



# Canadian Collections Care Survey Summary of Results

## Introduction

The Canadian Association for Conservation of Cultural Property (CAC) and the Canadian Association of Professional Conservators (CAPC) are proud to introduce the first national survey of its kind to examine the current state of collections care and conservation in heritage institutions in Canada. This data can be used freely for advocacy, fundraising and programming purposes. Responses were collected using online survey software between 23 May and 31 July 2018. As with all surveys that use an open invitation to participate via electronic networks, the results are determined by respondents who have access plus an incentive to respond. The respondents' locations and profiles are described at the beginning of this document. Please note that in this report, Canadian regions are defined as follows: Atlantic (New Brunswick, Newfoundland and Labrador, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island), Central (Ontario, Quebec), Prairies (Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba), West Coast (British Columbia), North (Yukon, Northwest Territories, Nunavut).

## Associate Partners

CAC and CAPC would like to thank the following organizations for their help in disseminating the survey link throughout their respective networks.

Alberta Museums Association  
Archives Society of Alberta  
Association des archivistes du Québec  
Association of Manitoba Museums  
Association of Newfoundland and Labrador Archives  
Association of Nova Scotia Museums  
British Columbia Museums Association  
Canadian Art Museum Directors Organization  
Canadian Conservation Institute  
Canadian Council of Archives  
Canadian Heritage Information Network  
Canadian Museums Association

Community Museums Association of PEI  
Government of Nunavut, Department of Culture and Heritage  
Government of Yukon, Department of Tourism  
ICOM-Canada  
Museum Association of Newfoundland and Labrador  
Museum Association of Saskatchewan  
Ontario Museum Association  
Regroupement des services d'archives privées agréés du Québec  
Saskatchewan Council for Archives and Archivists  
Société des musées du Québec

## Authors

Simon Lambert, Gyllian Porteous, Sophia Zweifel

## Technical Committee

Heather Dumka (CAPC), Diana Komejan (CAPC),  
Simon Lambert (CAC), Miki Lee (CAPC),  
Gyllian Porteous (CAC), Sophia Zweifel (CAC)



© CAC-ACCR & CAPC-ACRP, 2019

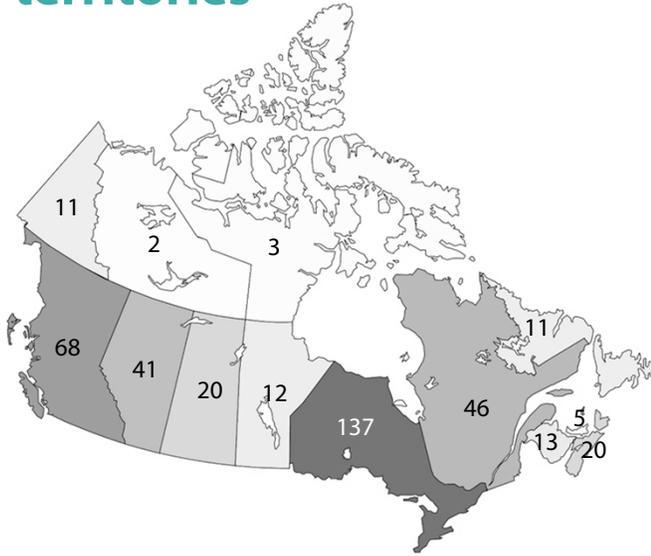


This material is licensed under a

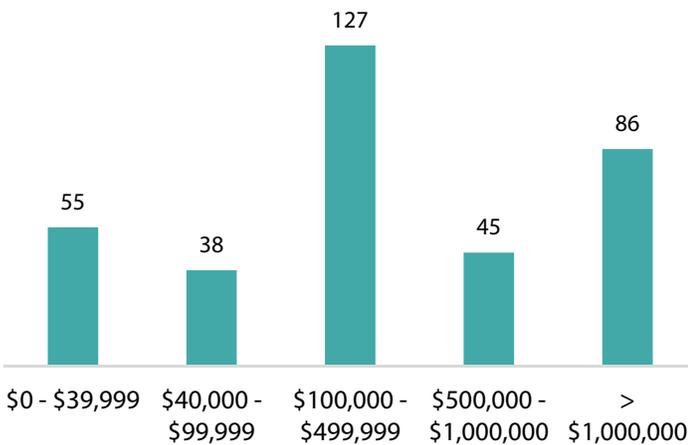
[Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License \(CC BY-NC-ND 4.0\)](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/)

# Respondents' Profile

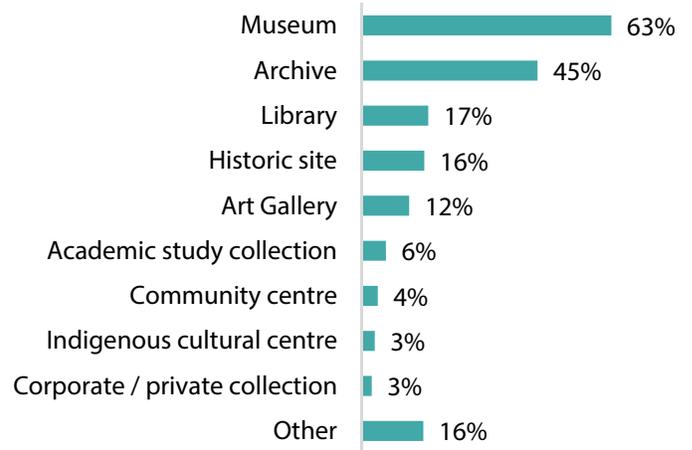
## 389 institutions from 10 provinces and 3 territories



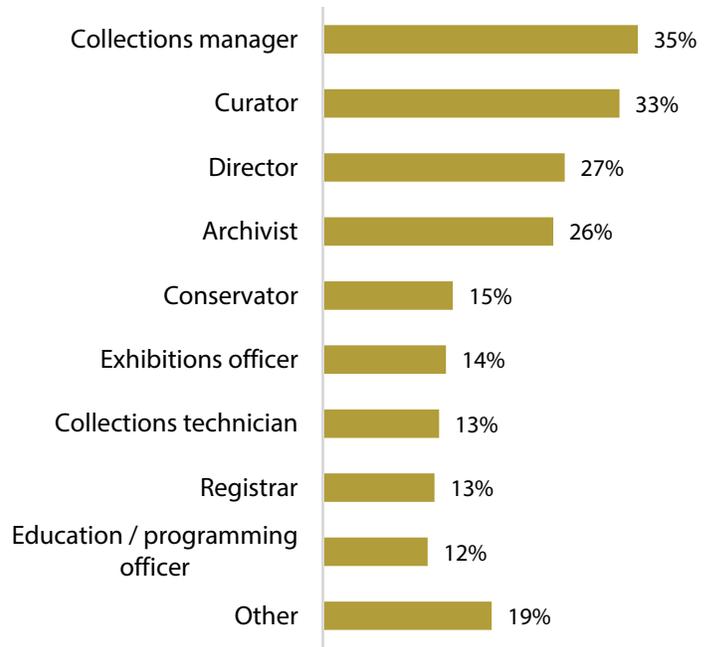
Geographic distribution of respondents



Number of respondents, by operating budget size (CAD) (2017)



How respondents described their institution, by number of responses (could select more than one option) (389 responses)



How respondents described their role, by number of responses (could select more than one option) (389 responses)

Many responses were submitted by a number of respondents together as a team, or by individuals who take on multiple of these roles within their institution. The most common types of institutions represented in the survey are museums and archives, however, nearly half of respondents described their institutions as serving multiple functions, and a wide variety of collection types were captured.

