American Alliance of Museums

Alliance Reference & Activity Guides

Guides to help you develop:

- Mission Statement
- Institutional Code of Ethics
- Institutional Plan
- Collections Management Policy
- Disaster Preparedness/Emergency Response Plan

Activities for your Institution

(Borrowed from the Museum Assessment Program)

- Mission Activity
- Code of Ethics
- Disaster Preparedness Activity

American Alliance of Museums

ALLIANCE REFERENCE GUIDE

Developing a Mission Statement

This guide aims to help a museum develop and refine its mission statement, the foundation on which a museum's operations and impact stand. This guide will explain the purpose and importance of a mission statement, provide some examples of them and identify considerations for creating or revising one. It reflects national standards and is in line with the requirements of the Alliance's Core Documents Verification and Accreditation programs.

What It Is

A mission statement is the beating heart of a museum. It articulates the museum's educational focus and purpose and its role and responsibility to the public and its collections. Some museums choose to also develop vision and value statements as a way of extending the concepts expressed in the mission statement. These are different but related guiding documents for the museum: mission is purpose; vision is future; and values are beliefs.

Why It Is Important

A mission statement drives everything the museum does; vision, policy-making, planning and operations are all extensions of a museum's mission. The mission gives the governing authority a foundation from which it can strategize. The governing authority sets the museum's strategic direction through the mission, which impacts the policies and plans influencing staff actions and behaviors.

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What to Consider

Museums are encouraged to take the time to explore their circumstances and articulate them accurately in their mission and other policies and plans. Each of the museum's official documents should speak to one another consistently and comprehensively to support mission. Therefore, it is important that policies and planning be integrated in order to be effective.

Anatomy of a Mission Statement

There are as many different ways to create mission statements as there are museums. That should be the case, as each museum has its own distinct history, community and set of challenges. Typically, a mission statement explains the museum's purpose and reason for existing. Sometimes, it will address audience and impact. A museum may look to other mission statements as a helpful starting point for drafting and discussing its own, but in order to create a strong foundation for everything the museum does, mission must be specific to each museum.

A good mission statement leans toward societal impact rather than simply an explanation of operations, "transitioning from being *about* something to being *for* someone." –Stephen Weil (*Daedelus*, 1999).

Here are a few examples of mission statements from accredited museums:

- **Museum of Science, Boston**

  The Museum's mission is to play a leading role in transforming the nation's relationship with science and technology.

- **Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum**

  The Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum advances creative thinking by connecting today's artists with individuals and communities in unexpected and stimulating ways.

- **Missouri History Museum**

  The Missouri History Museum seeks to deepen the understanding of past choices, present circumstances, and future possibilities; strengthen the bonds of the community; and facilitate solutions to common problems.

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Where to Begin

Creating or reviewing a mission statement is not easy, but it can be a stimulating and enlightening process. Missions may evolve as the museum does and therefore need to be reviewed from time to time. Most importantly, missions must be practiced; mission statements are only useful if they are being realized every day.

A museum reviewing its mission statement might consider reasons for review and how long it has been since the mission was changed. A mission statement is usually revisited or revised when change arises (e.g., institutional planning, applying for accreditation, shift in audiences served). Since it can evolve over time, it is important for it to be nimble enough to bend and move with change.

While this process can vary from museum to museum, here are some steps to take in revising a mission statement:

- *Create a review team and outline the review process*. Museums might consider who will be involved and how they will contribute to the review. This team can consist of people from different functions of the museum. Many times, the team incorporates members of the governing authority and staff, but a smaller group is usually more productive than a larger one. Greater feedback is encouraged, but the team's responsibility is to facilitate the process, identify key stakeholders and use feedback to shape what will eventually become the mission. Those leading the review must ensure that the development and end result are effective. The team should be authorized by the governing authority and report to the governing authority.
- *Do research.* Museums may find it helpful to do research on the origins and history of the museum to explore how purpose has evolved over time.
- *Look at the current mission statement*. Missions do not always need to change, but it is important to recognize when they have to. The strengths and weaknesses of the current statement can be considered in order to determine what types of revisions are required. Does it need just a few tweaks or a complete rewrite?
- *Get feedback*. While the mission statement review team will lead the process, feedback from other stakeholders is essential. Broad input from board, volunteers, staff and other stakeholders can push thinking to explore why the museum is a vital part of its community. It is wise to capture this feedback verbatim. Input from many people can build excitement and passion, which a mission statement should reflect.

- *Refine the mission*. The team can use the feedback collected to start drafting the statement. Drafts can go to stakeholders to refine the mission, making it more succinct and powerful over time. However, writing the mission cannot become the mission. It is important that museums strike the fine balance between getting the necessary input needed to create a strong mission, and moving forward to acknowledging, believing and living the mission.
- *Consider also writing vision and value statements at this time*.
- *Send the final draft of the mission statement to the board for formal approval*. This can be accompanied by an explanation of the process and the decisions made throughout.
- *Integrate the new mission statement into planning efforts, policies, documents and publications*. At this point, it would be prudent for the museum to consider documents needing revision in order to reflect this new mission. Those documents can be revised as needed and distributed to key stakeholders.

Core Documents Verification

The Core Documents Verification program verifies that an institution has an educational mission and the policies and procedures in place that reflect standard practices of professional museums, as articulated in *National Standards and Best Practices for U.S. Museums* and used in the Accreditation program.

A mission statement is one of five core documents that are fundamental for basic professional museum operations and embody core museum practices. Listed below are required elements of a mission statement for museums participating in the program.

Mission Statement Required Elements

- Educational in scope
- Describes the institution's unique purpose/focus/role
- Is approved by the governing authority

Where to Find Out More

- *National Standards and Best Practices for U.S. Museums*, edited by Elizabeth E. Merritt (AAM Press, 2008)

  This guide is an essential reference work for the museum community, presenting the ideals that should be upheld by every museum striving to maintain excellence in its operations. An introductory section explains how virtually anyone associated with museums will find the book valuable, from trustees to staff to funders and the media. It is followed by a full outline of the standards, including the overarching Characteristics of Excellence for U.S. Museums and the seven areas of performance they address. Throughout the book is commentary by Elizabeth E. Merritt, director of the Alliance's Center for the Future of Museums. This publication is available as a free PDF for all museum members.

- *Museum Mission Statements: Building a Distinct Identity*, edited by Gail Anderson (AAM Press, 1998)

  This book provides step-by-step guidance in writing or evaluating a museum mission statement and how to use it effectively. Generously supplemented with 79 outstanding mission statements from a wide variety of museums, the report is useful to museums of any size or type.

- *Small Museum Toolkit* by Cinnamon Catlin-Legutko and Stacy Klingler (AltaMira Press, 2011)

  This collection of six books serves as a launching point for small museum staff to pursue best practices and meet museum standards. These brief volumes address governance, financial management, human resources, audience relations, interpretation and stewardship for small museums and historic sites. Book One addresses mission.

- Sample Documents

  The Information Center's sample document collection is a unique and valuable resource for Tier 3 member museums. The collection contains more than 1,000 samples of policies, plans and forms from museums of all types and sizes, most of which were written by accredited museums. Tier 3 museum members can request sample documents from the Information Center in order to stimulate a conversation about issues and challenges facing the museum and to explore how different museums approach different issues. Using the sample documents should not replace the process of joining staff, governing authority and stakeholders in fruitful and thoughtful planning and policy-making.

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Standards

The Alliance's standards address "big picture" issues about how museums operate. For the most part, they define broad outcomes that can be achieved in many different ways and are flexible enough to accommodate a diverse museum field. These standards can be achieved in tandem with standards issued by other organizations that address aspects of museum operations or the museum profession.

Adhering to standards is achievable by all types of museums.

Standards provide a common language that enables museums to self-regulate, demonstrate professionalism and increase accountability. Policy-makers, media, philanthropic organizations, donors and members of the public use standards to assess a museum's performance and evaluate its worthiness to receive public support and trust. Simply stated by Elizabeth Merritt in *National Standards and Best Practices for U.S. Museums*, "Standards are fundamental to being a good museum, a responsible nonprofit and a well-run business."

Having a strong mission statement helps museums adhere to standards. For more on standards, visit the Alliance's website at www.aam-us.org.

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ALLIANCE REFERENCE GUIDE

Developing an Institutional Code of Ethics

This guide will help museums develop an institutional code of ethics, a core document that formalizes accountability and ethical practice. This guide aims to help museums develop a better understanding of ethics by explaining what an institutional code of ethics is, why it is important and considerations for developing one. It reflects national standards and is in line with the requirements of the Alliance's Core Documents Verification and Accreditation programs.

