



Reducing Risk Through Good Collections Management

Part 1

In order to reduce risks to your museum's collection the following elements must be part of your daily operations.

- ✓ Access Policies and Procedures
- ✓ Good Collections Management
- ✓ Training
- ✓ Security
- ✓ Practice Preventive Conservation
- ✓ Create and Practice a Disaster/Emergency Preparedness Plan

Part 1, in this issue, will discuss the first of these elements--Access Policies and Procedures. In our Summer 2015 issue, Part 2 will cover the other five elements.

Access Policies and Procedures

Access Policies and Procedures should address both internal and external access to your collections.

Staff Access

Limit the number of people who have unrestricted access to collections. The only people who need to have unaccompanied access to your collection storage areas are those individuals in charge of the 'care and feeding' of the collection. Depending on the size of your museum, this could be the Collections Manager, the Registrar or the Curator. Someone has to be in charge of making sure that items are not removed or moved without proper documentation and that items taken out of the storage area are replaced in their proper places and that these movements are documented and updated in the collection catalog. All other individuals requesting access, including the Director, should be accompanied by the person in charge of the collection.

Limit the number of keys to secure Collection storage. Not everyone needs keys to the store. Only the person in charge of the collection should have a key to Collection storage. Key control is critical to keeping your sensitive areas safe. Establish a procedure for securing keys in a locked key box. Any access to that key box and removal of key(s) from it should be recorded on a sign-out/sign-in sheet. Do not leave the key to the key box in the key box lock! Do not tag the keys with the name or room number that it goes to. Use a key code list that simply has numbers with which the keys are tagged. Secure the key box key, the key code list and the sign-out sheet and have someone in charge of monitoring the use of these important elements of security.

Access logs can be helpful to determine who last accessed the secure collections area. Having an Access Log (sign-out sheet) posted at the door to secure collections storage areas and enforcing its use is a good way to track entry into these secure areas. Key cards and card readers on the door can also track entry into secure spaces, but they are not always available to every museum due to the cost of installation and maintenance.

Researcher access

Train researchers in handling. As part of your Researcher Access Policy and Procedures make sure you have a training component in handling for any researcher that will be accessing your collections. Part of the training should include what can and cannot be used while accessing collection items--pencils, not pens; no post-it notes; cotton or nitrile gloves (if appropriate). When handling paper artifacts, be sure to instruct the researcher on page turning; keeping original order; and how to mark and ask for photocopies (if permitted)--use acid-free paper slips to mark pages requested. When handling other artifacts and books, be sure to instruct the researcher in proper handling of different types of materials and whether photographs are allowed--how to pick up and hold; when to wear gloves; what not to grab on to, etc. A note on photography: the photographer retains copyright of images he/she produces and can use those images in any manner they see fit. If you want control over images of your collection, it is important to be able to provide images to researchers that have been taken in house by staff so you can control via permissions how they will be used. These instructions should be both verbal and written. Permit only notebooks and pencils or a laptop (not the case) in the viewing area. Limit the amount of material that a researcher can bring with them when accessing your collection. When limiting that to a notebook and pencil or laptop, there are fewer opportunities to secret pages or other items for removal from the museum or archive. Watch the use of cell phones and computers for taking photos.

Create a secure area for coats, purses, briefcases, backpacks, etc. outside viewing area. Be sure to create an area where those items that are not allowed in the viewing area can be kept secure. Consider lockers or a 'coat check' system whereby you can control access in and out of this area.

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Maintain strict and attentive monitoring of researcher(s) during the use of the collection items requested. A staff member needs to be present when any collection item is being accessed. Staff needs to pull and return requested items from secure storage--one item or file at a time, making sure that the previous item is returned before the next is brought out.

Require appointments so staff is available to locate collections and monitor use without distractions. Requiring appointments allows the museum to have a dedicated staff person available whose job it is to monitor and assist the researcher with access to the items they request. This staff person should not be distracted by other duties or allow himself/herself to be distracted by another researcher when collections are being accessed. It would be wise to allow only one researcher at a time to access the collections.

Researcher logs

Require a written request for access with a reasonable reason for use of the collection. Requiring requests in writing allows the museum to vet the request before granting permission to access the collections. The reason for the access request should be reasonable and specific. The 'I just want to see what you have' reason may be a fishing expedition to locate valuable items to steal.

Use a sign-in sheet with verified contact information and require the researcher to sign-off on instructions for handling and use. Using a sign-in sheet and having the researcher sign off that they have understood the verbal and written instructions for use of the requested material will help to keep misuse and mishandling to a minimum.

Record materials requested and viewed on the sign-in sheet. Recording all materials access by each researcher can provide the museum or archive with a paper trail that can help track down material that may be found missing or misplaced.

Require staff to pull and return materials. Part of the staff monitoring is to retrieve, record, and return all materials requested by the researcher. Make sure that the first material brought out is returned before retrieving any other material.

Create written rules for photocopying which make sure that items do not get out of order. Respect original order in archival materials and folders and make sure to explain verbally and in writing the rules for keeping pages in the order in which they are presented to the researcher. As previously mentioned, using an acid-free paper marker to mark selected items for photocopying instead of post-its or pulling the original out of the file is a critical piece to maintain the original order of the materials. Again, staff should make the copies for the researcher to be sure the page(s) is returned to the proper place in the file.

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COLLECTIONS RESEARCH
for MUSEUMS



2015 TRAINING SCHEDULES

ONLINE TRAINING

MS103: Basics of Museum Registration
January 5 to 30, 2015

MS207: Collections Management: Cataloging
Your Collection
July 6 to 31, 2015

MS267: Museum Ethics
July 6 to 31, 2015

MS218: Collection Inventories
November 2 to 30, 2015

MS007: The Mission Statement: Is It Really That
Important?
November 9 to 13, 2015

!NEW!

SECURITY WORKSHOPS FOR TINY MUSEUMS

Collections Research for Museums now offering a half-day workshop titled "*Security for the Small Museum: Practical Low and No Cost Solutions*".

This workshop is designed for small museums with 10 or fewer staff (paid or unpaid) who are looking to improve or learn about museum security. It will present practical tips that anyone can implement with little or no cost focusing on non-technical solutions.

We are currently looking for institutions who would like to host one of these workshops

Check our website or call us for details:
<http://museumcollectionmgmt.com>

SERVICES

FILEMAKER® PRO CATALOGING TEMPLATES

Collections Research for Museums can assist small museums with computerizing their collection documentation using off-the-shelf database software.

Training is available for our database and in general FileMaker Pro techniques.

ON-SITE TRAINING

Collections Research for Museums offers **classes for small museums in Cataloging and Collections Management**. The course is designed for those museums which have small, non-professionally trained or volunteer staffs. It covers the basics of marking, handling, measuring, and cataloging, plus general care and storage for all types of objects and materials.

PROJECT SERVICES

We also offer a variety of **other services** to museums, large and small. These **range from simple inventories to complete and thorough cataloging of collections**. Feel free to contact us for more information. We provide a **free initial consultation**.

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