Together, these institutions care for over 106 million objects and 510 linear kilometres of archival records (381 responses)

# Collections Are a Valuable Resource



How respondents used their collections (other than for exhibitions) (388 responses)

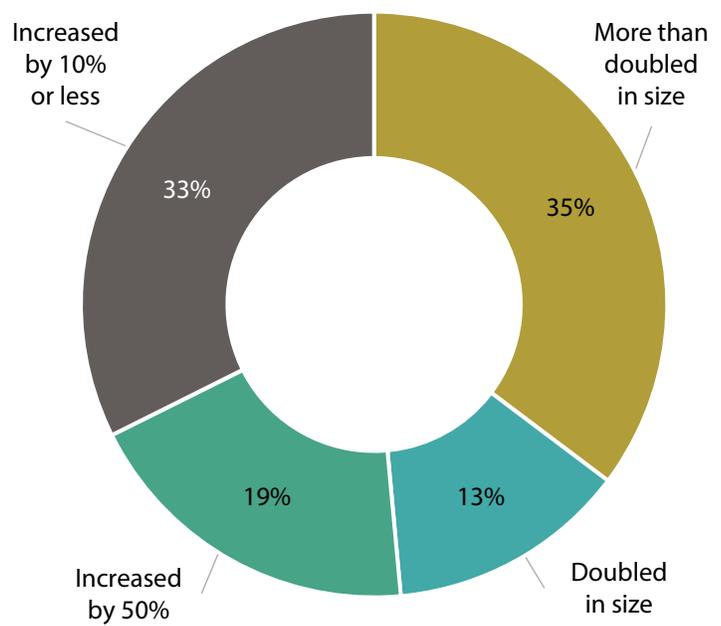
**Canadian collections are growing rapidly**  
**48% of respondents said their collection size had doubled or more than doubled over the last 20 years**

Collections are an extremely valuable resource for communities. In addition to being used for exhibitions, they are an integral component of historical and cultural research, educational programming, and community engagement.

The top ways in which respondents are using collections remain somewhat "traditional" (i.e. for research and loans). Yet, digitization, which ranked third, opens possibilities for innovative ways to reach new and diverse audiences.

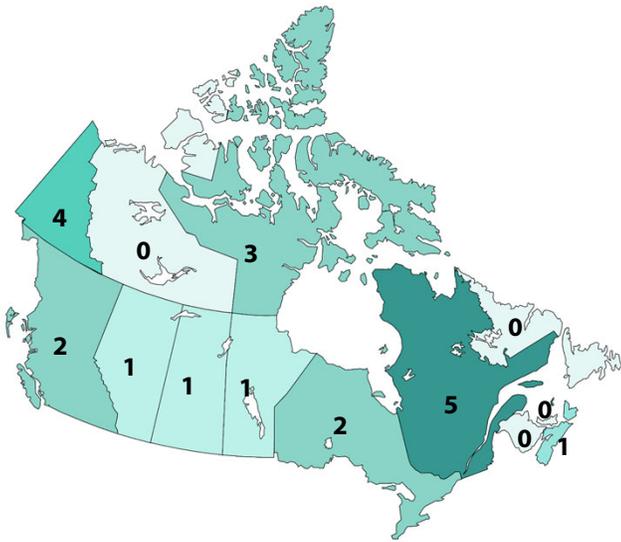
Many respondents indicated that collections that are kept "behind-the-scenes" are being used for storage tours, social media campaigns, visible storage and special exhibitions.

Respondents also mentioned using collections for community festivals or other heritage-related activities, for classroom teaching, outreach programs, traditional knowledge revitalization workshops, and a range of publication types (i.e. print, blogs, websites).

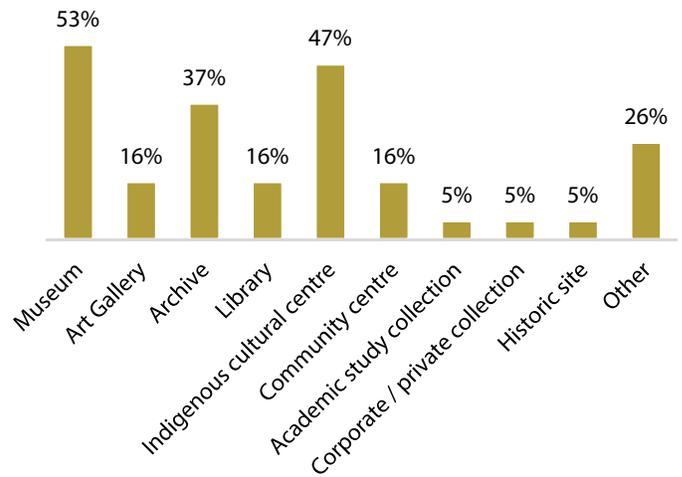


Change in collection size, compared to 20 years ago (1998) (384 responses)

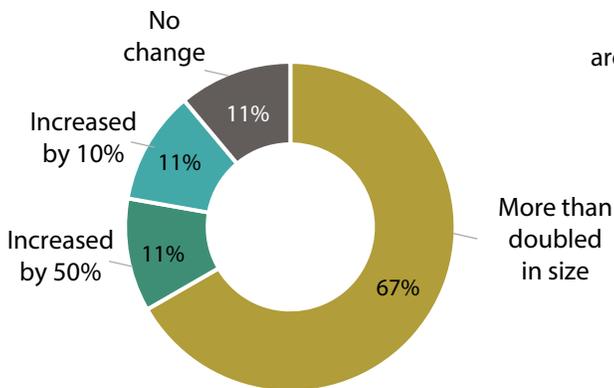
# Indigenous Material Heritage



Geographical distribution of Indigenous institutions surveyed



How respondents from Indigenous institutions described their institution, by number of responses (could select more than one option) (19 responses)

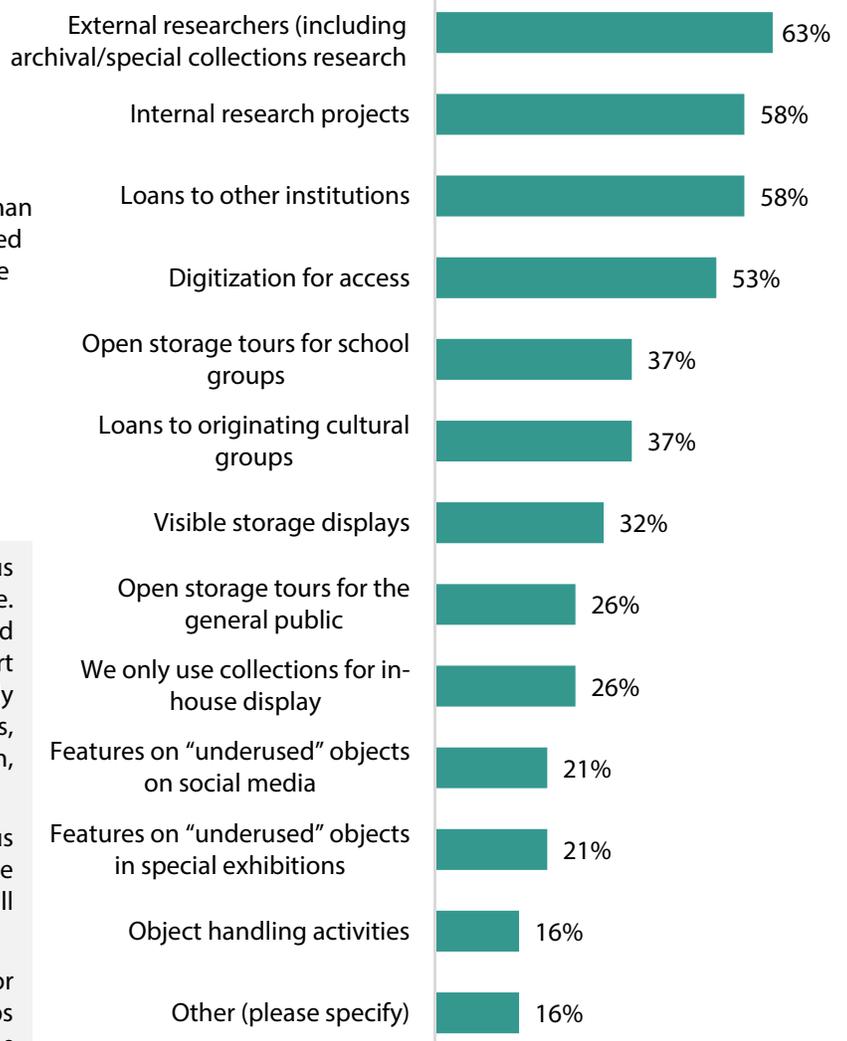


Change in collection size of Indigenous institutions, compared to 20 years ago (1998) (18 responses)

5% of respondents identified as Indigenous institutions. These institutions are diverse in nature. In addition to the Indigenous cultural centres (noted on p. 2), these include museums, archives, art galleries, libraries, research centres or study collections, First Nations government collections, community centres, a privately owned collection, and a historic site.

Over the past 20 years, collections in Indigenous institutions have grown more quickly: 67% more than doubled in size (compared to 35% for overall respondents).