What It Is

Codes of ethics put the interest of the public ahead of the interests of the institution or of any individual, using a core set of principles and shared values in lieu of individual judgment. A code of ethics is a single document, not a compilation or list of references to other documents, and is approved by the museum's governing authority.

An institutional code of ethics, sometimes called a code of conduct, describes a series of values that demonstrate the museum's commitment to public accountability and ethical practices. It explains how these values influence the museum's policies and the behaviors and choices of staff, governing authority and volunteers. The document addresses collections-related ethics and personal and professional conduct, and it references the museum's adherence to applicable laws.

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Why It Is Important

Operating in an ethical manner is a fundamental part of being a museum. Having a formalized code of ethics demonstrates to the public commitment to accountability, transparency in operations and informed and consistent decision-making. It positions the museum as reputable and trustworthy, which can strengthen relationships with stakeholders and the community.

Why Ethics?

Ethics are well-founded principles that help people make choices about what they ought to do. Ethical practices are based on rights, obligations, benefits to society, fairness or other values. Acting ethically means adopting behaviors that, if universally accepted, would lead to the best possible outcomes for the largest possible number of people. Therefore, ethical standards encourage people to act beneficially and for the common good—or with "common sense."

> "A code of ethics is a part of the process of creating and maintaining an ethical institution. However, it is only part of the equation. An ethical museum is one in which all participants acknowledge the core values and where those values are discussed in the context of a museum's mission. A museum's public responsibility revolves around the ethical correctness of museum activities, including both the care and use of collections. Ethical responsibility is evidenced by interaction inside and outside the organization and by the way in which a museum conducts its activities."
> Gary Edson (*Museum Ethics*, 1997)

A museum's code of ethics is founded on public accountability, public trust and public service. For museums and their staff, operating and acting ethically means making decisions with these fundamentals at the forefront and ensuring that no individual associated with the museum personally benefits (especially financially) as a result. It is important for museums to not only have a code of ethics but to foster a culture of ethical practice and behavior.

Acting ethically is different from acting lawfully. Laws usually reflect ethical standards that most citizens accept. "But legal standards," as noted in the Alliance's *Code of Ethics for Museums*, "are a minimum. Museums and those responsible for them must do more than avoid legal liability; they must take affirmative steps to maintain their integrity so as to warrant public confidence. They must act not only legally but also ethically."

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Anatomy of an Institutional Code of Ethics

An institutional code of ethics should demonstrate that the museum is ethical, professional and accountable. Codes should be consistent with the Alliance's *Code of Ethics for Museums*, which outlines ethical standards that can be applied to all museums. A museum's code should be tailored to its particular circumstances and should not simply replicate the Alliance's code. Instead, a museum should use it to facilitate discussions that explore how the museum legally, ethically and effectively carries out its responsibilities. Each museum has to write an ethics policy for itself. It should be applicable to governing authority, staff and volunteers and be approved by the governing authority.

Some discipline-specific associations have issued ethics statements or guidelines applicable to their disciplines or members. Museums should develop codes that they are consistent with the Alliance's code or any other code of ethics issued by a national museum organization appropriate to the museum's discipline (e.g., Association of Art Museum Directors' Professional Practices in Art Museums, the American Association for State and Local History's Statement of Professional Standards and Ethics, etc.). Moreover, museums may also choose to adopt codes from relevant organizations (e.g., Association of Fundraising Professionals' Code of Ethical Principles and Standards).

There is no one, perfect template for any document. Since the museum field is so diverse, each of the museum's documents will be influenced by its history, community, collections and governance. Policies and plans should be interrelated in order to contribute to a cohesive vision and mission. Codes of ethics vary in organization and in format, but most touch upon the following issues, addressing them differently, in light of the museum's specific circumstances:

Guiding Principles

Guiding principles are ideas that influence how and why decisions are made. They inform discussions, clarify plans and provide context for the policies outlined in the code of ethics. It is important for the museum to identify its specific shared values and then shape its codes around these core principles.

Ethical Duties

Serving the public over the interests of the individual and the institution is paramount. Museums should outline ethical duties and obligations to preserve and protect the public trust, such as duty of loyalty. Explaining the purpose of the code, whom it applies to and how it is used will provide context for the ethical duties listed in the code. This opportunity can be used to reiterate commitment to mission and explain how the code applies to it.

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Governance

This section explains the responsibilities of the governing authority in ensuring the museum's commitment to public accountability. Codes of ethics delineate the reporting structures, explaining the relationship between the governing authority and the director and what responsibilities fall under whose purview. Clarifying these roles and outlining any performance standards contribute to transparency.

Conflict of Interest

Conflicts of interest are circumstances that pose a threat to the museum's ability to fulfill its mission in an ethical and accountable way. The code should address several scenarios when conflicts of interest may arise and provide a clear roadmap for acceptable and unacceptable practice, applying to governing authority, staff and volunteers. The Alliance's *Code of Ethics for Museums* states, "Loyalty to the mission of the museum and to the public it serves is the essence of museum work, whether volunteer or paid. Where conflicts of interest arise—actual, potential, or perceived—the duty of loyalty must never be compromised. No individual may use his or her position in a museum for personal gain or to benefit another at the expense of the museum, its mission, its reputation and the society it serves." It also states that museums must ensure that "collections-related activities promote the public good rather than individual financial gain." Any person representing the museum should be able to accept the restrictions outlined in this section, in order to maintain public confidence in museums and in the museum profession.

The following issues are often addressed in conflict of interest statements: affiliations with other institutions, if any; expectations regarding disclosure; receiving gifts and favors; loans; outside employment or volunteer activity; personal collecting; political activity; purchase of museum property; referrals; and the use of museum assets, information or name. Ethical considerations, such as personal conduct, collections-related ethics and conflict of interest issues may also exist in other policies (e.g., a personnel policy or a collections management policy). If so, the museum should take care that these documents use consistent language.

Collections

This is how the museum manages, maintains and conserves its collections. Codes of ethics include the purpose of collections, how they support the museum's mission and public trust responsibilities and how collections-related activity promotes the public good rather than individual or institutional financial gain. If the museum has any collections-related plans or policies, those can be referenced here. It is important for museums to explore how the museum legally and ethically acquires, deaccessions, cares for and preserves objects and explain that in the code. In particular, a museum should address the use of proceeds from disposal of deaccessioned objects. Museums should also consider mentioning several other collections-related issues: reasonable access to collections records and collections; the acquisition, care and treatment

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of cultural property, and adherence to relevant laws; truth in presentation—the honest and objective representation of objects; and appraisals.

Museum Management Practices

There are other types of policies dealing generally with museum operations that may be outlined in the museum's code of ethics. These issues usually address fundraising; the museum's commercial activity, such as a museum store; personnel practices and equal opportunity; commitment to professionalism; and ownership of scholarly material, which designates who has ownership of the work developed or created by staff while carrying out museum-related responsibilities.

Compliance with Laws

It is important to protect the museum and its reputation and to ensure that staff are not violating any laws. In some cases, there are ethical as well as legal considerations for certain practices, so museums typically mention any laws and regulations that affect the way it operates. Often the museum will make a general statement that acknowledges adherence to laws; other times they will mention specific laws (e.g., NAGPRA), where relevant.

Forms

Many museums provide forms with their codes of ethics that include acknowledgement or affirmation of the code, documentation of personal collecting activity or disclosure forms.

Implementation

Usually, the code of ethics contains a section addressing how the code will be implemented and reinforced. Often, any ramifications regarding breach of the code will be mentioned in tandem.

