

## Pennywise: Repurposing cabinets and existing storage

**The problem:** Old or other odds and ends cabinetry or shelving used for collection storage and not enough money to replace them.

**The situation:** Wood or metal shelving or cabinets that have been acquired over the years or donated by well-meaning volunteers for collections storage.

The existing storage situation for your collection may or may not be in great shape. What is constant is the need to improve storage methods and maximize space for future growth. With limited budgets and specialized collections storage too expensive for many organizations, there are fairly simple ways to maximize and efficiently utilize existing storage.



Picture A

**Our solution:** Repurposing existing shelving or adapting shelving that will work for our needs.

**What you will need:** take a look around and see what you have in storage. What is being used and what isn't? What needs improving and what doesn't?

**Budget impact:** \$250 -\$500 or less. How many and how you modify will determine your final cost. You can go high end and purchase Museum collection specific storage, or go budget friendly and utilize what you have. Again, it is best to determine where you will get the most bang for your buck. This may also be a great grant project if funding is needed (check with the granting organization) or it can be your one major project and expense for that year. If you have a good

volunteer base, it would be a great opportunity to have them actively involved and see the kind of impact they can have.



Picture C

**Project:** Make sure to wear appropriate safety gear and clothing when operating power tools. Here is a summary of the shelving we have repurposed with previous Pennywise articles having gone over the projects in bold in detail:



Picture B

- **Mobile shelving:** constructed out of metal and built for book storage. We removed the shelving and used the exposed frame for hanging art storage by modifying it with chain-link fencing. (Picture A)
- **Medical cabinets:** they had been lying around storage for years, so we determined a use for them. The only cost was getting glass shelves to fit. Once cleaned and dried out, they work great for fragile items and saves on the number of boxes or crates needed. (Picture B)
- **Pallet shelving:** we had some lying around and a skilled staff member who could clean and fix them up. If this is not an option, they are fairly inexpensive to purchase online or at a DIY store. (Picture C)
- **Textile shelving:** a fabric store was going out of business, so we were able to purchase these fairly cheap and repurpose them for rolled textile storage. We also repurposed a section of mobile shelving and adapted it for rolled textile storage as well. (Pictures D & E)



Picture D

- **Wood cupboards or drawers:** the best way to address these is to line them with tin foil to create a barrier then line with Tyvek on top of that before storing collections objects inside them.
- **Wood shelving:** determine if they are stout and sturdy enough for its intended use. If so, pad out with ethafoam and line with foam core where ever collection objects will touch.

If worried about off-gassing from the plywood, you can line with Tyvek. For dust cover, have a washed unbleached cotton sheet ready to cover oversize or unusual shaped objects that don't fit into a crate or box. You can also attach the object number and label to the cover for ease of identification. To provide additional dust control, cover or drape the open side of the shelving with 7 millimeter plastic sheeting.

In all cases, make sure the shelving unit can support the combined weight of the stored objects and note it on the shelf somewhere visible (ie- "no more than x lbs.") so everyone knows the weight capacity of the shelving. Good rule of thumb: better to allow for more weight than you think you'll need than not enough.



Picture E

**Next time:** Storing objects in boxes

**Contributing writer:** Michelle Wallace, Curator, High Desert Curation, LLC, [michellerwallace2018@gmail.com](mailto:michellerwallace2018@gmail.com)