Developing a Collections Management Policy

Create Yours Here!

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Virtual Workshop | October 21st, 2020
Overview of Today’s Workshop

1. Collections management policy: What it is, why you need one, and how to create it

2. Explanation of the basic elements of a collections management policy

3. Participants will draft a policy for their institution
Major Goals of Good Collections Management

What do we have? Where is it located? How can we preserve and use it?

- First comprehensive survey that details condition and preservation needs of cultural heritage collections in the United States
- **4.8 billion artifacts** including rare books and manuscripts, photographs, documents, sound recordings, moving images, digital materials, art, historic and ethnographic objects, archaeological artifacts, and natural science specimens held in the public trust in **30,000+ repositories**
- At least 30% of objects in repositories are in unknown condition
- 50% of facilities did not have a collections management plan

2005 report by Heritage Preservation, now the American Institute of Conservation (AIC)
Major Goals of Good Collections Management

- Physical Control
  - Development and maintenance of collections care for the long-term

- Intellectual Control
  - Access and Use
What Is a Collections Management Policy?

A detailed *written* document that explains why a museum is in operation and how it goes about its business: *your institutional Road Map*

- Identifies who is responsible for and has the authority to make decisions and carry out specific tasks
- A good policy usually includes the following elements:
  - Mission statement
  - Scope of collections and collecting goals
  - Methods for acquiring (accessioning) collections
  - Methods for disposing of (deaccessioning) collections
  - Loan policies
  - Collections care, access and use
  - Insurance
  - Records maintenance
  - Compliance with legal regulations
“A collections management policy is like a pair of eyeglasses: both are effective aids...only if individually prescribed and faithfully used.” – Malaro and DeAngelis
 Collections Management Policy: An Effective Guide

- A good policy is clear and concise without being too rigid
- Comprehensive but practical
- Different policies for different kinds of facilities: unique needs
Why a Collections Management Policy?

- Provides a consistent set of agreed upon *written* practices to protect the collection and provide proper care and management
- Helps the museum to:
  - fulfill its ethical obligations to care for collections that are held in the public trust
  - navigate legal and ethical issues and prevents problems
- Affords the museum protection (e.g., when someone wants to donate something and you don’t want to hurt their feelings but you cannot take the donation, you can point to your policy!)
Why a Collections Management Policy?

- Who gave it to us?
- What do we have in our collections? What should we keep?
- Where is it located?
- How do we preserve collections?
- Why do we have it? Why do we collect what we collect?
- When did we get it?
Policy vs. Procedure: What’s the Difference?

- Need good *procedures* for carrying out the *policy*

Policy = *what* we do (the guiding principles)

Procedures = *how* we do it (set of steps to accomplish end goal)
Drafting the Policy, Approval and Revision

You want a policy that is:

- Easy to use
- Reflects the actual workings of the museum

Today you will develop the tools to **draft** a collections management policy. Make sure to **engage** you Board of Directors, Collections Committee, staff and volunteers, etc. and seek input before finalizing.

- Policy should be reviewed and updated periodically, at least every 5 years
**Registration system:** The repository’s memory, the records of everything in the collection. A system of policies and procedures that:

- Documents collections ownership
- Accounts for every object in the collection
- Preserves important associations with events, places, objects
- Tracks object preservation

**Acquisition:** “Anything acquired by the museum”. (Buck and Gilmore, *Collections Conundrums*, p.18)

**Accession:** the formal, documented process of formally accepting collections into the repository. (Malaro, *Legal Primer on Managing Museum Collections*)

- The two-part process of acquiring an object (acquisition) and documenting it (registration), including demonstration of transfer of title (ownership) to the museum. (Buck and Gilmore, *Collections Conundrums*, p.17)
Drafting the Policy: Define Terms

• **Accession**: a noun, a verb, and an adjective!
  - **Noun**: one or more objects acquired at one time from one source constituting a single transaction.
  - **Verb**: the process used to accept and record an object for the permanent museum collection.
  - **Adjective**: Describes an object that has been accessioned or something related to the process of accessioning. (e.g., accession form or number)
Drafting the Policy: Define Terms

**Deaccession:** the formal, documented process of removing an object(s) from the museum.

**Loan:** temporary transfer of object(s) from one institution to another in which there is no transfer of ownership.

**Preventive Conservation:** Non-intrusive processes by which a museum’s collections are stored, displayed, handled, in ways that promote long-term stability and slows the process of deterioration.

