takes us far across both states. Like most archaeologists in cultural resources management, I started as an on-call field technician but was able to secure a full-time position by volunteering to help with artifact processing after a data recovery project. That offer quickly evolved into a lab coordinator position, where I worked to prepare and deliver the firm's backlogged projects for curation with the state repositories in Washington and Oregon. I seemed to be a rare type at the firm, willing to meticulously read through repository guidelines and clean, label, bag, and catalog a seemingly countless number of artifacts, print out accompanying reports, track down old notes, and clean up photo logs. I wondered how many other firms struggled with that kind of work as well. Delivering collections to museums and getting opportunities to talk with curators and tour the backrooms further made me start to see the curation crisis even before I had the vocabulary to describe it. Even in states like Washington and Oregon that have state repositories meeting federal standards, it comes at a high cost of operation and storage problems.

Over time, my responsibilities at the firm expanded, and I now work across nearly every stage of a CRM project, from the first cold call through budgeting, research design, fieldwork, report writing, curation preparation, and the delivery of collections to repositories. I quickly became drawn to the "big picture" of archaeology projects, which helped me develop a project

management approach for CRM firms to address the curation crisis, which didn't seem to be discussed as much as practical alternatives.

I started this program during the Spring, with my first class being *Applied Archaeology Theory*. I was given so many great readings that helped me start to think about how CRM archaeology could continue to grow beyond significance narratives and the work I was already so familiar with. So, from early on, I was framing the curation crisis as a methods and theory problem rather than just a practical problem of storage capacity. That theoretical underpinning, together with my experience working with collections in the Pacific Northwest, became the inspiration for this thesis.

Dedication

I could not have completed this thesis and this graduate program without the love and support of my partner, Cache Alberda. We met exactly ten summers ago at a little pizza joint in Cottonwood, Idaho, before descending into the lower Salmon River Valley for field school at the Cooper's Ferry site. We quickly bonded over road trips to small towns, music, hard work, and play. We even survived a brief long-distance relationship before we started building our life together in Portland. You have been by my side through all of this and more, and I can't wait to finally marry you.

This is also dedicated to my mother, Danette Morgan, who has always supported my academic goals and helped me through those difficult teenage years, drove me to my first classes at community college, and saw me walk as the first college graduate in the family. To my father, Jeff Haddad, who taught me from a young age to find joy in hard work and to see that staying up late was worth it for a passion project; you taught me never to lose sight of my passions and sense of humor. To my stepmother, Cristin Haddad, who shares my interest in anthropology and appreciation for how culture is shaped by landscapes (and will be the parent most likely to actually read this thesis). And finally, to all my siblings in our big, crazy family: Paige, Kayla, Scott, Max, Spencer, Cooper, Gabriel, and Henry. I love you all so much.

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I would also like to thank Thesis Chair Matthew Palus for helping me through drafts of my project, the IRB process, and many starts at the thesis workshop. Instructor Marie Archambeault also greatly assisted me by suggesting that I focus my thesis on collection policies and by providing guidance on the structure of my survey questions. All my instructors and classmates in the program have been incredibly helpful. Although I approached this program on a nontraditional timeline and did not belong to a single cohort, I enjoyed the time I did get to spend with everyone. This has truly felt like a nationwide crash course in cultural and heritage resources management that I don't think we could have gotten from a traditional campus. I have learned so much about our field through all the lectures, class meetings, papers, stories, projects, and guidance. I hope for the best for all of your careers. Maybe we will work together again someday.

Finally, I am grateful to everyone who responded to my survey and shared their thoughts with me. I could not have done this without the support of this community.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The curation crisis has been an issue in archaeology since the inception of the cultural resource management (CRM) field alongside landmark preservation laws, but even before these issues of capacity arose, there was an entrenched idea that archaeologists, and archaeologists alone, are the gatekeepers of the material past. This thesis asks: *How do preservation professionals view the feasibility and need for collaborative collection strategies? Do they see them as a way to improve stewardship and address the curation crisis?*

The international "curation crisis" refers to systematic failures in cultural resource management, from fieldwork planning to federal policymaking (Childs 1995:11) that has left in its wake a litany of problems: from overflowing repositories (some of which have been forced to refuse new collections resulting in collections being held in the basements of CRM firms or off-site storage units (e.g. DeVanie 2021)); poorly cared for collections that do not meet curation standards (defined or otherwise) and are literally left to rot (e.g. Childs 1995; DeVanie 2021; Nepstad-Thornberry et al. 2002); "orphaned collections" (Milanich 2005; Olson and Cathcart 2019; Voss 2012); and a failure of many archaeologists to publish any synthesis of their fieldwork efforts at all, often resulting in critical and non-renewable information dying with the archaeologist. Underanalyzed and underreported collections have long been recognized as "archaeology's dirty secret", as Brian Fagan puts it (Fagan 1995:16). These problems make continued archaeological research, a driving goal of curation, difficult or impossible to conduct. One suggestion is that "excavation be halted altogether, or reduced to a minimum, until existing collections are adequately accessioned, analyzed, and reported" (Voss 2012:148), for "how can

we go on excavating new sites when we cannot deal with those excavations we have already done?" (Derks and Tarlow 2011 as cited in Voss 2012:148).

Solutions to keep more from piling up include deaccessioning existing collections (e.g., Childs and Warner 2020; Kersel 2015; Voss 2012), no-collection surveys or "catch-and-release archaeology" (e.g. Derks and Tarlow 2011; Kersel 2015), and rigid pre-accession culling policies (e.g. Childs and Warner 2020; Kersel 2015; Voss 2012).

I argue, however, that in addition to these practical strategies for reducing the volume of curated materials or increasing the space for storing them, solving the curation crisis will require moving beyond what some call the "Storage Wars" (Kersel 2015a; Kletter 2015). Addressing the issue will also require a conceptual reordering of archaeological knowledge-making in which archaeological research addresses community-identified needs, including the treatment and disposition of materials. Not only could this help address the curation crisis, but it could also begin to decolonize the practice of archaeology by applying principles of collaboration and community-based stewardship.

Throughout the thesis project, I considered many approaches to the curation crisis: no-collection policies, limited-collection policies, selective retention based on research value, deaccessioning collections, etc., but with too many ideas in my head and lack of a particular case study for this thesis project to explore any one of these approaches, I decided on a broader approach to survey preservation professionals on the viability of collaborative collection strategies themselves. This question arose from my professional experience as a CRM archaeologist working in the Pacific Northwest, drawing from my network and experience to shape both the problem I saw and the population I could realistically reach.

Chapter 2 offers a theoretical background, examining why archaeological collections are not simply neutral data fragments, and how collaborative approaches challenge traditional ideas of stewardship and authority. Chapter 3 discusses the historical context of the curation crisis, explaining how CRM, salvage archaeology, federal regulations, and a fieldwork-focused culture contributed to it. Chapter 4 outlines the methodology of this thesis, including why a survey questionnaire was used, who was contacted, what questions were asked, and how responses were analyzed. Chapter 5 reports the study's findings. Chapter 6 analyzes these findings, focusing on the open-ended survey responses and connecting them back to theory. Chapter 7 concludes the thesis by discussing the implications of the exploratory study, its limitations, and suggestions for future CRM collection policies.

Chapter 2: Theoretical Background: Why CRM Archaeologists are Prone to Hoarding Data

The early marriage of compliance-based archaeology with scientific modes of thought contributed to the curation crisis for compliance-based archaeology from its very inception. This theoretical background chapter will discuss archaeological theories that helped shape the curation crisis and then demonstrate alternative theories for a decolonized and collaborative approach to archaeological collection policies. These primary theories are presented first in the table below (Table 1) and expanded in detail in the following sections.

Table 1. Theory Shaping Archaeological Collection Practices

Theory	Approximate Period	Collection Principles
Antiquarianism	1800s	Collect and display artifacts of "museum quality". Data collected for their own sake, or in the hope that future study could reveal more about it.
Culture-History	1900-1950s	Diagnostic and exceptional specimens. Artifacts are collected and arranged so that patterns emerge and lead to the creation of broader archaeological models.
Conjunctive Approach	1930s	Some archaeologists start to consider even more classes of artifacts, even seemingly trivial, in the interest of reconstructing paleoenvironments and past subsistence.
Processualism	1960s-Present	Posits that archaeology is a science, and artifacts are the primary sources of data. Artifacts are therefore collected in perpetuity in order to have "reproducible results".
Post-Processualism	1980s-Present	Critiques objectivity, neutrality, and singular interpretation.
Public, Community, and Indigenous Archaeologies	1990s-Present	Emphasizes multivocality. Recognizes that artifacts are connected to living groups of people and put shared authority and community participation into practice.

History of Archaeological Theory in CRM Collections

Humans have undoubtedly always been drawn to collecting and displaying objects of beauty and curiosity. This innate desire is at the root of the archaeological discipline. Archaeology, as a formal study of past human cultures through their material remains, has its roots in antiquarianism.

The formal origins of collections began with the antiquarians for most of the nineteenth century, "who were interested primarily in obtaining and studying artifacts of museum quality" (Altschul 2005:193). During this time, archaeology "passed through a stage in which data were collected entirely for their own sake or in the hope that in the future enough would be known for serious questions to be asked" (Trigger 1989:27).

Scientific application to archaeology began in the early twentieth century, beginning with the culture history paradigm, "the sequence and spatial extent of cultures in a region" (Lyman et al. 1997 as cited in Altschul 2005:194). A key method under this paradigm requires that artifacts are collected and arranged so that patterns emerge, and that conclusions could be inferred based on these results. The focus was to work out the geographical and temporal distributions of archaeological material and to explain changes, which typically followed models of diffusion and migration (Trigger 1989:276).

The urge to collect even more than just diagnostic, museum-quality materials was perhaps introduced by Walter Taylor's conjunctive approach in the late 1930s, during the height of culture-historical archaeology (Altschul 2005:194; Trigger 1989:275). Unsatisfied with culture-history models, which focused on diagnostic types and exceptional artifact specimens—which Taylor viewed as a "mere chronicle" (Trigger 1989:276)—he included many more classes

of artifacts, even seemingly trivial evidence, to be examined and defined in detail in the interest of reconstructing paleoenvironments and past subsistence. The conjunctive approach called for special attention to all artifacts and features, and attached importance to sites "as primary units of analysis" (Trigger 1989:277). Once archaeologists have "synthesized the cultural significance of individual sites", they "could undertake comparative studies" (Trigger 1989:277). His work was most important as a critique of culture-history and as "a call for archaeologists to recover and analyze archaeological data in far greater detail" (Trigger 1989:279). Whether or not Taylor's conjunctive approach helped shape the New Archaeology is debated (Trigger 1989:278), and culture-historical archaeology continued to dominate the practice of archaeology throughout the 1950s (Altschul 2005:194).

