

WHY
DO WE
NEED THIS?

Insights and Hintsights from Deaccessioning

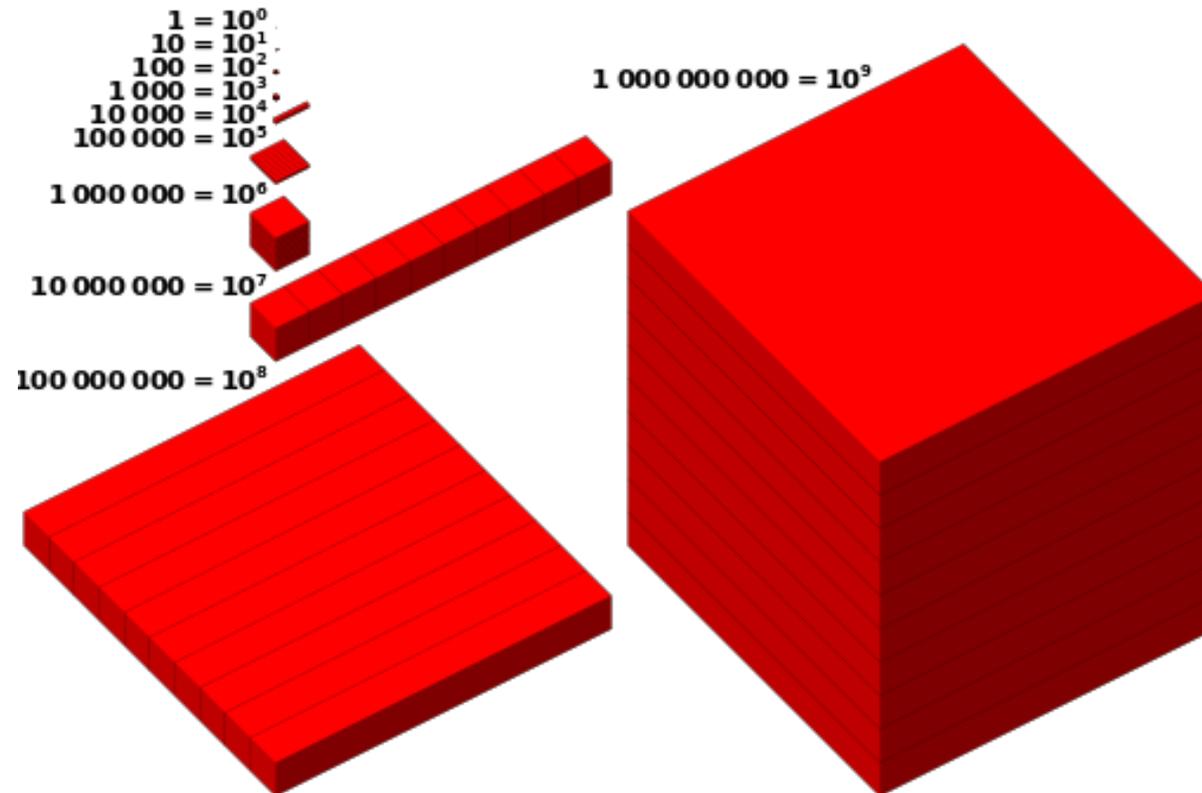
Leslie B. Jones | Vice President, Museum Affairs & Curator of Decorative Arts