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Where to Begin

To write an institutional code of ethics, a museum must honestly consider the issues it faces and is likely to face, and determine what ethical principles are needed to guide its operations and protect its integrity. Clear policies mean that staff and governing authority have standard procedures to follow and reference, allowing them to act with consistency and prevent misunderstanding. Here are some steps museums can take in drafting a code of ethics:

- *Create a team.* Since the code of ethics influences museum operations broadly, it is important for the museum to assemble a multi-functional advisory team to make sure the code is comprehensive.
- *Establish values*. Most museums have values that support mission. Those writing the code of ethics may use those values to inform it or, if relevant, consider whether or not those values need to be revised. If values do not exist, the team may want to develop them. Those affected by the code of ethics can provide feedback about what they consider to be the museum's values. Afterward, applicable core principles can be identified to influence how the code of ethics progresses. It may be prudent for museums to send the final set of values to key stakeholders and to the governing authority for approval before moving forward.
- *Draft the code and get approval*. The anatomy of an institutional code of ethics listed above may help a museum consider what its policy should cover. It is important to determine who will be responsible for dealing with conflicts of interest when they arise (most often it is the board chair or an ethics committee) and explore how the code of ethics will be enforced. The team is encouraged to think through what type of disciplinary action would result from violation of the code and make it explicit in the document. After considering issues that greatly face the museum, the team may draft an outline of the proposed code and circulate it amongst the team for review and comment. Once feedback has been received, a final draft must go to the governing authority for approval. Museums may consider circulating final versions to key stakeholders and having legal counsel review to provide guidance.
- *Revise other documents*. Since the code of ethics affects how museums operate and make decisions, other policies should be updated to reflect any changes in philosophy. It is important to identify what other documents need to be revised and edit them in light of this code of ethics.
- *Train staff, governing authority and volunteers to be ethical*. A code of ethics is only effective if ethical behavior is nurtured. Governing authority and staff should be encouraged to turn to the code for guidance on questions or concerns and educated on how to use it to act in the public's best interest. Leadership should cultivate ethical behavior so that staff and governing authority

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can make good decisions even when faced with situations or issues that the code does not directly address.

- *Review frequently and revise as necessary*. A successful code of ethics gets reviewed and referenced constantly, so it is important to revise the code when necessary.

Core Documents Verification

The Core Documents Verification program verifies that an institution has an educational mission and policies and procedures in place that reflect standard practices of professional museums, as articulated in *National Standards and Best Practices for U.S. Museums* and used in the Accreditation Program.

A code of ethics is one of five core documents that are fundamental for basic professional museum operations and embody core museum values and practices. Listed below are elements required for codes of ethics from museums participating in the program.

Institutional Code of Ethics Required Elements

- States that it applies to members of the governing authority, staff and volunteers
- Is consistent with the Alliance's *Code of Ethics for Museums* or other code of ethics issued by a national museum organization appropriate to the museum's discipline
- Is tailored to, and developed specifically for, the museum (i.e., it is not simply a restatement of, or a statement of adoption of, the Alliance's *Code of Ethics for Museums* or other organization's code, and is not simply a copy of any parent organization's code)
- Puts forth the institution's basic ethical, public trust responsibilities as a museum and nonprofit educational entity and is not solely about individual conduct (e.g., conflict of interest issues)
- Includes a statement on use of proceeds from deaccessioning (limiting their use to new acquisitions and/or direct care/preservation)
- Is a single document, not a compilation or list of references to other documents
- Is approved by governing authority

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Where to Find Out More

» *Code of Ethics for Museums* (AAM Press, 2000)

This code provides a framework for developing an institution's own code of ethics and reflects the current, generally understood standards of the museum field. Issues covered include governance, collections and programs.

» *National Standards and Best Practices for U.S. Museums*, edited by Elizabeth E. Merritt (AAM Press, 2008)

This guide is an essential reference work for the museum community, presenting the ideals that should be upheld by every museum striving to maintain excellence in its operations. An introductory section explains how virtually anyone associated with museums will find the book valuable, from trustees to staff to funders and the media. It is followed by a full outline of the standards, including the overarching Characteristics of Excellence for U.S. Museums and the seven areas of performance they address. Throughout the book is commentary by Elizabeth E. Merritt, director of the Alliance's Center for the Future of Museums. This publication is available as a free PDF for all museum members.

» *Codes of Ethics and Practice of Interest to Museums*, compiled by Jackie Weisz and edited by Roxana Adams (AAM Press, 2000)

This book provides an overall understanding of a broad scope of codes of practice, to help improve practices. This is a complete guide to ethics related to all aspects of museum operations. It includes information about standards and other useful tools.

» *Museum Ethics*, edited by Gary Edson (Routeledge, 1997)

This book explores the ethical obligations that staff, volunteers and members of the governing authority have to the museum profession and the public. It also considers ethical practices on many museum issues such as collecting, conservation and public programs.

» *Museum Governance* by Marie C. Malaro (Smithsonian Institution Press, 1994)

This book addresses issues facing museum administrators and trustees and principles of nonprofit governance, including: purpose and use of codes of ethics; setting collection strategies; handling deaccessioning; and maintaining effective board oversight.

» Ethics Resource Center

The Ethics Resource Center has articles on ethical issues, a glossary of ethical

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terms, and a quick test to assess an organization's ethical effectiveness.

www.ethics.org/page/ethics-toolkit

» Institute of Museum Ethics

The Institute of Museum Ethics explores critical ethical issues facing museums and supplies museums with resources to help them make informed decisions about ethical matters.

museumethics.org/

» Sample Documents

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Standards

The Alliance's standards address "big picture" issues about how museums operate. For the most part, they define broad outcomes that can be achieved in many different ways and are flexible enough to accommodate a diverse museum field. These standards can be achieved in tandem with standards issued by other organizations that address aspects of museum operations or the museum profession.

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Standards provide a common language that enables museums to self-regulate, demonstrate professionalism and increase accountability. Policy-makers, media, philanthropic organizations, donors and members of the public use standards to assess a museum's performance and evaluate its worthiness to receive public support and trust. Simply stated by Elizabeth Merritt in *National Standards and Best Practices for U.S. Museums*, "Standards are fundamental to being a good museum, a responsible nonprofit and a well-run business."

Having a strong code of ethics helps museums adhere to standards. For more on standards, visit the Alliance's website at www.aam-us.org.

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ALLIANCE REFERENCE GUIDE

Developing an Institutional Plan

This guide aims to help museums develop their institutional plan, a core document supporting sustainability and mission. While the end result is a plan, the primary goals of this guide are to explain the importance of institutional planning, offer considerations for the process of planning and outline steps to begin planning. It reflects national standards and outlines elements of an institutional plan that are in line with the requirements of the Alliance's Core Documents Verification and Accreditation programs.

What It Is

An institutional plan (sometimes called a strategic plan or a long-range plan) is a document that guides the museum's acquisition, growth and allocation of resources. It is generally multi-year and has measurable goals and methods by which the museum evaluates success. It includes prioritized action steps, establishes timelines and assigns responsibilities for implementing the plan. It also assesses and addresses resources needed to see the plan to fruition. It is often supplemented by an implementation or an operating plan that puts the decisions made in the institutional plan into practice. Implementation plans address day-to-day operations or one specific operational area, such as collections, business, development or education. An institutional plan should be current (up-to-date) and aligned with mission.

Why It Is Important

Finding the time to plan is a difficult but fundamental task. Since resources are finite and communities evolve, museums engage in planning to be sustainable and relevant. An institutional plan integrates and focuses operations in order to meet mission and the needs of its audience and community.

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What to Consider

- *The process of creating and implementing a plan is far more important and beneficial to the museum than the actual plan itself.* The plan may seem like the end result, but in actuality, the end result is what is achieved through using and updating the plan.
- *There are many different ways to plan.* Each museum has its own set of challenges, which requires thoughtfulness in planning. Museums are encouraged to take time to explore their circumstances and articulate them accurately in their plans.
- *Planning should be integrated in order to be effective.* Each of the museum's official documents should speak to one another consistently and comprehensively to support the museum's mission.

"If planning is well integrated into the museum, it becomes the way you do your work, not something you do on top of your work. What is important is that you make it a priority." Elizabeth E. Merritt (*Secrets of Institutional Planning*, 2007)

Anatomy of an Institutional Plan

Planning is a continuous but fruitful process that properly distributes resources in order to accomplish goals. It is important to nurture a culture of frequent, current and thoughtful planning.

There is no one, perfect template for any document. As the museum field is so diverse, each of the museum's documents should be influenced by its history, community, collections and governance. Each museum's planning documents will look different depending on its strengths, weaknesses and goals. Institutional plans should be mission-based and comprehensive, integrating other types of plans (e.g., development plans, interpretive plans, collections plans) into overall planning and setting prioritized and realistic goals. Here are some common elements of an institutional plan:

Introduction

It can be helpful to begin both the planning process and the written plan with a review of the institution's background. Not everyone in the planning process starts at the same point, and reiterating mission, documenting the history of the museum and its culture and working through vision and core values as a team can provide a strong foundation for the planning process.

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Overview of Planning Process

Providing some background on how the plan was developed, who was involved and what challenges and opportunities came to light, will give context for the decisions and action steps that follow. It is important that museums create transparency in the process and document the planning process. When museums undergo subsequent planning, they can extend this process rather than recreating it.

Overview of Operations and Programs

This is an assessment of all of the museum's projects and programs. To help make strategic choices about the museum's focus, prioritize goals, allocate resources as necessary and create a baseline for measuring progress, museums should identify strengths and weaknesses.