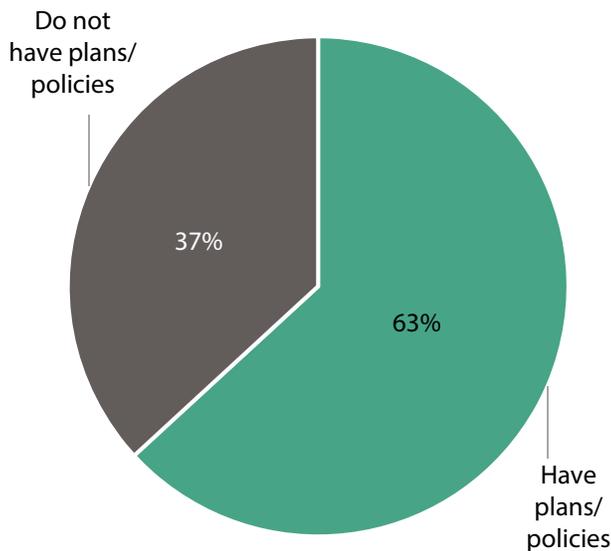
In terms of collection use, open storage tours for school groups, loans to originating cultural groups and visible storage displays ranked about twice as high compared to respondents overall.



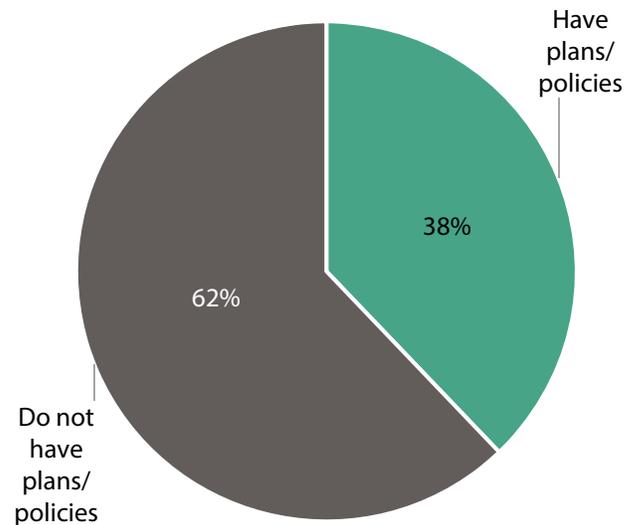
How Indigenous institutions use their collections (other than for exhibitions) (19 responses)

# Indigenous Material Heritage

58% of non-Indigenous institutions surveyed indicated that at least 1% of their collections consisted of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis material culture, representing over 6 million items across 207 responding institutions by this survey's estimation



Whether Indigenous institutions have plans or policies for the repatriation of Indigenous material culture (19 responses)

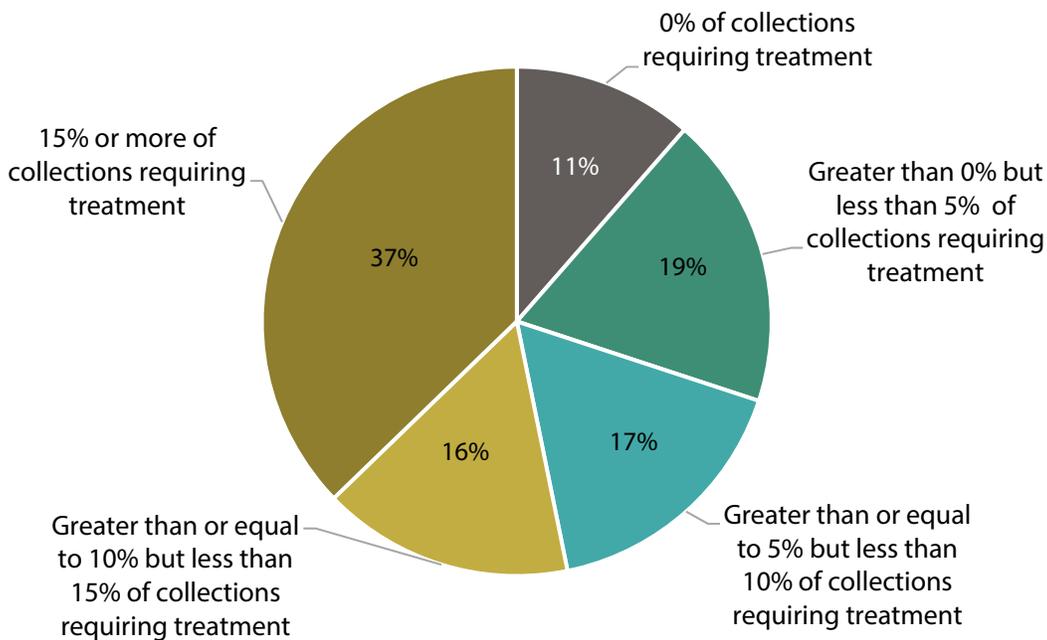


Whether non-Indigenous institutions with Indigenous collections have plans or policies for the repatriation of Indigenous material culture (206 responses)

47% of non-Indigenous institutions collaborate with members of Indigenous communities for the care, treatment, and use of Indigenous material culture

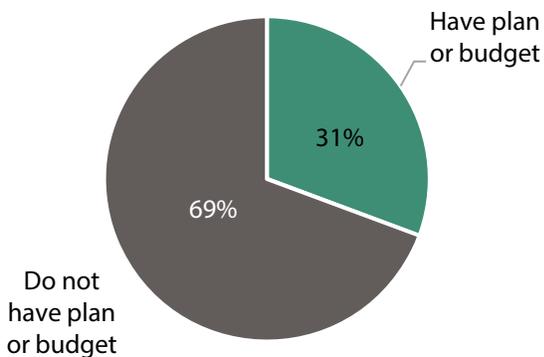
Among non-Indigenous institutions, some indicated that repatriation requests are handled on a case-by-case basis without an overarching policy, while others mentioned that the issue of repatriation had not previously come up. A number of survey respondents expressed that the repatriation of items of Indigenous origin does not apply to their institution for various reasons: the nature of their collections (e.g. contemporary art galleries possessing only contemporary Indigenous artworks in their collections), the quantity of material, or because they've determined their collections do not contain "spiritual," "significant," or "unique" materials that warrant such policies. The responses collected do not provide information as to how these determinations were made. Some respondents expressed that limited funding and staff resources have prevented the implementation of a repatriation policy from being addressed as a priority. Numerous comments expressed a willingness to adopt a policy, but uncertainty as to how to begin or to proceed.

# Collections Conservation Needs

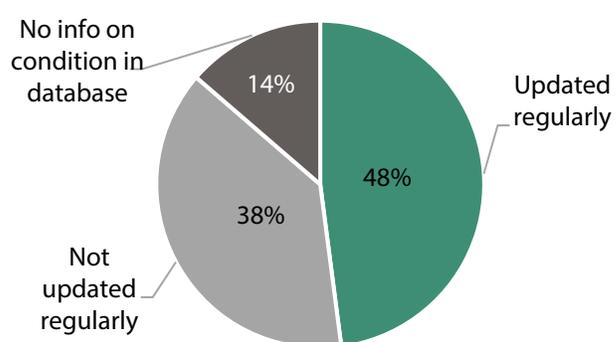


Estimated percentage of the collection that requires conservation treatment before items can be used by the institution (377 responses)

## 69% of respondents do not have a plan or budget in place for the treatment of collection items (362 responses)



Whether institutions have a budget or a plan for objects requiring conservation treatment (362 responses)

