

## Developing a documentation procedural manual

The procedural manual communicates a museum's policies, practices and standards for collecting information about their objects.

This resource describes how to develop and maintain a procedural manual, and what it might contain.

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### 1. What is a documentation procedural manual?



A documentation procedural manual is an evolving series of clear instructions to standardise the capture, recording, safekeeping and use of information about museum collections. It describes the documentation system used in a particular museum and communicates that system to all staff and volunteers. It is a requirement of the Museum Accreditation Scheme that Accredited museums have a documentation procedural manual in place (requirement 5.2).

### 2. Why is a documentation procedural manual important?

A documentation procedural manual:

- Provides a written record of the museum's documentation system.
- Enables a museum to demonstrate to all staff and volunteers how it is implementing its documentation policy.
- Helps a museum to demonstrate that it meets good practice standards.
- Enables information about a museum's documentation system to be passed onto all museum staff.
- Ensures continuity of practice and standardisation of procedures.
- Saves time - new staff and volunteers will not waste time trying to work out how the documentation system works, and training and induction will be quicker.

### **3. Spectrum 5.0 and Museum Accreditation**

The structure of a museum documentation system usually reflects sector standards such as Spectrum. It is helpful to frame your documentation procedural manual around Spectrum as it will help you to demonstrate that you meet current good practice and to identify areas where you could improve.

It is a requirement of the Museum Accreditation Scheme that the Spectrum primary procedures are in place in, as they are the foundation of a basic museum documentation system (requirement 5.2). It is therefore essential that your procedural manual describes how the primary procedures work in your museum.

### **4. What might a documentation procedural manual contain?**

It is helpful to create your documentation procedural manual as if you are describing your documentation system to someone who does not have any knowledge of your museum. It will also be helpful to test your manual to ensure it is clear and in a useable format. Using these elements as a guide, and following the requirements of the Accreditation Scheme, your manual might include:

#### **Contents page**

- Contents list.
- Date of initial compiling and name(s) of compiler.
- A version number and proposed review date.

#### **Introduction**

- Your museum's statement of purpose, or mission
- A description of your museum, its collections, and Accreditation status
- A definition of a procedural manual (see the top of this fact sheet)
- The aims of your manual
- Reference to the people who will use your procedural manual
- Reference to roles within your museum, including roles with responsibility for documentation, changes to documentation procedures and amendments to the manual
- A statement about the location(s) of your procedural manual, and the number of copies
- Relevant references for the Museum Accreditation standard and Spectrum and any supporting fact sheets.

### **History of your documentation systems**

- A brief history of your museum's past documentation systems.
- Examples of records which are no longer in use in your museum, and their location
- Details of historic numbering systems.
- Word of mouth information about policies, procedures and systems gathered from current and previous members of staff.

### **Your museum's collections management policies**

- For example, where to find:
  - Collections development policy (also known as acquisition and disposal policy).
  - Documentation policy.
  - Loans policy

### **Your museum's current collections management procedures**

- This section should include entries for each of the Spectrum primary procedures as a minimum, and any other Spectrum procedures implemented by the organisation.
- For each procedure, include:
  - The Spectrum definition of each procedure.
  - The Spectrum minimum requirements for each procedure.
  - Details of staff or volunteers responsible for the overseeing and/or carrying out the procedure.
  - How and when the procedure takes place.
  - Materials required and where to find them.
  - The information to be collected during the procedure, including completed examples of forms etc.

Also include any additional information relevant to that procedure, for example:

#### ***Object entry***

When an object arrives:

- When to fill in an object entry form.
- Format and location of blank object entry forms.
- Guidelines for filling in an object entry form, including completed examples.
- Guidelines for accepting objects, according to your museum's policy.
- What to do with each part of the object entry form.
- Location of completed object entry forms.

- Reference to your object entry numbering system.
- What to do with the object after it has been brought to the museum, including reference to any quarantine procedures.
- What to do if an object arrives in the post or is left anonymously at the museum.
- What to do if the object is collected away from the museum.

When an object arrives:

- Who (which role) is responsible for returning objects to depositors.
- How to contact the depositor to collect an object.
- Guidelines for completing relevant sections of the object entry form when objects are collected.
- How to file object entry forms after the object has been collected.
- What to do if a depositor does not come to collect an object.

### ***Acquisition and accessioning***

Acquisition:

- Guidance on decision making and authorisation.
- Information about how your organisation records transfer of title, for example object entry forms or transfer of title forms.
- Location of relevant forms and guidelines for how to use them, including completed examples.
- If sending a letter of thanks, who is responsible and where to find the template.