Organizational Chart

This summary of human resources can help museums align strategic goals with staffing. For instance, if a goal is to ramp up education programs, an organizational chart might reveal lack of staff capacity.

Other Planning Documents

Institutional planning needs to be comprehensive, taking into consideration all of the museum's operations. Museums will often have several planning documents that get integrated or referenced in the institutional plan. It is important that these plans be consistent and cohesive throughout the entire planning process.

Goals, Strategies, Action Steps

This section outlines what the museum is going to do, who is going to do what, when it is going to happen, how much it will cost and how it will be funded. Museums must be specific about the measurable end products (goals) and the means (action steps) and methods (strategies) for achieving them. It is important to assess, identify and plan to secure resources—both human and financial—needed to implement the plan. A timeline will delineate when things will rollout so that these goals are coordinated and integrated.

Measures of Success

Evaluation helps museums decide when a plan needs to be updated, when strategies need to change or when priorities shift. It is important to discuss this during the planning process so that those using the institutional plan know how to define and measure success.

Updating and Monitoring the Plan

A plan has specific, time-bound goals, but the need for a plan does not disappear after the past plan is completed. Using action items as part of staff's yearly work plans and regular review and assessment of the plan and the museum's progress can help encourage a culture of planning.

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Where to Begin

The planning process will vary from institution to institution and from time to time, but here are some ideas to get members of a museum's governing authority, staff, volunteers and community on-board with the planning process:

- *Create an institutional planning team and establish their responsibility, authority and a timeline for planning*. It is important that a museum first identify the scope of the planning process. This will include identifying who will participate in the planning process and how and whether a neutral outside facilitator is needed to assist in moving the process along.
- *Consider the audience for this written plan.* Is it just the board and staff, or does the audience include funders, members of the community, or others? Thinking about who this plan is aimed for will influence how it is written. Museums can choose to abbreviate the institutional plan depending on the audiences. For instance, funders or museum members may get a short, three-page summary of the plan, whereas staff get a full 20-page document with an accompanying implementation plan.
- *Collect feedback from internal and external groups.* By interviewing board members, staff and volunteers about the history of the museum and their visions, the museum can start shaping the planning process. Other communities can be surveyed to discover their visions for the museum, such as different demographic groups that the museum wants to attract. It may be helpful for the museum to extend an invitation to people who have never visited so that they can give feedback. This insight can be an important starting point for the museum's planning.
- *Assess current performance*. Museums may find it helpful to look at internal information (e.g., financial reports, attendance data, surveys) and external information (e.g., benchmarking information on financial performance, comparable data from other institutions, demographics, trend data on local tourism) to see where the museum is. Staff, volunteers and board members can tour the current facilities along with key decision-makers to see for themselves the current state of the physical plant, collections storage, exhibits and other areas that the plan may need to address.
- *Use interviews and performance assessment to help inform goals and a vision for the museum*. The museum should explore strategies and prioritize action steps, taking other types of plans into consideration during this process. They can establish these in a myriad of ways—some museums may find it helpful to create task forces or committees, some may want an "all hands on deck" approach. Every museum's planning process is different from the next, and the most important result is to have achievable and prioritized goals, strategies and action steps.

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- *Establish metrics for success and methods for measuring progress.*
- *Make sure key stakeholders review and edit the draft plan*. This may take several rounds of edits before it is "final," but museums can send the draft in rounds to separate groups of stakeholders. Once the plan is seen and edited by key stakeholders, it must be approved by the governing authority. It's important to know that a plan is never going to be perfect or final. A successful one gets reviewed and revised constantly, depending on changes to goals and priorities.
- *Celebrate and implement!* All the hard work and thought that has gone into writing the plan should be recognized before making it a reality. Moreover, museums are encouraged to communicate effectively and regularly and make sure board, staff, volunteers and community representatives know at what stage the planning is and what happens next, even if they are not directly involved.

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Core Documents Verification

The Core Documents Verification program verifies that an institution has an educational mission and the policies and procedures in place that reflect standard practices of professional museums, as articulated in *National Standards and Best Practices for U.S. Museums* and used in the Accreditation program.

An institutional plan is one of five core documents that are fundamental for basic professional museum operations and embody core museum values and practices. Listed below are elements required for institutional plans from museums participating in the program.

Institutional Plan Required Elements

- Is current (up to date)
- Is approved by the governing authority
- Aligned with current mission
- Articulates a big-picture vision as well as operational tactics to achieve the vision
- Covers all relevant areas of museum operations
- Includes:
    - goals (specific things the museum wants to achieve)
    - action steps (specific assignments to achieve these goals)
    - assignment of responsibility for accomplishing action steps
    - assessment of resources (human and financial) needed to implement the plan
    - how the institution will obtain these resources
    - timeline for implementation
    - priorities
    - evaluation mechanisms and measures of success

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Where to Find Out More

Content for this reference guide was pulled from *Secrets of Institutional Planning*, edited by Elizabeth E. Merritt and Victoria Garvin (AAM Press, 2007) and *National Standards and Best Practices for U.S. Museums*, edited by Elizabeth E. Merritt (AAM Press, 2008).

- *National Standards and Best Practices for U.S. Museums*, edited by Elizabeth E. Merritt (AAM Press, 2008)

  This guide is an essential reference work for the museum community, presenting the ideals that should be upheld by every museum striving to maintain excellence in its operations. An introductory section explains how virtually anyone associated with museums will find the book valuable, from trustees to staff to funders and the media. It is followed by a full outline of the standards, including the overarching Characteristics of Excellence for U.S. Museums and the seven areas of performance they address. Throughout the book is commentary by Elizabeth E. Merritt, director of the Alliance's Center for the Future of Museums. This publication is available as a free PDF to all museum members.

- *Secrets of Institutional Planning*, edited by Elizabeth E. Merritt and Victoria Garvin (AAM Press, 2007)

  This publication explains how to create a fully integrated plan, involve all relevant stakeholders and interests in the planning process, and ensure that sufficient resources are allocated at strategic times. It features case studies, sample documents and advice from experts.

- Museum Assessment Program (MAP), American Alliance of Museums

  The Alliance offers an Organizational Assessment to help a museum review its entire operation, which can be beneficial to institutional planning. The review covers mission and planning, governance, administration, finance, collections stewardship, interpretation, marketing, public relations, membership and community support.

- Strategic Planning Manual, Museums Australia

  This manual is particularly useful for smaller museums hoping to adopt more professional procedures. It guides museums through a 4-step process, provides examples and includes a glossary of terms.

  www.collectionsaustralia.net/sector_info_item/67

- How to Conduct an Organizational Self-Assessment, National Endowment for the Arts (NEA)

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This planning toolkit has 27 articles and a bibliography and reviews different methods for gathering information from internal and external stakeholders. It includes a sample questionnaire to use with the board and staff, sample focus group questions and a sample agenda for a planning retreat. It shares a checklist for evaluating aspects of institutional operations, 10 templates a museum can use to summarize and analyze historical financial data, make future projections in a realistic fashion, and consider questions potential funders may use when reading an organization's plan.

arts.endow.gov/resources/Lessons/index.html

» Sample Documents

The Information Center's sample document collection is a unique and valuable resource for Tier 3 member museums. The collection contains more than 1,000 samples of policies, plans and forms from museums of all types and sizes, most of which were written by accredited museums. Tier 3 museum members can request sample documents from the Information Center in order to stimulate a conversation about issues and challenges facing the museum and to explore how different museums approach different issues. Using the sample documents should not replace the process of joining staff, governing authority and stakeholders in fruitful and thoughtful planning and policy-making.

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Standards

The Alliance's standards address "big picture" issues about how museums operate. For the most part, they define broad outcomes that can be achieved in many different ways and are flexible enough to accommodate a diverse museum field. These standards can be achieved in tandem with standards issued by other organizations that address aspects of museum operations or the museum profession.

Adhering to standards is achievable by all types of museums.

Standards provide a common language that enables museums to self-regulate, demonstrate professionalism and increase accountability. Policy-makers, media, philanthropic organizations, donors and members of the public use standards to assess a museum's performance and evaluate its worthiness to receive public support and trust. Simply stated by Elizabeth Merritt in *National Standards and Best Practices for U.S. Museums*, "Standards are fundamental to being a good museum, a responsible nonprofit and a well-run business."

Having a strong institutional plan helps museums adhere to standards. For more on standards, visit the Alliance's website at www.aam-us.org.