The New Archaeology, or Processualism, was introduced in the United States in the 1960s by students of anthropologist Leslie White, most notably Lewis Binford, considered the "father of processual archaeology". White was a cultural materialist trained in the Boasian tradition but broke ranks, striving to make archaeology more like the natural sciences and provide an alternative to the culture-historical models. He proposed a three-tiered model of culture that placed technology and economy at the base, social and political organization above them, and ideology at the top. The model treated the technological/economic base as especially important for explaining cultural change. Binford adopted White's three-layer model of culture and argued that, in archaeology, "artifacts, as objects of material culture, can reflect all three layers, yielding a well-balanced picture of cultures in the past" (Erickson and Murphy 2013:109). That this "total cultural system" can be unlocked by archaeology is a keystone promise made by processualist archaeology. With this view, artifacts are not merely isolated objects: they

potentially hold evidence capable of reconstructing the broader cultural system. The promise of total understanding through artifacts helps explain why comprehensive collection, detailed analysis, preservation, and future reanalysis came to seem scientifically necessary.

A positivist epistemology maintains that "society and culture exert no significant influence on the development of archaeology, which is shaped by explanations based on explicit theories being tested in the light of adequate evidence and according to proper scientific methods" (Trigger 2006:2). Since processualism argues that archaeology is a science, it implies that in order to have reproducible results, all data (e.g. artifacts) ought to be collected in perpetuity, to be assessed and studied by present and future researchers.

In the 1980s, archaeologist William Butler reasserted the importance of making archaeological collections, echoing Binford in the assertion that "archaeology is a comparative science"(Butler 1987:827) and stating that "I can think of few things more detrimental to the discipline than not making collections for present and future research, because the source of replicability of any science lies in its data" (Butler 1987:826). He goes on to say that

> Archaeology is a comparative science, and as a science it requires reproducibility of results, i.e. collections are a must for present and especially future research… Significance determinations are based on replicable data, and field recording and field analysis do not provide the necessary replicability for proper management (Butler 1987:827).

What is an Artifact? Post-Processual Critiques of Collections Made under Processualism

The post-processualist movement coincides with processualism, especially in the United States, and provides critiques of this purely scientific assertion. Anthropologist Paul Roscoe (1995) provides a counter-argument to the positivist epistemology: "Since positivists reputedly

believe scientific method—and *only* scientific method—produces 'truth' or 'objective knowledge,' they advocate its application to all forms of subject matter and its displacement of all other means of knowing" (1995:494). This relates to how collections are made, preserved as empirical evidence, and regarded as the sole valid method for generating archaeological knowledge.

Many artifacts and ecofacts that have not been fully analyzed at the time of their accession are held onto out of a belief that one day advancements will be made in the field that unlock their full interpretative potential. Trigger presents a challenge to this notion:

> The data recovered in the past are often neither adequate nor appropriate to solve the problems that are considered important at a later time. […] New perspectives frequently open up whole new lines of investigation. […] Hence, while archaeological data are being collected constantly, the results are not necessarily as cumulative as many archaeologists believe. Indeed, archaeologists often seem to build more on what their predecessors concluded about the past than on the evidence on which these conclusions were based (Trigger 1989:16).

It is important to reconsider that what is being curated is not simply archaeological data. A post-processual approach adds an overlooked dimension in defining artifacts, or material culture, as not simply archaeological data points, but also as symbols of power and cultural identity, especially for marginalized groups. Laura Jane Smith (2001) applies Foucault's theory of governmentality to illustrate how archaeological knowledge becomes implicated in the governance of cultural identity:

> Material culture, defined as 'heritage', plays an important role in symbolizing cultural, social and national identities. As heritage, material culture provides concrete symbols, links and physical 'evidence' for the construction of social and cultural identities in understandings of the past. There is tension between this use of material culture as 'data', as the values and meanings that are generated by these uses are very different (Smith 2001:98).

Bonnie Clark (2018) observes that the very word "artifact" is a neologism derived from two Latin terms: *ars* (skill) and *factum* or *facere* (something made or done). She notes that the word "fetish" shares the same root (*facere*), a connection she argues should "give archaeologists pause" (547). Clark suggests that labeling a portable object an "artifact" functions similarly to calling it a fetish: it "takes it out of the mainstream of life" and translates it into a specialized "archaeological dialect". This process of objectification transforms a piece of a shared, lived past into sterile "data," effectively estranging descendant communities from their own heritage. “An archaeological artifact is no longer part of a shared vernacular past; it has become data” (Clark 2018:547).

A popular definition of archaeological sites and the artifacts they produce is that they are “significant and nonrenewable cultural resources” (Butler 1979:797; Nepstad-Thornberry et al. 2002:i). I would like to add that this definition requires a little more nuance. Altschul (2005) has argued that the bar for significance has been set low (197), and that redundant information can be made significant. Can we really claim that all archaeological objects are nonrenewable? Considering that a strictly scientific approach may have contributed to a critical volume of collections, what would curation look like under a post-processualist framework?

Shifting to Community-Based Collections

Moving toward decolonizing archaeological collections would mean, in part, questioning archaeologists’ presumed ownership, authority, research priorities, and exclusive control over cultural materials. The Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) forced a reckoning with long-held assumptions in archaeology. As Gonzalez et al. (2006)

observe, “The most weighty reevaluation has been of a revered archaeological assumption: that archaeologists are the best and only stewards, preservationists, curators, and owners of the past-no matter whose it may be” (393). Collaboration is a framework that shifts archaeology from an expert-driven science to an ethically engaged practice that shares authority with those most affected by its research; the community.

Chip Colwell (2016) defines collaboration as a dynamic and fluid continuum of practices that measures the degree of power and control shared between colonial control on one end of the spectrum and community control on the other. A key theoretical emphasis on collaboration is a kind of “critical multivocality” in which numerous voices develop goals jointly, exchange information freely, and there is full stakeholder involvement with realized benefits for all parties (116-117).

Collaboration is importantly distinct from the legal mandates of consultation, such as those under Section 106 of the NHPA or NAGPRA, which involve procedural steps, compliance, and “government-to-government” interaction. Collaboration represents a voluntary shift in mindset that emphasizes social relationships, equitable communication, joint decision-making, and “virtue ethics”. It represents a paradigm shift from exclusivity towards inclusivity. Ultimately, true collaboration transforms archaeology into a science driven by an ethical engagement with key publics, resulting in a richer, more accurate interpretation of history through shared stewardship (Atalay 2012:38; Colwell 2016:119; Gonzalez et al. 2006:393).

Through this definition, collaboration represents degrees of power and control for a given project, not merely participation amongst all communities. Multiple communities can include descendant, local, and professional stakeholders. Descendant communities are groups that claim

a cultural or lineal connection to the ancient peoples and heritage under study (Colwell 2016:113; Gonzalez et al. 2006:32). A broader definition of descendant communities can be applied to non-NAGPRA contexts, including non-federally recognized groups, ethnic minorities, and diasporic populations whose histories have been marginalized (Bruchac 2014:2069; Colwell-Chanthaphonh et al. 2010:232). Communities are also defined by geographic proximity to archaeological sites, regardless of whether a direct ancestral link exists, as well as economic and social stakeholders (Atalay 2012:22). There are also multiple "publics" in the community that interact with archaeology in distinct ways, including diverse audiences as well as professional communities (Atalay 2012:42). In the context of collection management, the definition of community expands to include an additional suite of actors who share responsibility for material remains, involving private landowners, developers, repository personnel, and government regulators (like SHPOs) (Cofield 2019:91; Majewski 2019:68). Scholars like Colwell and Atalay emphasize that communities are rarely uniform or cohesive; they often consist of various factions with diverse, and sometimes conflicting, goals (Atalay 2012:25; Colwell 2016:118).

For the purposes of this thesis, concerning non-NAGPRA and Pacific Northwest-based projects, parties who may participate in collaborative collection decisions could include Tribal Nations / Tribes, who are potentially sovereign political entities with distinct governmental, cultural, legal, and ancestral relationships; descendant communities, communities connected by cultural or lineal descent (this may include Tribal communities but is a broader category); local communities and landowners, affected through geography, property, family history; and professional actors, including CRM archaeologists, repositories, SHPOs/agencies, project proponents, specialists.

While many groups may have an interest in archaeological collections, inclusion in a collaborative process does not mean equal legal, political, cultural, or decision-making authority. Colwell prioritizes descendant communities as the "key publics" (Colwell 2016:119) who are most affected by the research, emphasizing that these communities are the "very people whose ancestors are the source of scientific data" (Colwell-Chanthaphonh et al. 2010:230) and should therefore never be excluded from the research process. Other local publics may also be relevant depending on the project.

Chapter 3: Historical Background: How the Curation Crisis Happened

This chapter builds on how archaeological theory has influenced CRM practice by shaping the professional assumptions underlying preservation laws such as the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA). These laws, along with agencies, professional standards, and archaeological theory, mutually reinforce each other regarding archaeological collections. Initially, NEPA and NHPA expanded American CRM and required archaeologists to assess historic significance and mitigate effects. These duties are interpreted through culture history and problem-oriented scientific archaeology, with data recovery becoming a standard mitigation method. Salvage efforts prioritized quick recovery and collection, while long-term preservation lagged.

Federal Preservation Law and the Expansion of CRM

Federal involvement with curation began with the Antiquities Act of 1906, which mandated that artifacts be "properly cared for" after excavation (Thompson 2000 as cited in Lyons et al. 2006:4 and Nepstad-Thornberry et al. 2002:2). Curation was manageable for most of the 20th century (Crane and Heilen 2019:163; Sullivan and Childs 2003:18), until legislation was passed in the 1960s that drastically increased the amount of archaeological research conducted in the United States; mainly, NHPA of 1966 and NEPA of 1969 had the most dramatic impact on the amount of archaeological research conducted in the United States, with most projects undertaken for the sole purpose of mitigating development activities (Lyons et al. 2006:4;

Nepstad-Thornberry et al. 2002:2), as opposed to pure research. The result of increased excavation translated to an exponential growth of artifacts with obligations to be cared for, yet provided no effective procedures for carrying this out (King 2000 as cited in Nepstad-Thornberry et al. 2002:2).

The federal legislation intended to protect heritage paradoxically generated a massive surplus of collected material without providing the infrastructure to care for it. Following the massive federal construction projects of the post-WWII era (dams, highways, and urban renewal), Congress passed a suite of laws that fundamentally changed the scale of American archaeology. Key legislation includes the Reservoir Salvage Act of 1960, the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, and the Archaeological and Historic Preservation Act of 1974. NHPA and NEPA, in particular, created the legal backbone for CRM to exist as its own specialized field of archaeology.

The Archaeological and Historic Data Preservation Act (AHDPA) was enacted by the federal government in 1974 to address concerns regarding protection of archaeological collections. It required that the Secretary of the Interior consult with groups in order to determine the ownership and the most appropriate repository for recovered artifacts from federal work (Nepstad-Thornberry et al. 2002:3). "Unfortunately, the AHDPA had no sanctions associated with it and was largely ignored by federal agencies" (Lyons et al. 2006:4).

In 1979, the Archaeological Resources Protection Act (ARPA) set forth procedures for obtaining permits for conducting archaeological fieldwork on federal lands. For collections, this law acknowledged federal ownership of artifacts collected from federal lands, and required the

resulting collections be held in federally compliant repositories pursuant to a formal written agreement (Lyons et al. 2006:4; Nepstad-Thornberry et al. 2002:3).

