“You and I are nothing. We’ll soon be ashes. The house is burning! Get into the field and do this work. You will be doing something for the people of the distant future,”

John Peabody Harrington

When anthropologist John Peabody Harrington died in 1961 at the age of 77, few understood the significance of his work. His obsessively driven career became dedicated to preserving Native American dying languages. He documented the languages of 130 Tribes across the country.

The J. P. Harrington Collection also includes close to one million pages of notes filling over 1,000 archival boxes, plus over 200 sound recordings, some 3,500 photographs, and thousands of botanical and other natural specimens. The National Anthropological Archives (NAA) materials are complemented by nearly 600 artifacts that also are part of the National Museum of Natural History’s Department of Anthropology collection.

Filmmaker Daniel Golding comes from the Tribes that Harrington recorded. Now in production, Chasing Voices: John P. Harrington and Native Language Revitalization, Golding explores how the Chumash, Mojave and Luiseño are using Harrington’s material to keep their languages alive.

If Harrington hadn’t been so dedicated to preserving this part of Tribal history, much indigenous knowledge may have been lost.

Indigenous knowledge has been passed down through the oral tradition of storytelling, but in today’s times, when less than half of our Tribal members live on their original lands, sharing that knowledge with our youth is difficult.

How do we pass down traditional knowledge in a meaningful way? How do we honor the legacy of our ancestors? How do we tell our youth that it’s OK to be Tribal, when nothing we hear in the mainstream media supports that?

That’s why Vision Maker Media does this work. Through our audio and video work, we are dedicated to sharing Native stories. Culturally sensitive material may be some of the most important media to save. There are safe guards to put in place to ensure only authorized individuals can access these materials.

I’ve been involved in TV and radio since 1979. I’ve seen many recording formats come and go. I learned audio editing with a razor blade in my hand! Just in the last decade, we’ve seen DVDs and certainly cassette tapes fall out of favor. Some of my adult daughters’ favorite movies are on VHS tape. My 5-year old grandson has never seen a VHS tape! With cloud storage, we can rest a little easier that our audio and video history will be preserved, but this guide will help you navigate the system.

We produced this guide to help personal and institutional collectors with instructions and examples of best practices to save your archives for future generations.

Shirley K. Sneve (Rosebud Sioux)
Vision Maker Media Executive Director

Native Media Archives Guide
About Us

Mission statement: Vision Maker Media shares Native stories with the world that represent the cultures, experiences, and values of American Indians and Alaska Natives.

Vision Maker Media History:
Vision Maker Media was founded in 1976 as the Native American Public Broadcasting Consortia (NAPBC). Vision Maker Media is a nonprofit organization governed and led by Native people funded by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting to develop and empower minority voices in public broadcasting. NAPBC changed its name to Native American Public Telecommunications (NAPT) in 1995 as its mission broadened in response to the changing technological environment and its constituents. NAPT changed its name again in 2013 to Vision Maker Media to encompass all forms of media.

History of the Vision Maker Media Archives:
When the project began, the materials were already stored in a secure vault area at Nebraska Educational Telecommunications (NET), but were not processed or described. We knew we were storing broadcast masters, raw footage and a variety of other media materials.

The Vision Maker Media Archives project began in 2010 under the guidance of Brendan McCauley and a committee of local resource people, including Terry Dugas at NET, Mary Ellen Ducey from the UNL Library, Paul Eisloeffel, and Vision Maker Media’s founding executive director Frank Blythe (Eastern Band of Cherokee/Sisseton-Wahpeton Dakota).

In 2012, Mary DeLeary (Chippewas of the Thames First Nation), a recent graduate of the Institute of American Indian Arts in Museum Studies. Student worker Alana Stone (Rosebud Sioux) assisted in getting the materials inventoried, and organized by format and in alphabetical order, as well as having inventory numbers assigned to each individual item. The materials were described using the PBCore Metadata Standard, a common standard in public broadcasting and one that is set up for media materials. With a grant from the NEA for 2014-2015, Alison Lotto continued to update this metadata, survey the remaining materials, and create a prioritization schema for the digitization of our materials. We also worked closely with NET to ensure that temperature and humidity were monitored, and kept in the best possible conditions. This guide was also created with the generous support of the National Endowment for the Arts.
Native Media Archives Guide

