Heritage and Research Center at Saint Mary's (HARC) Collection Development Policy
Adapted & revised Oct 7, 2025

Purpose

This collecting policy establishes the scope and priorities for acquiring materials that document the spiritual, educational, healthcare, and social justice ministries of partner congregations. Collections preserve the founding stories, leadership contributions, apostolic works, and prophetic witness of women religious. By making these materials accessible to researchers, scholars, and the public, the repository serves as a vital resource for understanding the historical and ongoing contributions of Catholic sisters to their communities and the broader society.

1. Mission & Scope

The Heritage and Research Center at Saint Mary's (HARC) serves as a specialized archival repository dedicated to collecting, preserving, and providing access to records documenting the history and legacy of Catholic religious congregations and affiliated organizations.

Primary Collection Areas:

- Official congregational records (governance, administration, formation)
- Records of women's religious communities and their sponsored ministries
- Born-digital and hybrid archival materials
- Community histories and biographical materials
- Audiovisual collections, including oral histories and documentary media
- Material culture and artifacts related to religious life and ministry

HARC's collections illuminate the founding narratives, spiritual charisms, apostolic works, and social justice commitments of religious communities, supporting scholarship on the

role of women religious in American Catholic history and their contributions to education, healthcare, social services, and advocacy.

2. Collection Rationale & Priorities

HARC's collecting activities are guided by the repository's mission to document the history and legacy of Catholic religious congregations, with particular attention to women's communities and their ministries. Active acquisition priorities include:

- **Congregational organizational records**: governance documents, constitutions, proceedings, administrative files, financial records, and institutional correspondence
- **Leadership and personal papers**: materials documenting the lives and contributions of founding members, superiors general, provincial leaders, and influential community members
- **Ministry documentation**: records of sponsored institutions and apostolic works in education, healthcare, social services, and advocacy
- **Oral histories and audiovisual materials**: recorded interviews, photographic collections, moving images, and digital media documenting lived experiences and community memory
- **Born-digital and hybrid collections**: electronic records, digital photographs, websites, social media, and collections spanning analog and digital formats
- **Materials documenting underrepresented communities**: records that amplify marginalized voices, document diverse experiences within religious life, and illuminate intersections of race, ethnicity, class, and justice work

Acquisition decisions balance historical significance, research value, and the repository's capacity to provide appropriate stewardship and access.

3. What HARC Will Not Collect (Exclusions)

HARC does not collect materials that fall outside its mission or exceed its preservation capabilities. The repository will not acquire:

- **Materials without clear legal title**: items with disputed ownership, unclear provenance, or unresolved copyright issues
- **Large non-archival artifacts**: oversized objects, furnishings, or materials more appropriately housed in museum collections (exceptions may be made for items with exceptional historical significance and adequate storage capacity)
- **Published monographs and serials**: commercially published books and periodicals unless they contain unique annotations, inscriptions, or archival materials, or document otherwise unavailable congregational publishing activities
- **Duplicative materials**: items already adequately documented in existing HARC collections or readily available in other repositories
- **Materials with insurmountable preservation or legal constraints**: records requiring resources, environmental conditions, or legal compliance beyond HARC's institutional capacity

Congregations of excluded materials will be referred to appropriate alternative repositories or collecting institutions when possible.

4. Appraisal & Acquisition Principles

HARC employs rigorous appraisal criteria to evaluate potential acquisitions and ensure responsible stewardship of archival materials. Appraisal decisions are guided by the following principles:

- **Research and evidential value**: materials that document significant historical events, institutional development, decision-making processes, or individual contributions
- **Uniqueness and rarity**: records not duplicated in other repositories or readily available through other sources

- **Contextual and associational value**: materials that enhance or complement existing HARC collections and provide broader historical context
- **Condition and preservation feasibility**: assessment of physical condition, format stability, and HARC's capacity to provide appropriate preservation and access
- **Legal and ethical considerations**: clear legal title, intellectual property rights, Congregation restrictions, and privacy protections

The Lead Archivist, in consultation with the Collections Committee, evaluates all proposed acquisitions against these criteria. For at-risk born-digital materials requiring immediate preservation action, HARC prioritizes rapid ingestion and stabilization, with formal appraisal occurring during subsequent processing activities.

5. Congregation Relations, Agreement of Deposit, & Transfer of Title

All donations, deposits, and transfers of archival materials to HARC must be documented through a written legal agreement prior to formal accessioning. HARC uses standardized Agreement of Deposit and Deposit Agreement forms that establish clear terms of transfer and ongoing responsibilities.