Legal mandates for consultation in the United States are rooted primarily in Section 106 and in NAGPRA. Under Section 106, formal consultation is required during an undertaking, and the federal agency must make a "reasonable and good faith effort" to identify historic properties, consult with Tribal Historic Preservation Offices, SHPOs, and consulting tribes, and seek to avoid, minimize, or mitigate adverse effects (36 C.F.R. §§ 800.1–800.6). Also introduced through this legislation is the concept of historic significance for management purposes:

> These acts allowed the excavation of archaeological sites important enough to be eligible for the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) to be considered a mitigation action of proposed destruction of these sites caused by federal undertakings. Curation of the recovered collections was an important component of data recovery. The costs of curation, however, were underestimated (Lyons et al. 2006:4).

Significance at the time of the NHPA's passing was influenced by the two, often competing discourses of archaeology in the United States; culture history and problem-oriented hypothesis testing (both in Taylor's conjunctive approach and the New Archaeology). "Significance prescribed in the law became a reflection of the prevailing schools of thought. The melding of research problems, hypothesis testing, and culture history was much like a shotgun marriage. The law required archaeologists to define significance, and these were the various approaches on the table" (Altschul 2005:196).

These laws, particularly Section 106 of the NHPA, mandated that federal agencies identify and mitigate the effects of their projects on cultural resources. This led to a massive increase in the volume of fieldwork conducted to "clear" areas for development. "Mitigation" is

an operative word here. While mitigation can be interpreted in various ways, in compliance-driven archaeology it has long been almost synonymous with data recovery. Further, the urgency of development in the post-war boom led to a specific mode of practice known as "salvage archaeology". The goal was to save data from immediate destruction, which prioritized rapid recovery over careful analysis or future planning. This ethos led to the accumulation of artifacts across the country that is difficult to conceptualize.

Barbara Voss's 2012 case study of the orphaned Market Street Chinatown project (1985-1988) is an example of how curation suffered under salvage archaeology. To keep pace with construction, archaeologists used a "rapid recovery method", but because there were no long-term curation plans, the collection was processed minimally and then stored in a warehouse lacking environmental controls or security, effectively becoming "orphaned".

The General Accounting Office (GAO) issued a report in 1987 (GAO 1987) that revealed staggering problems concerning the curation of federal collections in non-federal repositories. Many of the repositories had no collection inventories; had lost or destroyed records; cataloging backlog of several million artifacts; and about 30% of the facilities had already run out of storage space (Childs 1995:12; Nepstad-Thornberry et al. 2002:3). As a result of this report, the Code of Federal Regulations Title 36 Part 79 (36 CFR 79) was issued in 1990, providing guidelines for preserving archaeological materials and associated documentation (Nepstad-Thornberry et al. 2002:3). These regulations also highlighted repository staffing, inventories, inspections, physical security, conservation, access, and use of collections (Lyons et al. 2006:4).

That same year, Congress passed the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA). This legislation required the inventory and repatriation of Native

American human remains, funerary objects, sacred objects, and objects of cultural patrimony held both in federal and federally funded repositories. NAGPRA included deadlines for compliance and penalties for noncompliance (Lyons et al. 2006:4; Nepstad-Thornberry et al. 2002:4). "The federal mandates for curation and repatriation have increased the amount of time and money required by museums and other curation facilities to even begin to meet minimal standards" (Nepstad-Thornberry et al. 2002:5). In a way, NAGPRA has shown how little archaeologists do with what they have collected since the late nineteenth century.

A "Fieldwork First" Paradigm

A long-held belief within the field is that "excavation is the heart of archaeology" (Derks and Tarlow 2011:1). There is a pervasive disciplinary bias that privileges the act of excavation and discovery over the subsequent tasks of processing, publication, and curation (Kersel 2015:44). Voss (2012:149) describes this as an "epistemological rift in archaeological theories and methodologies" that views excavation as the primary source of information and in contrast, curation processes as secondary and reflexive, performed by *technicians* and not *experts*. Childs puts it succinctly and provides a feminist perspective: "True, excavating a pot can be an exciting process of discovery. Cleaning, analyzing, inventorying, and boxing that pot, however, is frequently viewed as drudge work to be relegated to people who cannot "make it" in the field. All too often, this means women, whose status may mirror the lower pay of indoor assignments" (Childs 1995:12).

This hierarchy of values is a primary driver of the global archaeological curation crisis, as it fosters a culture where amassing collections is viewed as the "real" work of an archaeologist,

while managing them is treated as an afterthought (Childs 1995:12). As Bustard points out in her overview of *Archaeological Curation in the 21st Century*, "It is as though archaeologists collect things and then the objects disappear into another realm of responsibility" (2000:14).

Within the academy, original field research is often the primary metric for career advancement, tenure, and reputation (Campbell 2011:14). In fact, there are few undergraduate or graduate archaeological curricula that include courses on professional, effective curation and collections management (Bustard 2000:14). Further, these academic excavations often go underanalyzed and unreported, making it seem as though these excavations never took place, and it has long been called the "dirty secret" of archaeology (Kersel 2015a:46).

> This is exacerbated by the prevailing leitmotifs of 'you are not a real archaeologist unless you excavate' (Jamieson) and that 'every sherd is sacred' (Silberman). This heady combination linked with a paucity of financial support for the post-excavation phase of research has resulted in a worsening storage conundrum" (Kersel 2015b:79).

It has even been suggested, by both archaeologists and politicians across the United States and Europe, that excavations halt until the currently existing collections can be analyzed (Voss 2012:148), for "how can we go on excavating new sites when we cannot deal with those excavations we have already done?" (Derks and Tarlow 2011 as cited in Voss 2012:148). While it may seem unreasonable to halt excavations in the CRM context, it may be time to embrace more creative mitigation solutions rather than defaulting to data-recovery excavations. One way to identify appropriate mitigation is through discussions with local and descendant communities.

Archaeology is a discipline "that is, perhaps uniquely, defined by its dominant method of evidence collection and generation of data" even though "it is one means, among many, of gathering primary data" (Derks and Tarlow 2011:1). In challenging the idea that fieldwork is the

only primary source of knowledge-making, Voss argues that "any solution to the curation crisis must be led by a conceptual reordering of archaeological epistemologies in which curation processes are recognized as a source of knowledge about the past in their own right" (2012:149). I would add that oral histories, ethnographies, and participatory research are also due for recognition as primary sources of archaeological knowledge.

Curation must be an integral part of archaeological praxis, not a costly afterthought (Kersel 2015a:53). As National Park Service archaeologist Bob Sonderman, an early proponent of proactive measures such as deaccessioning, has stated, "There's not a god of archaeology that can tell us what to do". If researchers and curators don't sort out the issues themselves, "some bureaucrat will start making these decisions for us" (Reichhardt 2007:37).

Archaeologists cannot avoid collection decisions; refusing to plan simply transfers those decisions to repositories, agencies, or later administrators. Collection policies offer a way to make those decisions earlier and with appropriate collaborators. The next chapter explains how this thesis study was structured to survey preservation professionals about whether such an approach is feasible and useful.

Chapter 4: Methods and Data Collection

Building on the theoretical and historical framework discussed in previous chapters, this study used a survey to explore whether preservation professionals view collaborative collection policies as feasible, useful, and relevant to the curation crisis, and to gauge opinions on alternative collection strategies. Previous chapters explain why collection practices need to be questioned. The survey asks whether professionals see practical room to question them within CRM.

Collection strategies/policies appear to be a niche topic in discussions about the curation crisis, which typically focuses on solutions to existing problems rather than addressing them before they arise, especially by the CRM firm handling initial collections. Collection policies could help address issues with curation and stewardship before anything is removed from the earth. CRM practitioners could address curation at the start of a project by presenting a written collection strategy in a project's research design.

I define collection strategies as the broader set of approaches used to decide what is collected, documented, analyzed, retained, curated, or not collected. Collection policies refer to the written agreements/plans within a research design that formalize those strategies for a project, region, agency, or consultation context. Collaboration refers to the framework for sharing and negotiating authority among appropriate participants. Community refers to people or groups most directly affected through cultural, ancestral, local, or social relationships to the archaeology. These function as my analytical definitions. Survey respondents were not supplied with these concise definitions.

Recent discussions surrounding NAGPRA and collaborative stewardship have prompted broader reconsideration of archaeological ownership and authority. If the field increasingly recognizes that descendant communities should have greater authority over collections after excavation, shouldn't collaborative decision-making begin before collection occurs?

Research Design

The survey aimed to explore perspectives about collection strategies from a broad range of cultural and heritage resources management professionals nationwide. It included CRM practitioners, State Historic Preservation Offices (SHPOs), Tribal Historic Preservation Offices (THPOs), museum and repository staff, and other preservation experts to evaluate the potential and effectiveness of collaborative and alternative collection strategies in addressing the curation crisis. The questions examined the necessity of new approaches, the feasibility of no-collection and selective-retention methods, and their assumed outcomes. The primary aim was to understand professional opinions rather than generate statistically representative data.

It is important to note that while a national reach was the original aspiration of this thesis, the final study has been defined by the sample actually obtained: an exploratory survey with a strong Pacific Northwest focus, influenced by my own experience with collections management in the region.

Survey Development and IRB Review

To complete this thesis survey, I first went through the Institutional Review Board (IRB) process and completed training in social and behavioral research. The IRB review was conducted because the project involves surveying human participants. However, the IRB determined that

the project does not qualify as human subject research. This exemption is documented in the IRB exemption letter, which can be found in Appendix A.

The survey was created in Google Forms. It started with a consent agreement, and all responses were anonymous unless participants chose to share contact information for optional follow-up. Even in those cases, this identifiable information was not shared in this thesis. To facilitate participation and analysis, the survey was designed to be completed quickly with only eleven questions, and all but one were multiple-choice (Table 2).

The main part of the survey (Questions 4-9) consisted of five-point Likert-type agreement items that asked respondents to indicate the direction and intensity of their perception using ordered response categories. Categories ran from Strongly Agree through Strongly Disagree, with Neutral as the midpoint. Likert-type items were used for five reasons: 1) The research concerned perceptions, not directly observable facts. It provided a structured way to record attitudes and professional judgments. 2) They captured degrees of agreement rather than forcing yes-or-no answers. A binary question would have flattened substantially different positions. For example, “Strongly agree” may indicate confidence or enthusiasm; “Agree” may indicate qualified support; “Neutral” may indicate uncertainty, mixed views, or insufficient experience; and “Disagree” and “Strongly disagree” capture different levels of opposition. 3) Standardized categories made the questions comparable. The distribution of responses could be compared across several connected issues. It also made it possible to compare responses descriptively across demographic markers. 4) They reduced respondent burden. A repeated five-category format was easy to understand and quick to complete. 5) They supported straightforward

exploratory analysis. Response counts, percentages, grouped patterns, and visual displays could be generated for each response.

The final open-ended question counterbalanced the limitations of the Likert-type items, which simplify these complicated professional decisions. Collection strategies depend on law, ownership, material type, repository capacity, research questions, consultation, cost, and project context. Question 10 allowed participants to explain why they selected a category, introduce conditions, or challenge the premise of a question.

