

Museum Essentials: Working with Collections - MA Disposal Toolkit

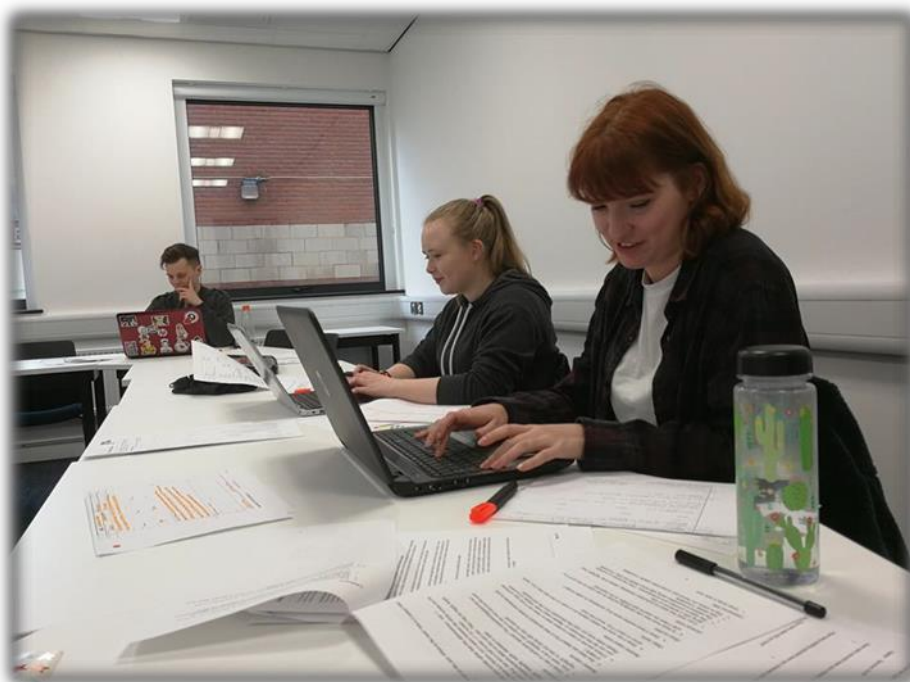
Introduction

Museum collections represent the generosity of past and current donors and the endeavours of collectors. These collections are established for the long term and each generation has responsibility to the next to ensure they do not become unmanageable or a burden and that they remain sustainable.

Equally it is imperative that collections are used and developed in response to the needs of today's society. Museums must balance the safeguarding and retention of items within their collections with the need to review and develop collections, acquire items and, in some cases, remove them.

Why Dispose?

- Items that fall outside the core collection as defined by the museum's collections development policy
- Duplicate items
- Underused items
- Items for which the museum is unable to provide adequate care or curation
- Items that are damaged or deteriorated beyond the museum's ability to repair
- Uncontextualised or unprovenanced items
- Items that pose a threat to health and safety



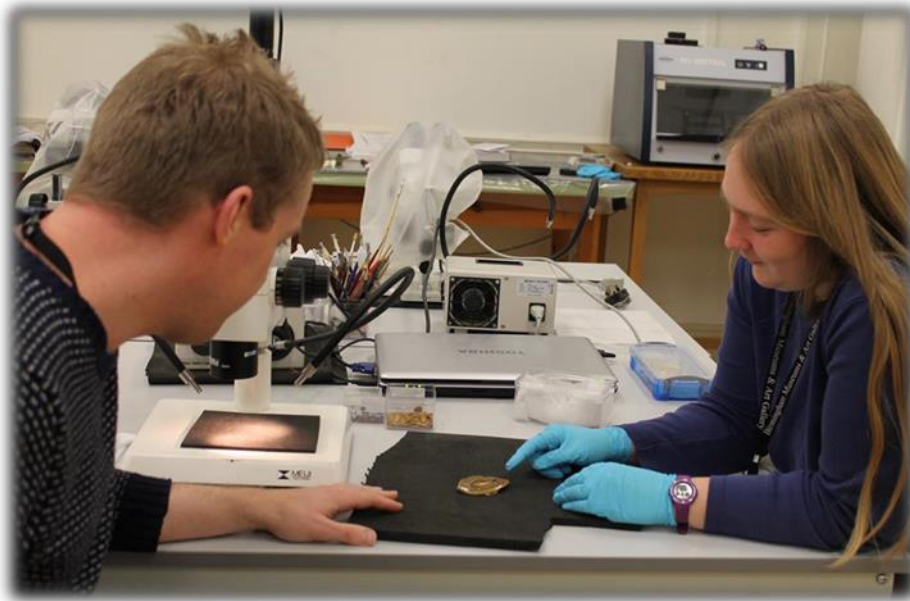
Things to consider

- Why was the item acquired in the first place?
- Is the item currently being used and what are the potential opportunities for use in the future?
- Is the item being selected because it is out of fashion?
- Would the item fit better and be more widely used and accessible in another museum's collection (e.g. would it be more geographically or culturally relevant)?
- What is the cultural significance of the item within the collection?
- Does the museum have the resources to care for the item or can they be obtained?
- Is the item beyond repair and what would it cost to conserve or repair?
- Has sufficient effort been made to research the item's history?
- Does the item present a risk to the public and the workforce and can the risk be removed?
- What legislation may affect the item's retention or disposal from the collection?



Methods of Disposal

- Free gift or transfer to another Accredited museum
- Exchange of items between museums
- Free gift or transfer to another institution/organisation within the public domain
- Return to donor
- Sale of item to an Accredited museum
- Transfer outside the public domain
- Sale outside the public domain
- Recycling of item
- Destruction of item



Critical Points

- Use the Code of Ethics throughout the process
- Consider the views of stakeholders and those who have a vested interest in the collections, such as visitors, researchers, local or source communities and, in the case of contemporary art, living artists
- If money is generated through the disposal of an item, it should be applied solely and directly for the benefit of the museum's collection
- The process should be transparent and recorded to Spectrum standards