Collections Care

Local History Services
Minnesota Historical Society
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Importance of Collections Procedures

Why bother with policies and procedures?

• Sets professional tone, which gives donors/patrons confidence in your organization

• Gives organization legal standing—if there is a dispute, written procedures will hold up much better than ‘good faith’ or a handshake

• Basics:
  – Collections policy establishes standards for institution’s procedures; provides framework for decisions; approved by Board of Directors.
  – Collections procedures provide the means for policy to be implemented; developed and approved by staff.
  – Collecting plan outlines what institution will collect and how it will collect it; establishes control over collecting activities.
Importance of Collections Procedures

• Acquisition Process: describes process and criteria for adding items to collection
  – Who decides what to take? Use Collecting Plan to decide what to collect.
  – Have a Temporary Deposit Receipt, Deed of Gift
• Use Policy: guides use of collection items
  – How will accessioned objects be used? Exhibits? Research? Programs?
  – Who has access to the materials?
• Loan Policy: guides incoming and outgoing loans
  – Does your organization loan items outside the institution?
  – Who may borrow? Who approves the loans?
Importance of Collections Procedures

• Conservation Policy: sets philosophies and policies guiding conservation and preservation
  — Who approves and monitors treatments?
• Deaccession Policy: describes process and criteria for removing items from collection
  — How do you determine what to deaccession? Condition, duplication, mission, storage? Who approves?
• Disposal Policy: sets process for eliminating items removed from collection
  — What do you do with deaccessioned items? Who approves?
• Compliance with State, Federal & International laws & regulations: e.g. NAGPRA, Abandoned Property Law
Abandoned Property Laws

- Minnesota Museum Property Act of 2004
- Not regulatory; created for voluntary use by MN museums/archives
- Minnesota Session Laws, 2004 Regular Session, Chapter 213-H.F. No. 1645
- Two types of objects are covered:
  - Unclaimed loans
  - Presumed gifts
- More loan information: http://www.mnhs.org/about/departments/registrar/index.html
Implementing Collections Policy

- Give a copy to all staff
- Review regularly, maybe every five years, to make sure policies are relevant
- Review when there is a change in staff or board members
Artifact Handling

Mostly common sense

- Remove rings, watches, ID badges
- Where is the object going? Is there a place for it when you get there?
- Prevent unnecessary exposure to light and dust
- Don’t use items’ handles—support underneath
- Where are the weaknesses? What needs support? Are there loose/broken parts?
- Gloves—sometimes OK not to use
- Handle photos and negatives by the edges with clean hands (gloves for negatives)
Artifact Labeling

- **Paper/Books**
  - Use #2 pencil on verso of document, or inside book in non-intrusive area
- **Photos/Negatives**
  - Older photos, use 6B drawing pencil on verso of photo
  - Newer photos, use blue photo marking pencil, e.g. Prismacolor P0919
  - Negatives: pencil number on acid-free envelope or interleaving paper
- **3-D Objects**
  - Use Acryloid B-72 and Pigma pen in inconspicuous area
- **Textiles**
  - Write accession number on twill tape or paper hang tag and affix with cotton thread
Artifact Care/Cleaning

- Textiles
  - Use low-suction vacuum with screen
  - If sturdy, can wash on delicate/hand wash with Orvis or Ivory Snow
- 3-D objects
  - Use soft-bristled brush to remove dust
- Paper
  - Remove dirt with ground eraser crumbs, e.g. Staedtler Mars plastic eraser
- Photographs
  - Use ground eraser crumbs for backs of photos
  - Wipe front of photos gently with ‘magnetic’ dust cloth, e.g. Dust Bunny
Artifact Care/Cleaning

• Newspapers
  — If crumpling, encapsulate in Mylar (never laminate!)
  — Consider microfilming
• Porcelain/Ceramics
  — Porous, best not to immerse in water
  — Wipe gently with damp cotton cloth—as long as the glaze is in good condition
• Glass
  — Wash in plastic dish pan, tap water OK
Artifact Storage

• Textiles
  – Fold and box: make sure to pad out creases
  – Roll and hang: interleave with tissue, cover with Tyvek or unbleached muslin
• 3-D objects
  – Sit on open shelving—shelf should have inert liner like Mylar; for padded shelving use thin ethafoam
  – Box, wrapped in tissue
  – Box, in ethafoam
• Photos
  – Interleave between sheets of acid-free paper, store upright in folders
Buffered vs. Unbuffered

Use buffered storage items for:
• Cellulose fibers—cotton, linen, flax, jute.
• Plant-based objects

Use unbuffered storage items for:
• Wool and silk
• Animal-based natural history collections
• Blueprints, albumen prints, cyanotypes

When in doubt, use unbuffered materials. If you have a buffered box and need unbuffered, wrap the items in unbuffered tissue.
Artifact Use in Exhibits

- Control light levels—no direct sunlight
- Use motion detectors or simply turn off gallery lights when there are no visitors
- Make sure the objects are properly supported
  - Book cradle
  - Boards
  - Padded hanger, mannequin
- Drape items that are light-sensitive—remove drape for visitors
- Rotate items regularly so they can ‘rest’
Permanent vs. Educational Collections

Permanent Collections
• Intended to be kept in trust indefinitely
• Accessioned, catalogued, ideally stored in facility meeting museum standard practices

Educational Collections
• Intended to be used as part of a museum program, exhibit, etc.
• Good idea to assign a number, but differentiate from permanent collection—perhaps begin with an E, EDU, etc.
Grants Assistance

• Minnesota Historical and Cultural Grants (Legacy Grants)
  – Manual online at www.mnhs.org/mhcg
  – Grants available for multiple collections projects
    • Survey, Inventory, Cataloging, Storage/Rehousing, Conservation, Pest Management, HVAC, Lighting, Security, ADA Accessibility, Disaster Plan
  – No deadlines set yet; waiting on appropriation
  – Updates on website, Local History News
Resources

- MHS Tech Talks: [http://www.mnhs.org/about/publications/techtalk.html](http://www.mnhs.org/about/publications/techtalk.html)
- Local History Office, 651-259-3460 (David) or 651-259-3459 (Melinda)
- Local History News enewsletter
Questions?