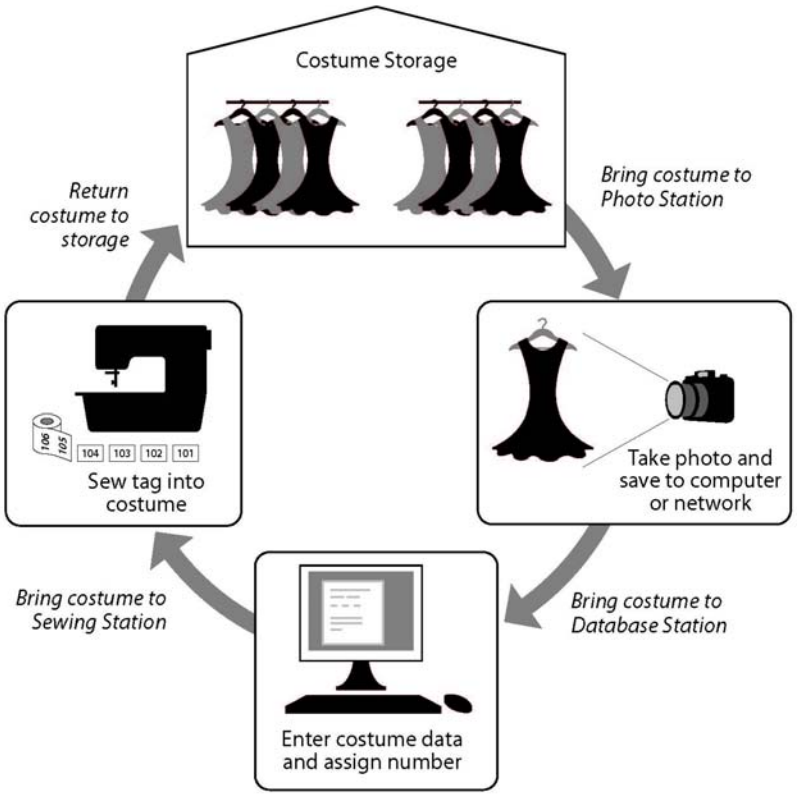
# Suggestions for Costume or Prop Inventory Day

You've got the costumes or props, you've got the inventory program, you've got the inventory tags - how can you put it all together??

The best way to get as many costumes or props inventoried and tagged is to have a **Costume or Prop Inventory Day**. You set aside 4 -6 hours of a day, clear your work area of projects, get 4-6 volunteers, a good pot of coffee and get to work !

***Here are the basic steps***: (outlined for a Costume Day)




***Here is a checklist of what you will need***:

1) **Costume Shop Supervisor or Prop Master** - the person who knows all the costumes/props and can help the data entry person with the costume details, help the seamstress decide where to put tags for difficult costumes, and generally answer questions as they arise during the day.

2) **Volunteers !** You can accomplish a lot if you have 4 - 6 volunteers who will work a station for a few hours. The jobs for these volunteers will be:

- Photographer and assistant - you will need at least one - it's better with two - to take pictures of the costumes/props - if you don't already have photos of each one. One person for the camera / webcam and one for arranging the costumes/props for the photo. If you are using a digital camera one of the photographers can also transfer the photos to a computer and then save the costume/prop photos to a USB stick or 'thumb drive' so that the photos can go to the data entry station. If you are using a webcam then the photos go directly to the computer with the database program. If you have a volunteer that is good at taking photos have them practice on a few costumes/props a day or two before the Costume or Prop Inventory Day so they know how to save and transfer the photos.

- Data Entry Person - You will need one for each computer you have. If your computers are networked you can have two or more people enter data at the same time (for 2 different costumes). The data entry people enter all the data about a costume, assign the inventory tag number, import the picture(s) if they are ready.

- Tag / Label Person. One or two people to sew-in or iron-on the inventory tags. You can also use a tagging gun (such as the Avery Dennison Fine Fabric Tagging Gun) to temporarily apply tags to the costumes. It is a quick and easy way to get the tags on.

  If you are inventorying props then one or more people will be needed to apply labels to the props directly or onto string/shipping tags that can be tied to the props.

- Runner - 2 people - it is good to have one person taking costumes off a rack or props off the shelf and delivering them to the Photo Station and then another volunteer to take finished costumes or props and put them back on the racks or shelves.

3) **Digital camera/ Webcam, lights**, etc.

**Lights:** You don't need professional lights but it is good to have lighting from the front and the side.

**Display the Costumes:** Costumes look better on a dress form but it can take too long to put the costume on the form and take it off. A heavy duty IV-Pole from a medical supply store works very well to hang a costume that is on a hanger for photographing. If a costume has no hanger I usually pin it to a bulletin board that is covered with a white or black piece of fabric.

**Digital Camera**: You can use a digital camera to take the photos and then save them to the computer. The process will be to take the photo with the camera, copy the photo to the computer. Once the photos are resized (see Resource Guide on Resizing Photos) and renamed then can then be loaded into the database costume/prop records.

**WebCam**: Another way to take the costume photos is to get an inexpensive webcam (available from many discount stores, office supply or the web). This can be attached directly to the computer so that photos can be taken and saved directly to the computer. The photo can then be loaded in one step to the costume record.

**Pay attention to the image file size !** No matter which method you use for taking photos the camera/webcam should be set to take the photos at a low resolution - 1 - 2 Megapixels. This will keep the size of the image small. Even though the database has an image processing software to manage the photos you still have to keep the size of the photos below 500 kb each. See the Resource Guide for "*Resizing Photos*" to reduce the size of the photos before they are loaded into the costume record.

**See the Resource Guides** "*Setting up a Photo Station*", "Setting up a Photo Station with a Webcam", and "Create a backdrop for Costumes" for help on setting up the station and making a backdrop and other suggestions.