Intern Alana Stone (Sicangu Lakota) working in the archives

Vision Maker Media Archives Vault after processing
Physical Storage Conditions

Temperature and Humidity

Archival materials are extremely susceptible to environmental conditions, with particular problems stemming from changes in temperature and humidity. Many archival collections, particularly those that are held in private hands or by institutions that do not have archival programs, tend to be stored in attics and basements. Controlling for these conditions can be extremely difficult. It is particularly hard in the spring and fall when the HVAC systems are adjusting constantly for shifting weather. However, if you can make some improvements to the temperature and humidity in the space, it will go very far in improving the longevity of your materials. There are some guidelines that are recommended for archival storage. The temperature should be no higher than 70° and the building should have a relative humidity between 30% and 50%. Humidity is more often a problem than temperature in spaces that are shared with personnel space, as people can tolerate a much larger humidity range. It is important to work closely with your building maintenance to make sure that these conditions are at least monitored. Some options that you may want to consider are spending a small amount of money for a temperature and humidity monitor, those are easily purchased online. Onset Hobo Data Loggers are an affordable brand that can be easily monitored using a personal computer. Dataloggers can be purchased on this website: http://www.onsetcomp.com/. Once you have this data, then it may be prudent to consider moving your materials to a part of the building where the environment is closer to recommended levels. It is important to remember that consistency is just as important as the settings themselves. When there are vast changes in temperature and humidity, especially in a short time-frame, materials will expand and contract, causing cracking and breakage. While it is impossible to ensure that materials will last forever, environmental conditions are an extremely common cause of deterioration in materials that would otherwise have a long life span. It is therefore a good first step in preserving your collections to address where they are stored, and make any adjustments to the space that will improve these conditions.
Appropriate Housing

Archival boxes meant for holding specific materials types are the ideal housing for archival materials. However, in many cases, especially for specialized materials, they can be prohibitively expensive.

Most archives use a combination of specialized housing and boxes that are less expensive but have a similar functionality. Most importantly, you should be storing your materials in boxes that protect them from dust, water, and sunlight, that includes any hard-sided cardboard box. For paper and photographs, make sure that the folders are acid-free and it is recommended to not use any metal or plastic, since they emit chemicals that can damage materials. Media materials are rarely stored in boxes, as they often come in storage containers that are appropriately sized and provide good support to the materials. Particularly with open-reel tape, there is no reason to remove them from the containers that they were in when they were created, as they will provide good support. All media materials should be stored upright.
Digital Files

Surprisingly, digital files can be more difficult to maintain and preserve than analog formats. Most everyone has lost a computer or a hard drive at some point. In the age of cloud storage, digital storage can cause a false sense of security. When digital files first came into widespread use, many people saw it as a solution to the problems of preservation. Digital files were not sensitive to light, heat, hand prints or humidity. However, after many years of use, it has become clear that digital files have many inherent issues that are difficult to manage and can lead to serious loss of important information if not managed well.

The problem of archiving and preserving electronic records is a serious issue that many people across the country have been attempting to address. Because formats constantly, digital files are susceptible to security issues and corruption. We are creating an incredible amount of digital files every day, a volume that has quickly surpassed anything that was created in previous areas. The Internet Archive is doing interesting work on this issue, particularly in preserving websites, but this type of archiving is still in development. There are a few steps you can take with personal files to ensure their long-term integrity, and if you are transferring analog media into a digital format, there are a number of recommendations that you should keep in mind.

There are a few important principles to remember to preserve histories in digital file storage, replication, migration, and metadata are three to remember.

Replication: One of the most important digital repositories used in libraries is a system called LOCKSS, which stands for Lots of Copies Keeps Stuff Safe. They specialize in journals, but the idea can be applied to any times of digital documentation. Do not store everything on one computer or one hard drive, have some copies on solid state drives and some in the cloud, and make sure to keep the multiples in different places (in case of flood, fire or other natural disaster).

