

What Is Media Preservation!

Media preservation is more than converting tapes to files — it's a thoughtful process of care, organization, and access. Through these workshops, Saint Paul Neighborhood Network (SPNN) and Minnesota Media Arts (MNMA) empower communities to plan, stabilize, digitize, and share the voices that define Minnesota's cultural legacy. The goal is to protect both the material and its meaning.

The Magnetic Media Crisis

Most of Minnesota's cultural memory—our stories, performances, and community histories—still live on fragile magnetic tapes. These materials were rarely stored in conditions that ensure stability or long-term access. As playback equipment becomes obsolete and unrepairable, countless recordings risk permanent loss.

MNMA and SPNN are working together to address this crisis through a statewide “Community Media Preservation Strategies and Archiving Workshops program”, offering practical training and collaborative solutions to safeguard these irreplaceable materials.

An “Archive Producer” helps guide this process—defining project goals, setting quality standards, and advising on metadata and storage strategies. Whether you're an artist, educator, or community archivist, preservation planning ensures that what you save today remains usable tomorrow.

Five Core Steps in Media Preservation

1. Archive Organization & Collection Care

Identify your media formats and assess conditions. Determine which videotapes are playable, which are damaged, and which contain your original camera masters versus copies. Set preservation goals and define outcomes for sharing and access. Good preservation begins with planning and prioritization—knowing your audience, defining access specifications, and matching resources to your goals.

2. Stabilization & Safe Storage

Preservation involves both “protecting original materials” and “transferring content to stable formats”. Store physical audio and videotapes in cool, dry environments and create a plan for multiple digital backups (hard drives, cloud,). Plan for long-term digital storage—where and how will your files and metadata be kept.

3. Visual Inventory & Cataloging

Document what you have. A detailed visual inventory is the backbone of your media preservation plan. Create individual ID#s for each media asset. On a spreadsheet record the visual metadata—titles, dates, creators, and content or program notes. As a reference, also photograph the cassette shell and case labels, using the new ID#s. This is also when you capture the “visual metadata information” from the

physical media, assess media conditions; dirt, dust. Mold or mildew, physical shell damage and playback issues, identify priorities, and decide whether to work with professional vendors for digitization or try a “Do It Yourself” (DIY) approach.

4. Media Digital Conversion

Migrate your recordings to digital formats. Most preservation projects create both a “Preservation Master” (high-quality archival file, e.g., .mov) and an “Access Copy” (smaller .mp4 file for sharing). After digital conversion, perform quality control checks and update your metadata inventory spreadsheet with verified content descriptions, actual segment or story run times and any sound or image quality comments.

5. Media Distribution & Access

Based on your Preservation Plan, determine how audiences will engage with your preserved content. Decide where your materials will be shared—community websites, libraries, or streaming platforms—and confirm copyright permissions for all works. Preservation is successful when your target audiences can experience and learn from its media legacy.

Why Metadata Matters

Metadata makes your digital files more searchable, understandable, and reusable. It captures the “who, what, when, and why” of each asset. There are three key types:

- “Descriptive:” What’s on the tape and who made it, audio status, tape condition
- “Technical:” File format, resolution, and codec details.
- “Administrative:” Ownership, rights, and preservation notes.

For better media preservation results, the visual inventories should assign a unique ID number to each asset, transcribe label data, and include condition notes. After media conversion, these identifiers carry over to the digital file names—ensuring consistency and long-term traceability.

Costs and Considerations

Media digitization costs vary depending on the age, condition, length, format of the material and desired outcome goals:

- “Consumer home movies:” \$25–50 per tape VHS/Betamax depending on creating just access to .mp4 files easy to share or higher quality .mp4 files for future editing projects. There are some “lower priced” media conversion resources nationally but this does require shipping and most often is limited to lower quality access files.
- “Professional or legacy formats (e.g., EIAJ-1/2”, 3/4" U-matic, Betacam-SP, 1" Type C):” \$125–350 per tape. These older, obsolete media formats are more expensive since VTR/VCR players are harder to source and maintain.
- Other considerations: Purchasing; Storage for Computer hard drives, shipping local vs. national. Sourcing any capture devices for a “Do it Yourself” transfer system.

Even if you use a professional service, a **preliminary visual inventory** is essential. This step defines your project scope, helps estimate costs, and tracks the process during playback or transfer. Professional preservation services can provide higher quality preservation files and also reduce risks associated with tape deterioration—especially the common issue known as “sticky-shed syndrome-SSD”, caused by moisture absorption in the magnetic tape.

Community Media Archiving Workshops & Survey

The “Community Media Preservation Strategies and Archiving Workshops” initiative is designed to help artists, educators, film video makers and local organizations safeguard aging audiovisual materials through hands-on education and collaboration.

Our Program Components:

- “Assessment Survey:” A statewide baseline survey to identify community media needs and current collection quantities and formats.
- “Educational Webinars:” Introductory sessions on the fundamentals of audiovisual preservation.
- “Hands-on Workshops:” Practical labs focusing on inventory, stabilization, digitization, and access planning.

How to Participate:

Complete the “AV Media Preservation Survey” to share your collection information, preservation interests and challenges. Registrants will be invited to webinars and workshops as part of the program’s timeline.

- Survey Deadline:** January 31, 2026 (with possible extension through June 2026).
- Partners: Minnesota Media Arts (MNMA) and St. Paul Neighborhood Network (SPNN).
- Funding: Supported by the State of Minnesota through the Minnesota Historical Society and the Arts & Cultural Heritage Fund.

Join Us in Preserving the Past for the Future

By participating in the survey and workshops, you help shape Minnesota’s collective media legacy. Together, we can ensure that community voices, stories, and creative histories remain accessible for generations to come.

Survey Invite Link and to learn more about the program:

For a [Survey invitation](https://mnmediaarts.org/contact-workshops.html) use this link. <https://mnmediaarts.org/contact-workshops.html>

For information [about the program](https://mnmediaarts.org/archiving-workshops.html) use this link <https://mnmediaarts.org/archiving-workshops.html>

“Community Media Preservation Strategies and Archiving Workshops” is a program partnership between Minnesota Media Arts (MNMA) and Saint Paul Neighborhood Network (SPNN)



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