

Collections Management

A museum's collection represents the tangible heritage of their community and the stewardship of that collection is the primary reason for the museum's existence. It is the responsibility of every museum, no matter how small, to practice good collection management. Good collection management ensures that all affairs related to the care and access of the collection is directed in a controlled and professional manner. Collection management begins with a clear policy that governs collection activities and is followed by a concise set of consistently applied procedures. Good policies and procedures are the cornerstone to an effective collection management program.

The collection management policy should be drafted and approved by its governing body. This policy should include a statement of the museum's collecting objectives as well as a definition of all functions related to collection management. Specifically, the policy should include: a reiteration of the museum's mission statement; a definition of the scope of the collection; the museum's collecting goals; the approved methods of acquisition; mandates for responsible recordkeeping, accounting, insurance, care, and access; provisions governing incoming and outgoing loans; and deaccessioning and disposal considerations.

Corresponding collection management procedures must be developed to direct the daily implementation of this policy. These should be specific instructions detailing the steps necessary to care for the collection. These procedures must be consistently applied in practice. With a thoughtful policy, comprehensive procedures, and conscientious practice, responsible collection management can be a routine part of any museum operation.

Museum collection management policies and procedures should:

- define what the museum should collect through a collection policy statement that is based on the museum's mission statement. This policy should be guided by legal and ethical standards outlined by the national and international museum community.
- define how the objects will be acquired by the museum. This defines the acquisition and accessioning process and involves a number of considerations related to the terms of donation and purchase of objects as well as the documentation of this process. Specific topics will include policies and procedures on temporary receipts of objects, gift and donations, object documentation and appraisal.
- define who has the authority to collect the objects for the museum such as the board or the curator.

- indicate how objects will be removed from the collection. This is the deaccessioning process and it is as important to the museum's collection policy as accessioning and requires clear and accountable policies and procedures.
- indicate how the museum document and care for the collection. This is a wide section of the policies and procedures and address areas of storage, handling, exhibition, transportation and conservation of the museum collection.

For more information on this topic see:

Guidelines for the Operations of Community Museums in Newfoundland and Labrador Collections Management – Page 39.

Resources for Developing Collection Management Policy and Procedures

MGnsw Collection Policy Template

<http://www.mgnsw.org.au/files/resources/CollPolTemplate.pdf>

Explanatory Notes

<http://www.mgnsw.org.au/files/resources/CollPolicyNotes.pdf>

British Columbia Museum Association Best Practices Module: Collections Management

<http://www.museumsassn.bc.ca/Images/Archives/BP%20%20Collections%20Management.pdf>

Government of Ontario's Ministry of Culture Ontario Museum Notes # 3 Writing a Collections Management Policy for the Museum

<http://www.culture.gov.on.ca/english/heritage/museums/munote3.htm>

Online Resources:

Western Australia Museums – Collections Management

- Developing a Collections Policy
- Acquisition and Accessioning Procedures
- Acquisition Flow Chart
- Assessing Significance
- Numbering Collections
- Object Data Sheets
- Deaccessioning and Disposal

<http://www.museum.wa.gov.au/services/map/collectmanage.asp>

Examples of Collection Management Policy and Procedures

Athabasca University Art Collection Loan Policy

<http://www.athabascau.ca/policy/administration/artcollectionpolicy.htm>

The Royal Engineers Museum Acquisition and Disposal Policy

<http://www.remuseum.org.uk/giving/forms/AcquisitionsandDisposalspolicy.pdf>

Wood County Historical Society

Collections Management Policy

http://www.woodcountyhistory.org/collections_policy.pdf

Donation Worksheet

http://www.woodcountyhistory.org/donation_worksheet.pdf

The Nepean Museum Collections Management Policy

<http://www.nepeanmuseum.on.ca/acquisition.htm>

Mineral Museum of New Mexico Manual for Collections Policies and Procedures

<http://geoinfo.nmt.edu/museum/policy.html>

University of Alaska - Museum of the North

Collections Management Policy

<http://www.uaf.edu/museum/depts/archaeo/pages/p&p/colman.html>

Museum of Domestic Design & Architecture, Middlesex University Collections Management Policy

<http://www.moda.mdx.ac.uk/docs/corpdocs/Acquisition%20%20Disposal%20Policy.pdf>

The Sound Archives of New Zealand – Acquisition and Selection Policy

<http://www.soundarchives.co.nz/Policy-Documents/selection.asp>

Tofte Historical Society/North Shore Commercial Fishing Museum Collections Policy and Procedures

<http://www.commercialfishingmuseum.org/collections/collection-policy.pdf>

Nova Scotia Museum Collection Management Policy

<http://museum.gov.ns.ca/info/policies.htm>

Examples Available Offline

Leicestershire Country Council Museum Collection Management Policy

http://www.leics.gov.uk/index/community/museums/heritage_services_policy_documents/heritage_services_collections_management_policy.htm

The Pictou County Genealogy & Heritage Society Collections Management Policy

http://www.rootsweb.com/~nspcg/hs/policy_an.htm

Museum of Health Care at Kingston

<http://www.museumofhealthcare.ca/about.html>

Collections Management Policy and Procedures Collections Standard Policy

The Musée acadien de Pubnico-Ouest Collections Management Policy

<http://www.museeacadien.ca/english/museum/policies/collections.htm>

Vancouver Police Centennial Museum Collections Management Policy

http://www.vancouverpolicemuseum.ca/websitedocs/Policy-Collections_Management.pdf

The Mariner's Museum Collections Management Policy

http://www.mariner.org/exhibitions/highlights/_images/CollectionsPolicyandProcedures.pdf

Greater Sudbury Heritage Museums Collections Management Policy

http://www.sudburymuseums.ca/index.cfm?app=w_vmuseum&lang=en&secid=565&type=doc

Provincial Archives of Alberta Acquisitions Policy

http://tprc.alberta.ca/archives/policiesprocedures/pdfs/1997Acquisition_Policy.pdf

East Lothian Council Museums Service Collections Management Policy

<http://www.eastlothian.gov.uk/content/0,1094,694,00.html>

Theatre Museum Canada Acquisition Policy and Procedures

<http://www.theatremuseumcanada.ca/pdfs/tmcacqpolicy.pdf>