

## Juggling Balls and Other High Wire Acts:

How a Well-Crafted  
Collections  
Management Policy  
Can be the Safety Net  
that Saves Your  
Collections



# StEPs

Standards and Excellence Program  
for History Organizations

*A Program of the American Association for State and Local History*



American Association for State and Local History  
[www.aaslh.org](http://www.aaslh.org)

Standards and Excellence Program for History Organizations  
<http://www.aaslh.org/steps.htm>

Small Museums Committee and information on how to join  
the Small Museums List Serv  
<http://www.aaslh.org/SmallMuseums.htm>

Small Museums Online Community  
<http://www.smallmuseumcommunity.org/>



*Our featured speaker ...*

**Bruce MacLeish**  
Director of Collections for Newport  
Restoration Foundation



## Juggling Balls and Other High Wire Acts:

How a Well-Crafted  
Collections  
Management Policy  
Can be the Safety Net  
that Saves Your  
Collections



## Two Goals for Today...

- 1 - Elevate the Collections Management Policy from a perfunctory document to a practical one, one that is used by your organization to help support and defend difficult decisionmaking.
- 2 – Be ready to create a Temporary Deposit Form and use it within the next six months

## What We'll Cover Today

- Policy vs. Procedure: What's the Difference?
- A Collections Management Policy: Why Have One?
- Essential Elements of a Collections Management Policy
- Temporary Deposit Forms



## A little about you....



## RUNNING A MUSEUM IS HARD WORK

Like any good tool, it (a collections management policy) won't work unless you use it!



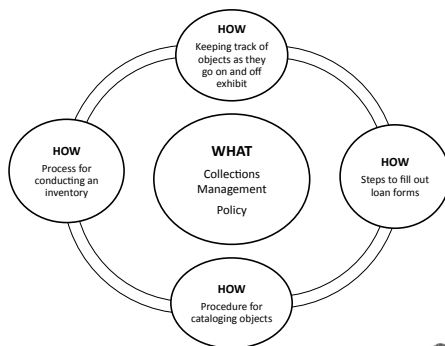
### Policy vs. Procedure: What's the Difference?

**Policies** "provide the operational framework within which the institution coordinates and merges efforts to achieve the institutional vision." (SOU)

**Policies=What**

**Procedures** "are the operational processes required to implement the policy."

**Procedures=How**



## Essential Elements of a Collections Management Policy<sup>1</sup>

### Statement of Purpose and Description of Collections

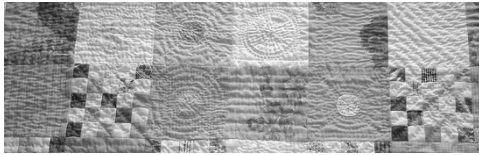
*This is not only your mission statement but also includes a description of the museum's collection and the goals the museum has for its collection.*

**Example:** "The Henry Clay Memorial Foundation will maintain a permanent historical collection to accomplish its goal of presenting a historically accurate view of life at Ashland. The collection may be seen as having two parts: historical and interpretive. The historical collection will consist of objects and documents owned and used by Henry Clay and Clay family descendants who lived at Ashland. The interpretive collection will consist of objects not belonging to the Clay family but having historical significance in interpreting the life of Henry Clay, the Clay descendants and life at Ashland in the 19th and early 20th centuries."

**\*\*Remember to include a glossary of terms or define the museum terminology within the document**

<sup>1</sup> Malaro, M. (1998)





### Acquisition of Objects

- What will you accept and not accept? Buildings? Land?
- Forms used to process incoming collections

### Deaccessioning

- What procedure do you follow? Who is authorized to deaccession? Where do objects go when deaccessioned?
- What are the criteria for deaccessioning?

<sup>1</sup> Malaro, M. (1998)



## Essential Elements of a Collections Management Policy<sup>1</sup>

### Loans

- Incoming and outgoing; To whom do you loan? For what purposes?
- Do you loan to community organizations?
- Do you accept "permanent loans"?