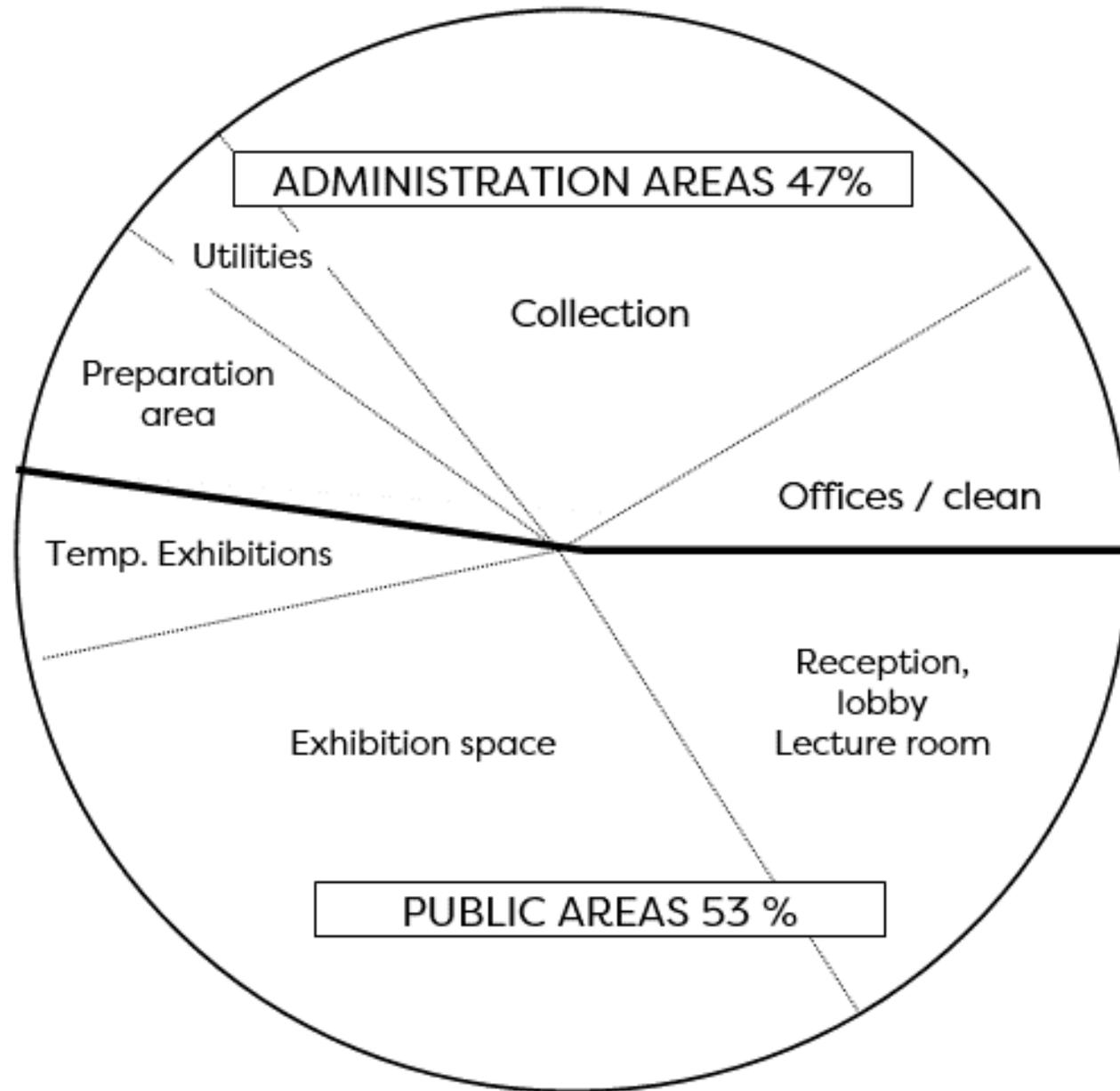
Cheekwood Estate & Garden | Nashville, TN

May 17, 2017

Museums preserve and protect more than 1 billion objects

Heritage Health Index (2004) borrowed from American Alliance of Museums





* ORGANIZED THOUGHTS *

DEACCESSIONING 101: Survey the Situation

DEACCESSIONING 201: Proactivity is Power

DEACCESSIONING 301: Research, Research, Research

DEACCESSIONING 401: Action and Dispersal

* NOT-SO-ORGANIZED THOUGHTS *

INSIGHT(S)

Recollections and examples of previous work that may prove to be helpful and/or instructive

HINDSIGHT(S)

Recollections and examples of previous work that demonstrate what is not helpful and/or instructive

CHEEKWOOD ESTATE & GARDEN

- Constructed between 1929 and 1932
- Private family home from 1932 until 1957
- Donated in 1957 to become the Tennessee Botanical Gardens and Fine Arts Center
- Opened to the public in 1960 with Museum space in the historic home
- Collection Categories include PERMANENT and ARCHIVAL
- Collection overview resulted in an encyclopedic approach with holdings of works on paper, artist books, video art, sculpture, paintings, photography, ceramics, art glass, metal ware, furniture, textiles, ethnographic objects, etc.



