

Deaccessioning Good Practice

By Bev Dietrich, Curator, Guelph Museums

As part of its collection management policy a museum should have clear deaccessioning procedures in place. The policy must clearly explain criteria for making decisions about deaccessions. All deaccessions require the approval of the Board of Management

Decision criteria are needed in order to make thoughtful and justifiable decisions.

Deaccessions should be considered only when the objects in questions are:

- Not within the scope or mission or collections mandate
- Beyond the capability of the museum to maintain and preserve
- Not useful for research or exhibition programs
- Duplicate
- Poor, less important, incomplete, or unauthentic examples
- Physically deteriorated/hazardous materials
- Originally acquired illegally or unethically
- Repatriation
- More appropriate to the collection of another museum
- In the case of living collections, the death of a specimen

Disposal Options

The following are common options for disposal of deaccessioned material. No items should be required by museum board, staff and their relatives.

- Donation of the objects to another museum, library, archives. Keeping the object in public domain is the best solution.
- Education or Research collection. Objects can be used for hands on collections, research, school programs, exhibition props
- Physical destruction. Objects that have deteriorated or may be considered hazardous should be disposed of.
- Repatriation
- Public Auction. The funds generated from the sale must not be used for operational procedures but used towards further developing the collection.
- Return to donor. This is not an option. Revenue Canada can revoke your charitable status. The act of returning artifacts to the original donor is considered by Revenue Canada as a new and separate transaction, thereby conferring a personal benefit on the private individual. This holds true regardless of whether the charity issued an official donation receipt to the donor for the gift.

Source: *Museum Registration Methods* 5th Edition. Edited by Rebecca A. Buck and Jean Allman Gilmore