Table 2. Survey Questions

Question	Answer Choices
1) What best describes your professional or community connection to archaeological collections?	Cultural Resources Management (CRM); Tribal Historic Preservation Office (THPO); State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO); Museum/Repository; Other; Prefer Not to Answer
2) What is your age range?	18-29; 30-39; 40-49; 50-59; 60+; Prefer Not to Answer
3) In which U.S. region do you primarily work?	Northeast; Southeast; Midwest; Southwest; West; Pacific Northwest; Multiple Regions / National Work; Outside the United States; Prefer Not to Answer
4) Do you think it is logistically possible to collaboratively develop a collection policy as part of a research design before fieldwork?	Strongly Agree; Agree; Neutral; Disagree; Strongly Disagree; Prefer Not to Answer
5) Do you think developing collaborative collection strategies is needed in the field of CRM?	Strongly Agree; Agree; Neutral; Disagree; Strongly Disagree; Prefer Not to Answer
6) Do you think a collaborative approach to collection strategies would help address the curation crisis by reducing unnecessary collections and/or improving stewardship?	Strongly Agree; Agree; Neutral; Disagree; Strongly Disagree; Prefer Not to Answer
7) Do you think meaningful archaeological research can be done if no artifacts are collected from the field?	Strongly Agree; Agree; Neutral; Disagree; Strongly Disagree; Prefer Not to Answer
8) Do you think retention strategies (defined as selective discard based on research value, or other criteria) can be implemented by a CRM firm? For example, a sample of glass shards is collected in the field, analyzed in the lab, and then discarded after analysis.	Strongly Agree; Agree; Neutral; Disagree; Strongly Disagree; Prefer Not to Answer
9) Do you think different collection or retention strategies are appropriate for different categories of archaeological materials?	Strongly Agree; Agree; Neutral; Disagree; Strongly Disagree; Prefer Not to Answer
10) Is there anything else regarding archaeological collection policies and strategies that you would like to discuss?	Short response
11) Would you be willing to be contacted for clarification or a follow-up discussion?	a. Yes: email or other contact information b. No

Survey Questions

Questions 1 to 3 gathered demographic information, including professional ties to archaeological collections, age groups, and geographic locations. These aimed to detect common patterns and biases within these groups. Questions 4 to 6 explored the feasibility of implementing collection policies, their usefulness, and their potential role in addressing the curation crisis by possibly reducing material collection and promoting stewardship. Questions 7 to 9 focused on practical alternative collection strategies, including no-collection policies, selective collection, and differentiating between types of materials, such as historic and non-historic. Question 10 provided space for final reflections, while Question 11 allowed participants to share contact details for follow-up, enabling further discussion if needed. The Likert-type agreement questions paired with the open-ended responses created the crux of the survey methodology. Questions 4-9 established broad response patterns, while Question 10 provided context, qualifications, and implementation concerns that fixed-choice responses could not capture.

Survey Distribution and Sample

The survey was first distributed via email through my personal professional network throughout Washington and Oregon states, including current and previous coworkers and classmates, connections with the Washington Department of Archaeology and Historic Preservation (DAHP), the Oregon SHPO, repositories including the Burke Museum of Natural History and Culture, the Oregon Museum of Natural and Cultural History (OMNCH), the Vancouver Historical Museum, and Fort Vancouver National Historic Site (FOVA), and THPOs

within my network, including the Cowlitz Indian Tribe, the Confederated Tribes of the Grande Ronde, Chinook Indian Nation, the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Nation, the Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakama Nation, the Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs, the Nez Perce Tribe, and the Shoalwater Bay Tribe.

The survey was then publicly shared via a LinkedIn post on June 11, 2026. The survey was left open for one month to gather responses. A total of 27 responses were received by the survey close date on July 11, 2026.

Data Analysis

Survey responses were collected in the Google Form and a linked Google Sheet. The analysis includes descriptive statistics for all multiple-choice questions, summarizing overall response patterns. Open-ended answers were examined using a thematic review to identify recurring ideas and key insights. In addition, comparisons were made across professional groups and regions, but only when sample sizes were sufficiently large to support meaningful interpretation. It is important to note that the survey aimed for national reach, but in practice it relied heavily on a network-based approach, faced time constraints, and was affected by self-selection and uneven representation among professional groups. It is important to stress that the sampling method is exploratory and qualitative, not designed to reflect a statistically representative national opinion.

Chapter 5: Results

This chapter presents the survey results, without interpretation, for the 27 responses received during the one-month survey period. Results are presented with both counts and percentages. They will be presented in four groupings. First, demographic categories of respondents (Questions 1-3). Second, the Likert-scale responses regarding the implementation of collaborative collection policies, including the logistical feasibility of collaborative policy development (Question 4), the perceived need for collaborative strategies (Question 5), and the perceived relevance to the curation crisis (Question 6). Third, the Likert-scale response concerning the implementation of alternative collection policies, including the perceived viability of no-collection research (Question 7), the perceived feasibility of selective retention (Question 8), and the appropriateness of material-specific strategies (Question 9). The open-ended responses (Question 10) will be presented in the Analysis chapter, with each response assigned an anonymizing number to facilitate discussion in the following Analysis chapter.

Here, only limited cross-comparisons among a single demographic, professional connections to archaeological collections, are presented in tables, as these were most relevant for this thesis. Cross-comparisons by age ranges and demographic regions were beyond the scope of this work and limited by the relatively low response rate, but are discussed further in the Conclusion chapter.

Demographics

The demographic questions addressed the respondent's professional or community connection to archaeological collections, their age range, and the region where they worked. These questions were asked to explore whether there were any biases or discrepancies across these demographics in any of the following questions or clarifications raised in the open-ended responses.

The majority of respondents, 51.85%, worked in CRM (n=14), followed by 22.22% in the nondisclosed "other" category (n=6), followed by 11.1% museum/repository staff (n=3), and an even split of 7.41% SHPOs (n=2) and THPOs (n=2) (Figure 1).

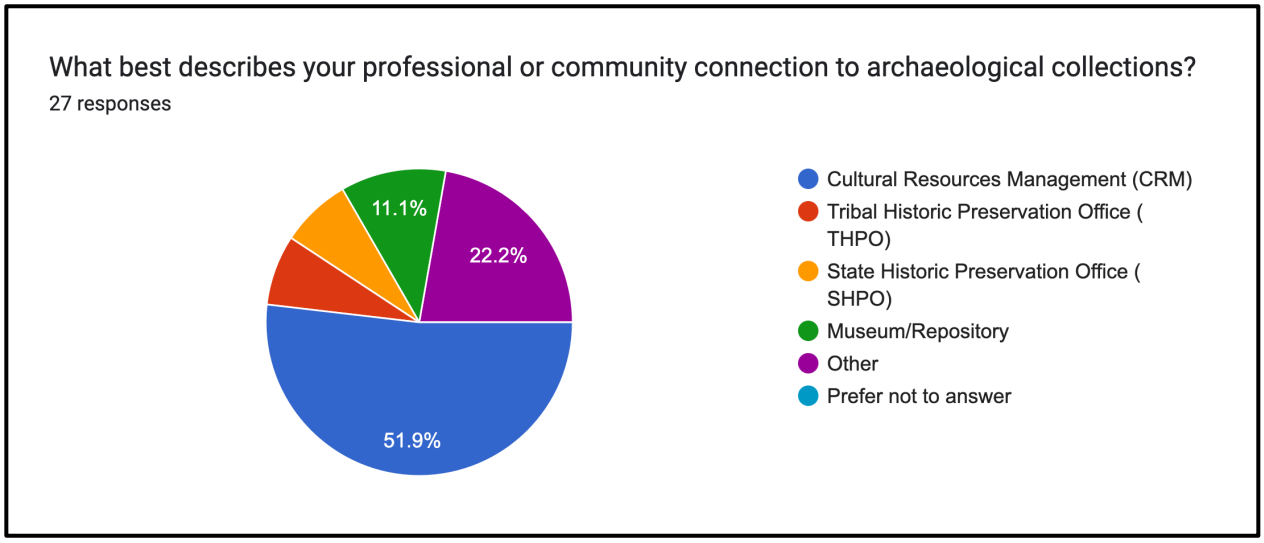


Figure 1. Results of Survey Question 1.

The age range of respondents was mostly representative of middle age, with 33.33% between 50-59 (n=9), closely followed at 29.63% by ages 30-39 (n=8), and 22.22% ages 40-49 (n=6), followed by 11.11% ages 18-29 (n=3) and 3.70% ages 60+ (n=1) (Figure 2).

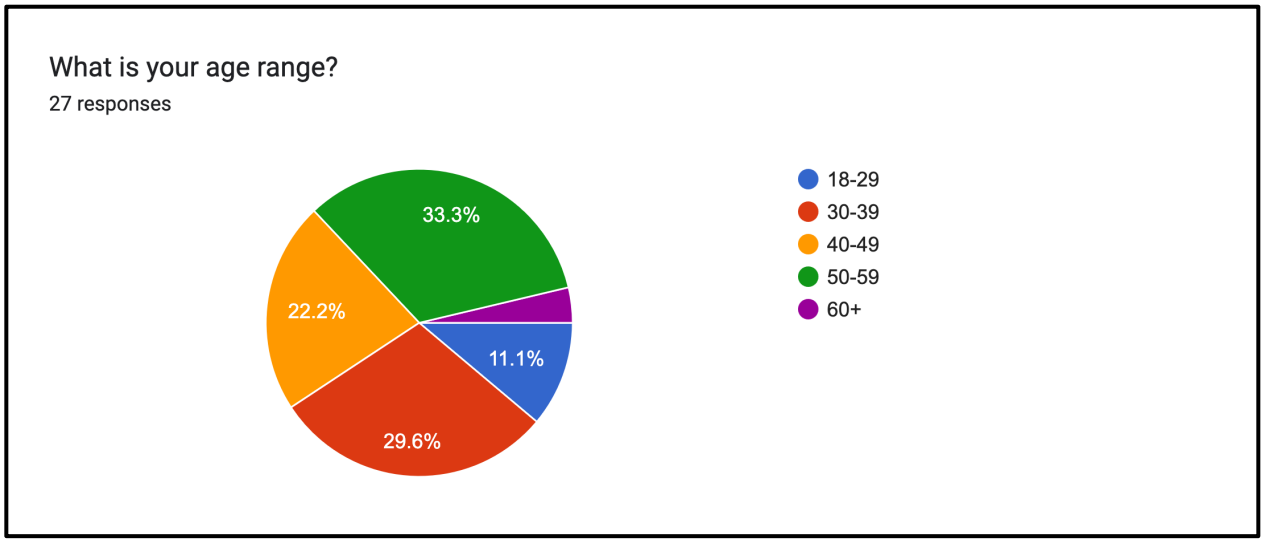


Figure 2. Results of Survey Question 2

Respondents were predominantly (51.85%) from the Pacific Northwest (the author's region) (n=14), followed by the Midwest (14.81% or n=4), Multiple Regions/National Work (14.81% or n=4), the Southeast (11.11% or n=3), the Southwest (3.70% or n=1) and the Northeast (3.70% or n=1) (Figure 3).