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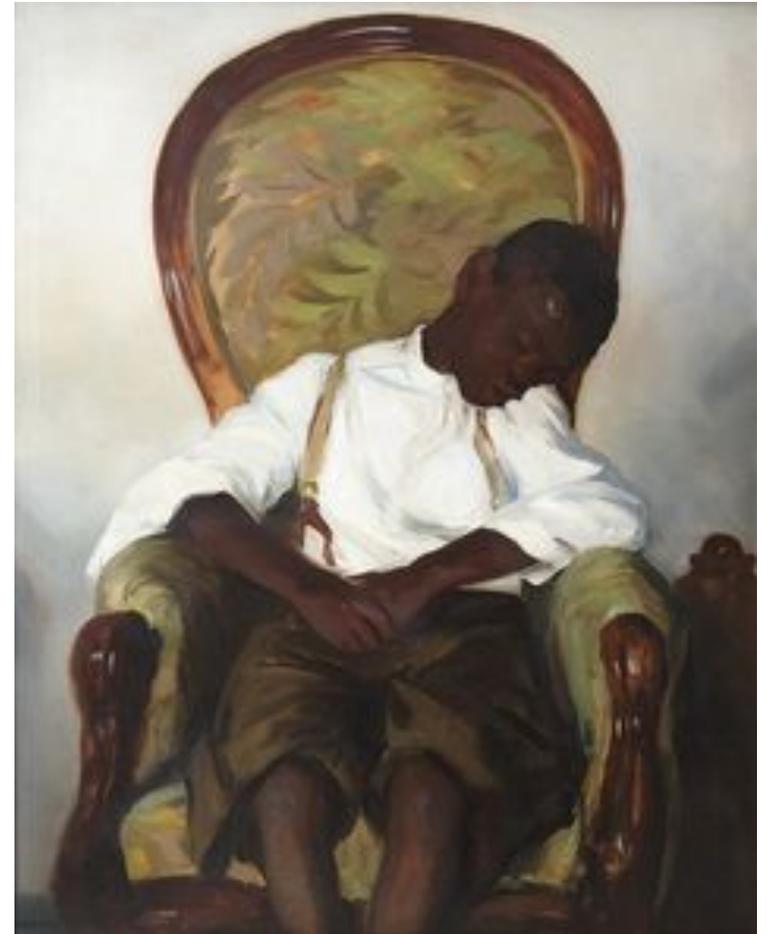
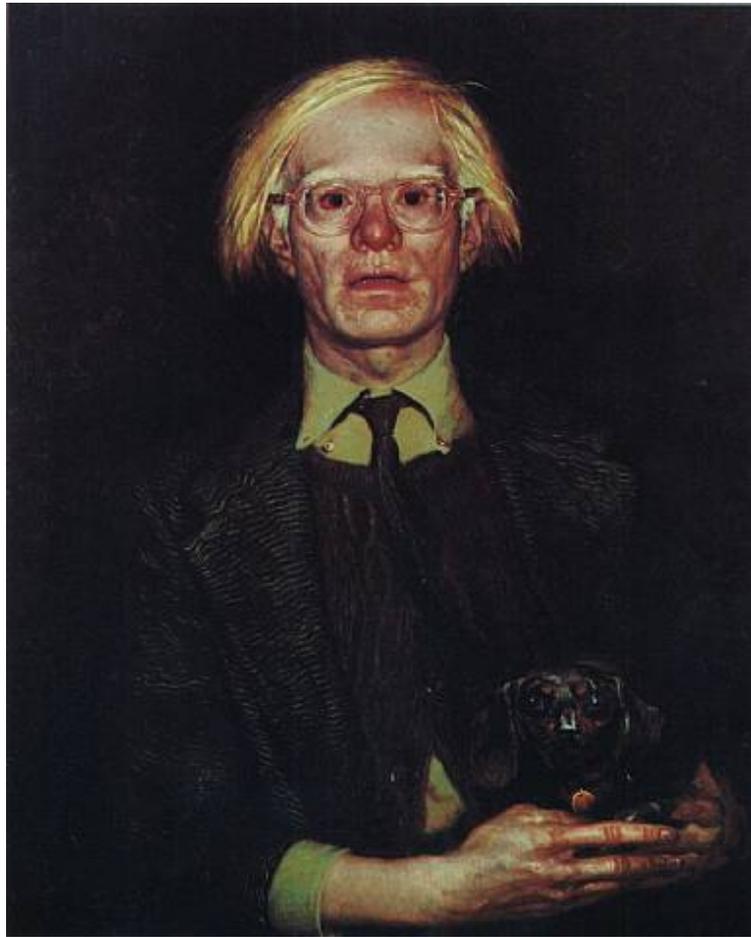
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CHEEKWOOD ESTATE & GARDENS