Migration: It is the nature of digital files that formats become obsolete. In the 1980s and 1990s, Word Perfect was used everywhere. Today it is very difficult to open a file on a new computer that was created in .wpd. This example illustrates a common problem with digital files that has not yet been resolved. By assessing the current formats of all of your files and migrating those that are on the verge of being obsolete, you will avoid attempting to open something long after it can no longer be used. Microsoft and other similar software companies tend to support the use of older formats for at least ten years, but this cannot be guaranteed going forward. It is also important to be mindful of using proprietary software that cannot be read by other formats. While we may believe that Microsoft will always be a powerful force in business, and Microsoft Word will always be the primary software for document creation, this is unlikely to be true. While the process of migration is time-consuming and tedious, it will protect those files.

Metadata: Metadata is data about data, an important set of information that can show a wide variety of important details. There are three types of metadata, structural, descriptive, and administrative. Structural metadata describes how a format is put together. Descriptive metadata describes the author, title, etc. and explains the content of the data. Administrative metadata shows when a document was created, by whom, and who has access to it. These three types of metadata can either be created by the
program when you create the file, or can be created and stored by the user. All of this metadata can be exported and managed in a file management system. In a small institutional or personal archive, metadata should be seen as a tool that you can use to your advantage, not another difficult and complicated technical problem. Most programs automatically create metadata that you can search and organize. The most important element of metadata is to be consistent and honest about all changes.

The Research Library Group and The Online Computer Library Center (OCLC) came together in 2000 to develop the Trusted Digital Repository Model, which provides a set of rules for digital repositories. They also developed the model for the Open Archival Information System (OAIS). These systems are complex, but will provide more context for how this work is being done in professional archives.

Digital preservation is an evolving field, but personal archiving is an area that is getting an increased amount of attention. There are a number of resources for digital file management that will provide more details and give information about conferences that deal with these issues.

For more information:
- Digital Preservation-Library of Congress
- Personal Digital Archiving-Library of Congress
- Columbia University Personal Digital Archiving

**Digital File Types for Long-Term Storage**

These file types are recommended by the Library of Congress for long-term storage.
- **Photographs:** JPEG-good for online access, easily compressed
  TIFF-best for a preservation master, very large file
- **Audio:** WAVE-can be uncompressed or compressed, widely adopted
  MP3-good for access
- **Documents:** PDF-best for storage of completed files, cannot be edited
  DOCX-widely adopted format, but can be changed so best to password protect
- **Video:** Video is particularly difficult because the files have both a codec and a wrapper, Audio Visual Preservation Solutions gives a good overview of the meaning of a video formats [here](#). MPEG-4 supports a few codecs, but they are useful
  Quicktime-supports many codecs
  MXF-Library of Congress is using this container
  MOV-Many archives have adopted this container as it is widely available

For more information on file formats:
- Sustainability of Digital Formats Planning for Library of Congress Collections
Photographs

Photographs are one of the most commonly archived material in personal and community archives, and require some special care and handling for their long-term preservation. Digital photography is similar to other digital files, addressed in another post. Digital photographers should be aware of the problem of proprietary software based on camera brands, for example, many raw files are not in widely accepted formats and cannot be considered a preservation format. Photographers should look closely at the format recommendations in the digital files post. Analog photography has a long history, and it is possible that you may encounter formats that are unusual, and perhaps printed on glass (ambrotype and glass plate negatives) or metal (tintype or daguerreotype).

It is important to identify what format you have, as the preservation needs are different for formats with different types of emulsions or substrates. This guide from the Northeast Document Conservation Center gives detailed information about each type, [Types of Photographs](#). There are a few general guidelines for handling photographs. You should protect them from heat and light, and be particularly mindful of the relative humidity (35-50%), since photographs are sensitive to changes in humidity. Color photographs are more stable at a cold temperature, so if you have access to a colder area that would benefit the newer color photographs. The emulsion of a photograph should never be
touched with bare hands, as fingerprints can leave oil that cause damage. If you do not have a pair of clean cotton gloves or disposable gloves to use, make sure to only touch the back and paper sides of the photograph.

It is best to minimize handling if possible. If a photograph needs to be handled regularly, you can encase it in a Mylar sleeve, available in a variety of sizes at Gaylord Archival Supplies. It is also recommended to storage photographs in folders so you can see what you have without pulling anything out and in boxes to protect from dust and debris. It is important to never use glue, staples, tape or to place photographs in albums that compromise the integrity of the photographic paper. Albums should be made with archival acid free paper, and always use photo corners to hold the photographs. Mats are a good option for high value photographs or anything you would like to display.

