

DE-ACCESSION, DELETE OR DESTROY: REMOVING ITEMS FROM COLLECTIONS

Jennifer Jenkins

Anne Morra

Deborah Stoiber

AMIA 2014

Savannah, GA

GENERAL INFORMATION

- Responsible transfer or disposal of collection objects is not a casual process and even the most well-reasoned de-accession process could encounter obstacles.
- Before initiating, the curatorial staff and administrators must carefully consider various factors that could potentially jeopardize a successful transfer or disposal of objects.

APPLICABILITY

- In accordance with New York State education law;
- Items that are recognized as expendable, non-collection materials (such as samples) are exempt.

BASIC STEPS TO REMOVE OBJECTS

- What can I de-accession?
- When can I remove items?
- What are the procedures?
- Once I have de-accessioned, what can I do with it?

WHAT CAN I REMOVE?

- The object is inconsistent with the mission of the museum;
- The object has failed to retain its identity;
- The item is redundant;
- The object's preservation and conservation needs are beyond the capacity of the institution to provide;
- The object is de-accessioned to accomplish refinement of collections;

WHAT CAN I REMOVE (CONT.)?

- It has been established that the object is inauthentic;
- The items is being repatriated or returned to its rightful owner;
- The item is being returned to its donor (or donor's heirs or assigns) to fulfill donor restrictions related to the item which the museum is no longer able to meet;
- The item presents a hazard to people or other collection items and/or;
- The item has been lost or stolen and has not been recovered.

WHEN CAN I DE-ACCESSION?

- How much time has to pass?
- Is the object harmful?
- Is the object under claimed by another person or institution?
- Does the object have cultural significance to another nation or tribe?

WHAT ARE THE PROCEDURES?

STEP ONE:

- The Collection Curator must first notify the museum director and registrar's office by means of a de-accession proposal. The proposal should include the following key components:
 - A well-defined reason or justification for removal
 - An itemized inventory of objects
 - A proposal method of transfer or disposal
 - An independent appraiser's report, if applicable

STEP TWO:

- The registrar's office may examine the accession records and verify the status of the objects considered for removal. Some concerns may include, but are not limited to:
- Provenance;
- Good and complete title to the property;
- Donor Restrictions in the original donation agreement;
- Non-binding requests or preferences;
- Tax implications;
- Conflict of interest.

STEP THREE:

- Presentation.
- Permanent de-accession record.

NOW THAT I REMOVED IT FROM THE COLLECTION, WHAT CAN I DO WITH IT?

- Donation, exchange or transfer by sale to a qualified educational institution
- Sale through an auction house or internet bidding open to the general public
- Consignment sale through a reputable gallery or equivalent
- Safe and responsible destruction

WHAT CAN'T I DO WITH IT ONCE I HAVE REMOVED AN OBJECT FROM THE COLLECTION?

- Cannot sell in the bookstore or gift shop.
- Cannot give to staff, students, interns, or to private collectors.

SUMMARY OVERVIEW-A CHECKLIST

- Consider how effect the museum can demonstrate to the public that the collection is being enhanced through de-accessioning. The anticipated GAIN must justify the LOSS.
- Does the proposed de-accession support future acquisition plans?
- De-accession plans must not be driven by financial issues not should they be swayed by the aesthetic taste and preferences particular to those caring for the collection (i.e. you cannot get rid of it because you don't like it)
- Verify the original donation as either unconditional or restricted by legal instruments (such as a tax deduction).
- Verify that the museum has a good a complete title to the object.
- Assess conflicts of interest