- 2012 Collection Assessment Process
- 2013 Collecting Plan Development
 - “American Art between 1910 and 1970”
 - “Outdoor Contemporary sculpture”
 - Established “niche” collections of American portrait miniatures, American Art Pottery, Chinese snuff bottles, English Worcester Porcelain
- 2014-2016 Deaccession
 - Objects identified and presented to the Art Committee
 - Vetting of sale options
 - Vetting of transfer options
 - Final lists presented to the Executive Committee and Board of Trustees
 - Awareness correspondence sent to donors
 - Dispersal of objects



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HINDSIGHT

Defining the institution's Collecting Plan and direction was prompted by an overarching organization-wide identity crisis and predominant financial hardship.



Within four years, the collection assessment, Collecting Plan, deaccession, historic restoration, collection-wide inventory, and launch of a Master Plan all took place.

DEACCESSIONING 101: Survey the Situation

DEACCESSIONING 101: Survey the Situation

one word...

INVENTORY

DEACCESSIONING 101: Survey the Situation

Locate your institution's...

Collections Management Guidelines

Collecting Plan/Collection Scope

Previous Deaccessions *(if applicable)*

DEACCESSIONING 101: Survey the Situation

Identify what you are trying to achieve through a deaccession:

- Do you actually need to do a deaccession?
- Are you reviewing a part of your collection now with plans to review other parts later?
Or Is this a full-collection assessment and deaccession?
- Does your institution's collection need to be more purposeful and thematic?
- Does the outcome include a hope for improved collections care?
- Is your institutional focus and mission a part of the decision-making process?

INSIGHT

It became quite clear through the Cheekwood deaccession process that the institution's purpose had changed significantly in the past three decades, considering the change in offerings and opportunities within the community.

In its first four decades of existence, it was the singular destination for the arts, and therefore an expectation formed to be the host of ALL art forms, movements, and genres.

What was once the sole “art museum” in the area was now bidding for the attention of patrons, visitors and volunteers (money and numbers).

INSIGHT

WHAT were the strengths of other local and regional institutions, and how might these new areas of focus separate and distinguish Cheekwood?

Cheekwood as a place is a unique fixture with its early 20th-century history, showcasing a moment in time within the American landscape; therefore American art representing the time period would be appropriate and informative.

There are sculpture parks in Tennessee, but none like Cheekwood's with its woodland feature.

DEACCESSIONING 101: Survey the Situation

Other questions to ask internally:

- Does your institution have a Strategic Plan?
- Has your institution carried out deaccessions in the past? Why?
- Does your staff have adequate time to appropriately carry-out a deaccession?
- Do you have the resources to ethically and logically carry-out a deaccession (legal counsel, experienced staff, etc.)?
- What are your hopes for your newly defined and refined collection?

HINDSIGHT

Always QUESTION MOTIVES, including your own and others. Why are you deaccessioning? What do you want to deaccession?

