

The SPECTRUM 4.0 Acquisition Procedure

Contents

1. What is the SPECTRUM 4.0 *Acquisition* Procedure?
2. The *Acquisition* Procedure and Accreditation
3. Why is the *Acquisition* Procedure important?
4. When is the *Acquisition* Procedure carried out?
5. What happens during the *Acquisition* Procedure and what information is recorded?
6. What form should *Acquisition* records take?
7. Glossary

1. What is the SPECTRUM 4.0 *Acquisition* Procedure?

[SPECTRUM 4.0](#) defines 21 Procedures, each describing how objects are managed in museums. The SPECTRUM *Acquisition* procedure is one of those procedures, and is used to manage and record objects when they are added to the long term collections. *Acquisition* is a SPECTRUM Primary Procedure, which means that it is an essential component of a workable and efficient museum Documentation System. The SPECTRUM Primary Procedures are:

- Object entry
- Loans in
- Acquisition
- Location and movement control
- Cataloguing
- Object exit
- Loans out
- Retrospective documentation

Museums use the SPECTRUM Standard to benchmark the effectiveness and efficiency of these collections management procedures.

This fact sheet explores how the *Acquisition* procedure might work in your museum, and is aligned to the requirements of the [Accreditation Scheme for Museums and Galleries in the UK](#).

You can also download the [SPECTRUM 4.0 Acquisition Procedure](#), which includes a step by step workflow diagram taking you through the procedure, and describing what you might need to do at each step, and the information you might collect.

Documentation: a Practical Guide contains more information about the application of all of the SPECTRUM Primary Procedures and can be bought from the [Collections Trust Shop](#).

2. The *Acquisition* Procedure and Accreditation



The [Accreditation Scheme for Museums and Galleries in the UK](#) requires that specific **procedures, policies** and **plans** are in place in your museum.

At a procedural level, it is a requirement of the Museum Accreditation Scheme that the **SPECTRUM Primary Procedures**, including the *Acquisition* procedure, are in place in your museum, and that you describe how the procedures work in your museum in a **Procedural Manual** - see [Accreditation Standard 2.7](#).

The Accreditation Scheme also requires that your museum has written **policies, or policy statements**, in place, which state your museum's policy regarding the management of the documentation of your collection. The two policies required by Accreditation, which will impact on your *Acquisition* procedure are:

- Your **Collections Development Policy**, also known as an Acquisition and Disposal Policy, which will contain agreed key statements about how your museum develops its collections – see [Accreditation Standard 2.2](#). This policy defines and impacts on the way you carry out your *Acquisition* procedure. It might influence the wording in your Acquisition records and will definitely influence the type of objects accepted into your long term collections, and how you manage the information you collect. It is good practice to include agreed statements in your policy about:
 - The types of objects which your museum will accept into the long term collections.
 - The terms and conditions under which objects are accepted into the long term collections.
 - Guidelines and constraints regarding storage, transport and conservation/care considerations which will may need to be taken into account before acquisition.
 - Guidelines regarding the intellectual property rights that the museum normally expects to acquire with an object.
 - Which members of staff are authorised to accept objects into the long term care of the museum.
- Your **Documentation Policy** – see [Accreditation Standard 2.3](#). This policy will contain agreed key statements about the way your museum manages the documentation of its collection, and with reference to *Acquisition* should state your museum's policy on:
 - Which members of staff are authorised to accession objects into long term collections.
 - The format of your Accession Records.
 - The procedure for accessioning objects into the long term collections, including labelling and marking practice, and numbering systems.
 - The maximum time permitted to elapse between the entry of an object and the completion of the accessioning procedure.
 - The format and routines for creating security copies of your Accession records.

If you have documentation backlogs, the Accreditation Scheme also requires that your museum has a **Documentation Plan** to improve its collections documentation and documentation systems – see [Accreditation Standard 2.5](#). This plan will state how you are going to remedy shortfalls in the quality of your Documentation System, such as:

- Documentation backlogs – e.g. for the Acquisition procedure, this might be objects in the long term collections which do not have Accession numbers, or documentation about accessioned objects which is not linked to the objects.
- An *Acquisition* procedure which falls short of the SPECTRUM standard.

Lastly, Accreditation requires that you have an '**appropriate workforce** for the museums responsibilities and plans' – see [Accreditation Standard 1.7](#). With reference to the *Acquisition* procedure and all of your collections management procedures, this requires that:

- There is a clear understanding about roles and responsibilities in your museum – for *Acquisition* this implies that roles and responsibilities are understood, and adhered to, throughout the museum, and are stated in policies and job descriptions.
- There is a commitment to sustaining the skills required to support the *Acquisition* procedure in training and induction.

