ARCS 2013 Conference Session: DEACCESSIONING: IS THERE ONE RIGHT WAY?
BEST PRACTICES HANDOUT

Definitions:

> **Collections Plan:** a plan defining the contents of the collections that guides staff in a coordinated and uniform direction to refine and expand the collections in a predetermined way.

> **Deaccessioning**: a museum procedure that involves the permanent removal of a collection item from a museum collection. It is the opposite of accessioning.

> **Disposal:** the process of getting rid of a collection item that has been deaccessioned.

> **Title:** the possession of rights of ownership of personal property.

The following policies need to be in place in order to begin the process of deaccessioning:

- Collections Management Policy which include both accession and deaccession policies. A strong deaccession program starts with an accession policy (Malaro 1997, 47).

- Next, proper accessioning prevents the acquisition of inappropriate objects, such as unresolved loans that might have to be returned later (Gerstenblith 2003, 409, 453-54).

- Finally, understanding the goals of the collecting plan will better inform what does not fit in the collection and consequently what is appropriate for deaccessioning (Buck and Gilmore 2011, 101).

Written accession policies and procedures should include:

- the scope of the collection developed from the museum's mission.

- a collecting plan that elucidates the strengths and weaknesses of the collection.

- the collecting goals of the museum (Buck and Gilmore 2011, 101).

- documentation requirements to prove clean title.

Written deaccession policy and procedures should include:

- the minimum retention time before deaccession (Simmons 2006, 53).

- a standard list of acceptable reasons for removing the tangible cultural heritage from the collection (Malaro 1997, 47) (for example: condition, duplication, quality, authenticity, relevancy, etc.).

- documentation or steps needed to show clear title and the absence of any outstanding issues with regard to unresolved loans.

- if the museum will issue quit-claims to deaccession items with an unclear title (Simmons 2006, 53).

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- when outside authority is needed (Simmons 2006, 53).

- if the museum will deaccession living donors' or artists' items (Weil 1997, 66).

- if the museum will notify the donor, donor's estate or the living artist prior to disposing of the cultural heritage (Buck and Gilmore 2011, 102).

- the authorization required to approve deaccessioning.

- the standard approval process, including those authorized to submit recommendations for deaccession and the authorization required to approve deaccessioning, with deaccessioning approval separated from disposal approval.

- standard list of appropriate methods of disposal (Malaro and DeAngelis 2012, 258-59) (for example, public auction, consignment, sale to dealer, exchange, transfer, destruction, retain for study or use).

- ethical restrictions on who may obtain deaccessioned items from the collection.

- how the funds from the disposal of the deaccessioned items are to be used (Buck and Gilmore 2011, 105).

- whether the donor names from the deaccessioned items will be transferred to the items purchased with the proceeds.

- whether donors will be notified of the specific purchase made with the proceeds from the sale of their deaccessioned items.

Documentation of the deaccession and disposition of the deaccessioned items should include:

- signatures of authorized museum representatives and date of approval of the deaccession and disposal (this can be a committee or other entity).

- photo documentation of the object to be deaccessioned.

- if objects are sold: date of sale, sale price, and net proceeds (and possibly sale info such as auction house's sale number). Otherwise, date of transfer/exchange, etc. and other details.

- marking of physical and electronic records with deaccessioned status (files, log books, etc.).

- notification of other departments (such as Photography/Image Library) of new status of work, so they can mark their records.

- placement of key documents in each accession file, such as:

    - correspondence with the donor approving the deaccession process.

    - a copy of the minutes from committees involved in the approval process.

    - deaccession recommendation/disposition, etc. forms.

    - a copy of the check with the proceeds.

    - notification from curatorial of the use of the proceeds.

- linking of the deaccessioned items to the items purchased with the proceeds from the sale.

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