Cheekwood's most recent inventory deaccession was largely based off the findings from an independent collection assessment

The resulting list of objects, based off the assessment's findings, seems to have had more input from the governing body and the curator's strengths than understanding the institution's origins and founding principles

The founding principles, however, were not conducive to the institution's current and future offering as a non-profit organization



DEACCESSIONING 201: Proactivity is Power

DEACCESSIONING 201: Proactivity is Power

one word...

INVENTORY

According to AAM, institutions should have a full-collection inventory accomplished every ten (10) years. However, periodic inventories should be taking place on an ongoing basis.

INSIGHT

As part of the inventory process...

- Make an effort to thoroughly understand object origins from a curatorial and collections management perspective.
 - Is there any information missing?
 - Do you have up-to-date information on the donor(s)?
 - What other objects are related to this specific object and how?
- Prepare yourself for the unknown, including...
 - FICs (Found In Collection objects)
 - Objects without accession tags/numbers
 - Damaged objects

HINDSIGHT

Cheekwood did not produce a collection-wide inventory prior to this deaccession process, however, an inventory was taken on in the midst



IF we had completed an inventory earlier, prior to the collection assessment and prior to the beginning of a deaccession process, less back-tracking would have occurred

DEACCESSIONING 201: Proactivity is Power

Identify WHO on staff is responsible for WHAT

INVENTORY:

Collections Manager / Registrar

DEACCESSION SELECTIONS/LIST:

Curator or Curatorial Staff

DONOR RESEARCH, OUTREACH, COMMUNICATION:

Executive Level and Development

EXTERNAL INQUIRY MANAGEMENT:

Marketing / Public Relations

Schedule regular meetings to discuss progress

DEACCESSIONING 201: Proactivity is Power

If you do not have a COLLECTIONS MANAGEMENT POLICY, build one in advance of pursuing a Deaccession and ensure there is a specific section relating to accessioning AND deaccessioning objects.

Make sure your policies are reflected in your documents such as your institutional and/or governing body bylaws, conflict of interest agreements, employee handbook, and security procedures.

DEACCESSIONING 201: Proactivity is Power

What should be in a COLLECTIONS MANAGEMENT POLICY?

“A collections management policy is a set of policies that address various aspects of collections management. This policy defines the scope of a museum’s collection and how the museum cares for and makes collections available to the public. A collections management policy also explains the roles of the parties responsible for managing the museum’s collections.”

Mission, Vision and History

Conservation/Care

Statement of Authority

Loans

Code of Ethics

Scope of Collections

Objects in Custody

Documentation, Collections Records
and Inventories

Collection Categories

Insurance and Risk Management

Appraisals

Acquisitions/Accessioning

Access

Legal and Ethical Considerations
Intellectual Property

Deaccessioning/Disposal

DEACCESSIONING 201: Proactivity is Power

INFORM and EDUCATE...

1. YOURSELF
2. Your STAFF and GOVERNING BODY on what a “deaccession” is, what it means, who is the official POC
3. Your STAFF and GOVERNING BODY on the process and projected timeline, in particular making the board and/or committees aware of future meetings when their review and vote is required

DEACCESSIONING 201: Proactivity is Power

1. Can a board member or sub-committee member suggest a work(s) of art to be deaccessioned?
 - 1) Do you have to put that object to a vote?
2. If a member of the board or sub-committee has previously donated or sold a work of art to your institution, and now that work of art is slated for deaccession, is that member allowed to vote on approving the deaccession?
3. If the object goes up for sale, can a member of the staff or a member of the board or sub-committee acquire the object(s)?

DEACCESSIONING 301: Research, Research, Research

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- If applicable, take the time to understand PREVIOUS DEACCESSION(S) that have taken place at your institution
 - Why did they take place?
 - What objects were deaccessioned then?
- Always take the time to review and research OBJECT ORIGINS
 - Who gave the work? What did the agreement look like?
 - Was there meaning or purpose with the acceptance/approval of the object?
 - Does the object have a market history?
 - Does the object have an exhibition history?
 - Does the object have distinctive cultural history?
 - Do you have clear title and ownership?

HINDSIGHT

Cheekwood did not do a thorough review of previous deaccessions prior to our most recent. Some objects that had been previously deaccessioned, noted in meeting minutes and in the deaccession file, were still on-site and were being reviewed all over again.