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American Alliance of Museums

ALLIANCE REFERENCE GUIDE

Developing a Collections Management Policy

This reference guide aims to help museums develop a collections management policy, a core document supporting a museum's mission and purpose. This guide explains what a collections management policy is, why it is important and considerations for developing one. It reflects national standards and is in line with the requirements of the Alliance's Core Documents Verification and Accreditation programs.

What It Is

A collections management policy is a set of policies that address various aspects of collections management. This policy defines the scope of a museum's collection and how the museum cares for and makes collections available to the public. A collections management policy also explains the roles of the parties responsible for managing the museum's collections.

Institutions with living collections may use different terminology for the policy and processes that govern the management of their plants or animals. Museums that do not own collections but borrow and use objects owned by others should have policies in place regarding borrowing items.

Why It Is Important

Collections advance the museum's mission while serving the public. Because collections are held in trust for the public and are made accessible for the public's benefit, the public expects museums to maintain the highest legal, ethical and professional standards. To demonstrate these standards, museums establish policies to support its mission and operations and to guide decision-making. Policies give the governing authority, staff and public the opportunity to learn about standards and help the museum fulfill its responsibilities as a steward of collections.

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American Alliance of Museums

What to Consider

- *The process of creating and implementing a policy is far more important and beneficial to the museum than the actual policy itself.* The policy may seem like the end result, but in actuality, the end result is a broad understanding of ethics and procedures, which influences how the museum operates.
- *There are many different ways to create policies.* Each museum has its own set of challenges, which requires thoughtfulness in policy-making. Museums are encouraged to take time to explore their circumstances and articulate them accurately in their policies.
- *Policy-making should be integrated in order to be effective.* Each of the museum's official documents should speak to one another consistently and comprehensively to support the museum's mission.

"A policy is useless if it is outdated, ignored, too complex to be followed, too simplistic to be useful, or does not serve the museum's mission. […] Good policies help the museum achieve its mission and demonstrate its commitment to professional standards and best practices." John E. Simmons (*Things Great and Small*, 2006)

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Anatomy of a Collections Management Policy

A strong policy is consistent in the day-to-day handling of an institution's collections and is written to meet the specific needs of the museum and its collection. It is important to take the necessary time and resources to think through and develop a realistic and usable document. Establishing policies that are not eventually followed is detrimental to the museum and the community it serves.

There is no one, perfect template for any document. Since the museum field is so diverse, each of the museum's documents should be influenced by its history, community, collections and governance. Interrelated policies and plans contribute to a cohesive vision and mission. While collections management policies vary in organization and in content, listed below are some elements commonly found in these policies.

Mission, Vision and History

Policies, procedures and plans should support mission. Thus, many museums begin each document reiterating their mission, followed by other introductory material, including the museum's vision statement and a brief history of the museum and its collections. This section provides the users of the policy with a better understanding of the museum's choices and its role in collections stewardship. For more guidance, review the Alliance's reference guide on mission statements.

Statement of Authority

The governing authority, committees and staff each play a role in helping the museum fulfill its role as stewards of its collections. This section summarizes those roles and responsibilities and usually includes the name of the museum, its purpose and identification of who is responsible for legal and fiduciary matters. Sometimes the statement of authority is found in the introductory sections, along with mission, vision and history.

Code of Ethics

A code of ethics is a set of principles that guide the conduct, decision-making and behavior of museum staff, volunteers and governing authority. It is a policy statement that establishes values and ethical standards that enable the museum to fulfill its mission and put the interests of the public ahead of the interests of the museum or of any individual. Each museum should develop its own institutional code of ethics, specific to its operations and needs. This document states that it applies to staff, governing authority and volunteers. A museum will often include its code of ethics—either in its entirety (although it should exist as a stand-alone document as well), in an excerpt or in a reference—in the collections management policy. For more guidance on this, please review to the Alliance's reference guide on codes of ethics.

Scope of Collections

This is a broad description of the museum's collections and an explanation of how and what

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the museum collects and how those collections are used. This section can include a brief history of the collections and a review of the collection's strengths and weaknesses. It often sets guidelines for growing and developing the collection, which museums can then use in collections planning.

Categories of Collections

These are the names and definitions of different categories of collections the museum cares for, documents and uses. Some common collections categories include: archives or library, education, exhibition, permanent, research or collections held under a repository or management agreement. In this section, museums might explain how collections in that category are used, acquired, cared for and deaccessioned.

Acquisitions/Accessioning

Acquisition is the act of acquiring an item or object for any of the museum's collections. Accessioning is the formal act of legally accepting an object or objects to the category of material that a museum holds in the public trust, or, in other words, those in the museum's permanent collection. Because of this, it is important that acquisition/accession policies are written with the museum's mission in mind. The museum must ensure that each accession not only enhances or strengthens the museum's collections but can be properly cared for, stored and used. This section outlines the specific criteria and decision-making process for adding objects to the collection. Having a thoughtful accession/acquisitions policy will yield a strong and cohesive collection, in addition to helping avoid any misunderstanding between potential donors and the museum. For instance, if an object does not fit the criteria for being accessioned, the museum staff can point to policy rather than say it was a choice made by judgment. If a museum has an acquisitions committee, their role and responsibilities can be outlined here. Furthermore, museums should include any legal or ethical obligations or restrictions concerning collection acquisition (e.g., appraisals, gifts, exchanges).

Deaccessioning/Disposal

Deaccessioning is the opposite of accessioning. It is the permanent removal of an object from a museum's collections. There are many reasons for deaccessioning an object, several of them being controversial, but the practice is a typical part of collections stewardship and a way for the museum to refine its collection. It is important that the museum understand the legal and ethical implications of deaccessioning and write a policy that helps the museum be transparent and accountable with the public. The museum should state its adherence to the Alliance's *Code of Ethics for Museums* and make sure that the "disposal of collections through sale, trade, or research activities is solely for the advancement of the museum's mission." In thinking through the deaccessioning policy and its subsequent procedures, it is important that museums clearly outline the specific criteria for removing an object from the collection, as well as the decision-making process. Moreover, this section should be explicit about the methods and means of disposing of an object and include a statement about how the proceeds will be used.

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Loans

Loans help museums share information with each other and the communities they serve. This section delineates the conditions covering the temporary transfer of collection objects (not their ownership) from or to the museum. In this section, museums typically include information about loan approval and acceptance, loan fees, documentation, insurance and monitoring. If relevant, museums can include sections about old loans and restricted works (i.e., objects not permitted to leave the museum except under special circumstances). Museums that do not own collections but which borrow and use objects owned by others should have policies in place regarding these items.

Objects in Custody

Objects in custody are collections that are found, abandoned or unclaimed. This section addresses how the museum will handle objects with unclear title.

Conservation/Care

There are many factors that affect the quality of care for collections. Museums must properly preserve and care for collections they hold in the public trust. In order to protect the collection from deterioration, museums are encouraged to address the following in their collections management policy: storage, temperature, relative humidity, pest control, conservation, handling of objects, disaster planning and location inventories. If a museum has a long-range conservation plan, it can be mentioned here.

Insurance and Risk Management

Risk management is a major part of the museum's responsibility to minimize any potential problems or dangers to the collections. This section is an overview of the museum's approach to safeguarding the collection (e.g., fire detection and suppression, security) and the types of insurance coverage provided. A more in-depth disaster plan accompanies the collections management policy. For more information on developing a disaster preparedness/emergency response plan, see the Alliance's reference guide on this topic.

Documentation, Collections Records and Inventories

Documentation captures an object's condition, history, use and value. It is how a museum maintains physical and intellectual control over its collection. Without documentation, an object has no identity. Museums must therefore be diligent in creating legible and comprehensive documentation and in managing those records. In writing this section, museums typically reference the types of records created, what information is contained in each record, the parties responsible for maintaining and documenting the records and any procedures and back-up systems. Museum staff are encouraged to commit to periodically checking inventories in order to ensure that an object's supporting information is secure and can easily be retrieved.

Access

Museums must give the public reasonable access to collections and collections records. In this section, the museum usually explains who

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has access to what and why, and denotes how those collections will be used and with what safeguards. Museums might assess staff capacity, physical facilities, preservation and awareness of legal issues (e.g., Americans with Disabilities Act, donor privacy, Freedom of Information Act) before shaping these policies.

Appraisals

Often, members of the public will contact a museum to seek staff expertise on an object. This can take the form of an appraisal or an authentication. Museum staff can appraise objects internally in order to establish a value for insurance. However, an appraisal or authentication by staff or governing authority on behalf of the public is discouraged. There are several legal and ethical restrictions to this practice and to addressing these concerns in their collections management policies. It is prudent to outline restrictions on staff appraising items donated to the collection and include a statement about conducting appraisals for donors or the general public.