4) **1 or 2 computers**

- Database Station: Windows Computer with the Costume or Prop Inventory Database loaded - use this computer to enter all the costume/prop records.
- Computer at the Photo Station - This is a good idea if you are taking photos with a digital camera and need to download them from the camera to then take to the Database Station on a USB.
- **OR** - if you have the database software installed on a network - you can have 1 or more workstations that are linked to that network. See Resource Guides on installing software.

5) **2 USB Sticks** or 'thumb' drives - these are used to transfer the photo image files from the Photo Station to the Database Station. <u>These are needed if you are not on a network</u>.

A few photos (up to 10) can be taken, resized and saved to the USB stick then handed over to the Database Station. Then the next series of files are saved to the 2nd stick. Once the data entry person has imported all those photos they will switch with the photographer who has the next batch ready.

If the computers are attached to a network these will not be necessary as the files can be stored on the network by the photographer and then retrieved by the data entry person (after resizing).

6) **Sewing machine(s) and / or Iron** - Any standard sewing machine is all that is needed to sew in the tags. You just need thread (in a variety of colors to match garments) and scissors to sew in the tags. For Iron-on tags you can use a household iron but a small iron called the *Petite Press* by Dritz is recommended. It can get very hot and has a small foot print so it can apply the tags well and work in the small area of a costume. Iron-on tags have to be applied with a hot iron (350°) and a heavy hand (press down hard) to get the adhesive to melt.

**Labels:** For props, shoes, or hats you can use the adhesive labels. For props that can support a label (for example a chair or framed picture) and shoes you can put the adhesive label directly on the prop or inside the shoes. For props that can't have a label (because it might show on stage) you can apply the labels to a heavy strung tag (such as Avery Shipping Tags #1 - available at office supply stores).

See the Resource Guide *"Suggestions on Applying Inventory Tags and Labels*",

7) **Portable wardrobe racks** - at least 3 portable racks are needed to hold costumes between stations. If you are photographing props you may want a few carts to move props from the storage area to the photo station.

8) **Theatre Inventory Database software** - available from Costume Inventory Resources. The Professional and Standard versions has modules to inventory costumes and props.

9) **Inventory tags and labels** - also available from Costume Inventory Resources. Sew-in, Iron-on and adhesive labels are available in a few sizes.

## *The Inventory Process*:

**1)** To start the day - have the Runners bring 15-20 costumes in from the main storage location and place them on a portable wardrobe rack. They will transfer the costumes to the Photo Station as the photographer is ready for them. As costumes are processed they will bring more costumes out.

**2)** If you are using a digital camera have the Photo Station set up early to begin taking photos right away so they can get a head start on the other stations. Once they have taken a photo move the costume to the next portable rack - near the Database station. After the photographers have taken 5 or 10 photos and saved the photos to the USB stick or the network, the photos can be transferred to the Database Station.

If you are using a webcam that is attached to the computer with the database, then get the costumes ready and take the photos as the data entry staff is processing the data.

**3)** The data entry person will have the inventory tags at the Database Station. They can assign the number off the next tag to the costume, enter the data they want recorded on the inventory record, import the photo (if it is available) then pass off the costume and the inventory tag to the seamstress/ironing station.

**4)** At the Tag / Label Sewing/Ironing Station the staff will sew or iron-on the tag for a costume. The Costume Shop Manager will decide the best placement for the tags. The Props Master can decide on how the Props label will be applied (directly to the prop or on a strung tag).

**5)** Once the tag has been applied to the costume / prop it can be returned to a portable rack/cart for the Runner to return to storage.

Once everyone gets in a rhythm you should be able to process 20 to 30 costumes or props an hour.

If you have more volunteers you can always have 2 people work the Data Entry Station - one person to look at the costume and give the other person the details to enter. If the person typing in the data has to stop and figure out the size or ask which production / role the costume is for it takes a lot of extra time. If you have extra seamstresses they can do minor repairs or identify spots and stains that will need to be cleaned later.

After a long day of creating the costume inventory - everyone will be tired and hungry. Treat the volunteers to a feast!

## *A few more hints:*

**Placement of tags:**

A lot of time can be wasted discussing where an inventory tag should be placed in a costume. It might help the process if the Costume Shop Manager makes these decisions ahead of time. There is a worksheet at the end of this handout with basic drawings of garments and a place to note where the tag should be placed. There will always be exceptions but it might be a good idea to think of how it should be done ahead of time. The Sew-in tags can be removed and reapplied to a new place but the Iron-on tags are very, very securely attached if they are applied with a hot iron (350°) and a heavy hand.

**Storage areas:**

If your storage area is already labeled, for example Rack 1, 2, ... 100, 101 or Box 1, 2 etc - try to have the runners take note of the rack as they take the costumes to the Photo Station. They can use a clothes pin to attach a note to the first costume of the rack so that the data entry person doesn't have to stop and ask where the costume is stored.

If your storage area is not already labeled this may be a good time to do so. Blank King Size rectangular rack dividers are inexpensive and available from Costume Inventory Resources and many companies online and E-Bay. The Costume Inventory Database programs (Professional and Standard) both have reports that can print labels/business cards for the king size rack dividers.

If you have a lot of costumes and want to arrange them by category and size - I would recommend getting the rectangular dividers to mark a section, i.e. "Black Suits" or "Rack 101" or by Production and Role.

# Worksheet for tag placement in garments:

Write your instructions for attaching the tags in each type of garment and/or mark the picture for more details. The more consistency in where you place the tags the better.

1. Shirt _____

2. Jacket / Coat _____

3. Dress _____

4. Pants _____

5. Skirt _____

6. Hats _____

7. Shoes _____