Required elements of transfer agreement include:

- **Collection inventory or preliminary description**: scope and content summary, physical description, and extent
- **Transfer of title statement**: clear conveyance of ownership or terms of deposit
- **Copyright and intellectual property provisions**: assignment or licensing of reproduction and publication rights
- **Access restrictions and privacy protections**: specific limitations on researcher access, embargo periods, and sensitive materials handling
- **Withdrawal and deaccession terms**: conditions under which materials may be returned or transferred
- **Insurance and transit responsibilities**: allocation of risk and costs associated with physical transfer

- **Contact information**: designated representatives authorized to make decisions regarding the collection
- **Authorized signatures**: executed by individuals with legal authority to transfer materials on behalf of the donating organization

HARC maintains ongoing communication with Congregation congregations through annual reports, consultation on access requests, and periodic collection reviews. Congregational representatives retain the right to inspect deposited materials with reasonable advance notice.

6. Access, Restrictions, & Privacy

HARC is committed to providing open and equitable access to its collections in support of research, education, and public engagement, balanced with respect for Congregation agreements, legal requirements, and individual privacy.

Access policies:

- **Open access**: collections are available to researchers, scholars, congregational members, and the public during regular repository hours, subject to Congregation-imposed restrictions and applicable law
- **Restricted materials**: time-based embargoes, confidential records, and sensitive materials are documented in collection finding aids and managed according to Congregation specifications
- **Periodic review**: access restrictions are re-evaluated at regular intervals or upon request to ensure continued appropriateness and compliance with Congregation intent

Privacy protections:

- HARC adheres to professional archival standards and legal requirements regarding personal data and sensitive information, including:

- **Redaction protocols**: personally, identifiable information, medical records, personnel files, and other protected data may be redacted or withheld
- **Access controls**: materials containing sensitive information are stored securely with access limited to authorized staff and approved researchers
- **Researcher agreements**: users must acknowledge and comply with usage restrictions, privacy protections, and copyright limitations

Reproduction and publication:

Policies governing photocopying, digital reproduction, and publication of archival materials are published in research guidelines and available on the HARC website. All reproduction is subject to copyright law, Congregation restrictions, and HARC use policies.

7. Born-Digital & Hybrid Records

HARC recognizes the increasing significance of born-digital materials in documenting contemporary religious life and actively collects electronic records in formats including digital photographs, email correspondence, word processing documents, databases, websites, social media content, and digital audiovisual materials.

Minimum requirements for born-digital transfers:

Congregations transferring born-digital materials must provide:

- **Comprehensive file inventory**: clear statement of included files, folder structures, and content scope
- **Descriptive metadata**: contextual information including creation dates, creators, file relationships, and relevant background
- **Secure transfer method**: materials delivered via encrypted external media, secure file transfer protocol (SFTP), or other approved methods that ensure chain of custody and data integrity

Digital preservation standards:

HARC maintains born-digital collections according to professional digital preservation standards and best practices:

- **Original file preservation**: retention of original files in their native formats alongside normalized preservation and access copies
- **Fixity verification**: generation of SHA-256 checksums at time of transfer to verify file integrity and detect corruption
- **Preservation metadata**: creation and maintenance of PREMIS (Preservation Metadata: Implementation Strategies) metadata documenting provenance, technical characteristics, and preservation actions
- **Redundant storage**: maintenance of at least two complete copies stored on geographically separated servers to ensure disaster recovery capability
- **Regular fixity checking**: scheduled verification of file integrity through checksum comparison
- **Format migration**: risk-based assessment and proactive migration of obsolete file formats to ensure long-term accessibility
- **Web archiving**: capture and preservation of congregational websites, blogs, and social media content using WARC (Web ARChive) format
- **Email preservation**: export and preservation of email correspondence in standard formats including MBOX or EML with associated attachments and metadata

HARC staff work collaboratively with congregations to develop transfer workflows, provide technical guidance, and ensure successful ingestion of complex digital materials.

8. Audiovisual Materials & Oral Histories

HARC collects audiovisual materials that document the history, ministries, and lived experiences of religious congregations. Audiovisual collections include sound recordings, moving images, photographs, slides, film, videotape, and born-digital audio and video files.

