



STANDARD PRACTICES HANDBOOK FOR MUSEUMS, SECOND EDITION ADDENDUM

Please replace the section on Disposal in 3.1.9 Deaccessioning (page 200) with the following:

In Alberta, museums receiving public funding from the Province of Alberta or from agencies funded primarily by the Provincial Government, such as Museums Alberta, must adhere to the Provincial Policy on Disposition of Museum Collections and Objects (1996). This Policy requires that museums wishing to dispose of any objects from their collections must first offer them at no cost to other appropriate Alberta public non-profit or government custodial institutions. Failure to adhere to this policy will result in the museum becoming ineligible to receive further funding support from Provincial government sources.

Disposal

Objects that have been deaccessioned from the museum's collections must be disposed of (unless they have been lost or stolen). The *Canadian Museums Association Ethics Guidelines* state that if public sources outside the museum gave financial assistance for acquiring the objects, then their disposal requires the consent of all parties to the original transaction.¹⁴

The first step in any disposal procedure is to remove any accession numbers, catalogue numbers or other identifying information from the objects.

For objects in good condition:

- Ensure the object remains in the public domain. It should first be offered as a gift, or for transfer, exchange or sale to other museums or public collections (e.g., art galleries, interpretation

centres or historic sites). A public institution that expresses interest in receiving the object should be able to demonstrate its ability to provide appropriate care and public access. Should more than one public institution make an acceptable offer, the museum deaccessioning the object can choose the most appropriate recipient.

- If no public institution is able to take the object, it can be offered for public sale through a publicly advertised auction. Private sales should be avoided. Under no circumstances should museum trustees, personnel, their families or close associates be permitted to purchase any object deaccessioned from the collections. Original donors are permitted to purchase the objects at a public sale at fair market value.
- Any funds obtained from the sale of deaccessioned objects should be allocated to enhance the museum's collections, either for acquisitions or for services directly relating to collections care. Funds from the sale of a deaccessioned object should never be expended on museum operations or capital costs.
- In Canada, museums that are registered charities with the Canada Customs and Revenue Agency are not permitted to return deaccessioned objects to original donors, even if an official tax receipt was not issued. When a gift has been made to a registered charity, title to the property transfers over to the recipient charity in perpetuity. Returning objects to original donors is considered a new and separate transaction by Canada Customs and Revenue, thereby conferring a personal benefit on private individuals. This provides Canada Customs

¹⁴ Canadian Museums Association. *CMA Ethics Guidelines*. Ottawa: Author, 1999: Section E4.

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and Revenue with grounds to revoke the museum's charitable status. Registered charities can only gift property to other qualified donees such as other registered Canadian charities or the Crown.¹⁵

For objects damaged or deteriorated beyond repair or, which present safety and health risks:

- These objects should be destroyed or, in the case of hazardous materials, handed over to those qualified to dispose of them, in front of witnesses. The remains should be disposed of in such a way that no one could retrieve and restore the object.

Tips

- To maintain good community relations, museums should undertake an awareness campaign to inform the public about the deaccessioning process. It is important that the public understand that the museum is not selling or giving away donated objects unethically or without due consideration. It may also be beneficial to contact the original donor of the object to be deaccessioned to determine if there is a particular museum or public collection that they would like you to approach first.

¹⁵ Canadian Museums Association, "Deaccessioning and the Income Tax Act." *Muse* Vol. 13, No. 4 (March 1996), p. 59.