Legal and Ethical Considerations

There are many laws regarding the ownership and protection of cultural and natural resources, including but not limited to: stolen, looted or reappropriated art, archaeological material removed from federally owned or controlled land and issues relating to the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA). Museums usually state compliance with local, state and federal laws that affect collections or collecting activities and the museum's commitment to adhering to them. It is important that museums be aware of ethical concerns regarding employee conduct, conflicts of interest, selling items from the collection or restoring certain objects.

Intellectual Property

In order to protect themselves and any intellectual property, it is important for museums to be aware of intellectual property rights, laws and concerns. Typically, this section addresses the acquisition of copyright for accessioned objects and the adherence to intellectual property laws, including: trademark, fair use, electronic use, licensing, image use, commercial use, royalties and fees, reproductions, privacy and Visual Artists Right Act, etc. Museums might consider including a statement about whether or not photography or filming in the museum or of specific objects is permitted and if so, under what conditions.

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Review/Revision

A collections management policy is a living, breathing document that should always be practiced. Museum staff should regularly review the policy and, when necessary, consider revising it. A museum might create a schedule for review.

Glossary

To familiarize all staff, volunteers and board with the collections management policy, museums may include a glossary of terms.

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Where to Begin

For policies to be effective, they must be understood and accepted by everyone at the museum. This means educating the staff, governing authority and volunteers about the purpose of the policies, the distinction between policies and procedures, and how the procedures put policies into action.

In most institutions, the governing authority approves and has the ultimate responsibility for the policies. Staff participation is critical for preparing policies that everyone understands and to which they are committed.

Policy development can be time-consuming, but approaching the issues from a variety of perspectives can be beneficial. The process is most effective when there is full staff involvement at every stage: initial draft, review, revision and recommendation to the governing authority for approval. Here are some steps in the policy development process:

- *Assemble the writing team.* Select a team that has a manageable number of participants yet represents a variety of perspectives within the institution, including administration, collections, conservation, governance, public programs, research and security. Include the staff who implement the procedures.
- *Develop the policy.* Use the mission statement and scope of the collections statement to develop broad, institution-wide collections management policies. Then develop specific policies to address particular institutional issues.
- *Review standards*. Review the policies to ensure that they are based on current legal, ethical and professional standards and adhere to the museum's code of ethics.
- *Get feedback*. Ask other staff members to comment on successive drafts of the policies. Once you have received feedback, revise the policy as necessary.
- *Get governance endorsement*. Following staff review and revision, present the policies to the museum's governing authority for approval. Be prepared to explain and defend each policy as well as to incorporate the governing authority's suggestions.
- *Develop procedures*. Once the policies have been approved by the governing authority, prepare a set of procedures for implementing each policy.

- *Implement*. The completed collections management policy and the corresponding procedures are presented, implemented and carried out by staff. Relevant staff should have been included in developing the policies and procedures but there may still be a need to talk about how to carry out their responsibilities.
- *Review and revise periodically*. These policies and procedures will evolve as the museum grows and thrives. Procedures might need revision more often than policies.

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Core Documents Verification

The Core Documents Verification program verifies that an institution has an educational mission and the policies and procedures in place that reflect standard practices of professional museums, as articulated in *National Standards and Best Practices for U.S. Museums* and used in the Accreditation program.

A collections management policy is one of five core documents that are fundamental for basic professional museum operations and embody core museum values and practices. Listed below are elements required for the collections management policies of museums participating in the program.

Collections Management Policy Required Elements

Note: Institutions with living collections may use different terminology for the policy and processes that govern the management of their plants or animals.

For institutions that own or manage collections:

- acquisitions/accessioning
- deaccessioning/disposal of collections/use of proceeds from the sale of deaccessioned collections
- loans, incoming and outgoing (museums that do not lend/borrow should state this fact)
- collections care
- inventories and/or documentation
- access and/or use of collections

For institutions that do not own or manage collections, but borrow and use objects for exhibits, education, or research:

- care/responsibilities for objects in temporary custody
- borrowing policies

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Where to Find Out More

Content for this reference guide was pulled from *Things Great and Small: Collections Management Policies* and *National Standards and Best Practices for U.S. Museums*.

» *National Standards and Best Practices for U.S. Museums*, edited by Elizabeth E. Merritt (AAM Press, 2008)

This guide is an essential reference work for the museum community, presenting the ideals that should be upheld by every museum striving to maintain excellence in its operations. It includes a full outline of the standards, including the overarching Characteristics of Excellence for U.S. Museums, the seven areas of performance they address and commentary. This publication is available as a free PDF to all museum members.

» *Things Great and Small: Collections Management Policies*, by John E. Simmons (AAM Press, 2006)

This publication comprehensively addresses how to write such a collections management policy for museums of any type or size. It reviews the issues that a collections management policy should address and the pros and cons of choosing one policy option over another. It also includes many excerpted sample collections management policies.

» *Museum Registration Methods 5th Edition*, edited by Rebecca Buck and Jean A. Gilmore (AAM Press, 2010)

This tome encompasses all that needs to be known and done when a museum accessions, measures, marks, moves, displays or stores an object or artifact of any kind. The 5th Edition includes special teaching sections that challenge readers with questions about the process and procedures of accessioning and caring for objects. It also contains expert advice from more than 60 acknowledged leaders in their disciplines, a bibliography, a glossary and multiple sample forms.

» *Collection Conundrums: Solving Collections Management Mysteries*, by Rebecca Buck and Jean A. Gilmore (AAM Press, 2007)

This book provides guidelines for investigating and determining what to do with the oddities found in every museum collection—objects without record, identification or sometimes even a location. The text features a history of registration methods and the standards for collection documentation and care, along with sample documents such as loan agreements, co-tenancy agreements, storage agreements and deeds of gift.

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» Sample Documents

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Standards

The Alliance's standards address "big picture" issues about how museums operate. For the most part, they define broad outcomes that can be achieved in many different ways and are flexible enough to accommodate a diverse museum field. These standards can be achieved in tandem with standards issued by other organizations that address aspects of museum operations or the museum profession.

Adhering to standards is achievable by all types of museums.

Standards provide a common language that enables museums to self-regulate, demonstrate professionalism and increase accountability. Policy-makers, media, philanthropic organizations, donors and members of the public use standards to assess a museum's performance and evaluate its worthiness to receive public support and trust. Simply stated by Elizabeth Merritt in *National Standards and Best Practices for U.S. Museums*, "Standards are fundamental to being a good museum, a responsible nonprofit and a well-run business."

Having a strong collections management policy helps museums adhere to standards. For more on standards, visit the Alliance's website at www.aam-us.org.

American Alliance of Museums

ALLIANCE REFERENCE GUIDE

Developing a Disaster Preparedness/ Emergency Response Plan

Preparing for disaster is one of the most important things a museum can do in order to safeguard its collections and protect staff and visitors from hazards. This guide provides a primer on disaster preparedness and helps museums understand the process of developing a disaster preparedness/emergency preparedness plan. It reflects national standards and outlines elements of a disaster preparedness/emergency preparedness plan that are in line with the requirements of the Alliance's Core Documents Verification and Accreditation programs.

What It Is

A disaster preparedness/emergency response plan, commonly known as a disaster plan, is a series of written policies and procedures that prevent or minimize damage resulting from disasters (either man-made or natural) and help a museum recover. All museums are expected to have plans that address how the museum will care for staff, visitors and collections in case of emergency. This should be tailored to the museum's specific circumstances and facilities and should cover all relevant threats or risks to the museum, its collection and its people. This includes evacuation plans for staff and visitors and plans for how to protect or recover collections in the event of disaster. The plan should also outline the responsibilities of each involved party.

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Why It Is Important

Identifying, understanding and preparing for risks are vital parts of museum management. Museums care for resources in trust for the public and must minimize risks to collections. Having a strong disaster plan helps the museum safeguard buildings, staff, visitors and neighbors. It also has financial implications that include insurance and conservation costs involved with salvage.

What to Consider

- *The process of creating and implementing a plan is far more important and beneficial to the museum than the actual plan itself*. The plan may seem like the end result, but in actuality, the end result is what is achieved through using and updating the plan.
- *There are many different ways to plan.* Each museum has its own set of challenges, which requires thoughtfulness in planning. Museums are encouraged to take time to explore their circumstances and articulate them accurately in their plans.
- *Planning should be integrated in order to be effective.* Each of the museum's official documents should speak to one another consistently and comprehensively to support the museum's mission.