Acquisition considerations:

HARC accepts audiovisual materials when appropriate preservation, storage, and access can be provided. Congregations are encouraged to consult with repository staff regarding collection conditions, format obsolescence, and preservation requirements prior to transfer.

Preservation standards for audiovisual materials:

- **Audio recordings**: preservation masters created or maintained in uncompressed WAV format (96kHz/24-bit minimum); access copies generated in compressed formats as appropriate
- **Moving images**: preservation of lossless or minimally compressed master files; obsolete formats (film, videotape) digitized according to professional standards with original media retained when feasible
- **Photographic materials**: digital surrogates created at archival resolution (minimum 600 dpi for prints; appropriate resolution for negatives and transparencies)

Oral history collections:

HARC actively collects oral history interviews that document the experiences of religious community members, sponsored ministry personnel, and individuals associated with congregational works.

Requirements for oral history donations:

- **Signed legal releases**: all interviews must be accompanied by release forms granting HARC permission to preserve and provide access to recordings and transcripts
- **Transcription**: typed transcripts of interview content required for all oral histories (HARC may assist with transcription services when resources permit)

- **Contextual documentation**: interview metadata including date, location, interviewer, interviewee biographical information, and topics discussed

Oral histories lacking proper legal documentation or transcription may be accepted on a case-by-case basis when exceptional historical value warrants the additional resources required for processing.

9. Accessioning, Arrangement, and Description

HARC assigns a unique accession identifier to every incoming acquisition using the pattern `HARC_YYYY_XXX` (for example, `HARC_2025_001`). Large or multipart deposits receive sub-accessions (e.g., `HARC_2025_001a`, `HARC_2025_001b`) so each discrete transfer can be tracked independently. The accession identifier must appear on the accession record, intake paperwork, and any physical/digital manifests.

At intake create a minimal accession record immediately (Congregation name, transfer/date, extent, box count or digital size, known restrictions, and a short scope note). That record is the authoritative point for later arrangement, processing, and rights tracking.

Processing priorities

- **Triage first:** Rapidly identify high-risk and born-digital material (failing media, sensitive files, or content with imminent deletion risk) for immediate stabilization and bit-level capture.
- **Prioritize work:** Give higher processing priority to high-use collections, high-risk media, and born-digital deposits; low-use and well-described backlogs may be scheduled later.
- **Document actions:** Record every major action (migration, normalization, conservation, rehousing) in the accession record and preservation metadata.

Standards & description

- Use **DACS** for archival descriptive practice and authoritative, human-readable finding aids.
- Record preservation metadata using **PREMIS** (or an equivalent preservation metadata schema) to capture fixity, provenance, and technical actions.
- For discovery and interoperability, map descriptive elements to **Dublin Core** or **MODS** as appropriate for web catalogs and repository exports.

10. Conservation, Storage & Environmental Care

HARC maintains professional, documented standards for the physical and digital care of collections to minimize deterioration, enable safe use, and preserve long-term access.

Physical collections

- Store materials in secure, climate-controlled spaces that meet archival practice: recommended targets **18–22 °C (64–72 °F)** and **40–50% relative humidity**, with stable daily and seasonal variation controls.
- Implement an **Integrated Pest Management (IPM)** program, routine housekeeping, and monitor storage shelving/racking to prevent pest, dust, and water damage.
- Protect collections from light damage (use UV filters, low light levels for storage and restricted display) and use archival-quality enclosures and housing (acid-free boxes, buffered or unbuffered folders as appropriate).
- Use appropriate fire and environmental safeguards (monitored alarms, climate monitoring, and fire suppression systems suited to archival materials). Access to storage areas must be controlled and logged.

Digital storage

- Preserve digital content using documented workflows that include **bit-level integrity checks (SHA-256 or stronger)** on ingest, automated fixity monitoring, and logged remediation of any fixity failures.

- Maintain **multiple geographically separated copies** (primary + replicate; consider a third cold/offline copy for high-value or high-risk material). All storage locations and media changes must be recorded in the preservation metadata.
- Use managed, versioned storage and access controls; encrypt sensitive data in transit and at rest where required by law or Congregation agreement. Maintain a documented backup and recovery plan with regular testing.

Conservation treatments

- Conservation treatments and repairs must be performed only by qualified, trained conservators or under their direct supervision.
- At intake, items requiring conservation are documented with a condition report. For materials that need significant conservation or specialized treatment, HARC will prepare an estimate and seek Congregation approval or funding before proceeding.
- Prefer **minimal, reversible** interventions that stabilize materials for access while preserving original integrity and evidence.

