

COLLECTING  
COMMUNITY RESPONSES  
TO COVID-19

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# COLLECTIONS MANAGEMENT PERSPECTIVE

- Not going to give specific advice on what exactly to collect—you know your communities best and what makes sense for your institution
- My role in my organization is to provide guidelines on HOW to do that collecting thoughtfully, legally, and according to our own policies
- We are not currently collecting but are in discussion phase—most of us not doing museum work right now
- Will share thoughts from our discussions about collecting guidelines and ethics of community interaction when soliciting for donations
- Goal is to treat community with respect & dignity, and not overwhelm your own institution

## AVOID FIELD COLLECTING – ENGAGE WITH PEOPLE AND DOCUMENT

- i.e. picking up items left out in the world, sometimes meant to be viewed by the community, like signs thanking healthcare workers, artwork, etc. Might be easier, but if we can get things another way, do so.
- Issues:
  - Sever the connection to the story behind the object and thus the community. Lose context.
  - Lose the opportunity for people to feel like their voices are being heard and that they're an active participant in the process.
  - Lose legal ownership
  - Possibly lose the opportunity for future use if we don't secure copyright and permissions—these are sensitive stories and **informed consent** is key. Be transparent about how we want to use their information.
- Now would be a good time to review agreements to make sure they reflect how the material will be used and what permissions we want.

## STICK TO THE COLLECTION POLICY

- Take the time to think about collecting scope when planning out covid-19 collecting
- We'll all need to narrow our focus to manage collecting in this crisis: avoid large quantities of generic items, try to stick to objects that are customized, handmade, are easily connected to groups or individuals in your community
- This is a unique scenario but just like with any acquisition, we'll be following our policy

## CONSIDER CAPACITY

- We won't know what our museums will look like in the near future. What will our capacity be to process everything we're collecting?
- Consider current resources and what they may be in the future:
  - Do we have enough staff to process material in a timely way?
  - Do we have enough storage space, physically and virtually?
  - Do we have the conservation staff and tools to deal with this type of material?
  - Do we have the space to safely quarantine objects and packing material as it comes in?
- Don't be afraid to be selective. We don't have to keep and save everything. Come up with a gentle and respectful way to turn down donation offers if we need to.



IN  
SHORT...

Take the time to slow down,  
document, make things  
official/legal, and keep it  
relevant and manageable

## STRATEGY FOR NOW

- No ability to put out a general request for material right now—we are all reassigned to essential services or working on other projects
- Working group to discuss the issues
  - Registrar, curator, historian, conservator
- Shared documents to keep track of wanted items, potential contacts, and donation requests
- This means most of our collecting will be Active—reaching out to people

# ETHICS

- Passive collecting (i.e. requests on your website on social media) ensures that people are coming to you on your own terms, when they're ready.
- Actively reaching out to people is still needed to capture the whole story but it means you're going in blind and don't know how they're feeling.
- Reaching out to other city departments, people already in our networks
- Think about adapting language on forms, and adapting usual processing timelines
- Your staff will be impacted by covid-19 as well—we are all part of the affected community



# ETHICAL FRAMEWORK

**Ethical framework from the American Anthropological Association:** <http://ethics.americananthro.org/category/statement/>

1. Do no harm
2. Be open and honest regarding your work
3. Obtain informed consent and necessary permissions
4. Weigh competing ethical obligations due collaborators and affected parties
5. Make your results accessible
6. Protect and preserve your records
7. Maintain respectful and ethical professional relationships

# ETHICAL FRAMEWORK

## **Further reading on ethics of contemporary collecting:**

Statement from the American Museum Association

- <https://www.museumsassociation.org/ethics/03042020-code-of-ethics-covid-19-contemporary-collecting-statement>

Contemporary Collecting: an ethical toolkit for museum practitioners

- [https://www.ltmuseum.co.uk/assets/downloads/Contemporary\\_collecting\\_toolkit.pdf](https://www.ltmuseum.co.uk/assets/downloads/Contemporary_collecting_toolkit.pdf)
- (Theme 4: Trauma and Distress)