- Avoids the need for often expensive remedial conservation
- Includes collections assessments, good policies and procedures (strategic plans, disaster management plan, etc.)
- Basic common sense approach
Drafting the Policy: Define Terms

Agents of Deterioration

- Physical Forces
- Thieves and Vandals
- Fire
- Water
- Pests
- Pollutants
- Radiation
- Incorrect Temperature and Relative Humidity
- Dissociation
Integrated Pest Management

- **Prevention**: provide barriers of entry to rooms, cabinets (good gaskets), good policies (no food/drink in collections), vacuum to keep areas clean, correct temp and RH
- **Monitoring**: regularly check pest traps, become aware of trends with seasonal variations, track distribution across space
- **Identification** of pests
- **Treatment**: several treatments available including low temperature/freezing, isolation, etc.
Museum mission, scope of collecting

- Statement of purpose, scope of collections, collecting goals
  - States why the museum/historical society is in business, what it collects and what it does not collect.
  - This section often includes the museum’s mission statement.
  - Sometimes includes collecting goals (e.g., our goal is to build up our collection of World War II memorabilia by 10% over the next 2 years).

A good mission statement leans toward societal impact rather than simply an explanation of operations, “transitioning from being about something to being for someone.” –Stephen Weil
Acquisition and Accessioning

This part of the policy asks you to consider:

- Consistent with collecting goals?
- “Exceptional opportunity?”
- Will you purchase objects?
- Can the museum effectively care for new acquisition long-term, costs?
- Is there good provenance, is it an unencumbered gift?
- Does the museum/institution intend on keeping the object as part of its collections long-term and will the museum use it?

- Document each acquisition with a Deed of Gift form
- Ensure that accurate donor information is obtained
- Generally, no restrictions on gifts is best practice
Acquisition and Accessioning (Procedure)

- **Document** each new collection with an Accession Form immediately
- Photograph objects as they come in

Quick Tip: A picture is worth 1,000 words! A simple point-and-shoot camera is useful for documenting collections.

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**ACCESSION FORM**

Accession Number: ____________________
Number of Objects in Accession Group: ____________________

List all objects and catalog numbers for this Accession in the table below. Attach a separate sheet if necessary.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Object Description</th>
<th>Catalog Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Additional Notes: _______________________________________________________________________________________

Date of Accession: ____________________  Accessioned by: ____________________

Method of Acquisition

☐ Gift/Donation  ☐ Exchange  ☐ Excavation  ☐ Other: ____________________

Source of Acquisition

Name: ____________________
Address: ____________________
Additional Contact Information: ____________________

Date(s) of Acquisition: ____________________

Object Provenience/Provenance (circle one):

Geographic Location of Objects in Accession: ____________________

Photographed? Yes ☐ No ☐ Date: __________
Condition Reported? Yes ☐ No ☐ Date of Most Recent Condition Report: __________

Additional Notes: _______________________________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________________________________________
Establish Criteria for Deaccessioning Objects:

- Does not support mission or scope of collections
- Has inadequate or missing documentation
- Object deemed to have little/no scientific or cultural value
- Cannot be preserved or has deteriorated irreparably
- Is a redundant sample
- Poses a hazardous risk to collections or personnel
- Item(s) has been approved for repatriation under the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) or other regulatory measure
Deaccessioning (Procedure)

Methods of Deaccessioning

- Transfer
- Exchange or donation
- Destruction
- Return to rightful owner
- Educational use

Processes for Deaccessioning

Museums should:

- Identify object that meets the deaccessioning criteria
- Consider all legal and ethical obligations, as an institution held in the public trust
- Ensure no restrictions are placed on the object(s) (e.g., donor-imposed restrictions)
- Take reasonable steps to contact donors/owners as a courtesy (if applicable)
- Prepare all required paperwork
- Obtain necessary approval: board of directors, collections committee, etc.
- Document deaccession process extensively

Sale? Not always ethical or acceptable, but if this method is used, consult American Alliance of Museums ethical guidelines and the National Standards and Best Practices for U.S. Museums as well as International Council of Museums (ICOM) Code of Ethical Standards regarding Deaccessioning.
Loans and Insurance

- For what purposes are loans made?
- Who has the authority to make them?
- Loan period specifications?
- Loan to institutions and individuals or just institutions?
- Do you have a loan form? (procedure for carrying out this part of your policy)
- Conditions for loans?
- Who will monitor the loan process?
- Can objects withstand travel?
- Insurance? Who covers, when?