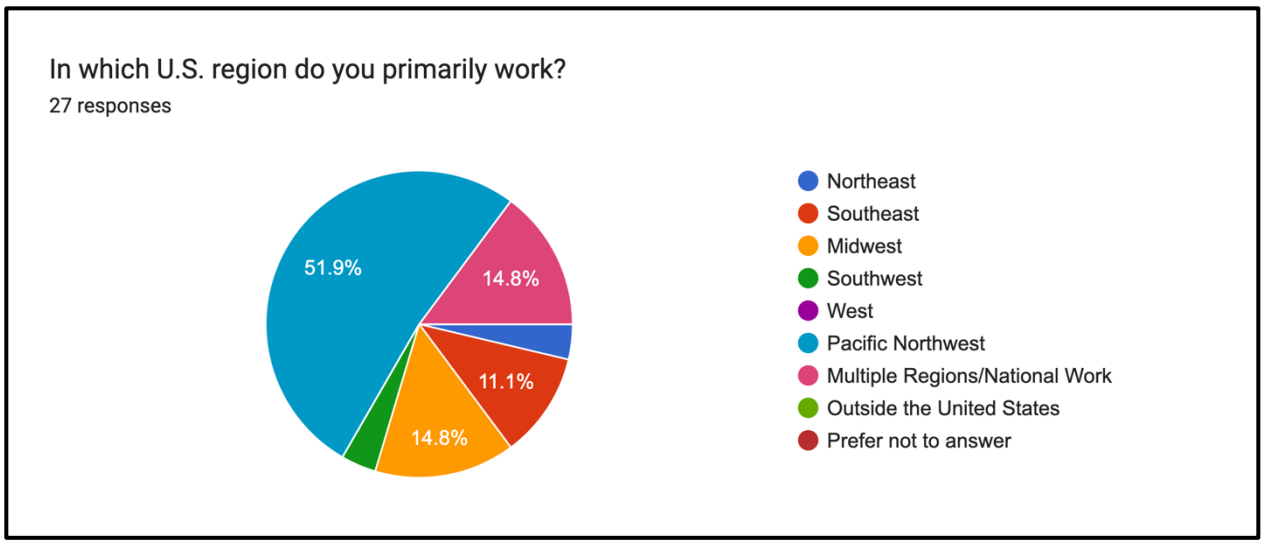


Figure 3. Results of Survey Question 3.

Feasibility, Usefulness, and Connection to the Curation Crisis

Almost all respondents thought it was logistically possible to collaboratively develop a collection policy as part of a research design before fieldwork, with 51.9% strongly agreeing (n=14), 33.3% agreeing (n=9), 11.1% neutral (n=3), and 3.7% disagreeing (n=1) (Figure 4). Amongst professional demographics, all neutral and disagreement perceptions were from those in CRM (Table 3).

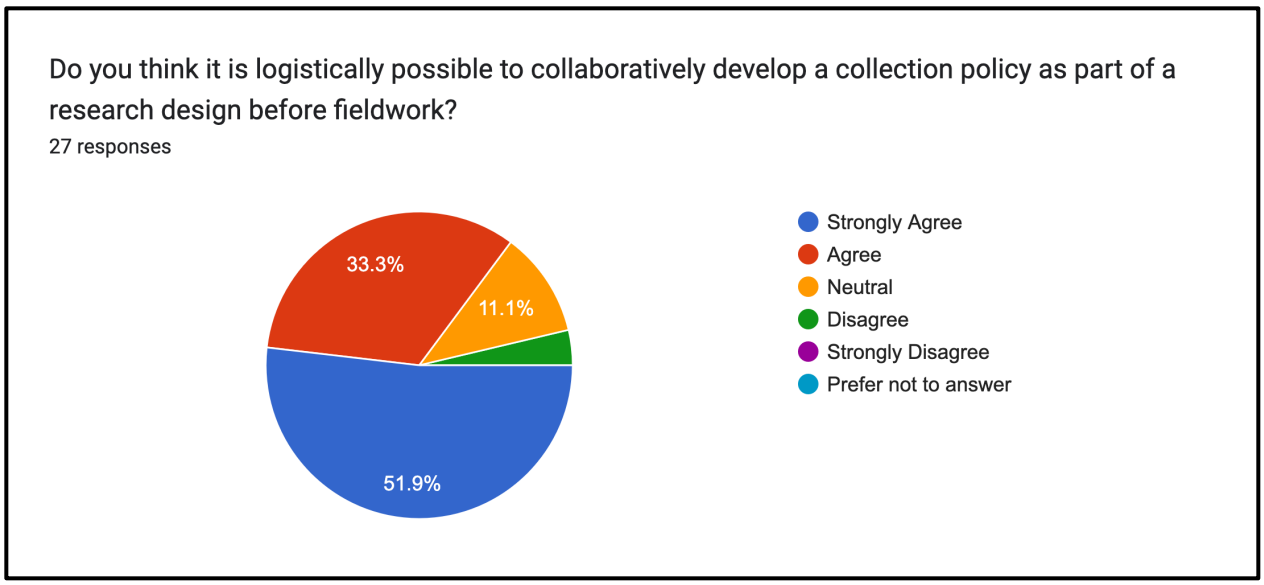


Figure 4. Results of Survey Question 4.

Table 3. Feasibility of Collaborative Collection Policies by Professional Connection

Question 4: Feasibility of Collaborative Collection Policies by Professional Connection						
Professional Connection	**Strongly Agree**	**Agree**	**Neutral**	**Disagree**	**Strongly Disagree**	**Total**
CRM	6	4	3	1	0	14
Museum/Repository	1	2	0	0	0	3
SHPO	2	0	0	0	0	2
THPO	1	1	0	0	0	2
Other	4	2	0	0	0	6
Grand Total	**14**	**9**	**3**	**1**	**0**	**27**

Question 5 resulted in all but one respondent thinking that developing collaborative collection strategies is needed in the field of CRM, with 70.4% (n=19) strongly agreeing, 25.9% (n=7) agreeing, and 3.7% neutral (n=1) (Figure 5). Among professional affiliations, CRM held the neutral response (Table 4).

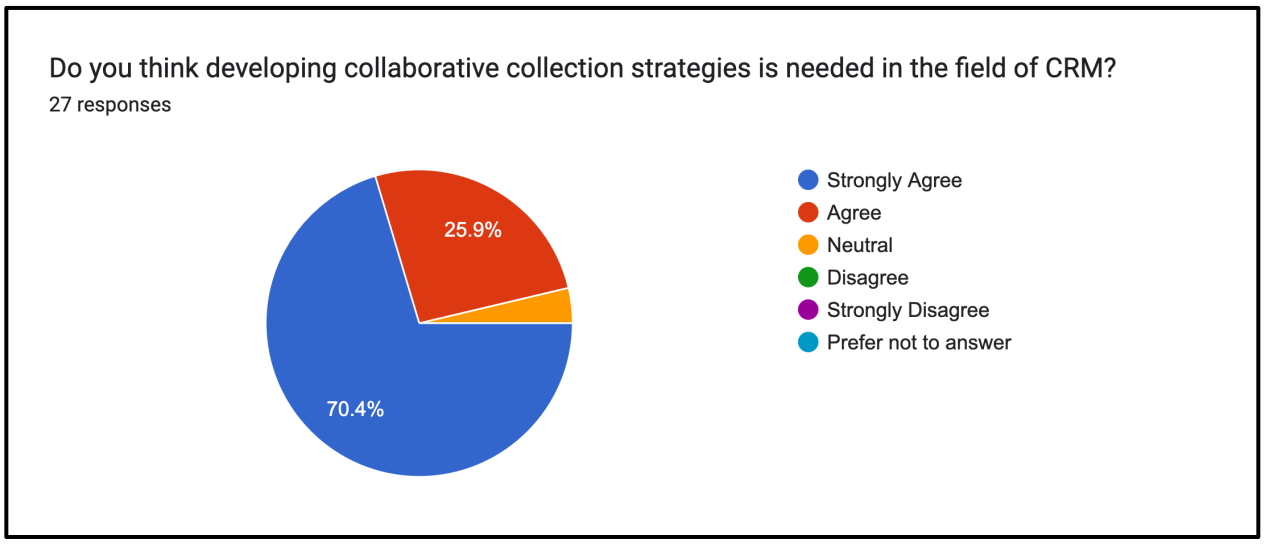


Figure 5. Responses to Survey Question 5.

Table 4. Perceived Need of Collaborative Collection Strategies by Professional Affiliation

Professional Connection	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total
CRM	10	3	1	0	0	14
Museum/Repository	1	2	0	0	0	3
SHPO	1	1	0	0	0	2
THPO	2	0	0	0	0	2
Other	5	1	0	0	0	6
Grand Total	**19**	**7**	**1**	**0**	**0**	**27**

Respondents mostly agreed, with some neutral and one in disagreement, that collaborative collection strategies would be helpful in addressing the curation crisis, with 51.9% strongly agreeing (n=14), 33.3% agreeing (n=9), 11.1% neutral (n=3), and 3.7% disagreeing (n=1) (Figure 6). Responses in agreement came from all professional demographics, with neutral opinions coming from CRM and SHPO respondents, and disagreement from Other (Table 5).

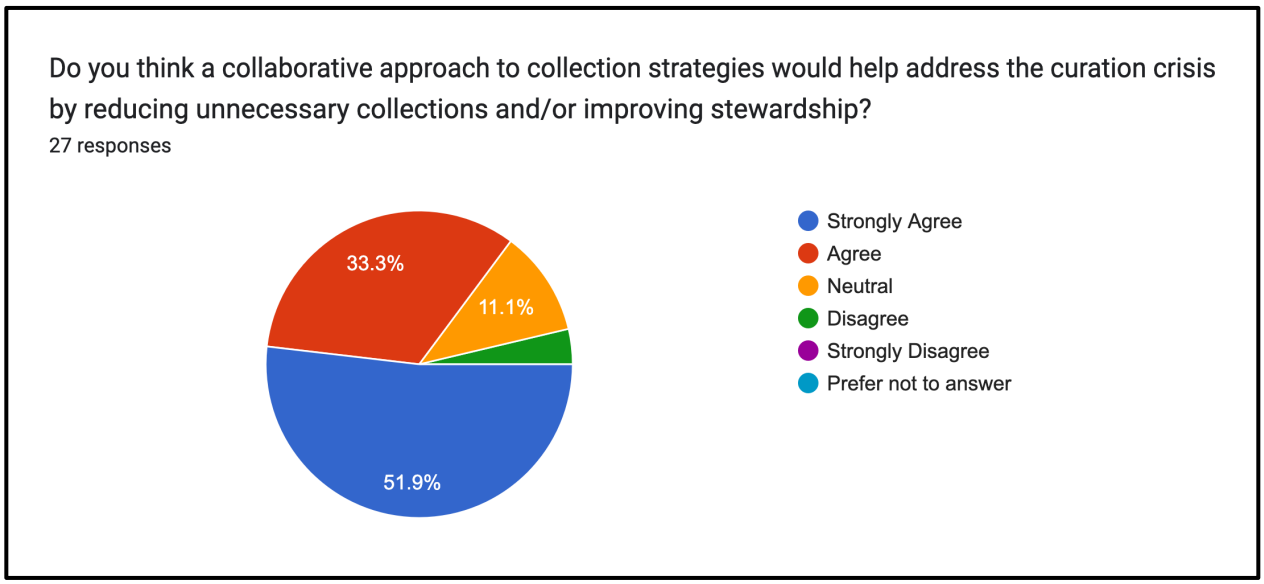


Figure 6. Responses to Survey Question 6.