By looking at previous deaccession documentation, we found extremely valuable information on the development of the collection, who was involved, and how decisions were made—all of which would have benefitted our work if we had known about it sooner.

DEACCESSION 301: Research, Research, Research

- Research and find consultation on potential LEGAL PARAMETERS
 - Understand gift or acquisition restriction language
 - Understand restitution
 - NAGPRA –National Park Service/Department of the Interior - National Museum of the American Indian
 - UNESCO – Convention on the means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property
- What was/is/will be a DONOR RELATIONSHIP to your institution?
 - Are they an active as part of a governance body? Are their family members?
 - Are they active or prior significant patrons? Are their family members?
 - Have they passed away? Who manages their estate?

DEACCESSION 301: Research, Research, Research

- Contact, engage and vet possible DISPERSAL METHODS
 - Reach out to auction houses and dealers to discuss the “possibility”
 - Ask for client information that is relevant to your situation (i.e. for whose benefit have they sold for in the past?) make contact with your peers
- Know and fully understand your ethical obligations with DISPERSAL RESULTS
 - If a sale, how can the funds be used?
 - If a transfer, who is responsible for what?

INSIGHT

- 1) Research destinations before presenting your findings to your board; have an idea of where you want things to go so they can be a part of that initial vote
- 2) Research your board; know who has familial, social, or professional relationships with former donors
- 3) Remind your board of their role and obligations (cannot acquire objects, must recuse themselves from voting if there is a conflict of interest)

DEACCESSIONING 401: Action and Dispersal

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put it to a

VOTE

DEACCESSION 401: ACTION AND DISPERSAL

- Be ORGANIZED with your final list of slated items
- PRESENT your findings to the appropriate higher powers for review and vote
 - Executive/Senior Level
 - This is not always required, but it can be a good checks/balances
 - Sub-Committees
 - If applicable
 - Executive Committee
 - If applicable
 - Board of Trustees/Directors

TAKE EXCEPTIONAL NOTES!

HINDSIGHT

Be sure you have the attention of your audience when going through the list, making certain that they understand this is their chance to vocalize any questions.



In reviewing the lists of objects originally slated for deaccession and reviewing the minutes from meetings, it became clear that the review of the objects was done quickly and with little discussion.



ART

TITLE, YEAR
ARTIST (BIRTH-DEATH, NATIONALITY)
MEDIUM
DIMENSIONS
SOURCE

RATIONALE FOR DEACCESSION:

Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, sit ut quas accusam prodesset, case justo scriptorem his ex. Sit facete meliore at et.

PROPOSED DISPERSAL METHOD:

Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, sit ut quas accusam prodesset, case justo scriptorem his ex. Sit facete meliore at et.

RATIONALE FOR DISPERSAL METHOD:

Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, sit ut quas accusam prodesset, case justo scriptorem his ex. Sit facete meliore at et.

DEACCESSION 401: Action and Dispersal

- Inter-Institutional transfers
 - On occasion, some objects are better suited in your Educational/Prop Collection or Archival Collection than in your Permanent Collection
- Non-profit institutions
 - For the benefit of the public and continual relevance of museums and cultural institutions, sometimes the ethical thing to do is transfer the object(s) to another non-profit that has the subject matter/artist/thematic sequence as part of their established collection
- Government institutions
 - There may be occasions where a government-run museum or a school may also better benefit from a transfer if the institution can adequately care for and exhibit the item; again, this is for the benefit of the public in maintaining the object(s) visibility
- For-profit institutions

DEACCESSION 401: Action and Dispersal

- Ensure that responsibilities are clearly understood with
 - packing/crating,
 - transportation,
 - insurance,
 - photography,
 - use of organization/institution name,
 - when/how review of final information occurs
- Negotiate terms of sale and be involved with valuations determinations
 - Understand the principles of valuation and differences in valuation
- Be involved in developing the contract
 - Keep control of your institution's name use
 - Make sure you are given the right to review and approve marketing materials

DEACCESSION 401: Action and Dispersal

COMMUNICATE

- Keep communication open and be prepared to share information
 - Communicate with donors
 - Communicate with whomever is selling these items or accepting the object(s)
 - Communicate with your Development staff when object(s) go up for sale in case donors want information
 - Communicate with your Accounting staff about costs, incoming funds, and use

INSIGHT

HOW could Cheekwood explain this rationale to the public, not to mention former, current and potential future patrons?