Find out more the *Acquisition* procedure and Accreditation:

- For policy requirements - see [Accreditation Guidance Sheet 2: Collections Management Policies](#)
- For the structure and content of a Procedural Manual - see [Developing a Procedural Manual](#)
- For procedures and plans - see [Accreditation Guidance Sheet 3: Procedures and Plans](#).

3. Why is the Acquisition Procedure important?

Making sure that the *Acquisition* procedure works well in your museum will ensure that you are able to:

- Establish accountability for objects
- Establish the identity of objects
- Confirm ownership of objects.

SPECTRUM 4.0 lists the following Minimum Standard for *Acquisition* – if your *Acquisition* procedure follows the SPECTRUM standard, it will:

- Ensure that written evidence is obtained of the original title to an object and the transfer of the title to the acquiring organisation.
- Enable the reconciling of acquisition records with objects as part of retrospective documentation, audit and inventory activity.
- Ensure that a unique number is assigned to, and physically associated with, all objects.
- Ensure that accession registers are maintained, describing all acquisitions and listing them by number.
- Ensure that information about the acquisition process is retained.
- Ensure that donors are made aware of the terms on which their gift or bequest is accepted by the organisation.
- Ensure that collecting complies with the organisation's collecting policy, and does not contravene any local, national or international law, treaty or recognised code of practice.
- Ensure a copy of the information in the accession register is made and kept up to date.

If your *Acquisition* procedure does not achieve the above, or does not exist in your museum at all, you will have a situation where objects may be accumulating in your museum, with no record of why they have been acquired or reference to the fact that the museum owns them. You may be unable to link objects acquired for the long term collections back to records such as purchase receipts, *Object entry* forms, information from donors and members of the public, or conservation records. You may not be able to locate objects through a workable location system.

4. When is the Acquisition Procedure carried out?

The *Acquisition* procedure begins as soon as possible after a decision has been made to add the object to the long term collections. The decision to acquire the object will always be made in the context of your museum's Collections Development Policy. Evaluate and authorise acquisitions according to your agreed Collections Development Policy and retain any written documentation of this process. Do not acquire objects if there is any doubt about the vendor or donor's rights of ownership.

The *Object entry* procedure should have taken place prior to *Acquisition*, and will have ensured that you have collected the information you need, and followed appropriate procedures to enable you to acquire the object on a more permanent basis.

5. What happens during the *Acquisition* Procedure and what information is recorded?

The *Acquisition* procedure is generally applied to single objects; however, depending on the nature of the acquisition, it is also possible to 'bulk accession' objects. For more about bulk accessioning see the [Bulk accessioning: SPECTRUM 4.0](#) fact sheet.

The exact steps and sequence of steps within the *Acquisition* procedure will vary according to the circumstances of the deposit, and the museum's policies. Essentially, the *Acquisition* procedure contains two processes:

- *Transfer of Title*: A legal term to describe the formal process of the change of ownership of an object, and its associated intellectual property rights, from one person or organisation to another.
- *Accessioning*: The formal addition of an object to a museum's long term collections (whether by gift, purchase or bequest). Accessioning follows transfer of title and includes assigning an accession number to an object, attaching the number to the object and recording the accession information.

Transfer of Title

The *Object entry* procedure will have started the process of transferring title to the object (or group of objects) from its owner to your museum. During *Object entry* you will have completed documentation (usually in the form of a Collections Trust [Object entry form](#)) which contains:

- A reference to the formal title of the legal body that is considering acquiring the object (i.e. your museum)
- The name and address of the owner of the object or any agent
- A brief description of the object, including any information about provenance
- A reference to the proposed method of acquisition.

You will also have started discussion with the owner of the object about:

- The assignment to your museum of any rights (e.g. copyright) associated with the object and currently held by the owner.
- Relevant information about the Data Protection Act and the Freedom of Information Act.