For more information on analog photography:
Storing Photographic Prints-National Archives
Care, Handling and Storage of Photographs-Library of Congress
A Short Guide to Film Base Photographic Materials: Identification, Care, and Duplication-NEDCC
Film and Video

Film and Video presents many of the same issues as photography and audio materials. It is very important to pay careful attention to temperature and humidity, and most film is best stored at a slightly lower temperature. Because many film and video formats are open reel, it is important to be extremely careful in handling and storage. Open reel should be stored in containers specifically meant for the materials, as the film will be significantly more secure. Like photographs, the emulsion should never be touched with the bare hands, although film is better handled using nitrile gloves than cotton gloves which can scratch. If you can make an access copy of your a/v material on a newer format, that will protect the originals from damage in handling or by the machine. It is also important to keep the players clean and in good order.

Nitrate film is a particular concern for many archives, as cellulose nitrate was widely used as the base for film until 1952. It is highly flammable at around 100 degrees Fahrenheit, particularly if it is stored with a lot of other nitrate film and without proper ventilation. If you have nitrate film, it is recommended that you take it to a professional preservation studio, but if you would like to keep the film, make sure it is stored properly. Cellulose acetate (safety film) replaced cellulose nitrate as a base, and while it does not have the same flammability, it can deteriorate very quickly. The deterioration of this film is called vinegar syndrome for the smell that the film produces as it breaks down. Once a film has vinegar syndrome that is severe enough that it can be smelled, it is very difficult to reverse the damage that the acid erosion has caused.

Video is more stable than film, particularly video in cassette formats, as the cassettes protect the film from dirt and debris. The Texas Commission on the Arts has a helpful guide to different types of video materials with images of each type for easier identification, Videotape Identification and Assessment Guide. Once you have identified what kind of videotape or film you have, it is best to move it into cool and stable humidity storage and then consider digitization as well as other types of preservation. Broadcast formats tend to have slightly better long-term stability than home video formats, but that is not necessarily true for all formats, so after you have assessed what you have, seek of guidance for each individual format.
Like audio, playback obsolescence is a major concern for the long-term preservation of film and video materials. It is unusual to find players for many older formats, and in many cases the people who have these machines cannot find qualified people to repair them. Formats that were popular in home video are particularly in danger from this problem but were not widely adopted, although many broadcast and ubiquitous formats are similarly problematic. Some examples from the Vision Maker Media vault are the 1” open reel tape (seen left), which is in very good condition but can only be played on one machine in the building. When we took another tape to be played the tech said he could not remember the last time he used it.

At right we have an example of at 3/4” U-matic tape, a very high risk format with similarly rare players.

Digitization is often used as a preservation tool for video, and while we have addressed the problems with digital files in other areas of this guide, the obsolescence of playback equipment and the problems of analog formats in video are substantial. Additionally, because playing a film is inherently dangerous to its preservation, it is a good idea to make access copies that can be used for viewing. This article looks further into digitization as preservation and provides a good template for larger institutions, Digitizing Video for Long-Term Preservation. Film preservation and particularly digitization is an area that requires a lot of technical expertise, but is an invaluable resource. There are
a number of resources available that can connect you to local, national, or international groups that can assist with these types of projects.

For more information:

- Association of Moving Image Archivists
- Film Preservation Handbook-AMIA
- Film Preservation Handbook-National Film and Sound Archive of Australia
- National Film Preservation Foundation
- National Film Preservation Board
Audio

Audio is one of the most difficult types of materials to care for, because of playback obsolescence and fragility of original format. Most audio formats are also easily damaged and once they are damaged they are very difficult to recover. Many audio archives specialize in restoring audio materials as well as preserving and transferring them, since without restoration the transfer will not reflect the complete recording. Be very careful with your audio, and since it is extremely susceptible to environmental damage, try to keep it in a space that has good temperature and humidity control. One of the major challenges with audio materials are their ubiquity, particularly the fact that audio was often used for original and unique materials like recording oral histories, live concerts, or meetings. These materials have incredible cultural value, but are often in very low-quality formats that were meant for home use with no expectation of longevity. With an enormous number of tapes, it is difficult to assess the preservation status of each, much less transfer them to a more sustainable medium. If you prioritize creating an inventory, which can provide some guidelines for how to decide which items should be addressed first. It can also be very hard to identify what format you have, this article from the library at Yale University gives a good timeline and brief description of many types of formats and the Library of Congress has a good overview of identification here, as well as this detailed format guide from the Preservation Self-Assessment program at University of Illinois (this also gives a good overview of video formats).