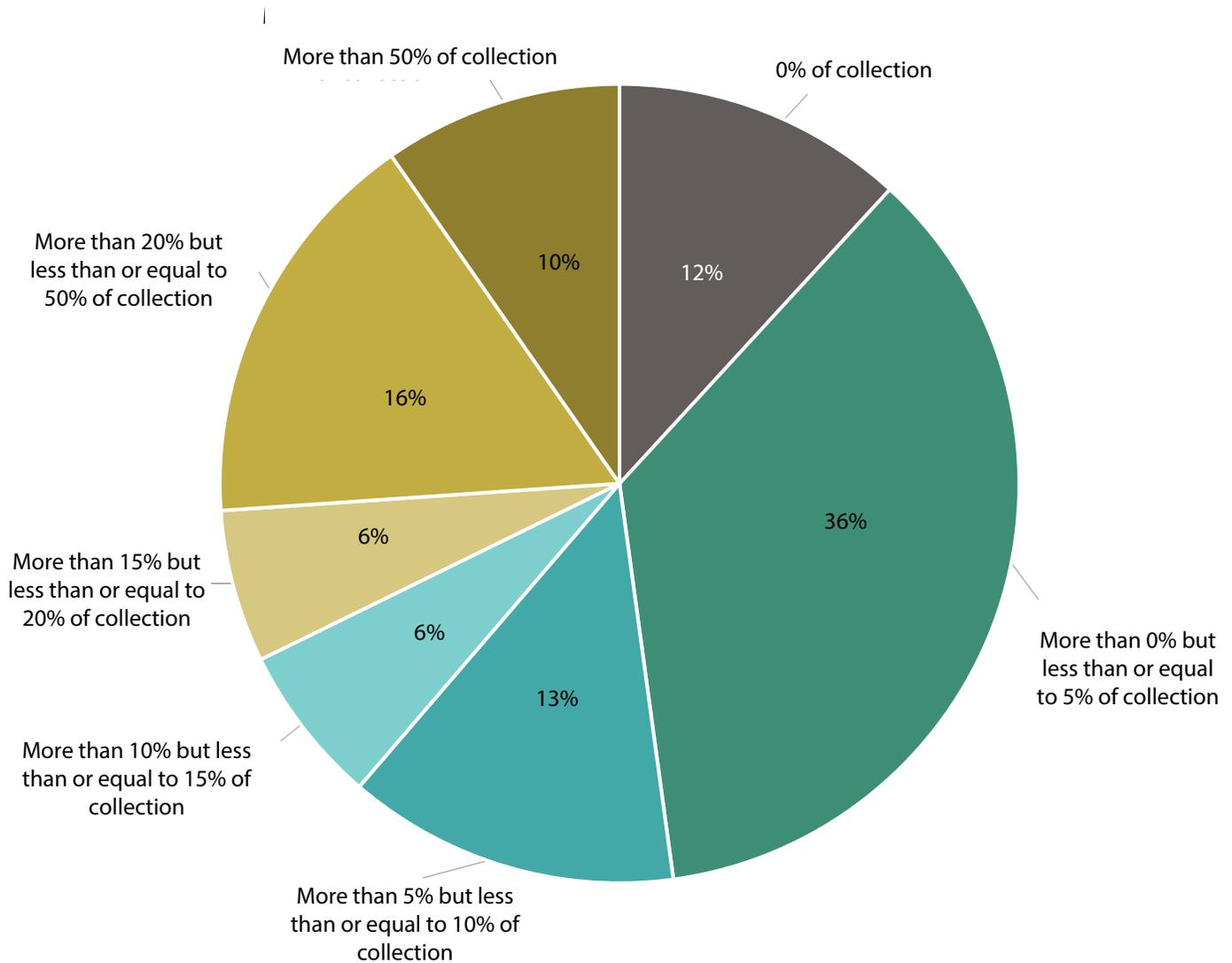


Whether changes in object condition are updated regularly in a collections or conservation database (388 responses)

Actual numbers of collection items requiring treatment cited by respondents may be different than those provided, as only half of institutions regularly update condition information in their collections database. Many respondents expressed that they do not have the time, knowledge, or resources to identify conservation needs.

# Collections at Risk - Dissociation

39% of respondents estimated that more than 10% of their collection consists of “found in collection” items\*, with 10% of respondents indicating 50% or more

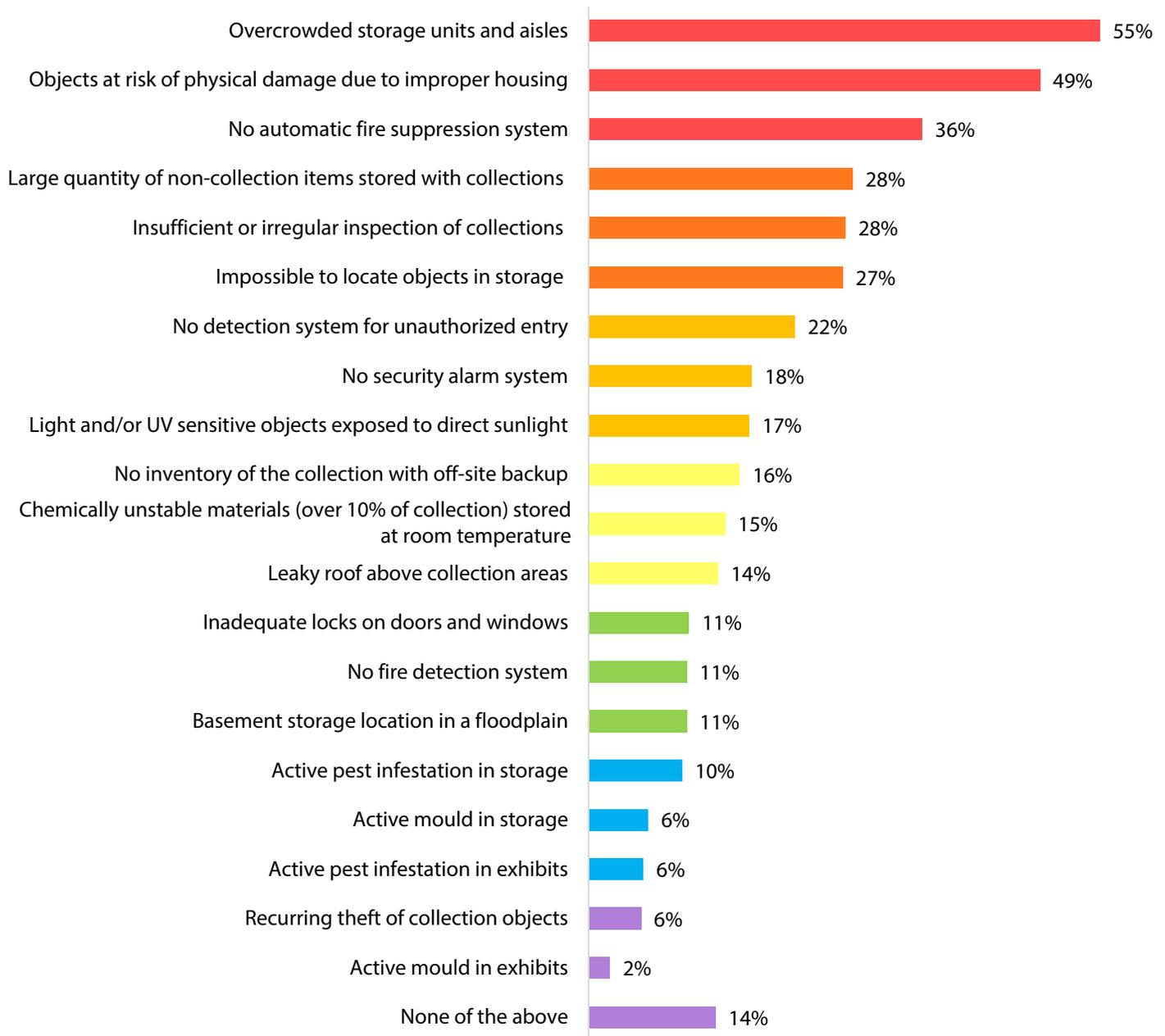


Estimated percentage of collections consisting of “found in collection” items  
(372 responses)

\*“Found in collection” items refer to undocumented objects that remain without status after all attempts to reconcile them to existing records. Other dissociation issues that arose in some of the respondents’ comments were that collections inventories remained incomplete, and that the provenance of collections items are not always, or have not always been, tracked and retained.

# Collections at Risk – Facilities

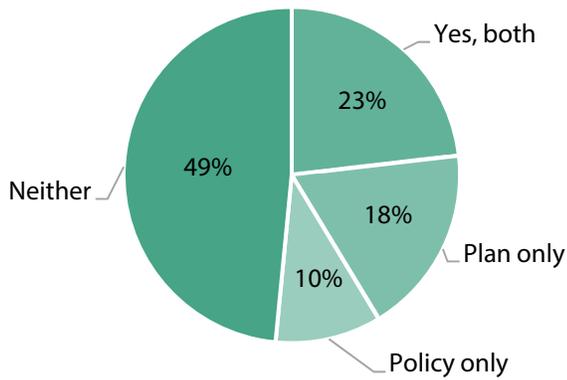
36% of respondents have no automatic fire suppression system in at least one main collection facility, and 11% have no fire detection system (386 responses)



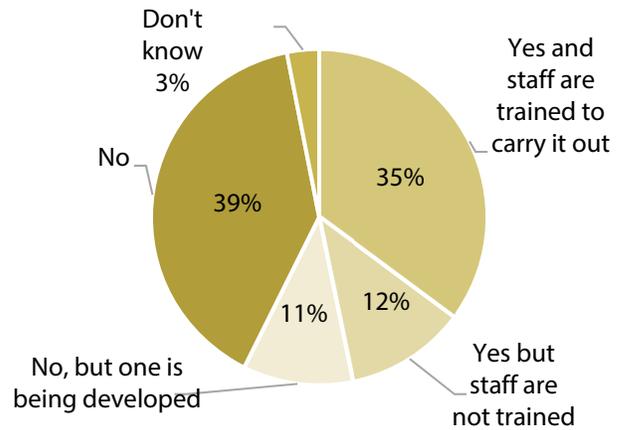
## Threats affecting any main facility where collections are present (386 responses)

Institutions face a wide range of challenges that, in many cases, are putting collections at risk. For the smallest institutions (budget < \$40K), “no automatic fire suppression” ranked highest, while “overcrowded storage units and aisles” ranked highest for the largest institutions (budget > \$1M). A notable regional difference is that a greater number of respondents from the Atlantic region reported having “no automatic fire suppression system” than did respondents from other regions. Encouragingly, 14% of respondents to this question indicated having experienced none of the collections threats listed. The top collections concerns reported by Indigenous institutions were overcrowded storage units and collections items being at risk of damage due to improper housing, which is consistent with overall respondents.

