

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

October 6, 2010

MEMORANDUM TO THE HEADS OF EXECUTIVE DEPARTMENTS AND AGENCIES

FROM: John P. Holdren, Assistant to the President for Science and Technology, and
Director, Office of Science and Technology Policy



SUBJECT: Policy on Scientific Collections

Background: Scientific collections are widely recognized as a vital part of the common infrastructure for science in the United States and globally. In 2005, the Interagency Working Group on Scientific Collections (IWGSC)—part of the National Science and Technology Council—began to assess agency needs for collections and related policy issues. As part of that effort, the IWGSC performed the first cross-agency survey of government collection holdings, which provided important insights into the nature of these resources and how collections are being housed, staffed, and cared for.

In 2009, the IWGSC released its report, “*Scientific Collections: Mission-critical Infrastructure for Federal Science Agencies*,” which highlighted the many ways collections contribute to improving health, enhancing national security, protecting commerce and trade, studying climate and ecosystems, and understanding our environment. As noted in the science and technology priorities memorandum for the FY 2012 budget, it is important to begin coordinated implementation of that report’s recommendations.

Policy: The IWGSC report made several recommendations about how the Federal government should manage, document, fund, share, and report on scientific collections. This memo provides deadlines by which agencies should implement the following three recommendations.

- i. Budgeting for Collections: While some agencies budget directly for collections care and maintenance, much of the money spent on collections is appropriated within research or other activities. Agencies should ensure that their collections’ necessary costs are properly assessed and realistically projected in agency budgets, so that collections are not compromised. This should be implemented within 12 months of this policy issuance.
- ii. Developing best practices: Proper policies and procedures for maintaining and preserving scientific collections are central to their value. The report noted wide variation in the collections policies across agencies. Agencies are urged to share their scientific collections policies and procedures to help agencies develop best practices. This should be implemented within 12 months of this policy issuance.
- iii. Making collections more accessible: The President has established the Open Government Initiative to better deliver information to the American people. Making collections accessible on the internet improves public access. Within the scope of their missions, agencies should work together to document their holdings and make as much collections information as possible available on-line where it can be useful to the public and the research community. This should be implemented within 36 months of this policy issuance.

Thank you for your continued attention to the important issue of scientific collections.