Monitoring, documentation & review

- Continuously monitor environmental conditions and security logs; maintain alerts for excursions and a rapid response plan for environmental or security incidents.
- Record all conservation, housing, migration, and storage actions in the accession record and preservation metadata (including agent, date, methods, and costs).
- Establish review thresholds: if anticipated conservation costs or storage needs exceed specified limits, escalate to the Collections Committee for decision before acceptance or treatment.

This policy balances preventive care, documented intervention, and prudent digital preservation so that both physical and digital materials remain stable, discoverable, and usable for future researchers.

11. De-accessioning & Disposal

De-accessioning is an exception, not routine practice. HARC will only remove materials from the permanent collections for sound, documented reasons and after transparent, governed review.

Grounds for de-accessioning

- Proven duplication of materials is held in a stronger, long-term repository.
- Congregation-requested returns where consistent with the original agreement/contract and feasible.

Required governance & approvals

Any proposed de-accession must be supported by a written recommendation explaining the reason, proposed disposition (transfer, return, destruction, or sale), and estimated costs.

Disposition options & restrictions

- **Transfer:** Prefer the transfer of materials to a more suitable repository, with documentation of transfer terms and a new accession record.
- **Return to Congregation:** If title or agreement terms permit, return to Congregation following documented packing/shipping procedures and cost agreements.
- **Destruction:** Only when material is hazardous, personally identifying in violation of law, or irreparably damaged; must be documented and approved by governance and legal counsel.

Documentation & transparency

- Document every de-accession decision with rationale, approvals, disposition method, recipient (if any), and financial accounting.

- Update the accession and catalog records to reflect the disposition and make a summary of de-accession actions available to stakeholders in the annual collections report.

12. Rights, Copyright & Intellectual Property

Clear rights documentation is essential for stewardship, access, and reuse. HARC requires Congregations to assert ownership or authority to deposit materials and to provide clear statements about copyright and other intellectual property (IP) rights.

Congregation responsibilities

Upon deposit, the Congregation must represent that they own or have the authority to deposit the materials and to grant the rights described in the agreement. Congregations should disclose any third-party copyrighted content or contractual restrictions.

Agreement of Deposit / Deposit Agreement elements (minimum)

- A clear statement of transfer or custody (custodial deposit vs. deposit).
- Explicit language about copyright and licensing (transfer, retained, or licensed rights).
- Any embargoes, restrictions, or time-limited access conditions and a review/expiration mechanism.
- Permissions required for reproduction or publication and the party responsible for obtaining them.
- A clause describing HARC's right to create preservation and access surrogates (scans, derivatives, WARC files) unless explicitly prohibited.

HARC obligations & practices

- Record rights statements and permissions in the accession record and catalogue metadata so access staff and researchers can identify reuse restrictions.

- When HARC holds only custody (custodial deposits), HARC will enforce Congregation restrictions and require written permission from the rights holder before fulfilling reproduction requests that exceed fair use.
- For born-digital items HARC will capture license/rights metadata with the deposit (who owns copyright, who controls access, any embargo dates).

Permissions, third-party content & orphan works

- Congregations are responsible for securing permissions for third-party copyright material prior to depositing where possible. HARC will require written documentation of permissions for materials that raise obvious copyright concerns.
- If permission cannot be obtained, HARC will evaluate permissible uses under fair use and may restrict access or require researchers to obtain permissions for publication. HARC will consult legal counsel for complex orphan-works determinations.

Attribution, moral rights & takedown

- HARC will honor reasonable attribution and moral-rights requests consistent with law and archival best practice and will record attribution preferences in descriptive metadata.
- If HARC receives a valid takedown notice or legal order concerning IP or privacy, HARC will follow legal obligations, notify the Congregation where appropriate, and take documented remedial action (restrict access, remove digital objects, or seek court direction).

When rights are transferred to HARC

If copyright is conveyed to HARC, the repository will manage copyright in accordance with mission and Congregation intent—deciding on reproduction, digitization, licensing, and commercial use in consultation with stakeholders and legal counsel. HARC will continue

to respect any documented Congregation restrictions even after copyright transfer where those restrictions were part of the original agreement.

Metadata & discoverability

Rights and permissions information must be captured in accession records and exposed in discovery systems (where restrictions allow), so researchers and staff understand reuse conditions. Include fields for copyright owner, license type, embargo end date, and any special permissions.