Having decided that your museum wants to proceed with the acquisition, you will now also obtain the following documentation depending on the method of acquisition (some of this may be collected using a Collections Trust [Transfer of Title form](#)):

- For Bequests
 - A legal copy of the relevant section of the will
 - The agreement of the executor (signature confirming transfer of title).
- For Field collection
 - A reference to the collection site and other field collection information
 - Evidence of internal and external justification for the collecting
 - Proof that the collecting is both legal and licit
 - Evidence of external responsibilities i.e. compliance with Memoranda of Understanding between the museum and other organisations/countries/governments
 - Evidence of CITES (The 'Washington' Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of wild fauna and flora) plus export and import permits where applicable.
- For Purchases
 - A signed statement from vendors stating that they are the legal owners
 - A signed statement of the provenance of the object (if known)
 - The original invoice and receipt identifying the goods purchased

- The details and conditions of any grant aid received for the purchase.
- For Exchange
 - The transfer of title to the object for which the non-monetary exchange was made.
- For Treasure
 - A record of the treasure inquest, including any expert report submitted as evidence.

Accessioning

Accessioning will generally include the following steps, which apply to single objects and groups of objects:

- Plan for the receipt of the object and consider all implications concerned with the acquisition. For example confirm that appropriate long-term storage or display space is available for the object to be acquired and that sufficient staff time has been allocated to undertake the acquisition process.
- Complete a condition report for the object to be acquired. The condition report should be appropriate to the circumstances. Make a brief note of the condition, e.g. 'Small crack on base', 'Stain on back'. An image or a more comprehensive condition report may be necessary in some cases. It is important to check the condition of an object before acquisition to ensure that the hidden costs of conservation can be avoided or planned for by the museum. If the acquisition is a disposal/deaccession from another organisation, it may arrive with an existing condition report. This should be compared with your condition report and any discrepancies between them discussed with the organisation disposing of the object.
- Assign a unique number to the object. See [Numbering: SPECTRUM 4.0](#) fact sheet for more about numbering formats.
- Mark and/or label the object with its unique number. The method will depend on the type of material and its condition. The preference should normally be to physically mark objects; however in some cases this may not be possible, for further details see the Collections Trust's [Labelling and Marking Museum Objects](#) fact sheet, and search for 'labelling and marking' on [Collections Link](#) for further resources.
- Record the Accession information in the Accession Register for each object or group of objects identified by a single number. This should include:
 - Entry number
 - Accession number
 - Date received or accessioned
 - Acquired from (Name and address of vendor or donor)
 - Acquisition method
 - Simple name/basic description/identification and historical information
 - Initial store.

The information above is usually recorded in an Accession Register; [pre-printed registers are supplied by the Collections Trust](#))

Further information which could be recorded for each object includes:

- The reason for acquisition
- The date of acquisition (i.e. date that title was acquired, which may predate formal accessioning)
- The history of the object
- The form of acknowledgement (credit line)
- Any additional contextual information received directly from the acquisition source;
- Any additional information about the acquisition of the object

- If possible photograph the object.
- Send a formal acknowledgement to the donor, on headed paper, together with the object number and information about access.

6. What form should *Acquisition* records take?

Accession information is usually recorded in the following types of records:

- **Accession Registers.** These should be bound registers, on archival paper, with numbered pages. They should be filled in, in permanent ink, in Accession number order. Archival quality accession registers [can be ordered from the Collections Trust](#). They have 147 numbered double pages with pre-printed column headings.
- **Object entry forms.** [The Collections Trust Object entry forms](#) have a section for transfer of title; the *Object entry* procedure will begin the process of transferring title.
- **Transfer of Title forms.** The Collections Trust Transfer of Title forms are a useful way of capturing further information about Transfer of title, and confirming transfer with the owner. It is not always necessary to use separate Transfer of Title forms and your museum should decide whether it wishes to. They can be useful for the following reasons:
 - Listing in detail the items being acquired. It is sometimes not possible to do this on Object entry forms.
 - A separate Transfer of Title form can be filed in the object's history file for easy reference.
 - Making it clear to the donor that title is being transferred, particularly for very valuable or significant acquisitions.
 - If the depositor who signed the *Object entry* form was not the owner.

The SPECTRUM and Accreditation standards require that Accession records are maintained and backed up using methods which are:

- Auditable
- Secure.

An *auditable* system is a system, either electronic or on paper, which tracks the use of the system, and keeps a permanent record of any changes to the system. For example in the case of a handwritten Accession Register, the register is an auditable system of recording accession information if:

- The pages of the register are numbered
- All entries are made in ink
- Each page is signed off by the person delegated to maintain the register.

A *secure* system, either electronic or on paper, exists where the use of the system is controlled by defined responsibilities which are recorded in Job Descriptions, the Documentation Policy and the Procedural Manual, and, in addition, copies of information in the system are stored safely and backed up regularly, with backup copies kept off site.

Your Documentation Policy must state:

- Who is responsible for producing backups.

Your Procedural Manual must state:

- The format of backups
- How and where records of back up routines are kept
- Locations of backup copies.

