

## Process Document for Collections Development Project

(The development of this document was largely guided by processes contained within Significance 2.0 and Revisiting Museums Collections)

### **Process for Re-framing Collections**

- 1. Gather information:** gather as much information as possible related to the object. This could include information from the artifact file including acquisition date and associated records, donor information, research files or other related documentation.
- 2. Research:** research the history and provenance of the item.
- 3. Consult:** consult donors, owners and knowledgeable people. Identify people with an interest or knowledge of the item (present or past museum staff, researchers, etc.).
- 4. Explore:** explore the context of the item, consider how it relates to wider historical patterns or themes.
- 5. Compare:** compare the object or collection to other similar objects or collections. Check to see if there are other heritage organizations with similar or related collections.
- 6. Engage:** engage with people from outside of the museum who can bring new perspectives to the collections. This may be individuals or groups who are subject matter experts or individuals or groups with an interest in the collections.
- 7. Document and Embed:** it is important that information is collected in a way to ensure appropriate documentation and embedding where appropriate in the institution's collections database system. This ensures that the information that has been collected will form part of the story about the collections, that it is recorded and that the information is accessible.

## **Process for Engaging Partner Organizations**

Outreach – provide an overview to potential partner organizations outlining the project. This overview should include the objectives and goals of the project and use clear language (avoid museum specific terminology). The overview also must include a clear outline of the expectations of the collaborating organization: what exactly they will be required to do, what is the time commitment and what are the parameters of the project (deadlines for work, any other related expectations).

### **Objectives for the session**

- Include in your introduction what your organization hopes to achieve as part of this project. It is helpful to acknowledge that your organization recognizes the limitation of its own knowledge about the collection and is interested to listen to, understand, record, and value external voices.
- Engage outside organizations more closely with your organization, its work and its collection.
- Reveal new information about how particular objects may have been used, made, regarded, named or how the content of records reflects people's lived experiences.

### **Outcomes**

#### **Partner Benefits**

- Confidence in handling and analysing museum objects and related information
- Confidence that their contributions will be listened to and that they are 'allowed' to challenge and change the museum's approach to interpreting its collections
- New awareness of other people's perspectives and the power and meaning of objects and language in different cultures
- An understanding of how museums acquire and manage collections and information about them

#### **Staff Benefits**

- Excitement and confidence about working directly with community groups.
- A positive experience and understanding of the benefits of the organization and its users of cross-disciplinary working
- Insights into possible new approaches to interpretation and display

**Object Number:** \_\_\_\_\_

## **Object Questions**

### **Basic questions for every session:**

- Why did you choose this object/record? Is there anything about it that you particularly like or dislike? Can you say why?
- How do you think it might have been used? You might want to think about: who by, when, where and why?
- Does it remind you of anything you've seen or used yourself?
- What questions do you have about it?
- What is the most important or interesting thing about this object/record?
- What topics or subjects do you think it relates to?
- Does it relate to your own experience, or a tradition or practice you know about?
- What can we find out from it?

Looking at the **written description** of the object:

- Does it tell you what you need to know?
- What does it leave out – what questions do you have?
- What do you think of the language used? Is it helpful? Are there other words you would like to see used to describe the object and its significance?
- Is it easy to understand?
- Do you think it's accurate (as far as it goes)?
- Do you think it tells the whole story or does it describe the object/record from just one point of view?

\*\*The questions used for this handout are taken from the questions provided by Revisiting Museum Collections\*\*

**Record Number:** \_\_\_\_\_

## **Archival Questions**

### **Basic questions for every session:**

- Why did you choose this item – is there anything about the way it looks or what it contains that you particularly like or dislike? Can you say why?
- Why do you think it was created? What do you think it was meant to record? Who for?
- How do you think it might have been used? You might want to think about: who by, when, where and why
- Does it remind you of anything you've created or used yourself?
- What questions do you have about it?
- What is the most important or interesting thing about this object/record?
- What topics or subjects do you think it relates to?
- Does it relate to your own experience, or a tradition or practice you know about?
- What can we find out from it?

Looking at the **written description** of the record:

- Does it tell you what you want to know?
- What does it leave out – what questions do you have?
- What do you think of the language used? Is it helpful? Are there words you would like to see used to describe the object/record and its significance?
- Is it easy to understand?
- Do you think it's accurate (as far as it goes)?
- Do you think it tells the whole story or does it describe the object/record from just one point of view?

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