Table 5. Perceived Connection to Stewardship & the Curation Crisis by Professional Connection

Professional Connection	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total
CRM	9	3	2	0	0	14
Museum/Repository	1	2	0	0	0	3
SHPO	1	0	1	0	0	2
THPO	1	1	0	0	0	2
Other	2	3	0	1	0	6
Grand Total	**14**	**9**	**3**	**1**	**0**	**27**

Alternative Collection Strategies

Alternative collection strategies received the most varied responses. Regarding no-collection policies, respondents mostly agreed that meaningful archaeological research can be

conducted if no artifacts are collected from the field, with 25.9% strongly agreeing (n=7), 40.7% agreeing (n=11), 22.2% neutral (n=6), 3.7% disagreeing (n=1), and 7.4% strongly disagreeing (Figure 7). Cross-comparing with demographics shows that CRM respondents were the most polarized, representing both "Strongly Agree" and "Strongly Disagree" responses (Table 6). When also crossing results with age ranges, "Strongly Agree" ranged between 18-59, with "Strongly Disagree" pulled between 40-59 (Table 7).

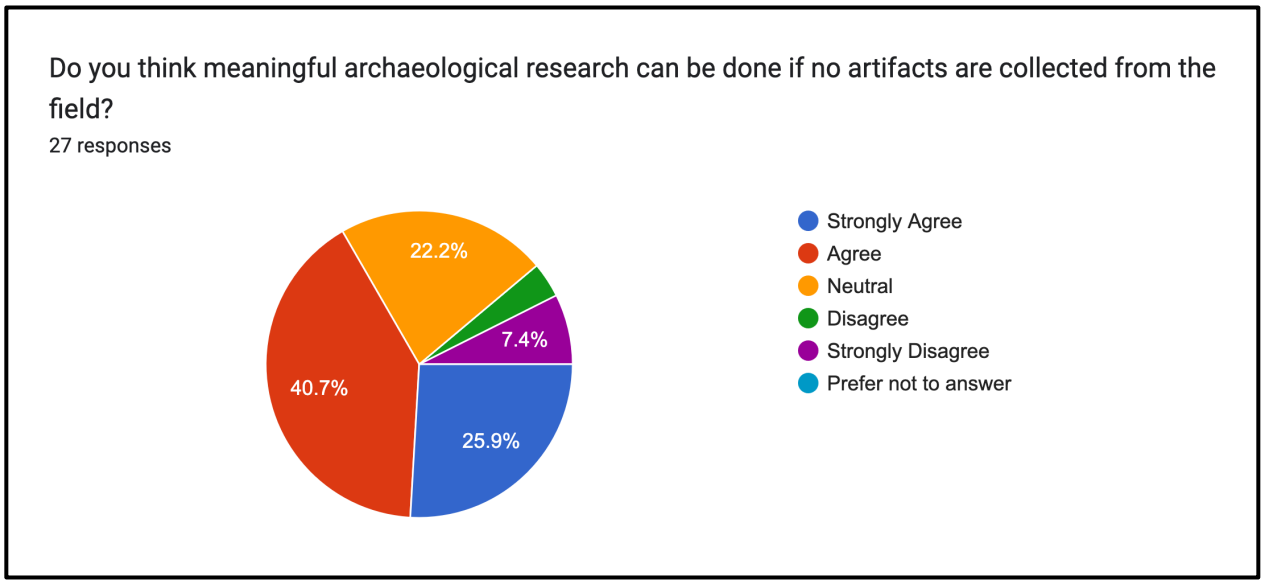


Figure 7. Responses to Survey Question 7.

Table 6. Perceived viability of no-collection research by professional connection

Professional Connection	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total
CRM	3	5	4	0	2	14
Museum/Repository	0	1	1	1	0	3
SHPO	0	1	1	0	0	2
THPO	1	1	0	0	0	2
Other	3	3	0	0	0	6
Grand Total	**7**	**11**	**6**	**1**	**2**	**27**

Table 7. Perceived viability of no-collection research by age range

Age Range	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total
18-29	2	1	0	0	0	3
30-39	2	2	4	0	0	8
40-49	1	3	1	0	1	6
50-59	2	5	1	0	1	9
60+	0	0	0	1	0	1
Grand Total	**7**	**11**	**6**	**1**	**2**	**27**

Perceptions of a CRM firm's ability to implement selective retention strategies were again varied. Most respondents agreed: 33.3% strongly agreed (n=9), 37% agreed (n=10), 14.8% were neutral (n=4), and 14.8% disagreed (n=4) (Figure 8). Across professional demographics, those who disagreed were in CRM, THPO, and other fields.

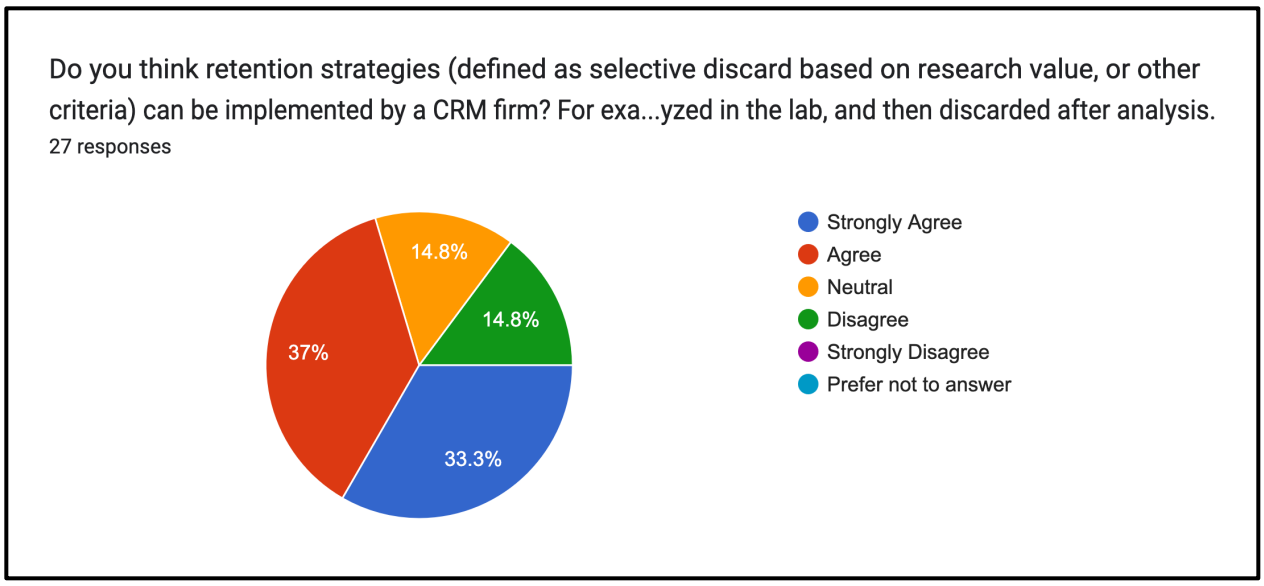


Figure 8. Survey Responses to Question 8.

Table 8. Perceived feasibility of selective retention by professional connection

Professional Connection	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total
CRM	6	5	1	2	0	14
Museum/Repository	0	2	1	0	0	3
SHPO	1	0	1	0	0	2
THPO	0	0	1	1	0	2
Other	2	3	0	1	0	6
Grand Total	**9**	**10**	**4**	**4**	**0**	**27**

Respondents were almost universally in agreement that different collection or retention strategies are appropriate for different categories of archaeological materials, with 70.4% (n=19) strongly agreeing, 25.9% (n=7) agreeing, and 3.7% (n=1) neutral (Figure 9).

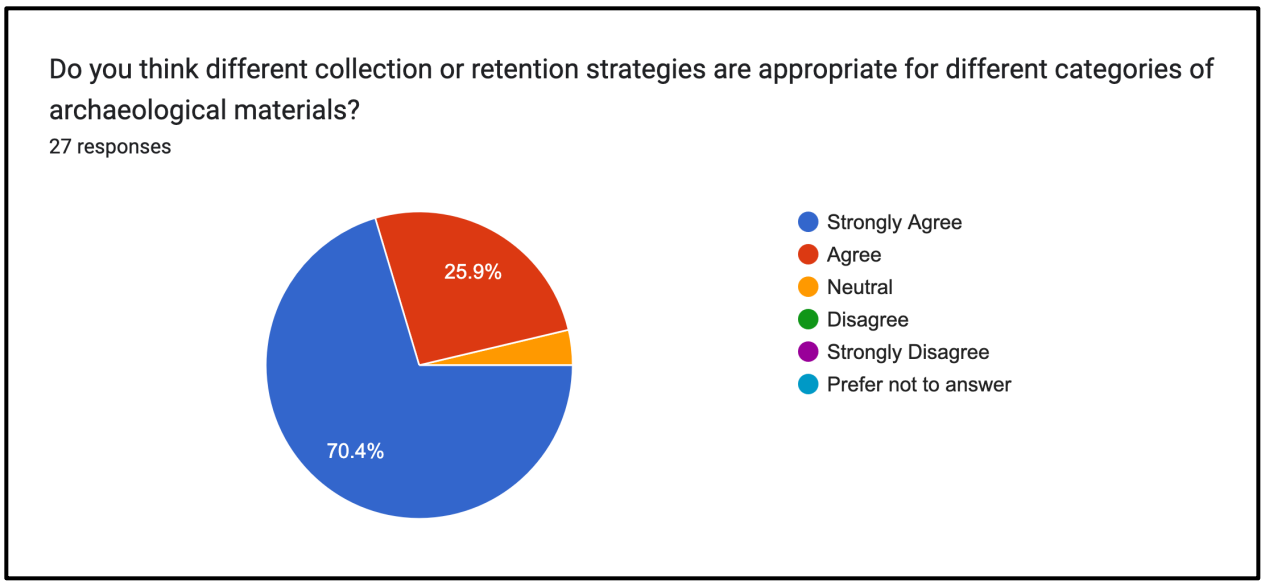


Figure 9. Survey Responses to Question 9.

Summary of Response Patterns

As shown above, respondents generally supported the feasibility, need, and potential stewardship value of collaborative collection planning. Responses became more varied when the questions moved from collaboration as a broad principle to specific practices such as no-collection and selective retention. The fixed-choice results show where agreement and disagreement occurred, but they do not fully explain the conditions, concerns, or reasoning behind those positions. The following Analysis chapter therefore uses the open-ended responses and existing literature to examine questions of adaptability, capacity, expertise, authority, and long-term stewardship.

Chapter 6: Analysis

The survey questions aimed to understand professionals' views on collaborative collection strategies, the alternative collection methods they might involve, and how these could influence the curation crisis and community-informed stewardship. The previous chapter presented descriptive results from both closed-ended and open-ended responses. This chapter interprets the findings to indicate the practicality and perceived value of collaborative collection strategies in CRM. The analysis is structured around the open-ended responses, providing needed nuance to the statistics generated from the Likert-scale questionnaire. These responses are then contextualized through the existing literature, primarily through the collection of papers in the primary "how-to" book: *Using and Curating Archaeological Collections* (Childs and Warner 2020).