The reverse side of a loan form contains stipulations for the loan. See the “Resources” section of this presentation for more information.
Care of and Access to Collections

- Access to Collections
  - Who has access, when?
  - Who sets rules for access?
  - Will you charge fees for access to collections, to make copies or records, etc.?
Objects Left in the Temporary Custody

- Make sure to fill out a form for any object left in the temporary custody of the museum
- Be clear about time frame for return
- Ensure that contact information for the lender is clear and up to date
- These practices avoid a potential for problems associated with unclaimed or abandoned property
Inventories and Records

- Inventories
  - Uniform method of maintaining collections records
  - Schedule periodic inventories
  - Spot-check inventories
  - What to do if something is missing

- Records: Two general types: (1) those pertaining to registration functions (i.e. ownership of collections, loans, conservation) and (2) records that document the historical/cultural value of the object
  - Store records in safe location (fireproof safe)
  - Create duplicate copies of records, store off site (and digitize)
There are many excellent references for developing a collections management policy. Here are a few good places to start:


**Template for Developing a Collections Management Policy** (created by Danielle Benden. This document was emailed to you.) and Connecting 2 Collections Care: [https://www.connectingtocollections.org/coming-up-essential-elements-of-a-collections-management-policy/](https://www.connectingtocollections.org/coming-up-essential-elements-of-a-collections-management-policy/)
DEED OF GIFT

I/We [insert name] the undersigned, hereby unconditionally and irrevocably convey, donate, give, and deliver the item(s) listed and/or described below or on the attached pages to the [insert museum name].

1/We waive all present and future right and title in the listed items.

This gift includes all present and future copyright, trademark, reproduction, and associated rights to the listed item(s).

1/We acknowledge that the [insert museum name] can and will use these in any manner that is deemed to be in the best interest of the museum in accordance with the institutional collections policies.

1/We also certify that I am/we are the only legal and lawful owner(s) of the item(s) listed below or on the attached pages, and have sole authority to make this gift.

1/We acknowledge actual delivery of the item(s) listed below to the [insert museum name].

By signing below, I/we acknowledge acceptance of the foregoing conditions that are provided on the reverse of this form.

Donor(s): [insert names]
Address: [insert address]
Phone: [insert phone]      Date Items Received: [insert date]

ITEM(S)/SPECIMEN(S):   Accession Number (to be assigned by the museum): ____________
________________________________________________________________________
Donor 1 Signature        Donor 2 Signature
Date: __________________________

(Please sign one copy and return it to _____________________ and retain one copy for your records).

ACCEPTED BY and agreed to for the [insert museum name]:

Signature: ________________________________________________
Printed Name: ______________________________________________
Title: _________________________________________________________
Date: _______________________________________

[INSERT MUSEUM NAME] COLLECTIONS POLICIES AND CONDITIONS GOVERNING GIFTS

GENERAL CONDITIONS

• The [insert museum name] is a tax exempt, 501(c)3 non-profit organization. The museum collects items for the purposes of ______________________________________________________.

• Donations to the [insert museum name] are charitable contributions to the full extent of the law. According to Internal Revenue Service codes, donors are solely responsible for the appraised value for any donation. Benefiting institutions cannot provide appraisals or estimates of fair market value. Consequently, the [insert museum name] cannot provide appraisals or fair market valuations either expressed or implied for donations. The [insert museum name] urges the donor to consult with his/her attorney, the Internal Revenue Service, or a licensed appraiser should any questions concerning tax-deductible donations or appraisals arise.

• Objects in the museum that are not on public display are generally available through responsible inquiry to scholars, researchers, and the general public for study.

• Only objects that will be used in the foreseeable future are acquired. Objects must adhere to the [insert museum name] mission and scope.

• Objects for which the [insert museum name] anticipates no foreseeable use for exhibition, research, education, or exchange will not be accepted.

• The [insert museum name] only accepts unrestricted acquisitions, free of limitations in its use. All acquisitions become the permanent property of the [insert museum name] and will be held and accessed in a manner consistent with the policies of the [insert museum name] and applicable law.

• Care will be taken to ascertain that the [insert museum name] acquires clear title to all incoming material.

• If an object is offered for sale, it should be determined prior to purchase whether a comparable object may be acquired via gift or bequest.