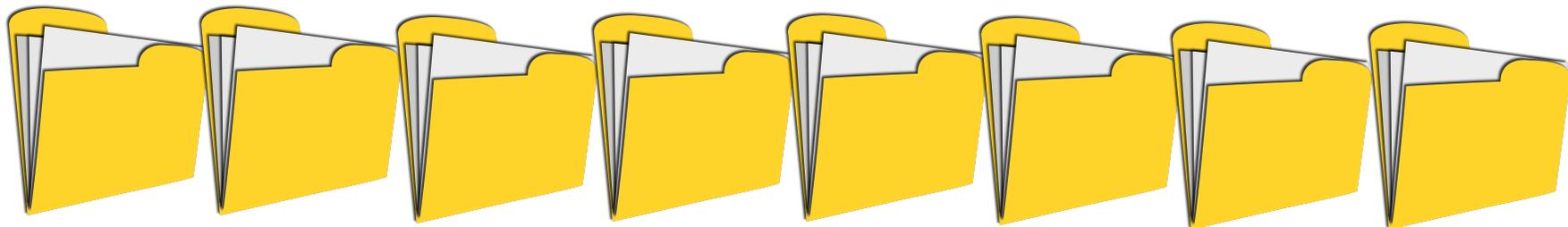
Collectively, Cheekwood drafted language for media inquiries and to contact former donors or their heirs about the deaccession.

Our strategy was two-fold:

1. create internal points-of-contact for inquiries and provide consistent messaging
2. formal letters were sent to donors or known heirs/representatives outlining exactly what was happening at Cheekwood, our intended plan for their former donations, and an invitation to meet with each person or group if requested.
 1. Some individuals did meet with our CEO and me, personally, but fortunately after explaining Cheekwood's history of collecting and our plans for the future, the personal meetings and responses to letters was overwhelmingly positive.

DEACCESSION 401:
Action and Dispersal

Record
EVERYTHING!



INSIGHT

Designate WHO on staff is in charge of keeping and maintaining those files

Generally, it is the Collections Manager or Registrar

INSIGHT

RECORD IN MULTIPLES

One on your computer where emails can be saved, attachments and can be dragged/dropped

One hard copy that has copies of every document, written correspondence, and notes

INSIGHT

DO NOT
throw away/destroy/get rid of
the object files from those items
that have been dispersed

Keep the hard files, put copies of corresponding documents in those files, mark the object as DEACCESSIONED along with date/year

Move the file to the location where all the deaccession files are kept

INSIGHT

RELOCATE the original object file from
where you keep all other object files.

Move the now deaccessioned object file to the location where
the deaccession files are located.

Use NEW folder or divider in your object file location that has

1. the object's accession number
2. The object's pertinent information
(title, artist, date, medium, dimensions)
3. The date/year the object was deaccessioned
and where to reference that information

BONUS!

How can you avoid deaccessions in the future?

Stick to your Collections Management Policy and Collecting Plan

Review and discuss your Collecting Plan

Do NOT accept gifts that are irrelevant to your institution
(hint: your Collecting Plan is a great excuse!)

Do your due diligence on offered gifts or acquisitions before committing

Ensure you have the capacity to care for an object before committing

Think of how you can utilize an object, honor the object and enhance your institution through the ownership and display of the object

CONCLUSION

- DEACCESSIONS are complicated.
- DEACCESSIONS are time consuming.
- DEACCESSIONS require careful and sincere thought and planning.
- DEACCESSIONS do not end with dispersal.
- DEACCESSIONS should be organized and produced for the benefit of your institution as well as that of the object itself.
- DEACCESSIONS exist for a reason.
- DEACCESSIONS should be your last resort.