Grooved audio discs are one of the earliest audio formats likely to be found in personal and small institutional collections. Some examples of grooved audio discs are lacquer discs, LPs, aluminum discs, and cylinder recordings. They have very few inherent preservation issues, although they still benefit from good storage and handling practices. They can be easily damaged by scratches, and some discs have glass substrates that are easily broken if a disc is dropped or roughly handled.

Typical Vinyl LP

Edison Gold Molded Record Cylinder, circa 1904
Magnetic tape is one of the most common materials for tape, including reel to reel and cassette tapes, and without any preservation issues at all, its maximum life-span is 50 years. Most of the tapes created in the 1960's have therefore probably already reached the end of their lives. If a tape has been duplicated numerous times, it has lost quality in that process as well. Some particular problems associated with magnetic tape are sticky-shed syndrome where tape will squeak and shed powdery material. This can be easily fixed, but will require professional preservation intervention. Magnetic tape is very easily ripped or crushed, so it should be handled very carefully, and with gloves to prevent damage. Magnetic media is also quite susceptible to magnets, so it is important to store them away from magnetic or electrical fields. Many of the problems of magnetic audiotape also affect videotape, so make sure that you look at both of these types of collections.
CDs, particularly CD-RW is an extremely unstable format, as optical media was not created with any attention to long-term longevity. They are extremely easy to scratch and break. CDs that are pressed instead of copied are slightly more reliable, but these should always been seen as a temporary option for storage, particularly of unique information. Playback obsolescence is an even more pressing problem in audio preservation. Because machines are necessary to play audio, it can be difficult to obtain a machine at all, much less one in good working condition. It is also important to keep the machines in impeccable order and extremely clean, otherwise they can damage the reels, tapes or discs. Many of the necessary machines can be purchased used, but it is likely they will need to be serviced. Local libraries and archives may also have these machines that you could request access to use for your collections. Record players in particular need to be properly calibrated, and you should confirm that you have the proper player for the type of record. Many modern players can play 78s, 33s and 45s, but before you attempt to play a record on a machine confirm that it is 1 speed, 2 speed or 3 speed. Audio is a format that requires immediate attention from any collection holders, and will likely require professional assistance, but has incredible value if it is preserved.

For more information:
[WNYC Archive and Preservation Process](#)

Native Media Archives Guide
Provincial Archives of Alberta Preservation FAQ
Library of Congress- Care, Handling and Storage of Audio Visual Materials
National Archives - Preserving Audio Recordings
Paper Records

Paper records reflect what people think of traditionally as archives. They vary from institutional records and government documents to correspondence and diaries, and even in a digital world they continue to be a major part of the record of cultural and institutional life. In fact, the production of paper has increased substantially since the advent of the computer, and will continue to grow as people still rely on paper for a number of processes. There are a few important archival theories that apply specifically to paper records, and are useful in this context as well. Original order is a fundamental part of archives, meaning the papers should as closely reflect the intentions of their creator rather than the intentions of the archivist. If the papers need to be rearranged for storage or to facilitate easier use, any changes from the original order should be tracked and made available to anyone who is looking at them. Appraisal is another important concept, in this context appraisals means decision-making on whether or not something should be kept permanently. While it is appealing to save everything, volume reduces your ability to keep the records you have in an accessible way, and can obscure the value of more important items. The third important concept to remember is provenance, meaning the source or origin of papers. Tracking provenance gives important information to users and provides context for collections.

Archival boxes, photograph by Ron Wiecki

With the large volume of records that many archives have, there are some ways to process these materials and make them available for use without going through every folder and doing detailed processing. In the 1990s, new processing rules were put together to address the large backlog of records in many archives, and to make materials available that had been sitting unprocessed for many years. Requesting a list of folders from the donor provides enough description for most users, and it is usually sufficient to use those lists in combination with a robust historical description and provenance note. All boxes of records should be opened and assessed for major preservation issues, with particular attention to the presence of bugs or mold.
Placing paper into archival acid free folders and hard sided boxes will protect the records from many environmental conditions. If you re-folder paper, make sure to retain the original titles of the folders that they were held in and keep careful track of any changes you make.