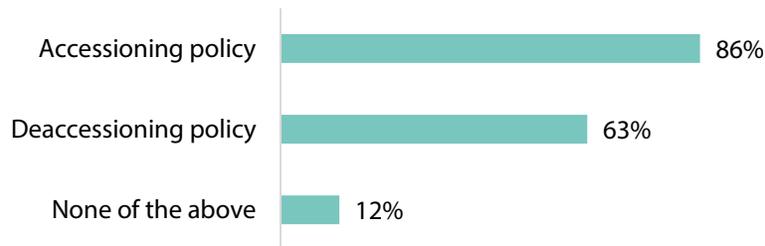
# Collections at Risk – Policies & Procedures



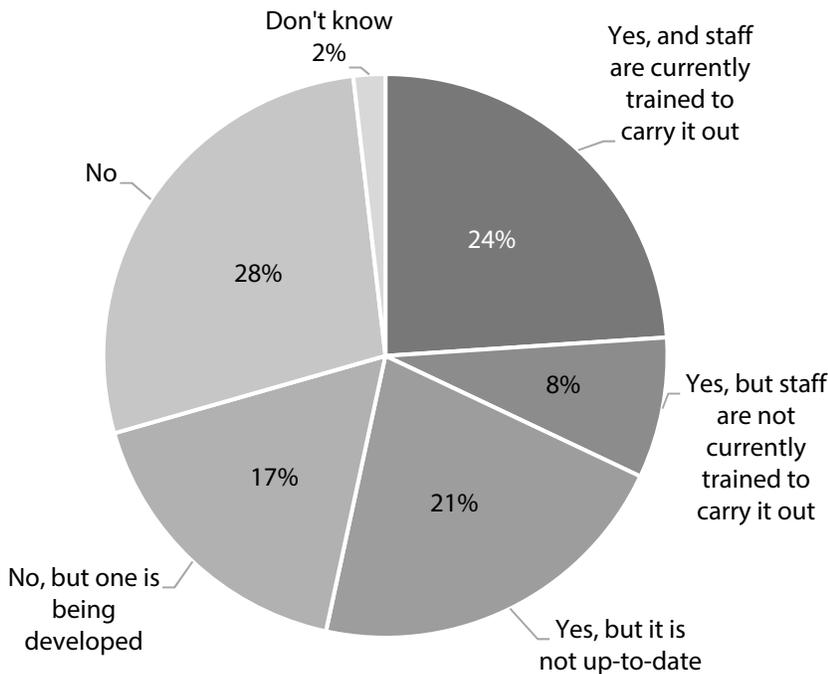
Existence of preservation plan or policy for digital collections (376 responses)



Existence of integrated pest management (IPM) program (387 responses)



Institutions operating under accessioning and/or deaccessioning policies (388 responses)



Existence of emergency plan that covers the protection and salvage of collections (384 responses)

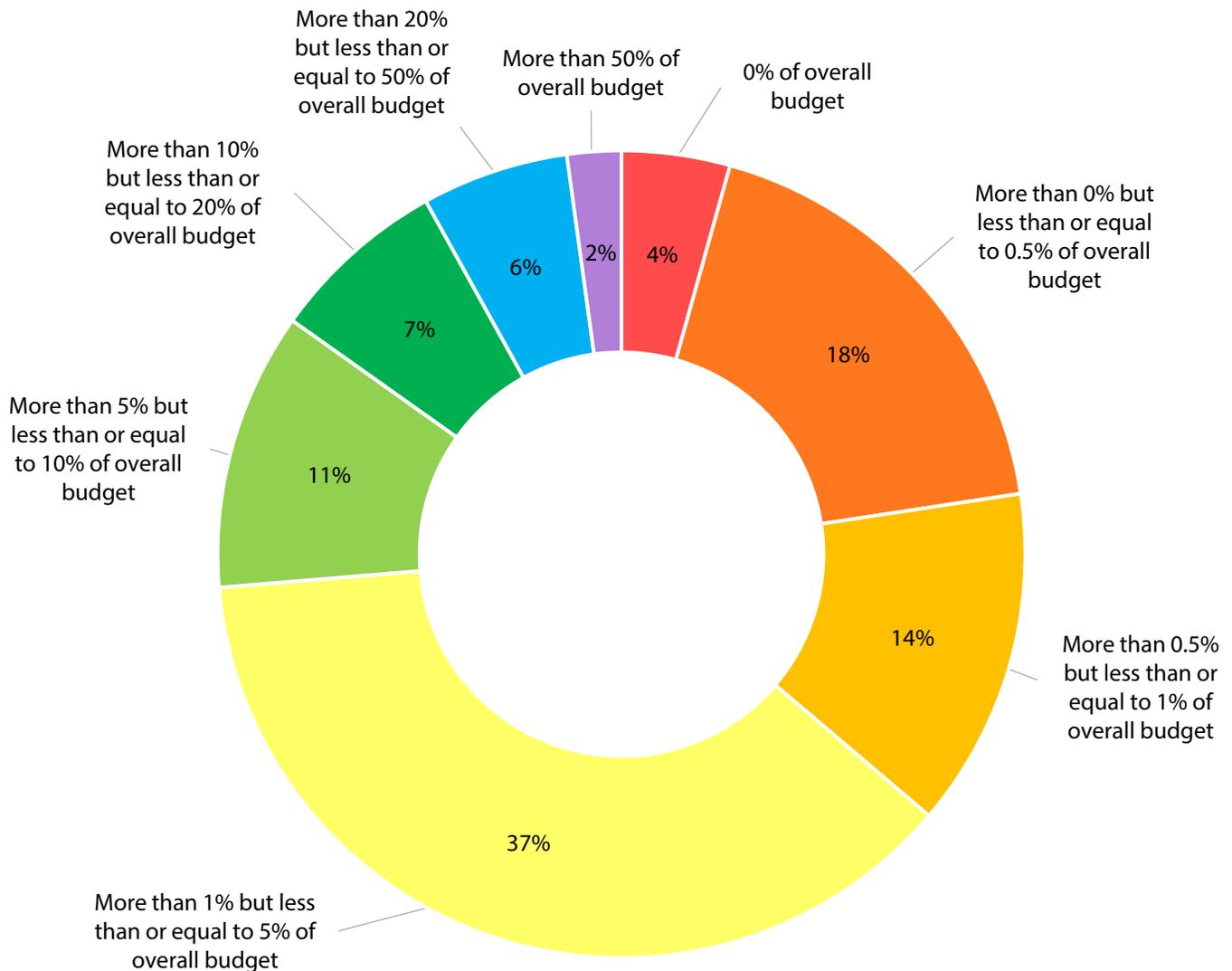
Nearly half of responding institutions with digital collections have no policy or plan for their preservation. Results were similar across all institution sizes, regardless of their total operating budget.

Three in four institutions (76%) do not yet have a functional\* emergency plan for their collection, and two in three institutions (65%) do not have a functional\* IPM program in place. As operating budgets increased, more institutions reported having an IPM program in place with people trained to implement it.

\* Functional meaning: in place, up-to-date, and staff are trained to carry it out.