13. Legal Demands; Privacy; FOIA

HARC will protect Congregation interests and privacy while complying with applicable law. The repository's approach is governed by transparency, prompt notification, and legal prudence.

Notification & Congregation consultation

- If HARC receives a subpoena, search warrant, court order, or other legal demand affecting deposited materials, HARC will notify the affected Congregation(s) promptly (email + certified mail and phone where possible) and allow a reasonable opportunity for the Congregation to seek protective relief or to consult counsel.
- Notification timelines: initial notice within 5 business days of receipt (unless legally prohibited), plus updates as the matter progresses.

Privacy & data protection

- HARC will apply reasonable safeguards to protect personally identifiable information (PII) and other sensitive content. Where Congregation agreements or law require redaction or restricted access, HARC will enforce those restrictions and document redaction decisions in the accession record.

- For born-digital and hybrid deposits, HARC will follow security best practices (access controls, encryption in transit/at rest when required, and audit logging) for materials containing personal or sensitive data.

14. Disaster Preparedness & Risk Management

HARC maintains a proactive, tested approach to protect collections from physical and digital threats and to recover materials when incidents occur.

Planning & prevention

- Maintain a written **Disaster Preparedness & Response Plan** covering prevention, immediate response, salvage priorities, communications, and recovery for both physical and digital collections. The plan will include a prioritized salvage list tied to accession identifiers and associated contact information for Congregations.
- Implement preventive measures: environmental monitoring, fire and water detection, UPS/power protection for critical infrastructure, and secure offsite replication for digital holdings.

Testing & training

- Conduct regular drills and tabletop exercises (minimum annually) for staff and emergency partners. Update plans based on drill outcomes and technological changes.
- Train staff and key stakeholders in emergency procedures, salvage priorities, and chain-of-custody documentation.

Response & recovery

In the event of disaster or incident:

- Activate the Disaster Response Plan and incident command structure.
- Notify affected Congregations and stakeholders as soon as feasible with an initial situational update and estimated timeline for next steps.

- Prioritize salvage and stabilization according to the pre-established priority list (high-value, at-risk, and mission-critical materials first).
- Engage conservation specialists and qualified vendors for recovery and treatment when needed.
- Document all actions, condition changes, and costs in the accession record and incident log.

Digital incident response

For digital incidents (data corruption, ransomware, loss of access), follow documented incident response that includes isolating affected systems, verifying fixity of unaffected copies, activating offsite backups, restoring from verified copies, and documenting remediation steps. HARC will involve IT and legal counsel for incidents implicating data breach laws.

15. Implementation Notes & Operational Additions

To ensure the policy is actionable, the following operational practices will be implemented, documented, and routinely reviewed:

- **Born-digital ingestion workflow:** Formal, documented procedures for ingest (manifest, checksums, PREMIS metadata), short-term stabilization, and transfer into long-term storage.
- **Rapid-response triage:** A triage protocol for failing media or time-sensitive transfers (drive imaging, media stabilization, priority accessioning).
- **Web & social-media archiving:** Policy and technical workflows for capturing websites and social content (WARC or equivalent), including metadata requirements and consent considerations.
- **Accession numbering & recordkeeping:** Consistent accession and sub-accession schema (`HARC_YYYY_XXX[a]`), with accession IDs recorded on all intake paperwork, manifests, and digital deposits.

- **Collections Committee governance:** Chartered decision-making body with documented thresholds for referral and approval processes.
- **De-accession governance:** Clear steps, documentation templates, and stewardship of sale proceeds or transfer outcomes.
- **Disaster preparedness & recovery:** Tested response plans for physical and digital incidents with prioritized salvage lists and mutual-aid contacts.
- **Oral history practice:** Standardized release forms, transcription/editing protocols, and preservation standards for audio/video interviews.
- **Privacy & rights guidance:** Operational checklists for redaction, embargo tracking, and rights metadata capture at intake.
- **Digital replication & fixity:** Requirement for at least two geographically separated copies, regular fixity checks, and logged remediation.
- **Staff training & documentation:** Ongoing staff training on digital forensics basics, conservation triage, legal notice procedures, and metadata standards.
- **Public tools & Congregation resources:** Provide downloadable templates (Agreement of Deposit, digital deposit checklist, manifest templates) and Congregation guidance materials to streamline deposits.