In practice museums will use a combination of forms, registers and databases to make up a secure and auditable system of recording Accession information. Two SPECTRUM Compliant systems are illustrated below.

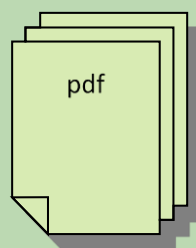
System 1:

Primary Accession information is kept in:

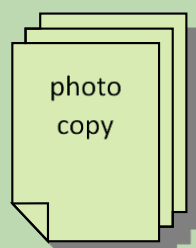


A handwritten archival quality bound register or registers, which meets the standards for handwritten Accession Registers described in the Glossary below.

Security copies of Accession information is secured in one (or more) of the following ways:



Scanning the Accession Register/set of Registers to produce an electronic document which cannot be changed (e.g. a pdf), and keeping a copy of the document off site. Electronic backups should not be produced by overwriting previous backups. Each back up file must contain metadata which indicates the date of the backup.



Photocopying the Accession Register/set of Registers in a format which meets the standards for photocopies described in the Glossary below.



Recording Accession information in an auditable electronic system (e.g. MODES, Adlib) which is regularly backed up, and keeping a copy of the backup off site.

System 2:

Primary Accession information is:



A collections management system which is secure and auditable

Primary Accession information is kept in:



A duplicate copy of the basic accession information written into a register which meets the standards for handwritten Accession Registers described in the Glossary below.



A print out from the collections management system, which is bound into a register which meets the paper standards described in the Glossary below.

See Section 7. Glossary below for definitions of some terms used in the illustration above.

7. Glossary

Accreditation Scheme for Museums and Galleries in the United Kingdom – Accreditation is the UK standard for museums and galleries. It defines good practice and identifies agreed standards, thereby encouraging development. It is a baseline quality standard that helps guide museums to be the best they can be, for current and future users.

Documentation System – all of the recorded information a museum holds about the objects in its care. This includes paper and digitised records of all kinds (e.g. registers, forms, committee minutes, curator's files, and donor letters).

Collections Management System – an electronic database, often provided by a software supplier, which enables the user to record information about collections and their management, and forms part of the documentation system.

[SPECTRUM 4.0](#) – SPECTRUM is the UK Collections Management Standard. It represents a common understanding of good practice for collections management in museums and contains detailed procedures for managing the different processes that an object goes through in its lifecycle in a museum. Find out more about [SPECTRUM and the SPECTRUM Community](#).

SPECTRUM Primary Procedures – the procedures that should be in place in a workable and accountable museum Documentation System. If the Primary Procedures are not in place, documentation backlogs will occur.

Documentation Backlogs – a term used in museums to describe undocumented or poorly documented collections. Your museum should have policy statements which define the standards expected for the documentation of your collections – most museums use the SPECTRUM Primary Procedures as a standard against which to measure the quality of their Documentation System and records. If the Primary Procedures are not in place there will be gaps, or backlogs, in the system and the information it carries (e.g. object will not link up with records). Backlogs are tackled using the SPECTRUM *Retrospective documentation* Procedure.

Metadata – refers to the information which describes an file or folder held in an electronic system. Metadata about an electronic file will be collected automatically by the electronic system, and can include information such as the date the file is created, the file format and possibly the name of the creator of the file.

A handwritten Accession Register should be made of archival quality paper and be bound in permanent form, with numbered pages, indicating the total number of pages in the book. Entries should be made in permanent ink, and mistakes should be scored through with a single line, so that they are still legible. The person responsible for the register should sign and date each completed page of the register. The register should be kept in a secure condition, ideally in a fire-proof cabinet. Entries should be made using the best quality permanent ink. Accession registers should be made from the best quality, high rag content, archival paper.

A photocopied security copy of a handwritten Accession Register should be made from a good quality (more than 80gsm) high rag content paper should be used and copies should be made using a dry-process photocopier. Registers should not be damaged by forcing them against the copier glass and splitting the spine

This fact sheet forms part of SPECTRUM Advice, a support pack which is published on Collections Link at www.collectionstrust.org.uk/spectrum/spectrum-advice-factsheets.



**ARTS COUNCIL
ENGLAND**

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Collections
Trust

The Collections Trust is the professional association for collections management. Established in 1977, it is a UK-based charity that works worldwide with museums, libraries, galleries and archives to improve the management and use of their collections. It does this by providing know-how, developing and promoting excellence, challenging existing practices, pioneering new ideas and bringing experts together.

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