# Resources for Collections Care – Financial

In 2017, 73% of respondents spent less than 5% of their operating budget on collections care,\* and 36% spent less than 1% (323 responses)

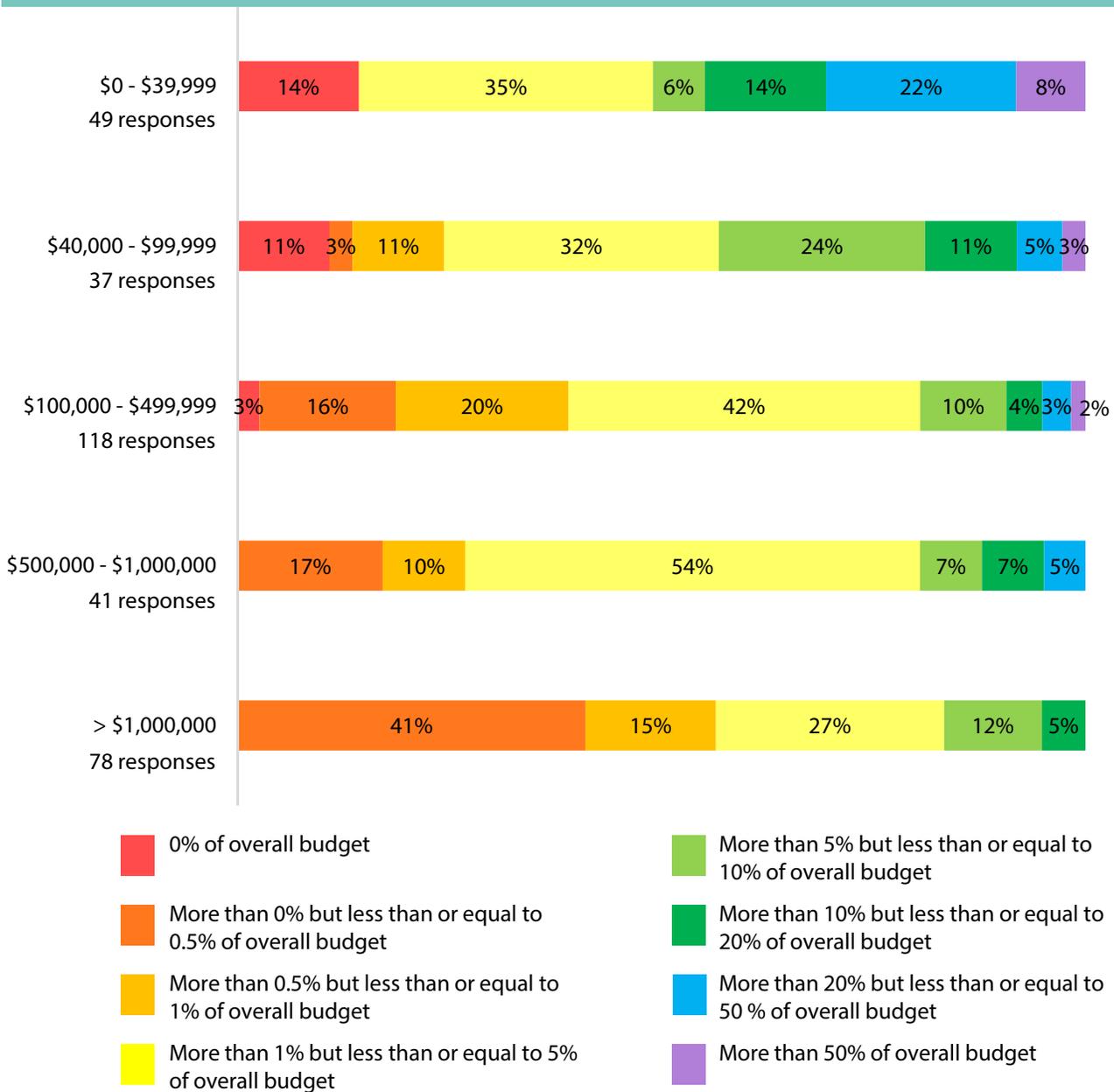


Percentage of overall budget allocated to collections care in 2017 (323 responses)

\* As part of “collections care” expenses, respondents were instructed to include items such as materials, equipment, supplies, external consultants or contractors, external service providers (e.g. pest control, movers, handlers), etc. but to exclude staff salaries and wages.

Some respondents specified in their comments that their collections care budgets are dependent on grant funding, and therefore vary from year to year.

# Resources for Collections Care – Financial

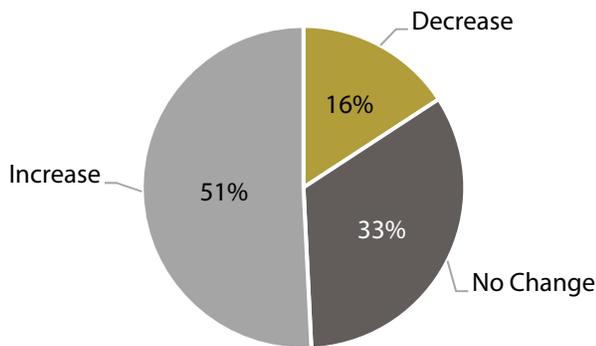


## How institutions with different operating budgets allocated funding to collections care in 2017 (323 responses)

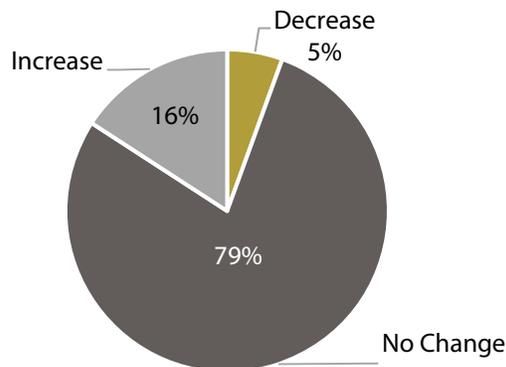
The majority of institutions with operating budgets ranging from \$0 to \$1,000,000 spent between 1% and 5% of their overall budget on collections care, while the majority of institutions with the largest operating budgets (over \$1,000,000) spent more than 0% but less than 0.5% of their overall budget on collections care. According to the responses of this survey, the percentage spent on collections care decreases as the overall operating budget increases.

When grouped according to operating budget ranges, it became apparent that institutions with smaller operating budgets were more likely to spend zero dollars on collections care. However, these also seemed more likely to spend over 20%, but also over 50% of their budget on collections care. Although this may seem as a positive sign of the value placed on collections care, it can also be seen as an indication of the impact on their other activities and operations if such a significant proportion of their budget goes towards collections care. Most of these smaller institutions – some of which are volunteer run and/or seasonally operated, would not qualify for some of the grants that are available to support collections care projects because they are simply too small.

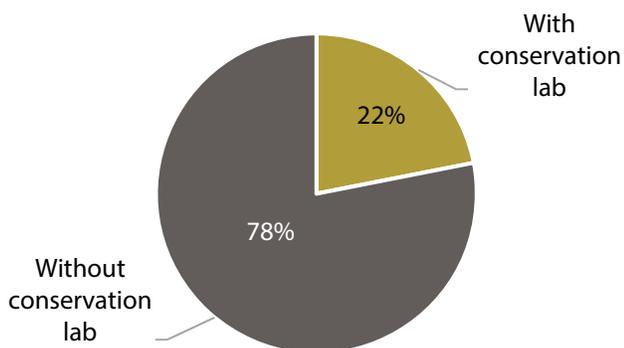
# Resources for Collections Care – Staff/Facilities



Relative change in paid staff delivering collections care, compared to 20 years ago (1998) (380 responses)

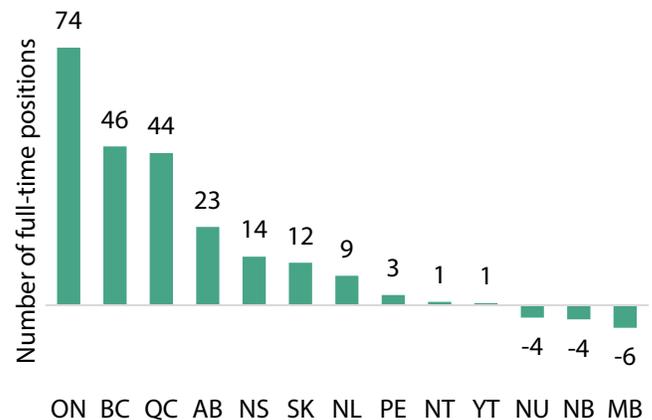


Relative change in trained conservators\* (i.e. graduates of a recognized program) delivering collections care, compared to 20 years ago (1998) (379 responses)  
\* included in "paid staff delivering collections care" graph above



Percentage of institutions that have access to an adequate conservation laboratory space to carry out conservation treatments (388 responses)

Despite the rapid growth of collections, 1 in 3 respondents saw no change in collections care staff numbers, and 1 in 6 actually saw a decrease



Net increase and decrease in number of paid staff delivering collections care over the last 20 years, by province (380 responses)

The total number of paid staff positions delivering collections care in Canada increased by 31% over the last twenty years, i.e. 211 full-time equivalents\* (FTE). In the same time period, institutions from Manitoba, New Brunswick, and Nunavut indicated a net decrease in staff delivering collections care.