"Universal staff participation in the creation of a unique disaster plan is essential. Simply 'adopting' a plan from a similar institution would not have created a body of critical knowledge among staff members in the absence of the actual document. Create a plan that, in addition to specific technical direction and procedure, has universal application." Courtney B. Wilson, (*Covering Your Assets: Facilities & Risk Management in Museums*, 2006)

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Anatomy of a Disaster Plan

Museums should have a current and comprehensive disaster plan tailored to its needs and circumstances. Each museum's plan will vary from the next because of its unique collections, regional area and infrastructure. In developing a plan, museum staff should be aware of all relevant threats to staff, visitors, structures and collections. A strong disaster plan will recognize potential risks and allocate the necessary resources to minimize damage or threat.

There is no one, perfect template for any document. Since the museum field is so diverse, each of the museum's documents should be influenced by its history, community, collections and governance. Interrelated policies and plans contribute to a cohesive vision and mission. Here are some common elements of disaster preparedness plans:

Introduction

Most museums have an introduction that explains how the plan is organized, where it is stored and how often it gets updated and by whom.

Emergency Preparedness and Prevention

Emergency preparedness and prevention can be accomplished in a number of ways. Generally, a museum explains how it will minimize potential risks. Common measures outlined in a disaster plan are: how the museum safeguards records; preventing damage to collections (e.g., integrated pest management, protection from mold, monitoring any potential hazards in the collections); a list of emergency supplies and the frequency with which they are inventoried; and security measures.

Response Procedures

This includes general guidelines and specific steps museum staff will take to respond to each type of disaster or hazard. In preparing this section, staff are encouraged to first do a risk assessment. Often risks may be particular to region. For example, museums along coasts have a risk of hurricanes that museums in the Midwest do not. Museums in California have a higher risk of earthquakes. Some museums may have a higher threat of wind damage, snow damage or excessive humidity. In addition to natural disasters, museums should consider man-made emergencies (e.g., terrorism, civil disturbances, health emergency). While no museum is exempt from the threat of terrorism, those in urban areas or with iconic stature probably face a higher threat. All museums face risk from fire or water damage (e.g., broken pipes) or mechanical failure (e.g., loss of security). Response plans should focus first on human safety—staff, volunteers and visitors.

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Emergency Clean-Up/Salvage Procedures

It is important that museums specifically outline the clean-up and salvage procedures for both the collections and the buildings. These procedures should be prioritized so that staff and emergency suppliers can use their time wisely and effectively. Museums are encouraged to create step-by-step instructions for conserving and stabilizing collections, consider any condition reporting to be done during and after the emergency or disaster, and explain who will be responsible for what during disaster. It is important to consider long-term restoration treatment procedures and list any suppliers that may be involved if any professional cleaning, drying or repair is needed. Museums may find it beneficial to speak to other museums of the same discipline or in the same area to see how they plan to conserve objects. It is important to identify those to contact for help—first responders (e.g., police, fire fighters) and those who can help in recovery (e.g., area museum professionals, conservators)—before a disaster strikes.

Institution-Specific Information

This information includes: floor plans; a list of emergency resources/suppliers; an outline of roles and responsibilities, including designation of emergency coordinator(s); chain of command; emergency contacts and call list; evacuation procedures; information about alarm systems; and any forms or checklists that can facilitate and document the disaster. The museum might consider including or referencing a crisis communication plan for when it must communicate with the media and the public.

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American Alliance of Museums

Where to Begin

Strong disaster plans are comprehensive, yet simple and flexible, and are easy to follow during an emergency. In devising the plan, staff can work together to gather information regarding the institution, the collection and any potential threats in order to outline preventive measures and develop emergency response procedures. The more integrated the disaster planning, the more usable the operating procedures. Here are some steps museums can take to plan effectively for emergencies and disasters:

- *Create a team or committee to develop the disaster plan*. Museums are encouraged to include different functions of the museum in order to create a comprehensive plan. Having several people as part of the planning process empowers a greater number of staff to respond during disaster.
- *Read resources*. There are many resources on disaster preparedness that can help museums develop their plan, some of which are included at the end of this guide.
- *Assess and document risks and hazards*. These risks and hazards will be specific to the museum, so consider natural disasters, man-made threats and mechanical failure.
- *Establish preventative measures*. Steps can be taken to prevent disasters or minimize damage. Due diligence in monitoring hazards can prevent them from morphing into potential disasters. As Benjamin Franklin said, “An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.”
- *Prepare for disaster*. To prepare, museums may find it helpful to determine supplies needed and inventory, label and make them accessible. Collecting staff and, if relevant, board emergency contact information will help staff communicate and respond during disaster. It may be helpful to identify and establish relationships with suppliers and collaborators before disaster strikes, offering tours of the museum so that they are familiar with the facilities.
- *Take risk management measures*. As a risk management measure, it may be wise to make duplicates of important records and store them off site and make duplicates of keys.
- *Outline emergency response, establish chain of command and appoint emergency coordinator(s).* When considering procedures, the museum can think about developing any forms or checklists. The better these forms, the easier it will be for staff to stay collected when disaster strikes.
- *Develop salvage techniques and think of what needs to be done within a certain time frame.*
- *Review and revise the plan often*. Like any plan the museum has, it should be a living and breathing document, reviewed frequently.

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Core Documents Verification Program

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A disaster preparedness/emergency response plan is one of five core documents that are fundamental for basic professional museum operations and embody core museum values and practices. Listed below are elements required for disaster preparedness/emergency response plans from museums participating in the program.

Disaster Preparedness/Emergency Response Plan Required Elements

- Is tailored to the institution's current facilities and specific circumstances
- Covers all threats/risks relevant to the institution
- Addresses staff, visitors, structures and collections
- Includes evacuation plans for people
- Specifies how to protect, evacuate or recover collections in the event of a disaster
- Delegates responsibility for implementation

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Where to Find Out More

- *National Standards and Best Practices for U.S. Museums*, edited by Elizabeth E. Merritt (AAM Press, 2008)

  This guide is an essential reference work for the museum community, presenting the ideals that should be upheld by every museum striving to maintain excellence in its operations. An introductory section explains how virtually anyone associated with museums will find the book valuable, from trustees to staff to funders and the media. It is followed by a full outline of the standards, including the overarching Characteristics of Excellence for U.S. Museums and the seven areas of performance they address. Throughout the book is commentary by Elizabeth E. Merritt, director of the Alliance's Center for the Future of Museums. This publication is available as a free PDF to all museum members.

- *Covering Your Assets: Facilities and Risk Management in Museums*, edited by Elizabeth E. Merritt (AAM Press, 2005)

  This publication offers data on how professionals around the country operate their facilities, manage space and risk and prepare for emergencies. Data is broken out by museum discipline, governance type and parent organization. It also includes insightful essays on best practices from outside experts and leading professionals in the field.

- *Building an Emergency Plan: A Guide for Museums and Other Cultural Institutions* by Valerie Dorge and Sharon L. Jones (Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Trust, 1999).

  Building an Emergency Plan provides a comprehensive, step-by-step guide that a cultural institution can follow to develop its own emergency preparedness and response strategy.

  www.getty.edu/conservation/publications_resources/pdf_publications/emergency_plan.pdf

- Integrating Historic Property & Cultural Resource Considerations into Hazard Mitigation Planning, Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)

  This how-to guide provides community planners with tools and resources to develop and implement strategies for their historic properties and cultural resources. While the emphasis is on the built environment, the guide also addresses museum collections, works of art, books and documents. The complete document (202 pages) or individual chapters can be accessed from this introductory page.

  www.fema.gov/plan/ehp/hp/fema386-6.shtm

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- dPlan, Northeast Document Conservation Center (NEDCC) and the Massachusetts Board of Library Commissioners

  dPlan is a free online program that helps institutions write comprehensive disaster plans. The program provides easy-to-use templates that allow museums of all sizes to develop a customized plan with checklists; salvage priorities; preventive maintenance schedules; contact information for personnel, insurance and IT help; and a list of emergency supplies and services.

  www.dplan.org/

- Worksheet for Outlining a Disaster Plan, Northeast Document Conservation Center (NEDCC)

  This template guides a museum in identifying equipment and services needed for disaster preparedness and recovery, setting salvage priorities and scheduling drills. It also includes checklists of tasks that should be completed on a daily and weekly basis.

  www.nedcc.org/resources/leaflets/3Emergency_Management/04DisasterPlanWorksheet.php

- Guide to Navigating FEMA and SBA Disaster Aid for Cultural Institutions, Heritage Preservation

  This is an easy-to-use guide to the process of applying to the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and the Small Business Administration (SBA) for assistance after major disasters. Heritage Preservation also includes online tools to assist with disaster preparedness and recovery.

  www.heritagepreservation.org/federal/index.html

- In the Face of Disaster: Preparing for Emergencies in Central New York

  The Central New York Library Resources Council (CLRC) offers an 88-page manual that addresses collection priorities, facility audits to prevent potential disasters, insurance, response plans, and salvage priorities and techniques.

  www.clrc.org/downloads/disastermanualrev.pdf

- Emergency Response and Salvage Wheel, Heritage Preservation

  Heritage Preservation sells a hands-on tool that outlines steps that facilitate disaster response and salvage.

  www.heritagepreservation.org/catalog/wheel1.htm

- Sample Documents

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Having a strong disaster preparedness/ emergency response plan helps museums adhere to standards. For more on standards, visit the Alliance's website at www.aam-us.org.

