Managing Previously Unmanaged Collections

A Survival Guide for Messes Great and Small
Schedule for This Webinar:

- The 3 Golden Rules
- How to Approach the Collection
- Logical Exits
- How to Keep the Process Going
- How to Get Help
- A Few Last Hints
- Your Questions
The 3 Golden Rules:

1. Be forgiving with your past self

2. Take good care of your present self

3. Be kind to your future self*

* Phrase borrowed from colleague Tracey Berg-Fulton

Silent Killers

Arsenic!  Radiation!  Mercury!
Natural Enemies
Yourself

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Your Diary:

May 20, 2016, 8 A.M.: Found door to collections room unlocked.
How to approach your collection

• To effectively manage your collection hands-on, the first thing is to keep your hands off
Fairfax County VRE Disaster Exercise Nov. 13, 2010: "Victims" Evacuation, via flickr (CC BY-ND 2.0)

How to approach your collection

- To effectively manage your collection hands-on, the first thing is to keep your hands off
- Take more photos – touch fewer things
- Spot ALL the issues
- Set your priorities, choose your battles
- Make a plan how to tackle and define logical exits

Only a collections manager who takes good care of his or her health, time and resources can effectively manage a previously unmanaged collection.

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A: Sorting
B: Cataloging
C: Collections Policy

Example of a “rough-and-ready” Collections Policy

• We collect only farming equipment that was either built or used in our area
• We don't collect archival material → Town Archives
• We don't collect textiles → Textile Museum

“Oh, okay. How did THIS guy end up in our collection?” →
Men and dogs at the 85° South depot, on the way to the pole, 15 November 1911, photo public domain in the U.S.

The First Logical Exit – Getting Prepared

- Compilation of all basic information
- All relevant information collected
- Your library
- 2 lists of issues to tackle
  1) Things you can do on your own
  2) Things you need help with
- Material list
- Collection of all available legal documents
- Collections policy
- Diary of decisions and occurrences

The Second Logical Exit – Getting Organized

- Building has a consistent location numbering
- Collections storage room(s) +
  - 1 place to work,
  - 1 place to store (materials, tools)
  - 1 place to eat
  - 1 place for trash
- Biggest issues with storage are fixed
- Control access
- Explain new organization to staff & upper management

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The Third Logical Exit – Sort Things Out

• Decide on logical categories for sorting
• Sort the collection into those categories
• Document how you sorted – and why

Photos courtesy of Flannery O'Connor-Andalusia Foundation
The Forth Logical Exit – A Game of Strategy

- Documentation strategy
- Collections care strategy
- Interlink documentation and collections care strategy
- Eventually design some tasks for interns or specialists

FIRST
SOCKS
THEN
SHOES

The Forth Logical Exit – A Game of Strategy

Numbering and Measuring → Cleaning → Photographing

Rehousing → Packing for Transport → Moving

Unpacking → Complete Condition Reporting → Complete Cataloging

Packing and Storing for Eternity
The Forth Logical Exit – A Game of Strategy

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The Fifth Logical Exit

Your turn!

Logical Exits for a move under time pressure:

• Fifth: Complete photographic overview, collections move strategy, rough storage planning
• Sixth: All objects numbered, named, measured
• Seventh: Detailed collections move plan
• Eighth: Move completed
• Ninth: Every object has proper detailed catalog entry
How to keep the process going:

I can fix it!

How to keep the process going:

"Plans are worthless, but planning is everything"

_Dwight D. Eisenhower_
How to get help

• Ask your peers:
  Connecting to Collections Care
  Online Community
  RC-AAM Listserv
  (http://www.rcaam.org/listserv),
  Museum Junction of the AAM
  (http://community.aam-us.org/home),
  museum associations, museums & institutions with the
  same scope of collections

• Research grants
• Neighborhood help
• Be creative

Angela Kipp: Managing Previously Unmanaged Collections – A Survival Guide for Messes Great
and Small, September 2016. Join the Registrar Trek at world.museumsprojekte.de
A Few Last Hints:

- Educate yourself. It costs next to nothing and there is no such thing as too much knowledge.
- Ask for help.
- Take care of yourself and everybody you are working with.
- Document everything.
- Provide help for others.

More info about Unmanaged Collections:

MANAGING PREVIOUSLY UNMANAGED COLLECTIONS
A PRACTICAL GUIDE FOR MUSEUMS
ANGELA KIPP

May the road rise to meet you!

Twitter: @RegistrarTrek  Mail: angela.kipp@museumsprojekte.de
Blog: Registrar Trek  http://world.museumsprojekte.de