



City of Arts & Innovation

Museum Board Memorandum

TO: METROPOLITAN MUSEUM BOARD **DATE: JUNE 12, 2019**

FROM: MUSEUM DEPARTMENT

SUBJECT: REVISED COLLECTIONS AND EXHIBITIONS MANAGEMENT POLICIES

ISSUE:

Recommend that the City Council approve the revised Collections and Exhibitions Management Policies.

RECOMMENDATION:

That the Metropolitan Museum Board (MMB) recommend that the City Council approve the revised Collections and Exhibitions Management Policies.

BACKGROUND:

Policy documents relating to the formation, management, use, and care of collections are among the documents most distinctive to the operation of museums. Understanding that zoos and gardens are also included in the definition of “museum,” no other type of institution holds physical objects, specimens, and living organisms in growing and/or managed collections. Collections management policies and collections development plans are, thus, unique in most respects to the museum field.

As the museum field has steadily professionalized over the past decades, the factors affecting collections management have grown more complex, encompassing such topics as cultural repatriation, legal issues relating to loans, antiquities trafficking, intellectual property, conservation and care, and many other considerations. Thus, museums have developed collections management policies to capture standards that apply in their individual cases, codify unique positions, and ensure that evolving standards are met.

The American Alliance of Museums (AAM) now considers a collections management policy to be one of the field’s five (5) “core documents,” and one (1) of the four (4) of these five (5) that must be approved by any accredited museum’s governing body. The Museum of Riverside (MoR) is an AAM-accredited institution; it is thus obliged to comply and, furthermore, desires to comply with the field’s standards even as they become ever more demanding.

The MoR has had many iterations of collections management policies over its decades of operation. The latest version was revised in 2015 and approved by City Council on February 9, 2016, in advance of the most recent reaccreditation process.

The document recommended today has undergone thorough review by the Collections Committee over the course of several meetings held from August 2018 through March 2019. The Collections Committee includes Board members, curatorial and education staff, and community members with disciplinary specialties relating to the MoR's collections. Committee members also consulted peers and published resources during the document review process.

DISCUSSION:

Pressure to prepare for the 2016 reaccreditation process led to an expedited reexamination of the collections management policies that existed at the time, primarily to ensure that the document did not include inaccuracies. Staff have since conducted research to revise and augment the policy document to 1) include sections previously not included, 2) enhance sections that lacked detail, 3) apply more rigorous standards, 4) clarify the treatment of loans, and 5) spell out all steps in the important processes of accessioning (adding an object to a permanent collection) and deaccessioning (removing an object from a permanent collection).

The Collections and Exhibitions Management Policies now include the following:

- Clear definition of the kinds of collections the Museum will hold. The policy now defines five (5) categories of collection (permanent, community, education / teaching, live collections, and library). Each of these kinds of collections may hold objects or specimens relating to any of the MoR's disciplines (for example, anthropology or geology).
- Individual staff and committee responsibilities and oversight relating to collections decisions which were unclear or unstated in previous versions.
- Recognition that collections are held in large part for the purpose of public exhibition. A section previously not present was added, which pertains specifically to public exhibition. Thus, "exhibitions" is now included in the title of the draft document.
- Related but previously separate policy statements such as one relating to living collections.
- Additional matters now covered that were previously absent include guidelines on handling objects donated for sale, object-specific ethical considerations, rights and reproductions, physical access to collections, publication of collections, key reference resources that support collection-holding institutions, and similar.

Collections management policies differ from collections development plans. Management policies define *how* practical and logistical matters that pertain to collections will be handled. Development plans define *what* a collection will comprise and how a museum will pursue reasoned collections growth and refinement. A new Collections Development Plan for the MoR is in preparation and will be presented for MMB consideration at a later date. Collections development plans are advised but not required by the AAM.

FISCAL IMPACT:

There is no fiscal impact associated with this report.

Meeting professional standards for the care, housing, and exhibition of collections may have impact on the “special department supplies” and “professional services” portions of the Museum’s general fund budgets. The Museum is already operating to ensure that minimum standards of care are met, including budgeting for necessary archival supplies, storage equipment, and conservation surveys and treatments. Staff are strategizing to accomplish more costly collections care projects (such as specialized cabinetry and storage reconfigurations) on a case-by-case basis, including investigation of potential grant funding.

Prepared by:	Robyn G. Peterson, Ph.D., Museum Director
Certified as to availability of funds:	Edward Enriquez, Chief Financial Officer/Treasurer
Approved by:	Lea Deesing, Assistant City Manager
Approved as to form:	Gary G. Geuss, City Attorney

Attachment:	Collections and Exhibitions Management Policies
-------------	---