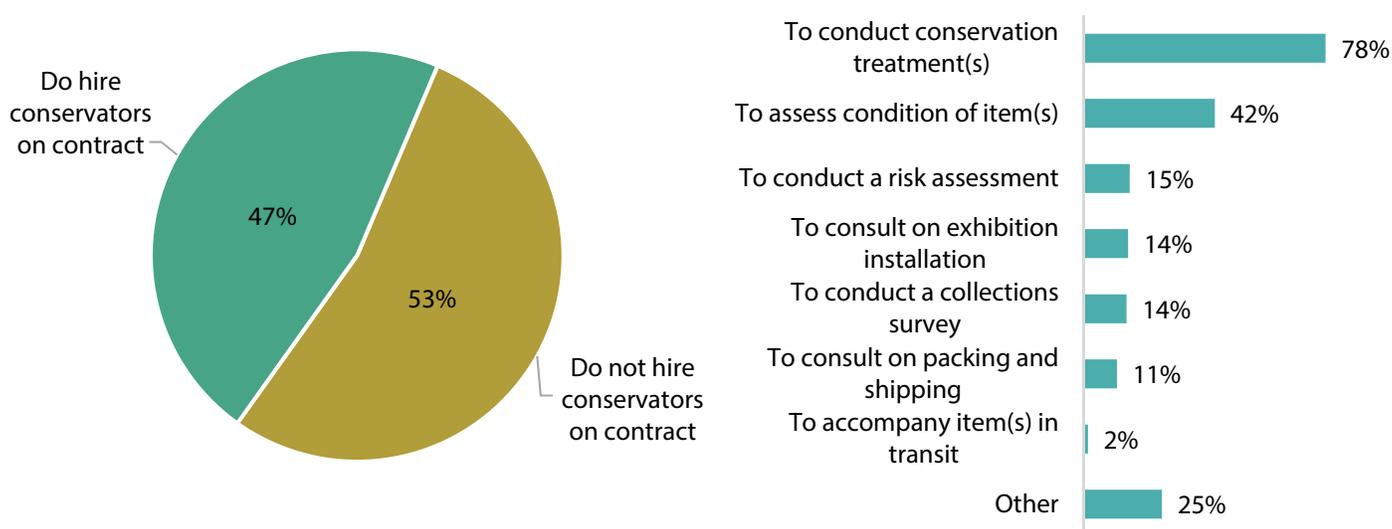
Professional conservators – who also deliver collections care, but who possess “the necessary training and experience to understand the physical nature of cultural heritage and to effect appropriate preventive and remedial interventions” (CAPC) – have not increased in numbers at the same rate as overall staff delivering collections care, but have also seen a bigger retention of positions compared to overall collections care staff (i.e. 5% decrease as opposed to 16% decrease overall). The institutions with larger operating budgets were more likely to have a trained conservator on staff.

\*Full-time equivalent: equal to x number of employees working more than 30 hours/week

Among survey respondents, 63% of collections care staff were volunteers (1,159 FTEs, compared to 690 FTEs for paid staff) (214 responses)

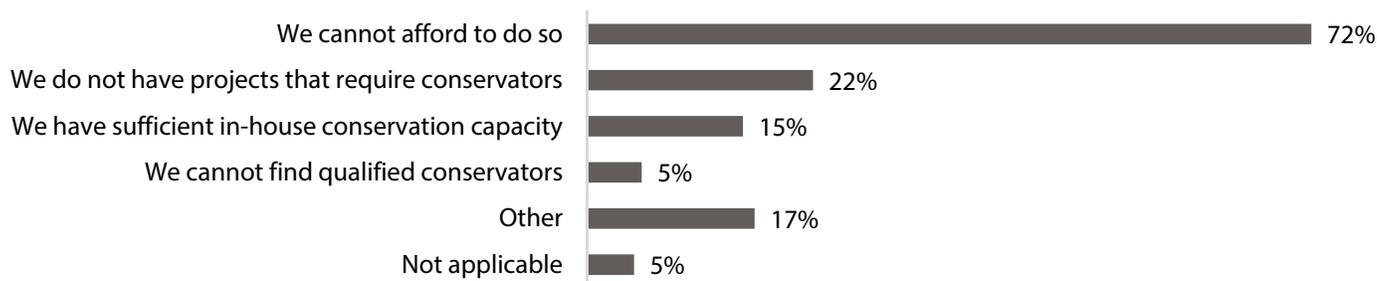
# Hiring Conservators on Contract

74% of institutions surveyed do not have any conservators on staff (379 responses)



Percentage of institutions that hire private conservation firms or individual contract conservators (389 responses)

Main reasons why contract conservators are hired (194 responses)



Main reasons why contract conservators are not hired (259 responses)

Not surprisingly, the ability to hire conservators on contract increased with an institution's operating budget size. The hiring of conservators also varied by region; institutions located in the North were most likely to hire conservators on contract (75%), followed by Central (54%), the Atlantic (45%), the Prairies (34%) and the West Coast regions (34%).

Nearly half of respondents hire conservators on contract – mostly to conduct conservation treatments. Apart from those indicated above, other reasons included: to consult on collections storage environments; to carry out complex or specialized treatments; to alleviate heavy conservation workloads; to aid in disaster response; and/or to deliver training.

The other half of respondents **do not** hire conservators on contract – mainly due to lack of funds (72%). Numerous respondents noted that for conservation support, they rely on services offered by the Canadian Conservation Institute (CCI) or the Centre de Conservation du Québec (CCQ). Considering that three quarters of respondents do not have conservators on staff, and that 72% of respondents cannot afford to hire conservators on contract, there is considerable pressure on these two organizations (one with a national mandate, and one with a provincial mandate) to fulfill Canada's vast conservation needs.

Some respondents commented that hiring conservators is not considered to be a priority by their institution's decision-makers, citing a lack of understanding of collections care needs as the main reason for this. Other respondents noted that time limitations and competing priorities have prevented them from hiring conservators. Others still noted that few or no conservators are available locally for hire; this emerged as an issue for institutions in remote locations.

## In your words...

Survey respondents were encouraged to provide additional open commentary at the end of the survey. A sample of these responses are included here to illustrate some of the particular situations or challenges faced by Canadian collecting institutions. Some respondents offer testimonials on how collections care resources are managed or attained within their own institutions, and others propose suggestions as to how their collections care needs could be better supported.

### *On Facilities...*

" We are a public government with 85% Indigenous population. We face facility and collections care challenges because we have no facilities in our own territory to care for our collections, and they are housed outside our territory. "

" We have no lab to care for artifacts, we share space with other groups. "

" We are a national historic site and our collection storage is all located inside the historic building, which was not built for storing museum objects and therefore lacking in all environmental controls! "

### *On Staffing...*

" We are a small institution with only one full time staff member year-round. The collection needs significant time and attention to update documentation, but it is difficult with one staff member being responsible for all other aspects of the museum and art gallery as well. "

" Need more funding for more staff to work on contract to bring the collections up to standard. Once that occurs then it will be manageable for 1 person to run the site. "

" We are completely volunteer run and lack expertise. "

" The place where I currently am employed was without a collections manager for 3 years and operated on a staff of 1. I work at a Federally funded museum (I am a public servant). The struggle to provide adequate staffing levels is real across the board. "

" We rely too much on untrained volunteers. "

### *On Grants...*

" Small museums have difficulty receiving funding for operating costs, as most grants are related to an event, a project, or activity. Conferences are priced out of reach. "

" Receipt of a BC/Canada 150 grant in 2017/18 allowed us to bring our collection up to international standards. "

" We had a long term period when there was no dedicated collections person on staff due to budget issues and our collection and records management fell into disarray during this time. Through term grant funds, we're now in the process of conducting an inventory, assessing and rehousing our collection, and digitizing objects. "

" Difficult to find funding for small organizations. Much of the funding requires full time staff. "

" Though we have indicated a budget line for "collections care", this money largely comes from grants and not from the regular operating budget. "