Brittle older paper can also be placed into a Mylar sleeve for protection, these sleeves can be purchased here. If you have a large amount of newsprint or similarly brittle paper, you can color photocopy those materials to allow for access and preserve the information.

One thing in particular to be aware of is to make sure that your folders are tightly packed into the boxes, as they can easily slump if the box is not full. Slumping can permanently damage the materials. Description and organization will make the biggest difference in making these materials accessible, and protect the paper for the long-term.

For more information:
Indiana Historical Society-Lets Talk About Paper
NYU Preservation Tumblr
Description

Description is one of the most important principles of archives, and is an important step to protecting and managing your materials. It is important to work within what you are capable of doing. There are standards for archival description that you can use as a guideline to make sure that your materials are easily searchable and contain the same vocabulary as other collections. The type of description that you use depends largely on the type of materials that you have. Most collections have a variety of materials, so it may be easier to use something very universal and simple.

Archival collections are usually described in a format called a finding aid, which essentially gives information about all of the items in a collection as well as the access conditions, scope of the collection, size, types of materials, and the history of the collection, organization, and important people involved in the creation of the materials.

Example of a Finding Aid from the UNL Archives and Special Collections

In most archives, finding aids are created using Encoded Archival Description (EAD), an international standard created and maintained by the Library of Congress and the Society of American Archivists. EAD is written and edited in an XML-schema, so it takes specialized training, but once staff is trained it can be easily implemented. There are also systems that allow for data entry and will output EAD, but those systems still require some knowledge of EAD. ArchivesSpace is a newly launched archival management software which combines different features of previous systems. It requires some technical knowledge for installation and maintenance, but does not require as much specific archival training. EAD provides a model for the structure of description, but Describing Archives: A Content Standard (DACS) provides the model for how items should actually be described. This standard provides information about word choice, order of information, and what type of information is required. It also gives specific information about how to describe items on every level, and also gives a good overview of archival description in general.
These professional standards are important, but they can be impractical for a collection over which you have absolutely no intellectual control. In order to gain a basic understanding of what you have, the first step is to complete a detailed inventory of what is in the collection. It may help to look at DACS and EAD first, just to understand the type of information that archival description requires. An inventory should be made in a software that is easily sorted and searched. It is recommended that you use either Microsoft Excel or Access, or another database software that everyone in your organization can access and learn how to prepare inventories. This site gives more information: Frequently Asked Questions About Records Inventories

Once the basic inventory is complete, a finding aid can be created using one of the methods described above. This is often the step where organizations choose to hire professional archivists, since they can easily create finding aids and put them online, or at least make them accessible to your users. If that is impractical, it is simple to create the basic front matter described in DACS and then add it to the existing inventories. Many organizations keep that information in word documents or pdfs, since they are easy to print, copy and send to interested parties.

For Tribal archives it is crucial that archival descriptions be consistent, so that materials can be easily searched. Settle on common spellings—this is particularly important in identifying materials that are in Native American languages.
Security

One of the most important places to start in archival preservation is security. It is very basic, but is an integral element of protecting collection. Security needs should address theft, natural disaster, fire, and other issues that could happen in your area. Theft protection: This can be easily built into any space you are using for storage. Make sure that you keep archival materials in rooms that can be locked when they are not being monitored, and if that is not possible they should at least be in cabinets that can be locked. It is more common for items to go missing because they have not been properly cataloged and tracked than to lose things to theft. If you would like to have your materials open to your community, it is best to put in place a system of checking items out or at least marking where they have gone that is strictly enforced.

Fire: Plan to install a fire suppression system of the highest quality that you can afford. All archival materials tend to be extremely flammable, particularly many media materials. At minimum, purchase a fire extinguisher and confirm that your smoke detectors are within the recommended age and have good batteries. Many archives have suppression systems that release water or foam, which is recommended, but it can be cost prohibitive in personal or small archive or in institutions with limited budgets.