• Because of its trusted responsibility to maintain and preserve collections in perpetuity for the public, the [insert museum name] will accept and acquire only those objects for which it can provide proper care, conservation, and storage. The [insert museum name]

COLLECTIONS

• The [insert museum name] collects ___________________________________________.

• The ______________________ makes materials available for research and public outreach, and curates these materials for the public trust for future generations.
Sample Forms:
  - Deed of Gift
  - **Accession**
  - Deaccession
  - Loan Form
  - Objects left in the temporary custody

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Method of Acquisition

- [ ] Gift/Donation
- [ ] Exchange
- [ ] Excavation
- [ ] Other: ____________

Source of Acquisition

Name: ____________
Address: ____________
Additional Contact Information: ____________

Date(s) of Acquisition: ____________

Object Provenience/Provenance (circle one):

- Geographic Location of Objects in Accession: ____________

Photographed? Yes [ ] No [ ]  Date: ____________  Condition Reported? Yes [ ] No [ ]  Date of Most Recent Condition Report: ____________

Additional Notes: ____________________________________________________________________________
Resources for Further Exploration
Prepared by Danielle Benden, Driftless Pathways, LLC

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Sample Forms:
- Deed of Gift
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Resources for Further Exploration

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Loans:
- Wallace State Community College, 401 Main Street NW, PO Box 200, Hanceville, AL 35077-2000, c 256.352.8118

LOAN AGREEMENT

The Evelyn Burrow Museum at Wallace State Community College (hereafter THE BURROW MUSEUM) will exercise the same care with respect to handling and exhibiting works of art on loan as it does in the safekeeping of comparable property of its own. Objects will be protected at all times from excessive light, unfiltered artifical or natural light, and heat, humidity, or dry conditions. Unless otherwise specified, works on paper will be exposed only to light levels meeting 50 foot-candles or less. Works will not be unframed or removed from mats, mounts, or bases, nor cleaned, repaired or altered in any way except with the express written permission of the Lender.

CARE AND PRESERVATION

The Evelyn Burrow Museum at Wallace State Community College (hereafter THE BURROW MUSEUM) will exercise the same care with respect to handling and exhibiting works of art on loan as it does in the safekeeping of comparable property of its own. Objects will be protected at all times from excessive light, unfiltered artifical or natural light, and heat, humidity, or dry conditions. Unless otherwise specified, works on paper will be exposed only to light levels meeting 50 foot-candles or less. Works will not be unframed or removed from mats, mounts, or bases, nor cleaned, repaired or altered in any way except with the express written permission of the Lender.

INSURANCE

Unless the Lender expressly elects to maintain his/her/its own insurance coverage, THE BURROW MUSEUM will insure insured items only while under its fire, theft, and/or vandalism insurance and will provide a certificate of insurance naming The Evelyn Burrow Museum and Wallace State Community College as additionally insured or issue a waiver of subrogation against any other insurer for the duration of the loan. Without the certificate, The Evelyn Burrow Museum and Wallace State Community College are automatically held to be co-insured and subrogation waived for the duration of the loan.

PERIOD OF LOANS

THE BURROW MUSEUM will assume responsibility for loans during the period specified on the face of this form with time allowed for shipping and handling. Loans may be withdrawn from exhibition by the Administrator or President of THE BURROW MUSEUM, at any time, at their discretion. The Lender must give 30 days notice in writing for the recall of loans. If THE BURROW MUSEUM is unable to contact the Lender within one month following the expiration of a loan, and no special arrangements have been made for the return of the work, then the loan will be placed in storage at the Lender’s risk and expense. If after seven years a work has not been reclaimed, the Lender shall be deemed to have made it an unrestricted gift to THE BURROW MUSEUM.

PROVENANCE

By signing this agreement, the Lender confirms that to the best of his/her knowledge he/she has clear title to the loaned objects and no part of the provenance of any of the works conflicts with import laws, endangered species legislation, Native American legal issues, Nazi/World War II era legal issues and/or national or state civil or criminal laws.
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Sample Forms:
- Deed of Gift
- Accession
- Deaccession
- Loan Form
- Objects left in the temporary custody
Thank you for participating!

www.driftlesspathways.com

Contact Information

Danielle M. Benden, Owner
Driftless Pathways, LLC
Email: danielle@driftlesspathways.com
Phone: (608) 284-8907

The information provided herein is made available to aid in your ability to develop a collections management policy. Please consult an attorney for legally binding matters.