

Practical Nuts & Bolts Strategies: Day-to-Day Protection of Small Museums

January 16, 2018

Questions and answers

Joanna McMann [Quebec]: *Will you cover security issues when collections are in a traveling exhibit? (Especially for exhibition in non-museum settings)*

Artifacts in transit are at risk, same for exhibits without the protection of a museum. For artifacts in transit, it is recommended to tighten security at both ends of the trip, require background checks on drivers, assure that receiving end is properly secured and vehicles are secured and sealed upon departure. For large shipments, a security escort is a consideration. For exhibits in other buildings, video surveillance, contract security on site, and a review of the building's perimeter protection are recommended. The same goes for the room where exhibits are displayed. All of this should be agreed upon in advance and included in your loan documents. Please feel free to contact me directly for a detailed discussion.

Ana-Elisa Arredondo [Tucson]: *What about copiers — should they be turned off and unplugged when the museum is closed?*

Copiers should be okay if turned off, and checked at closing to assure they are turned off.

Itxel Castro-Soto [Hamilton]: *Is it recommended to ventilate the flammable cabinets that hold flammable materials? Or is it simply enough to house them in a cabinet (unventilated)?*

Flammables need to be stored in a fire-rated, ventilated cabinet.

Evelyn Fidler [Prince William, New Brunswick]: *What about open fires in historic homes?*

Open fires are a threat in any location. We prefer to have them banned and replaced with artificial devices. When this is not possible, a staff member must be in the room during the time fires are present, assure they are properly extinguished at closing, and make one extra check to assure they're out before closing.

Joanna McMann [Quebec]: *In Canada references are not permitted to make negative comments - how then can one check re: abusive personality?*

You should be able to ask questions related to the subject's performance, where the employer can rate same, and check to see if it's permitted to interview co-workers.

Jackie Oshman [New Brunswick, NJ]: *@Joanna and @Evelyn: our director was told you can only say whether or not you would rehire someone.*

You need to check with your attorney to see if your state has no Job Reference Immunity which permits the release of documented information without fear of litigation. However, there is no known legal restriction from releasing legitimate information, especially if the applicant signs a waiver allowing the release of information documented in personnel files.

Louise Doll [Perkasie, PA]: *What about volunteers? We are small and all are volunteers.*

Lisa Masengale [Monterey, CA]: *Every museum I've worked at has required volunteers to fill out application and undergo background check same as staff would be.*

Evelyn Fidler [Prince William, New Brunswick]: *We have volunteers fill out applications and be interviewed*

All staff, VOLUNTEERS, interns are subject to complete background investigations, based on their level of exposure to visitors and collections. The explanation to volunteers is for the mutual safety of staff and others from persons with criminal histories or other known problems.

Margaret Monti [Long Beach, California]: *Should volunteers be treated as potential employees?*

Volunteers should be treated as volunteers, but should undergo the same screening as employees.

Irene Karsten [Ottawa, ON]: *Some of my clients have told me that they have reconsidered panic buttons because staff feel they will get immediate response to an issue but police may not be able to respond quickly.*

There is no guarantee that police will be their immediately. But without the use of silent signals, they may not be summoned until too late. In that case, having the availability of panic/duress signals enhances staff safety considerably.

Llyn Sharp [Blacksburg, VA]: *Sounds like best practice would be to have at least 2 people on duty at any time.*

Jenny Yearous [BISMARCK]: *Is it always a good idea to have two people, staff or volunteers, working at any given time?*

It's always advisable to have at least two staff members present, for mutual protection, and welfare checks upon each other.

Joanna McMann [Quebec]: *When I worked retail as a student, we got training re: some of these security issues, but as a heritage professional we don't do this*

Your exposure, and therefore your risks, are the same as someone working in retail. This is about your safety, which requires a certain level of training.

Dara Shore [1849 C Street, NW, Washington, DC 20240]: *Stevan, what would you say is the best way to familiarize emergency contacts with the facilities that's workable for emergency response without providing them with a "shopping list" for theft?*



First responders are like anyone else, responding to invitations, especially when food or other refreshments are provided. Your tours should be to point out exit routes, emergency equipment, and alarms, especially where panic/duress signals are located. It is not necessary to identify any specific exhibits in terms of value other than to generalize about the most frequent targets for thieves, which include precious metals, jewelry, weapons, and irreplaceable artwork.

Ana-Elisa Arredondo [Tucson]: *Incident Commanders—Do they have to be on the premises on a regular basis? Or can they work remotely?*

When a crisis occurs, the Incident Commander needs to be right there, right now. IN an emergency, it's always possible to have someone assume that role long enough for the appointed incident commander to get there, as long as the response time is fairly quick. We're talking about the need to make decisions which may affect life safety, or the future of the institution.



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