Natural Disasters: It is very difficult to plan for the eventuality of all natural disasters, but make sure that you are considering what is most likely in your area. In the Midwest, it is best to keep materials in a tornado safe space, while on the coasts it is recommended to protect your materials from hurricane or earthquakes. Many of these things are difficult to fully protect against, but make the best decisions you can for your collections.

Floods: Flooding is prevalent in nearly all areas, and many archives have experienced water damage. Paper materials can be dried, but media is likely to be irrevocably damaged. The best way to make sure that your materials are not damaged in a flood is to make sure that you are not storing anything on the floor. A shelf that keeps items at least a few inches off the floor will minimize damage if a few inches of water come into your space. While it does not seem obvious, description is one of the best things you can do to protect your collection. If you know what you have, it is much easier to make sure that it is not lost or destroyed.
No budget

There are a few things that you can do that are a good place to start, and will give you the basic measures needed to make sure your materials are safe.

Do not store your important media, paper, or photographs somewhere that it could be easily damaged. This includes floors, top shelves of closets, under your desks or anywhere that you wouldn't store something that you wanted to keep safe. Aim for six inches off the floor (on a shelf is fine). Cool and dark is best. If you decide to store in an attic, make sure that it has some climate control and that you do not have a leaky roof. If a basement is the best option, be especially careful to keep your items away from any places there could potentially be leaks or flooding. Clearly label the boxes.

Low Budget

1. Make a minimal inventory, at least of the number of boxes or items that you have. The more description you do the better (more information on description can be found here)
2. Organize things by type of item, put photographs with photographs and newspapers with other newspapers. This is particularly important for paper, as one type of paper can damage another. With media, this will help save space, as items organized by size are more efficient.
3. Storage-When you are storing things in boxes, make sure that everything fits as tightly as possible without ripping or tearing. The paper and photographs will provide support for each other and prevent bending or curling.
4. Apply for grants! Here are some great resources for grants for this type of work.
5. Reach out to local archives, libraries and special collections to see if they are interested in what you have collected. If you are interested in donating your collection eventually, it is best to start that conversation early. If you don't want to donate, the archivists can certainly give you some advice or guidance on your materials.
Native American Archival and Library Organizations

Association of Tribal Archives, Libraries, and Museums
National Association of Tribal Historic Preservation Officers
Native American Archives Roundtable
Tribal Libraries, Archives and Museums Project at UW-Madison SLIS

Archives Holding Large Collections of Native American Materials

Archives at the Institute of American Indian Arts
National Museum of the American Indian Archives Center
American Indian Archive at the Oklahoma History Center
American Indian Records at the National Archives
Northern Arizona University Cline Library
National Museum of American History National Anthropological Archives

Preservation

Indiana Historical Society-Lets Talk About Paper
NYU Preservation Tumblr
Sustainability of Digital Formats Planning for Library of Congress Collections
WNYC Archive and Preservation Process
University of Alberta Preservation FAQ
Library of Congress- Care, Handling and Storage of Audio Visual Materials
National Archives - Preserving Audio Recording
Digitizing Video for Long-Term Preservation-NYU
Film Preservation Handbook-AMIA
Film Preservation Handbook-National Film and Sound Archive of Australia
Storing Photographic Prints-National Archives
Care, Handling and Storage of Photographs-Library of Congress
Trusted Digital Repository Model
Open Archival Information System (OAIS)
Digital Preservation-Library of Congress
Personal Digital Archiving-Library of Congress
Columbia University Personal Digital Archiving
Archives and Library Organizations

Society of American Archivists
The Library of Congress
National Archives and Records Administration
Describing Archives: A Content Standard
Encoded Archival Description
Archives Space
Association of Moving Image Archivists
National Film Preservation Foundation
National Film Preservation Board
Internet Archive
The Online Computer Library Center (OCLC)

Item Identification Guides

Yale Audio Timeline
National Archives Audio Format Guide
Texas Commission on the Arts Videotape Identification and Assessment Guide
A Primer on Codecs for Moving Image and Sound Archives
Preservation Self-Assessment Program
A Short Guide to Film Base Photographic Materials: Identification, Care, and Duplication-NEDCC

Supplies

Gaylord Archival
University Products Archival Supplies
Archival Products
Hollinger Metal Edge