### Objects Placed in the Custody of the Museum

- Temporary Deposit Form (I'll discuss this more in a few minutes)
- How do you cope with abandoned property? (we all have it, 'fess up)

<sup>1</sup> Malaro, M. (1998)



## Essential Elements of a Collections Management Policy<sup>1</sup>

### Records

- How do you maintain records for the collection?
- Maintaining records is a large part of the museum's responsibility, museum trustees have been sued over failure to maintain proper records.

### Insurance

- What type of policy do you carry for the museum collections?
- What is covered, what is not covered?
- How are incoming and outgoing loans treated?

<sup>1</sup> Malaro, M. (1998)



## Essential Elements of a Collections Management Policy<sup>1</sup>

### Inventories

- How do you conduct your inventory (Annually? Every three or five years? On a rolling basis?)



<sup>1</sup> Malaro, M. (1998)



## Essential Elements of a Collections Management Policy<sup>1</sup>



### Access to the Collections

- Who has access to the collections and under what circumstances?
- Is there a time limit or days of the week?
- Who must be present?
- Are photographs permitted?

<sup>1</sup> Malaro, M. (1998)



## Essential Elements of a Collections Management Policy<sup>1</sup>



### Final Thoughts....

- Include the governing body's date of approval
- Also include a version number and date (insert date with "version 1" in the footer, for example)



Time for a few questions!



## CASE # 1

A college art museum in Virginia



The college forcibly removed four valuable paintings from its collection to finance general operating expenses of the college.

How could a Collections Management Policy have helped?



## CASE # 2

A museum in Washington, DC

Museum trustees borrowed objects for their own use.

How could a Collections Management Policy have helped?



## CASE # 3



A museum deaccessioned three paintings to which it did not have clear title.

How could a Collections Management Policy have helped?



Do you have ...



## TEMPORARY DEPOSIT FORMS (YES, YOU NEED ONE!)



## And here's 3 Reasons why

1. Legal Protection
2. Formal Documentation
3. Demonstrates Museum's Commitment to Professionalism



## Essential Elements of a Temporary Deposit Form by John E. Simmons

CATEGORY	EXPLANATION
Date	Date the object is received in the museum.
Museum identification	Name, address, and telephone number of the museum and the contact information for the staff member receiving the property.
Identification of owner	Name, address, telephone number, and e-mail address of the person placing the object in the museum's custody.
Duration of custody	The date the owner must pick up the property.
Forfeiture	Statement that property not claimed by the specified date will be forfeited to the museum.
Responsibility	Statement that the property is left in the museum's custody at the owner's risk and that the museum is not responsible for it.
Description of the property	A description that is detailed enough to identify the object with certainty.
Actions	Documentation of any actions related to the object, including examinations, appraisals, reviews, provenance or title research, or return to owner.
Purpose	The reason the object was left at the museum.
Number	The temporary number used to identify all documentation related to the object in custody.
Receipt	A receipt for the object is signed by a museum staff member and the owner or the owner's agent and a copy is given to the object's owner or the owner's agent.



## GUIDE TO WRITING (OR REVISING) YOUR COLLECTIONS MANAGEMENT POLICY

### Step #1: Information Gathering

Collect all of the information that you have about your collection—how many objects, how many are cataloged, do you have a teaching collection, is the collection well-cared for, do you have a separate line item in your budget for collections care, etc.



## GUIDE TO WRITING (OR REVISING) YOUR COLLECTIONS MANAGEMENT POLICY

### Step #2: Assemble a Task Force or Committee

Your Collections Management Policy Writing Committee should be composed of:

- Collections staff
- Chief administrator/executive director, etc.
- At least two board members
- An attorney (or at least have one available to review the last draft or two)

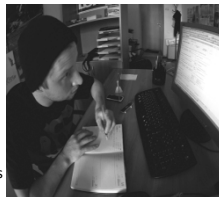
## GUIDE TO WRITING (OR REVISING) YOUR COLLECTIONS MANAGEMENT POLICY

### Step #3: Break Out the Work

What skills do your committee members have?