The key themes discussed here include the conditional feasibility of collaborative policies, debates over alternative approaches, and the importance of governance and expertise. Respondents generally supported collaborative planning, but only as a flexible, accountable, context-specific process.

Perceived Feasibility and the Need for Collaborative Planning

Over half of the respondents (~52%) strongly agreed with Question 4, that collaborative collection strategies are logistically feasible for CRM firms to develop. Question 5, about the perceived need for such a change, had the highest "strongly agree" response rate (~70%) of any

survey question, suggesting that respondents feel the current way collections are made needs improvement.

The response in disagreement with the feasibility and neutral to the overall need for a collaborative approach commented that "My concern with such a proposal is that CRM companies are already operating so close to the line and things take so long that adding more steps to deal with the curation could grind things to a halt, especially if groups do not agree." (R07, CRM, 50-59, PNW). Another response, R01, mentioned that "timing will be essential, especially given how quickly most CRM projects require a turnaround" and adding "but this is an important step" (R01, CRM, 30-39, PNW). The survey indicated a strong perceived need for change but also highlighted practical concerns regarding implementation.

From Reactive Decisions to Adaptive Collection Policies

A crucial finding from the open-ended responses was the belief that collection strategies should be flexible rather than fully established ahead of fieldwork. A respondent left a detailed response stating, "In my experience, collection methods for pedestrian and probe surveys are more often than not open-ended, and no agreement has been made or put to paper as to the collection methods. Rather, they are determined after something has been collected and a decision needs to be made regarding what to do with the collected materials" (R05, CRM, 30-39, PNW). While R08 (Other, 40-49, Midwest) argued that "Strategies need to be adaptable and change in the field if a different kind of site is encountered." These comments highlight a belief that collection plans should account for actual field findings. Collection decisions may be refined after materials are encountered.

While these concerns about adaptability and deference to governance are warranted, deciding how to handle an artifact only after collecting or observing it in the field contributes to what Fagan calls the "archaeologists' dirty secret" (Fagan 1995:16): unpublished research and drawers full of unaccounted artifacts. While flexibility remains important, a good research plan (inclusive of a collection plan) should consider the project's specific historic and ethnographic contexts, the types of archaeological materials likely to be found, regulatory nexus, land ownership, and existing lines of communication and coordination with descendant groups, local communities, and SHPOs. R05's (CRM, 30-39, PNW) comment suggests a prevailing "fieldwork first" paradigm and why it might need reevaluation; researchers should plan thoroughly in advance, even for initial phases such as a Phase I survey, but then allow for unanticipated findings. This type of proactive planning is a key point in developing a "Collections Management Ethos in Archaeology", as explored by Majewski: "It is only when collections management needs are thoroughly incorporated into the planning stages for archaeological projects that we can be confident that curation is not just the end game anymore" (Majewski 2010 as cited in Majewski 2019:74).

Capacity, Training, and the Status of Curation Work

R05 (CRM, 30-39, PNW) also pointed out the importance of "the identification skills of the crew" in developing a collection strategy. This comment raises another theme revealed by the open-ended questions: Training in artifact identification, context, and lab work should be considered an important part of implementing collection policies and strategies.

These issues with uneven familiarity with curation among field-focused CRM practitioners were also illustrated in R02's response, which stated "I'd like to learn more about how collaborative collection policies could work in practice. I unfortunately do not know much about the curation end of archaeological investigations, dealing mostly with Phase I survey work." (R02, CRM, 30-39, PNW). Further, budgeting concerns and unequal care towards lab work in CRM contexts were brought up by R03, "Collection analysis and maintenance seem to be given less budget and thought in CRM contexts and result in rushed work or an area to "cut corners" to offer clients a better deal. Having more delineated policies may put pressure on treating the collections and curations end of archaeology with more respect." (R03, CRM, 30-39, PNW) In contrast with R07's (CRM, 50-59, PNW) concerns that forcing curation planning early in the project scope might be too much of a burden for the CRM firm, R03's response suggests that this kind of planning could instead put the proper pressure on firms to reckon with curation, rather than the "end game" as Majewski stated earlier.

R03 also brought up a concern with the gendered-labor aspect of lab work: "Maybe a bit tangential, but the sex politics of collection work. Collection processing and curation have […] been treated as women's work, thus being treated with less regard than other facets of archaeology." This respondent's concerns resonate with much of the existing literature, which prizes "fieldwork first" and has historically used gender to categorize and devalue the critical labor required for long-term collection care (Childs 1995:12).

These responses show a key theme: a collection policy is only meaningful if staffing, expertise, time, and budget are available to implement it. It is another key aspect of Majewski's "Collections Management Ethos in Archaeology": "the poor integration of collections

management into university curricula that train archaeologists and heritage managers must be addressed; likewise, requirements for in-depth training and continued education on collections management for agency cultural resource managers and contracting/procurement personnel must be instituted. Curriculum materials must include the growing literature on curation and collections management" (Majewski 2019:75).

Alternative Strategies: Retention, Discard, and Irreversible Loss

Questions 7 through 9, which explored openness to alternatives to a "collect everything" model—namely, no-collection policies, selective retention based on research value, and differing policies by material type (e.g., precontact vs. historic)—elicited the most diverse and conflicted responses. These questions produced the greatest disagreement, with Question 7, about no-collection policies, receiving the only "strongly disagree" responses (~7%), and Question 8, addressing selective retention and phased discard based on research potential, with disagreement (~15%), though applying different collection strategies to material types was in strong agreement (~70%). So, while respondents generally agreed that collection strategies are feasible for CRM firms to develop, are needed, and may help address stewardship and care by forcing firms to consider collections early in the process, respondents are more comfortable with context-specific strategies than blanket rules and were especially hesitant to accept no-collection policies.

The fear of irreversible loss from the discard or non-collection of an artifact was brought up by R04 (SHPO, 50-59, PNW), who thought that "as a rule, precontact sites should be safely curating and retaining lithic and bone artifacts and that people in the future are going to look back on current practices as a big error and unnecessary loss of culture and heritage."

However, the survey data suggest that, under certain circumstances, discarding can be justified. R09 (CRM, 40-49, Midwest) illustrates this by showing that discard may be appropriate after thorough specialist analysis, documentation, and reporting—especially for redundant, high-volume materials—and also connects this to the broader storage concerns related to the curation crisis:

> The level of (in lab) analysis should be considered for all categories of artifacts-when opting for discard. For [example]: Urban excavations can lead to an immense amount of faunal remains. If the faunal remains are analyzed by a faunal specialist and the results are compiled into its own sub-report [with references], being able to discard these often redundant and space consuming artifacts can save a curation facility a lot of space. [R09]

Existing literature suggests that historic collections are ripe for selective retention strategies, in the paper titled "Every Artifact is (not) Sacred: A Call to Rethink Historical Archaeology's Collection Management Assumptions and Practices", Warner argues that "the problems that historical archaeologists create is that we recover a lot more stuff than prehistoric archaeologists; what we recover takes up more space; it is made by machines as frequently as it is by people; and the objects are overwhelmingly repetitive or redundant" (Warner 2019:146). But there are precautions needed for any collection strategy that involves discarding artifacts, as highlighted by the survey responses. It is important to consider that historic materials can carry under-recognized research and community value, especially for historically marginalized groups. This is brought up in R06's (CRM, 30-39, Southwest) response:

> I think it's important to consider the full scope of what fragments of historic artifacts can tell us - including methods used in academia that are generally not useful to CRM timelines and research capabilities, like residue analysis, XRF scanning, etc. Historic sites and artifacts are already regularly dismissed in the field - and yet, archaeologists wonder why they are surprised to learn about events like the Tulsa Race Massacre when

> they've been systematically calling sites in historically Black neighborhoods and towns "ineligible" since the NHPA passed. [R06]

R10 (CRM, 50-59, Southeast) also raised a concern that the discretionary nature of a selective retention policy could be abused. "While selective retention is a useful concept, there is the unfortunate flip-side of the chance to minimize the 'value' of item(s) that can then be "discarded" but actually taken by someone and sold […] As with anything, there is potential for abuse that must be considered in developing an effective policy."

The main takeaway from these responses is the support for material and context-specific decision-making. The survey did not suggest a straightforward "collect less" strategy. Instead, it showed that: no-collection strategies are considered plausible but have limitations; selective retention raises concerns because it involves making significant judgments; and material-specific methods indicate that respondents oppose blanket retention or discard, but need transparent criteria, documentation, review, and safeguards.

Authority, Collaboration, and Long-Term Stewardship

The deference to an authoritative body was brought up by multiple respondents. While the majority of survey respondents belonged to the CRM demographic (~50%), there was caution about CRM firms making collection decisions on their own. This could indicate firsthand knowledge of the limitations of individual CRM firms and recognize the need for safeguards.

The importance of guidelines established by SHPOs, rather than the CRM firm, was brought up in two of the open responses: R05 (CRM, 30-39, PNW) stated, "Collection practices vary widely from state to state, firm to firm and from individual to individual. I believe that it should depend on the situation, I also believe that some kind of standard could be upheld, even if

ever so broadly and in the form of SHPO guidance documentation." While R08 (Other, 40-49, Midwest) argued, "I don't think individual firms should set a policy, but rather SHPOs and THPOs should work together to develop policies that could be followed by multiple firms or academic archaeologists in an area."

These comments suggest that respondents want standards beyond individual firms, while the appropriate authority remains project-specific. An effective approach to developing a collection strategy could first draw on broad regional guidance and then undergo project-specific revisions based on the CRM firm's findings and capabilities.

However, agency guidance will only be a starting point. Other issues need to be addressed at the onset of a project, including who has decision-making authority, who is responsible for consultation, who has legal custody, who is responsible for long-term care, and who determines final disposition. When considering this thesis's analytical definition of collaboration, recognize that participants have different authority, responsibilities, rights, expertise, and interests. These questions posed by R07 (CRM, 50-59, PNW) show how too many competing interest groups might complicate community-based collection practices:

> What can happen when the "consulting parties" get involved and then you have two Tribes and a Sons of the Confederacy group all vying for the artifacts. Where do they get curated under such a plan? Who's responsible for their permanent care? Who takes the lead in this consultation? [R07]

Viewed through Colwell's continuum of collaboration, we can recognize that those parties cannot automatically be treated as equivalent claimants simply because all are interested.

Much of this can be decided by the legal framework and regulatory nexus of a given project, though regulations can be interpreted by acting parties. In Sara Rivers Cofield's paper,

"On Whose Grounds? The Importance of Determining Ownership Before There Is a Collection", the critical importance of determining land ownership is discussed as a front-end task at the onset of a project because ownership dictates which specific laws and regulations apply to any resulting collection (Cofield 2019:91). "Professional archaeologists are generally diligent about ensuring that before they put a shovel in the ground, they know who owns the property and they have the necessary permissions and permits to undertake an excavation there. […] The same diligence should be applied to thinking about the ownership of any collections resulting from archaeological work *before* the project begins" (Cofield 2019:91). This is typically established during the permitting phase, where I argue in this thesis is the stage in which a project-specific collection policy should be co-developed. Essentially, collection ownership follows landownership. A federal nexus would create a federal collection; whereas on Indian lands, material remains are owned by the individual Indians or Tribes. This distinction is vital for determining the "appropriate official" responsible for leading consultation. Disposition can become a little more unclear in cases of private landownership, and can be a point where budgeting for curation are essential at the onset of a project soon after determining ownership (Cofield 2019:92). It is one of the biggest risks to creating "orphaned" collections, where materials that have no clear owner and therefore no entity with the legal right to provide funding or make decisions about their care (Cofield 2019:92).

