

# Collections Management for Today and Tomorrow

Policies, Procedures and  
Plans- Taking Control of Your  
Collections

# Policy, Procedure, or Plan

## What's the Difference

### Policy:

- Establishes the standards upon which the museum operates
- Establishes general guidelines and principles
- Approved by governing authority
- Delineates lines of authority
- Provides framework for staff decision making

# Policy, Procedure or Plan

## What's the Difference

### Procedure

- Succinct, unambiguous action steps
- Detailed instructions that specify how the staff should apply the policies in daily work setting
- Developed at the staff level
- Does not require approval from governing authority

# Policy, Procedure or Plan

## What's the Difference

### Plan

- Current, on-going, institutionally supported
- Inclusive effort across departments, administration and board
- May include external stakeholders
- Careful implementation, review, and revision critical to success

# National Standards and the Collection Policy

- A policy establishes the standards upon which the museum operates.
- These standards must reflect current National Standards as described and advanced by the American Alliance of Museums.
- <http://www.aam.us.org/resources/bookstore>

# National Standards

- A required or agreed level of quality or attainment
- Generally accepted level of attainment that all museums are expected to achieve
- Set of objective criteria by which museum can be assessed
- Provides a common vocabulary
- Should inform goals in any planning process

# National Standards

National Standards are fundamental to being a good museum!

# Formulating a Collections Policy

## General Principles

- Typically a set of policies that address various aspects of Collections Management
- Governs what a museum does to care for and grow collections and make them available to the public
- Must be specific to each museum, its collections and how they are used



# Formulating a Collections Policy

## General Principles, continued

- Based on the museum's mission and statement of purpose
- Not inherently time limited, although should be evaluated and reviewed on regular basis (eg. every 5 years)

# Elements of a Collections Policy

## The Writing Team

### Team approach

- Should include all staff responsible for collections
- Should include other staff and departments
- Should include administration and Collections Committee
- Could include volunteers, interested public, trusted, experienced professionals

# Elements of a Collections Policy

## Introduction to the Policy

- Purpose of the Policy
- Articulates museum mission and goals
- Establishes importance of policy and consequences of non-compliance
- Establishes decision-making structure

# Elements of a Collections Policy

## Scope of Collections

- Historic overview of the development of the collections
- Defines the scope and limits of the collections
- Describes current strengths and weaknesses of collections
- Explains how the collections enhance and reflect the museum's goals

# Elements of a Collections Policy

## Categories of Collections and Their Status

- Three-dimensional objects- permanent
- Archival material-permanent
- Library and reference material- non-permanent
- Educational “hands-on” objects- non-permanent
- Exhibit props- non-permanent

# Elements of a Collections Policy

## Personnel and Authority

- Identifies the various personnel by position/role in relation to the museum's collections
- Identifies who is responsible for making collections-related policies
- Identifies who is responsible for implementing collections-related policies

# Elements of a Collections Policy

## Acquisitions/ Accessions

- Who has authority
- Defines criteria for selection
- Outlines accepted methods of acquisition
- Ensures proper transfer of legal ownership
- Provides guidelines for collections' growth
- Mandates required documentation

# Elements of a Collections Policy

## Deaccession and Disposal

- Who has authority
- Defines criteria for deaccession
- Establishes acceptable methods of disposal
- Establishes the use of funds
- Establishes donor reporting
- Mandates required documentation



# Elements of a Collections Policy

## Loans

- Who has authority
- Establishes criteria for loans in and out
- Establishes required documentation
- Provides guidelines for unclaimed loans

# Elements of a Collections Policy

## Collections Care

- Establishes responsibility and standards of care of collections
- Mandates minimum standards for exhibition and storage
- Mandates standards, intervals, and types of inventories
- Establishes preventive conservation standards

# Elements of a Collections Policy

## Access and Use

- Establishes who has authority both to permit and deny access
- Establishes standards and regulations for use and preservation of collections- staff, volunteers, public
- Establishes regulations for access to collections- staff, volunteers, public

# Elements of a Collections Policy

## Risk Management

- Mandates levels of security for collections, building, visiting public, and staff
- Establishes guidelines for disaster planning and implementation
- Establishes guidelines for monitoring and controlling pests
- Helps determine level of insurance coverage

# Elements of a Collections Policy

## Legal Issues

- Identifies important local, state, national, and international laws and regulations
- Ensures that legal counsel is consulted regarding laws and regulations and revisions to policy

# Elements of a Collections Policy

## Ethics

- Consistent with professional codes of ethics
- Conflict of interest statement
- Code of ethics incorporated into policy and procedures
- Code of ethics is reviewed on a regular basis (every 3-5 years)

# Elements of a Collections Policy

## Additional Elements

- Research Policy
- Documentation Policy
- Objects in Custody
- Stewardship
- Off-site Storage
- Cultural and Intellectual Property Rights

# Collections Management

## Taking Control of Your Collections

### Collections Management Standard #2

“The institution legally, ethically, and effectively manages, documents, cares for, and uses the collections.”



# Collections Management Useful Tools

## AASLH STePS Program

Designed to help museums become more professional

## Past Perfect Museum Software

Designed to help museums become better stewards of their collections

- Free evaluation download available for Windows and Mac at [www.museumsoftware.com](http://www.museumsoftware.com)

# Collections Management Useful Tools

## Books

Simmons, John E. *Things Great and Small: Collections Management Policies*. American Alliance of Museums: Washington, D. C., 2006.