# In your words...

## *On Governance...*

"There is little understanding from the donors and upper management of how much work goes into the management of a collection and that we are stewards of the collection and not just a facility that produces revenue. "

"Turnover of exhibits is accelerating due to need to get [visitor] numbers up, as our staffing budgets depend on it. This is good in that more collections get direct conservation attention, but policies etc. suffer. "

"We have an Indigenous representative on our board and follow direction/comments regarding Indigenous artifacts wherever possible. "

"We are also the official repository for our local First Nation. We have repatriated all items in our collection back to them but they remain under our joint care for the time being. We are also helping repatriate items back to them from other institutions. "

"Collection care is not sexy and is not what is measured when it comes to measuring success of a museum. "

## *On Collections Challenges...*

"We are a science and technology museum, and as such face pressures to operate our historic machinery and equipment. Any use of an artifact like this, poses risks to objects and to visitors. "

"We have noticed increased public demand for access to digital collections. "

"I did a random survey of our Indigenous Studies collection a number of years ago and found that approximately 32% of that collection would need treatment for stabilization or appearance. The art collection is probably in better condition and the (large) history collections slightly worse. "

"Most of our collection is in need of conservation treatment, but we consider basic cleaning to be conservation treatment. "

## *On Access to Conservation Services...*

"We are a museum in rural Manitoba, and have difficulty accessing conservation professionals for any of our artifacts. "

"Any conservation/restoration that the collection needs is addressed case by case. We depend on donors to assist with these cases. Usually a single donor is secured for each project, but occasionally we crowd-fund projects as well. "

"Webinars could be a great way for conservators to educate museum professionals in geo-remote locations on specific collections preservation approaches (see BCMA webinar program). "

"Costs associated with collection care are a major issue for small museums where financially keeping the doors open is the main concern. Especially the cost associated with professional conservators is prohibitive. Inexpensive or free availability of templates or manuals for use by non-professionals of basic techniques for care and conservation would be great to have. "

"It'd be great to have a stronger network of collections professionals within Canada. "

# Appendix: Survey questions

1. In which province / territory is your institution located?
2. How would you describe your institution? Select all that apply.
  - Museum
  - Art Gallery
  - Archive
  - Library
  - Indigenous cultural centre
  - Community centre
  - Academic study collection
  - Corporate / private collection
  - Historic site
  - Other
3. What is your role at your institution? Select all that apply.
  - Director
  - Curator
  - Registrar
  - Collections manager
  - Collections technician
  - Education / programming
  - Conservator
  - Archivist
  - Exhibitions
  - Other
4. How many items are part of your collection? If uncertain, please estimate.

Number of items:  
Linear metres or feet (specify unit):  
Other measurement (specify unit):
5. How is the current size of your collection compared to what it was 20 years ago (1998)? Select the closest option.
  - More than doubled in size
  - Doubled in size
  - Increased by 50%
  - Increased by 10%
  - Increased by 5% or less
  - No change
  - Decreased
6. What percentage of your collection is currently on display? If uncertain, please estimate.
7. What was your institution's total operating budget for 2017?
8. What was your institution's budget for collections care in 2017? This may include items such as materials, equipment, supplies, external consultants or contractors, external service providers (e.g. pest control, movers, handlers), etc. Do not include staff salaries and wages. If you have a "Collections" line item in your budget, use that amount.
9. How is the number of paid staff whose duties include collections care different from 20 years ago (1998)? Use decimals for part-time staff (e.g. 0.5).

Number of staff whose duties included collections care 20 years ago (1998):

Number of staff whose duties include collections care staff now:
10. Of the paid staff whose duties include collections care, how many are trained conservators (i.e. graduates of a recognized program) - now and 20 years ago (1998)?

Number of trained conservators 20 years ago (1998):  
Number of trained conservators now:
11. How many volunteers currently deliver collections care in your institution? Use decimals for part-time staff (e.g. 0.5).
12. Does your institution have access to an adequate conservation laboratory space that is equipped to carry out conservation treatments?
13. For which reason(s) does your institution hire private conservation firms or individual contract conservators? Select all that apply.
  - We do not hire conservators on contract
  - To assess condition of item(s)
  - To conduct conservation treatment(s)
  - To conduct a collections survey
  - To conduct a risk assessment
  - To consult on exhibition installation
  - To consult on packing and shipping
  - To accompany item(s) in transit
  - Other (please specify)
14. If you do not hire conservators on contract, please explain why. Select all that apply.
  - We have sufficient in-house conservation capacity
  - We cannot afford to do so
  - We do not have projects that require conservators
  - We cannot find qualified conservators
  - Not applicable
  - Other (please specify)
15. What percentage of your collection is in need of conservation treatment (i.e. active intervention, not preventive measures) before it can be used for your institution's activities?
16. If you answered 1% or more for the previous question, does your institution currently have a plan or budget for objects requiring conservation treatment? If you answered "no", please explain why:
17. Do you have a preservation plan or policy for digital collections?
  - Yes, both
  - Plan only
  - Policy only
  - Neither
  - Not applicable
18. Do you have an Integrated Pest Management (IPM) program?
  - Yes and staff are trained to carry it out
  - Yes but staff are not trained
  - No, but one is being developed
  - No
  - Don't know

## Appendix: Survey questions

19. Does your institution face any of the following issues in any of its main facilities where collections are present? Select all that apply.
- Impossible to locate objects in storage using the documentation system
  - Overcrowded storage units and aisles
  - Objects in storage at risk of physical damage due to improper housing
  - Basement storage location in a floodplain
  - Large quantity of non-collection items stored in collection storage rooms
  - Active pest infestation in storage
  - Active pest infestation in exhibits
  - Active mould in storage
  - Active mould in exhibits
  - Recurring theft of collection objects
  - Significant quantities (10% of collection or more) of chemically unstable materials stored at room temperature (e.g. magnetic media, colour prints/negatives, foams and rubbers)
  - Leaky roof above collection areas
  - Inadequate locks on doors and windows
  - No fire detection system
  - No automatic fire suppression system
  - No detection system for unauthorized entry
  - No security alarm system
  - No inventory of the collection with off-site backup
  - Insufficient or irregular inspection of collections in storage and on exhibition (pests and theft)
  - Light and/or UV sensitive objects exposed to direct sunlight
  - None of the above
20. How do you use collections if not for display? Select all that apply.
- Internal research projects
  - External researchers (including archival/special collections research)
  - Open storage tours for the general public
  - Open storage tours for school groups
  - Visible storage displays
  - Object handling activities
  - Digitization for access
  - Features on “underused” objects on social media
  - Features on “underused” objects in special exhibitions
  - Loans to other institutions
  - Loans to originating cultural groups
  - We only use collections for in-house display
  - Other (please specify)
21. Do you have a written, up-to-date emergency plan that covers collections?
- Yes, and staff is currently trained to carry it out
  - Yes, but staff are not currently trained to carry it out
  - Yes, but it is not up-to-date
  - No, but one is being developed
  - No
  - Don't know
22. Are changes in object condition regularly updated in your collections / conservation database? (e.g. condition upon accessioning, damage incident, vandalism, after maintenance work, after treatment)
- Yes
  - No
  - Our database does not include information on condition
23. Does your institution operate under the following policies? Select all that apply.
- Accessioning policy that clearly defines the scope of what your institution collects
  - Deaccessioning policy
  - None of the above
24. What percentage of your collection is comprised of “found in collection” items (i.e. undocumented objects that remain without status after all attempts to reconcile them to existing records of permanent collection and loan objects are completed)? If you are unsure, please estimate.
25. What are your institution's plans / policies concerning the repatriation of items of Indigenous origin?
- We are an Indigenous institution planning to engage (or currently engaged) in a process that will lead to the repatriation of cultural materials to our institution
  - We are an Indigenous institution, but currently have no such plans
  - We are a non-Indigenous institution and have policies in place to facilitate repatriation requests for cultural materials of Indigenous origin
  - We are a non-Indigenous institution and currently have no such policies in place
  - We are a non-Indigenous institution with no Indigenous collections
  - Not applicable
  - If you currently have no plans to repatriate cultural materials or have no policies in place, briefly explain why:
26. If you are a non-Indigenous institution, what percentage of your collection is made up of materials originating from Canada's Indigenous peoples (First Nations, Inuit, Métis)?
27. Does your institution care for / treat / use Indigenous artifacts with traditional methods / usages and through collaborations with members of the originating communities?
- Yes
  - No
  - If “no” please explain why:
  - Not applicable