FAQs

## **Why should I use this registry?**

### **Why should I register my institution and collections?**

This registry allows institutions and collections to register a globally unique identifier that can be used in a wide variety of applications. Global uniqueness ensures citations to specimens, collections, and institutions remain accurate over time.

Registering your institution or collection also ensures your resources are discoverable to the larger scientific research community. Increasing visibility of collections can help increase usage and foster collaboration.

### **What about specimens in personal research collections?**

Individual researchers and private collectors are also encouraged to register their collections. This will allow others to locate these specimens if they are needed and will make it easier to track them if and when they are accessioned into a museum or other institutional collection.

Collections held by individuals who are affiliated with an institution should enter their collections under ‘Institutional/Project Collections’ and label entries with an ‘Accession Status’ of ‘Project’. Unaffiliated individual researchers and private collectors should register their collections under ‘Personal Collections’.

### **How are my records connected to other initiatives?**

This registry follows the structured format for the specimen\_voucher data field approved by GenBank and the other two members of the International Nucleotide Sequence Database Collaboration (EMBL and DDBJ). GenBank, EMBL, and DDBJ will use the data registered in this system as a look-up table for building hyperlinks to specimen databases.

The registered data will also be made freely available through the Global Biodiversity Information Facility (GBIF) and the Biodiversity Collection Index (BCI), an initiative launched by GBIF to assemble metadata about natural history collections.

NCBI, GBIF, and CBOL hope that this online database of registered collection information will make it easier for researchers to exchange information on the specimens stored in different collections and institutions.

#### **What is the new structured format for voucher specimen data?**

The structured data field that GenBank, EMBL and DDBJ use for voucher specimens has three parts, separated by colons (:)

InstitutionCode:CollectionCode:CatalogNumber such as UAM:Mamm:86887M

These three data elements, used in conjunction, should be a pointer to a unique specimen in the catalog database of an institution. It is not designed to point to a derivative part of a specimen (e.g., frozen tissue sample, DNA extract) because the voucher specimen is the source of the nucleotide sequence stored in GenBank.

#### **Are URIs or other digital identifiers assigned?**

Each collection is assigned a HTTP URI. For more information about URIs, see the Web Services page.

## **How should I use this registry?**

### **Where did this list of Institution Codes come from?**

The National Center for Biotechnology Information (NCBI, GenBank's parent organization) assembled a database of about 7,000 institution codes from several sources:

* Published compendia of biorepositories such as Index Herbariorum,
* Lists of discipline-specific biorepositories published in professional journals, and
* Institution codes submitted with GenBank records.

### **What should I do if I find that there is another institution with the same code as my institution in the database?**

The goal of the registry is to ensure unique codes for institutions and collections. If you find that your preferred code is not available, please contact us and we will help troubleshoot the problem.

### **My institution has used several different codes in the past but we only use one now. I can register the active code but what should I do about the old ones?**

Please register the current InstitutionCode and include a list of previously used InstitutionCodes in the Description field.

### **What should I do if my institution uses several different InstitutionCodes for different collections?**

Some institutions use more than one institution code, for historical reasons. For example, the National Museum of Natural History of the Smithsonian Institution uses the institution code 'USNM' for some of its collections and 'NMNH' for others. Simply register both institution code and then register the associated collections under each code.

Please note that even though an institution can use several codes, each collection must be registered under only one code.

### **Our institution has changed its InstitutionCode and we no longer use the one that's registered – what should I do?**

This registry is meant to be for current and past institutions and collections. In cases where an institution has changed names, InstitutionCodes, or even stopped operating, the Status should be changed to “Inactive” on the outdated record and a new recorded added. We also ask you to enter an explanation at the end of the Description field explaining the reason why the status has changed and directing users to the current record of the institution.

### **My institution has absorbed 'orphaned' collections from other institutions. Under which code should these collections be registered?**

Any collection that is formally accessioned into your institution should be entered under your institution’s code. When absorbing an ‘orphaned’ collection you should check the registry to see if that collection has a record. If it does then the record can be modified to reflect the new affiliations and any changes to the information (please use the Description field to note the movement). The one exception being if the CollectionCode changed due to the accessioning at the new institution, then a new record will need to be created and the old record should be classified as ‘Inactive’.

### **What do I do if I made a mistake in my entry or created a record in error?**

All records can be edited. If the mistake was clerical in nature and can be fixed please make those corrections in the record itself. If the mistake was in the InstitutionCode or CollectionCode fields then you will need to contact us to have the moderator delete the erroneous record.

### **How do I delete an entire record?**

Only the registry’s moderators can delete an entire record. Please use the Contact Us form to send a request to delete a record with a brief explanation. Please note that the registry retains records of inactive institutions and collections with information directing users to the records for the relevant active institutions and collections.