This tension regarding these competing interests and desire for governing guidance is suggested in Crane and Heilen's paper on the "Implications of Limited Collections Policies and In-Field Analysis", which states, "Overall, existing guidelines and policies suggest little collaboration in identifying best practices, resulting in broad variability in collection, sampling,

and analysis strategies across project jurisdictions" (Crane and Heilen 2019:165). A project-specific process could first identify appropriate participants; distinguish communities, sovereign Tribal governments, institutional actors, property owner and developer interests, and then identify the kind of authority or responsibilities each actually holds.

It is also important to note that few survey responses came from THPOs (n=2), and it is unclear whether any of the "other" respondents represent Tribal groups or other descendant groups. While there may be limited information that can be inferred from those perspectives, R11 (THPO, 40-49, PNW) brought up in their response the "importance of religious/cultural connection between people, artifacts/objects/belongings and their place as part of a holistic strategy to preservation."

In the paper, "Tribal Voices on Archaeological Collections", Angela Neller also brings up Atalay's (2006) "calls for archaeological practice to shift toward a collaborative methodology that is inclusive of an indigenous archaeology" (Neller 2019:22). Neller highlights that regulations do not address terms and conditions established by Indian tribes for the care, use, and access to collections that come from public sites that the tribes themselves have determined are culturally important (Neller 2019:15). "The views that Native Americans hold regarding archaeological collections are as varied as the tribes within North America and also between generations of the same community" (Neller 2019:17). On one end of the scale are tribes that prefer to rebury all disturbed and unearthed artifacts, and on the other end of the scale tribes that require curation. "In all cases, the voice and authority of the tribal community plays a role" (Neller 2019:17).

Collaborative Planning as a Curation-Crisis Intervention

Question 6 related the survey to the central thesis by asking whether collaborative strategies might help address the crisis by reducing unnecessary collections or enhancing stewardship. Most respondents agreed (~85%), though some were neutral (~11%) and one disagreed. Two open responses, R03 and R09, indicated that earlier, more intentional planning could foster greater respect for curation and reduce long-term storage issues. However, as noted in the section on alternative collection strategies above, these ideas are debatable and require ongoing negotiations, clear authority and ownership, and expert guidelines. The results of the survey suggest that collaboration isn't a universal solution; it cannot guarantee that cooperation will lower collection volume or repository load in practice, but it can shift the focus from post-collection issues to proactive stewardship decisions.

Key Discoveries

Respondents generally agreed that collaborative collection strategies are needed, but they were more divided on how those strategies should be implemented in practice. Several cautioned against setting too many rules before fieldwork begins, noting that overly rigid policies could be difficult to apply in the field and could add strain to already tight budgets. Others worried that bringing too many collaborators into the decision-making process could make final disposition more complicated. Taken together, these concerns demonstrate that collaborative collection planning must remain flexible, context-specific, and accountable. The study therefore supports collaboration as a framework for making decisions rather than a standardized rule dictating what

must be collected or discarded. The following chapter considers what this finding contributes to CRM practice, while accounting for the study's limitations and the need for further research.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

This thesis has explored the curation crisis not only as a repository-storage problem, but also as a series of decision-making processes undertaken before, during, and after archaeological fieldwork. It has examined what and why archaeologists choose to collect by tracing the field through its prevailing paradigms, including antiquarianism, culture-history, processualism, and post-processualism, and the preservation laws shaped by them that continue to structure CRM archaeology. These legal frameworks have often prescribed methods of archaeological research that prioritize fieldwork, assume authority over the material past, and leave curation and collections management as an afterthought. As archaeological theory continues to shift toward collaborative and decolonized approaches, this thesis has considered whether those principles can be incorporated into collection strategies that still too often rest on the assumption that archaeologists alone decide what is worth collecting, retaining, studying, and caring for. Specifically, this thesis has asked: *How do preservation professionals view the feasibility and need for collaborative collection strategies? Do they see them as a way to improve stewardship and address the curation crisis?*

Project Summary

This research question was explored through an exploratory survey of cultural and historic preservation professionals' perceptions of collaborative collection policies with a focus in the Pacific Northwest region. The questionnaire asked whether respondents see practical room to make these decisions earlier and more collaboratively, and it opened discussion across several

related questions. Do preservation professionals see collaboratively developed collection policies as logistically feasible before fieldwork? Do they see collaborative collection strategies as needed in CRM? Do they think such strategies could reduce unnecessary collection or improve stewardship? How open are they to specific alternatives, including no-collection approaches and selective retention after analysis? Do respondents believe collection and retention decisions should vary by material type and project context? What concerns do they raise about implementation, including cost, time, ethics, legal obligations, future research value, repository capacity, and professional responsibility?

The findings from this study suggest that collaborative collection planning is broadly plausible to respondents, that it is needed for the field, and that it may help address the curation crisis by improving stewardship and, in some cases, reducing collection volume if a method such as selective retention is adopted. However, this agreement on principle did not amount to support for a universal rule on collections, underscoring that collaborative strategies function best as a planning framework rather than a single prescriptive model. No-collection and selective-retention approaches elicited greater caution among respondents, indicating that any collection policy involving discard or selective retention carries distinct ethical, legal, practical, and professional risks. Material categories and project context clearly matter. A policy must therefore be accountable and adaptable, not one-size-fits-all. In this sense, collaborative collection policies appear most plausible as flexible, accountable planning frameworks that link fieldwork, specialist analysis, community or agency involvement, and long-term stewardship.

Limitations

It is important to emphasize that the responses do not establish professional agreement or confirm that a strategy lessens curation burdens. Several limitations should shape how these findings are interpreted.

First, the network-based Pacific Northwest concentration limits the generalizability of the study. It could not define any consensus among professions by career association, age group, or region. Results should be interpreted as exploratory. While the survey suggests conditional support for collaborative, adaptive collection planning, it cannot prove that collaboration reduces collection volume or solves the curation crisis.

While the thesis sought to explore inclusions of Indigenous archaeologies and principles of decolonization, participation from sovereign Tribal Nations and descendant-community representatives was limited, so the thesis cannot claim to represent these perspectives.

The survey primarily examined the broad perceptions of collection strategies rather than the implementation or outcomes of actual collection policies. The questionnaire necessarily simplifies decisions that, in practice, depend on many factors that are specific to a project, such as land ownership, regulatory nexus, project phases and timelines, stakeholders and consulting parties, ethnographies and land history, artifact types and volume, repository capacity, and the priorities of involved communities.

The simplification of the questionnaire was a concern for some respondents, who were wary it would flatten such complex issues into generalizations. R07 (CRM, 50-59, PNW) stated, "I know this is a problem with questionnaires, but each archaeological project is different, and in answering these questions, I can think of scenarios where something might work and others

where it wouldn't. The one-size-fits-all nature of questionnaires is hard to apply to a complex problem like this." R06 (CRM, 30-39, Southwest) added, "There is nuance needed that some of your questions may leave out." These comments suggest that future work surrounding this topic should use project vignettes, case studies, or follow-up interviews to strengthen these arguments.

Finally, the terms "collaboration" and "community" were not clearly defined in the survey questionnaire and so were open to respondent interpretation. The author further refined these terms' analytic definitions during the thesis writing process.

Recommendations for Future Research

Future research should include a larger, deliberately stratified survey with meaningful representation across CRM, repositories, SHPOs, THPOs, and descendant communities. It should also include community-led or collaboratively designed research focused directly on descendant-community priorities. Case studies of real collection policies would help show what actually happens during fieldwork, analysis, curation, and reporting, while a comparative review of agency, state, and repository policies could clarify broader patterns. Finally, future work should track actual outcomes such as collection volume, cost, processing backlog, consultation experience, research utility, and stewardship quality.

Recommendations for Current CRM Practice

The majority of respondents agreed that CRM firms could implement collaborative collection strategies and that they are needed within the field. Collection-policy conversations should begin at the beginning of a project, during research design and scoping, not after

recovery. While archaeological projects can be unclear until they are ground-truthed, a good archaeologist should not go blindly digging.

Relevant communities and other participating parties should be identified early, distinguishing among their different relationships to the project (e.g., Tribal Nations, descendant communities, local communities, landowners, agencies, repositories, proponents, etc.), and their participation and authority should be determined in a project-specific basis, rather than assuming equivalent standing for all parties.

Project teams should document the anticipated lifecycle of materials, including collection criteria, analysis, retention, repository destination, access, and any possible revision points. Once established, collection policies can then be adapted for unanticipated discoveries, with accountable decision records. In any case, no plan should be treated simply as boilerplate.

Broader Implications

Considering the regional focus of this thesis in the Pacific Northwest, I also think it is important to note that many agencies already have collection policies that may address issues of curation and stewardship, or may complicate matters. For example, the Oregon Revised Statutes Chapter 390 § 390.235, *Permits and conditions for excavation or removal of archaeological or historic material* (ORS 390.235(3)) requires that "Any archaeological materials, with the exception Indian human remains, funerary objects, sacred objects and objects of cultural patrimony, recovered by a person granted a permit […] shall be under the stewardship of the State of Oregon to be curated by the Oregon State Museum of Anthropology". This statute was alluded to by R05: "I believe that in the state of Oregon, the official Oregon SHPO guidance

documents state that all materials should be collected, regardless of phase etc. but in practice, they recommend and condone a variety of practices based on the situation at hand."

The open interpretation by agencies of what are otherwise clearly defined excavation permit requirements, such as those shown here, complicates the planning of collection strategies in a research design. One person's experience with flexibility isn't universal. In an informal follow-up, R07 noted that OR SHPO has been inflexible in its interpretation of the statute and has required long-term curation of all artifacts from a project. Discussions with curators at the Oregon State Museum of Anthropology indicate that this strict interpretation has led to an increase in artifacts—especially historic materials—creating a backlog of archaeological collections requiring long-term curation that the museum cannot fully support without ever expanding its storage capacities.

Final Takeaway

This thesis contributes to CRM practice by reframing collection policy as an early-stage stewardship and governance tool rather than an after-the-fact repository burden. It identifies collection strategy as a practical point where CRM can connect research design, curation capacity, specialist expertise, consultation, and long-term responsibility. It also distinguishes between the broad principle of collaborative planning and the much harder project-specific decisions about collection, analysis, retention, discard, access, and care. In doing so, it gives the field language for discussing these questions before materials are removed from the ground.

Collaborative collection strategies are not a universal substitute for professional judgment, legal obligations, or specialist expertise. However, they may offer CRM a more

intentional way to make collection decisions before a project creates another long-term stewardship obligation. Better stewardship does not simply mean collecting less; it means making collection decisions deliberately, transparently, and with appropriate authority and expertise involved.

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