Accessioning:

- Guidance on decision making and authorisation.
- Length of time allowed for accessioning after acquisition.
- Format of tamperproof accession records, for example an accession register.
- Location of accession records.
- Guidelines for completing accession records, including completed examples and materials to use (eg archival pens).
- Accession number formats.
- Guidelines for terminology used in accession records.
- If relevant, your MDA code.
- A description of your back up procedures for accession records - how and when you create a security copy of your accession records.
- Information about labelling and marking techniques in your museum, including location of equipment.

### ***Location and movement control***

- Format of location and movement records and where to find them.
- How to record object movement, for example using object movement tickets.
- Completed examples of your location and movement control records.
- Maximum amount of time allowed to pass before an object's new location must be updated in your catalogue system, according to your policy.
- A guide to your museum locations, location maps and location systems (note, there may be security considerations here).
- Reference to your museum's object handling guidelines.
- Reference to your museum's quarantine procedures, if relevant.

### ***Inventory***

You may know that some of the primary procedures are not carried out effectively in your museum, or that you have objects in your collections which are not directly linked to their documentation. This is often referred to as a documentation 'backlog'. Spectrum 5.0 helps you banish the backlog through the *Inventory and Documentation planning* procedures.

- Where the minimum inventory information is recorded.
- If you do not have the minimum inventory information required, refer to your documentation plan.
- If you do have the minimum inventory information required, how it is maintained.
- Your museum's step by step procedure for *Inventory*, referring to the suggested procedure in Spectrum.
- What information needs to be recorded during the listing stage and how to record or update this.
- Format of temporary numbers and guidance for labelling.
- Where and how temporary numbers are recorded.
- Who (which role) is responsible for checking discrepancies and carrying out due diligence, to match temporary numbers to existing information.
- Process for recording these checks and sources of information.
- Refer to other Spectrum procedures to resolve outstanding problems, for example *Acquisition and accessioning*.

### ***Cataloguing***

- Format and location of catalogue records.
- When to catalogue an object.
- What information should be recorded on a catalogue record.

- Completed examples of catalogue records.
- If cataloguing is carried out using an electronic collections management system (CMS), include information about the system, for example which system you use, what version, the location of the system's manual, how to contact your system's help desk or support.
- Reference to any terminology lists you use.
- A description of your back up procedures for your catalogue records - how and when you create backups of your catalogue records and where they are stored.

### ***Object exit***

- Format and location of blank object exit forms.
- Location of completed object exit records.
- Completed examples of object exit records.
- What to do with each part of the form after completion.

### ***Loans in (borrowing objects)***

Before the loan:

- How should loans be requested.
- What information to record.
- Where to file loan information.

Agreeing the loan:

- Who (which role) is responsible for agreeing terms and conditions.
- What documentation to use in order to agree a loan. This may be the lending organisation's standard agreement or your own.
- Where to file loan agreements and correspondence.

Documenting a loan:

- Format and location of loans in records, for example loans registers or catalogues.
- Guidelines for completing loans in records.
- Format of loans in numbers.
- Completed examples of your loans in records.

Receiving the loan:

- Refer to *Object entry* procedure.
- Is a condition report required? If so, who is responsible and how should this be recorded?
- Who is responsible for monitoring the loan?

Returning or renewing the loan:

- How to contact lenders, and who is responsible.
- What documentation is used to record the return of a loan.
- Where to file completed loan documentation.
- What to do if you are unable to contact a lender.

***Loans out (lending objects)***

Before the loan:

- How should loans be requested.
- Process for authorising loans out.
- What information to record.
- Where to file loan information.

Agreeing the loan:

- Name of person responsible for agreeing terms and conditions.
- What documentation to use in order to agree a loan, for example your museum's standard loan agreement.
- Where to file loan agreements and correspondence.

Documenting a loan:

- How to document loans out for example in the catalogue record.

Dispatching the loan:

- Refer to *Object exit* procedure.
- Who is responsible for monitoring the loan.

Return or renewal the loan

- How to contact borrowers, and who is responsible.
- How to document a returned loan.

***Documentation planning***

- Dates of current documentation plans.
- Location of current documentation plans.
- Date to review current documentation plans.
- Location of reports on completed documentation projects.

## 5. What format is suitable for a documentation procedural manual?

Formats may be:

- A hard copy document often stored in a single location, or in a limited number of locations.
- An electronic document that is easy to access and share.
- A hard copy document with links to related documents stored online.

Whichever choice you make, it is important to make sure that you have backups of your manual, and that you have a clear process for updating and revising it. In all circumstances version control is a must.

### **Collections Trust**

Collections Trust's mission is to help museums capture and share the information that gives their objects meaning. Our standards and advice are used around the world to make museum collections accessible.

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