- Writing
- Research
- Ethics/Law

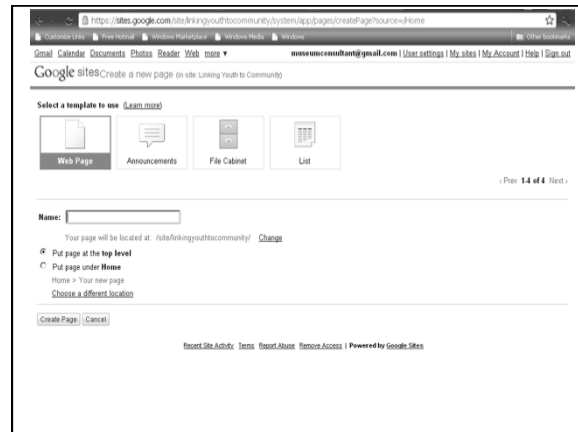
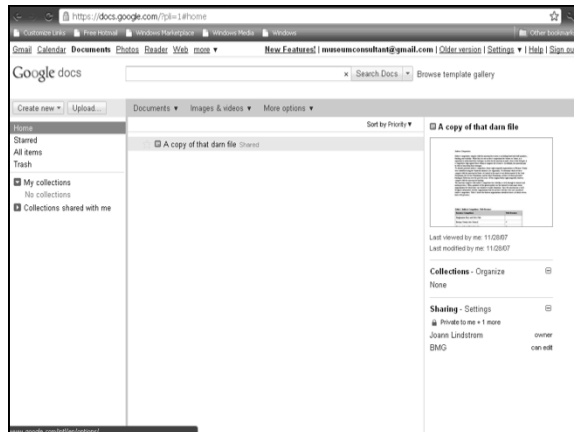
Inasmuch as possible, ask committee members to take up a task that will fit into their schedules and match their strengths and interests



## GUIDE TO WRITING (OR REVISING) YOUR COLLECTIONS MANAGEMENT POLICY

### Step #4: Take Out Your Calendars (or Blackberries)

- Think about using technology to ease the process of meeting and revising multiple versions of your documents
- Make a GANTT chart of tasks and timelines



### Sample Gantt Chart

Task	February	March	April	May	June
<b>Committee Chair (Greta)</b>					
Gather sample collections management policies from other museums					
Create Google Docs account to share policies					
Create a Google Wiki for each sub-committee					
<b>Accessions &amp; Deaccessioning Section Sub-Committee (Sue, Jane &amp; Ed)</b>					
Contact former board members to discuss accession problems in the past					
Contact state museum association about laws pertaining to collections					
Evaluate/update current Deed of Gift, Temporary Deposit, and cataloging form					
Evaluate accessions form, and Deed of Gift to protect museum in case of deaccessioning					
Evaluate current accessioning procedure					
<b>Loan Section Sub-Committee (Bob, Dan, &amp; Valerie)</b>					
Evaluate and update the current incoming and outgoing loan forms					
Research information systems to keep track of loans					
<b>Insurance &amp; Ethics (Paula &amp; Allison)</b>					
Work with Accessions & Deaccessioning Sub-Committee on state law					
Obtain quotes from national and local insurance firms on fine art/wall-to-wall policies					
<b>Records &amp; Inventories (John, Mark &amp; Danielle)</b>					
Create a flow chart of object accessioning, storage, and loan					
Gather all previous inventory records to establish a uniform system					
Explore ways to catalog the collection through online and off-the-shelf software					

AASLH

### Put Your Policy to Work!

- Discuss with your board or ED about the need to create or revise your CMP
- If everyone agrees to move ahead, establish a committee and break the tasks out to sub-committees
- Take time to create a Temporary Deposit Form

AASLH

**Bruce MacLeish**  
bruce@newportrestoration.org

AASLH