DECOLLECTING YOUR COLLECTION

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Another word for it is...

- **DEACCESSION:**

  The process by which historical artifacts and materials are permanently removed from a museum organization’s collection.
DECOLLECTING

Why do we “Decollect?”
What is the process?
Who decides?
How do we decollect?
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Why Do We Decollect?

- Excess to requirements
- Not mission related
- Can no longer care for
- Hazardous material
- Condition*
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**Condition***

Condition alone may not be justifiable reason for deaccessioning.

Sometimes the condition of an artifact is the reason why it is considered historical.

When justifying deaccessioning based on condition, make sure research is thorough.
DEACCESSIONING PROCESS FLOW

Curator staff identifies candidates for deaccessioning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Legal documentation</th>
<th>Justification</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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Deaccession Committee Review

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Approve</th>
<th>Disapprove</th>
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After action

| Proceed to Disposition | Return to collection |
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- What is the Process?
  - Identify the object(s)
  - Determine legal status
  - Draft justification
  - Deaccessioning Committee
  - After Action
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- Who Decides?

- Museum’s Collections Management Plan should provide for a deaccessioning policy that:
  - Establishes the proper authority to approve a deaccession decision
  - States level of delegation of authority in extreme cases
  - Establishes a Deaccessioning Committee. Possible composition of such committee:
    - Curator
    - Museum Director
    - Exhibit Staff Representative
    - Administration
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- **AFTER ACTION**
  - What are your options?
    - Transfer to another organization
    - Use for educational purposes
    - Sale or Trade
    - Disposal

**ENSURE YOUR ORGANIZATION FOLLOWS ACCEPTED PROFESSIONAL GUIDES FOR ETHICAL DISPOSITION**
AT THE COMPLETION...

- Always ensure that the accession records for the objects deaccessioned are updated. These records should be kept by the museum indefinitely.

- If a museum accepts an object into its collection that it later decides to deaccession, it must be able to account for the object.

- The updated record should include the justification, any notes from the deaccession committee and disposition.
AS AN EXAMPLE AS OF 9 SEPTEMBER 2011

• The Naval History and Heritage Command Artifact Database listed 151,987 cataloged artifacts.

• 11,463 of those records are for items that have been deaccessioned.

For auditing purposes, I have to be able to account for the disposition of those items that have been deaccessioned.
WHAT NOT TO DO

- Do not think of the artifact collection as a source of revenue in times of fiscal austerity

- Do not collect items with the intent of using solely for trading

- Do not take action that will undermine the public confidence in your museum
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CASE STUDY 1

Is this a candidate?

WWII era battle lantern

Known legal status? Yes

Provenance? None

Poor condition? Yes

Hazardous item? Potentially

Other examples in Collection? Yes
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CASE STUDY 2

Is this a candidate?

WWII Submarine Depth Gauge

Known legal status? Yes

Poor condition? Yes

Provenance? Yes

Hazardous? Yes

Other examples in collection? Yes
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CASE STUDY 3

Is this a candidate?

WWII Era British Welrod

Known legal status? Yes

Condition? Excellent

Hazardous? Radioactive site

Provenance? Yes

Others examples in collection? No
SOME FINAL THOUGHTS

- Clearly define your organization’s scope of collection.
- Don’t collect unnecessary material
- Clearly define legal status of objects accepted
- Be thorough in research!
- Have access to legal advice
As Marie C. Malaro says:

“Collecting ... is not a mechanical process. It is a combination of intelligent selection and thoughtful pruning. Periodic reevaluation is as important as acquisition, and deaccessioning, if properly used, can be a means toward true growth.”

From A Legal Primer on Managing Museum Collections
QUESTIONS?