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American Alliance of Museums

ALLIANCE ACTIVITY GUIDE

Code of Ethics Activity

A museum's institutional code of ethics specifies how the museum will behave in certain circumstances, as well as describing appropriate behavior for members of the staff, governing authority and volunteers. Each institution's ethical issues will vary from museum to museum, depending on subject area, mission, values, programming choices and other activities. This exercise can help your museum identify ethical issues that can be addressed in your institutional code of ethics and improve your museum's understanding of what "institutional" ethics issues are, and which are relevant to their museum. It can be used in assessing an existing policy, or to help create and review a draft policy.

Museum Assessment Program

Since 1981, the Museum Assessment Program (MAP) has helped museums strengthen operations, plan for the future and meet national standards through self-study and peer review. Supported through a cooperative agreement between the Alliance and the Institute of Museum and Library Services, MAP helps museums do one or more of the following: prioritize goals; plan for the future; strengthen communications between staff, board and other constituents; and build credibility with potential funders and donors.

Part of the MAP process includes a self-study questionnaire, which uses questions and activities to provoke exploration. The activities provide museums with the opportunity to assess the knowledge about its operations in action. The activities are designed to be conducted as group exercises in order to stimulate dialogue about issues and challenges that the museum faces. MAP participants assemble an assessment team to work through all of the activities and self-study questions. Museums not participating in MAP may find it helpful to create a team of appropriate participants for each activity.

This activity is one of many designed by MAP as part of the self-study process.

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Materials

- Copies of your museum's institutional plan, if you have one.
- Copies of *Code of Ethics for Museums* (optional)
- Copies of the Alliance's Standards Regarding an Institutional Code of Ethics (optional)

Participants

Suggested participants include a representative group of staff, including the director, and at least one member of the governing authority. It is important to include people involved in performing all the different functions that go into running a museum—operations management, scholarship, sales, education, fund-raising, etc., whether these are performed by volunteers or paid staff. It may also be helpful to include "outside experts" from advisory groups or from another museum. Large groups can sometimes inhibit some people from speaking up, so opt for a smaller group and look to get broader input in other venues.

Part 1: Mine Your Institutional Memory

Many of the ethics issues your museum potentially faces in the future have actually come up in your past. In this activity, you will draw on the "institutional memory" held by your staff and governing authority to compile a list of such issues. Before starting the activity, consider the scope of this exploration—are you revising your code of ethics or writing one for the first time? It may be helpful to provide copies of your existing code, the Alliance's *Code of Ethics for Museums* and Standards Regarding an Institutional Code of Ethics. Think about the most useful way to give your staff this information, knowing some people will read handouts and others won't. It may be helpful to explain the exercise at a staff meeting, departmental meetings, or a brown-bag lunch.

Ask people to describe an ethical decision they had to make in the course of working at the museum. Tell participants that it is ok to say "none," but encourage them to list more than one if appropriate. While this activity calls for there to be group discussion—as they stimulate each other's thinking—your museum may find it helpful to collect these answers through email. You may consider more than one method—perhaps an email inviting input from all staff and one or more discussion groups of staff with key roles or who have been at the museum a long time.

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Part 2: Identify Relevant Ethics Issues

In shaping a code of ethics, a museum may consider differences between individual and institutional ethics issues. *Individual* ethics issues concern choices made by individuals about their own behavior. For example, it an employee deciding to take outside employment, or a board member contemplating buying something for his or her private collection that the museum might want for its own collection. *Institutional* ethics issues concern decisions made on behalf of the organization about how it will behave. Even though these decisions may be made by an individual, that person is acting for the museum. For example, the museum may need to make a choice about accepting money from a tobacco company for a health exhibit. Both types of ethics issues should be covered in the museum's code of ethics.

- Step 1: Distribute the handouts listed in Part 1 and an explanation of the difference between individual and institutional ethics issues given above.
- Step 2: Have each participant prepare a summary of any institutional ethics issues related to the functions they are involved in at the museum. This includes researching discipline or profession-specific codes of ethics. For example, the person who manages the museum store might summarize relevant material from the *Museum Store Association Code of Ethics*. Assign one person to collect internal museum documents related to ethics standards, including the museum mission and (if one exists) its values statement.
- Step 3: Have the participants meet and present their summaries. Discuss how the general principles expressed in these standards apply to the museum's operations. Explore whether participants think the museum faces institutional ethics issues not addressed by any of the standards examined, and what sources of information might help shape the museum's ethics choices in these areas.

Summary

Based on these discussions, take the written responses and notes from each discussion group and organize similar issues together to start a list of issues to address in the museum's code of ethics. Compare this list to your existing or draft code of ethics. Consider any issues it does not deal with and decide whether the museum wants to add corresponding sections to the code. If you have not yet written a code of ethics, use the notes and responses to shape the table of contents of your draft.

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American Alliance of Museums

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Standards

The Alliance's standards address "big picture" issues about how museums operate. For the most part, they define broad outcomes that can be achieved in many different ways and are flexible enough to accommodate a diverse museum field. These standards can be achieved in tandem with standards issued by other organizations that address aspects of museum operations or the museum profession.

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Having a strong code of ethics helps museums adhere to standards. For more on standards, visit the Alliance's website at www.aam-us.org.

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- *Code of Ethics for Museums* (AAM Press, 2000)

  This code provides a framework for developing an institution's own code of ethics and reflects the current, generally understood standards of the museum field. Issues covered include governance, collections and programs.

- *National Standards and Best Practices for U.S. Museums*, edited by Elizabeth E. Merritt (AAM Press, 2008)

  This guide is an essential reference work for the museum community, presenting the ideals that should be upheld by every museum striving to maintain excellence in its operations. An introductory section explains how virtually anyone associated with museums will find the book valuable, from trustees to staff to funders and the media. It is followed by a full outline of the standards, including the overarching Characteristics of Excellence for U.S. Museums and the seven areas of performance they address. Throughout the book is commentary by Elizabeth E. Merritt, director of the Alliance's Center for the Future of Museums. This publication is available as a free PDF for all museum members.

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American Alliance of Museums

ALLIANCE ACTIVITY GUIDE

Disaster Preparedness Activity

A good disaster plan, well conceived and familiar to all staff, is a museum's best risk management tool for the protection and recovery of collections in the case of natural or man-made disasters. These plans also help protect museum staff and visitors and assist the museum in recovering crucial business and operational records. This activity assesses response readiness to emergency situations that affect collections. It can help identify weak links in an existing disaster preparedness plan, or help start the process of creating a plan.

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Part of the MAP process includes a self-study questionnaire, which uses questions and activities to provoke exploration. The activities provide museums with the opportunity to assess the knowledge about its operations in action. The activities are designed to be conducted as group exercises in order to stimulate dialogue about issues and challenges that the museum faces. MAP participants assemble an assessment team to work through all of the activities and self-study questions. Museums not participating in MAP may find it helpful to create a team of appropriate participants for each activity.

This activity is one of many designed by MAP as part of the self-study process. It ranks highly with program participants and has been used in over 2,000 assessments.

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Materials

- Copies of your organization's disaster plan (if you have one)
- Copies of the "Emergency Supplies and Information" checklist included in this activity guide

Participants

Suggested participants include the director and a cross-section of functional areas—collections, building and grounds, security, conservation and public relations. As a disaster plan protects the whole museum, and helps to get it up and running again as soon as possible, it is beneficial for all functional areas of the museum to be represented.

Part 1: Check Supplies and Information

Have the participants use the attached "Emergency Supplies and Information" checklist to assess the adequacy of your supplies and information in case of an emergency. This will be used in the next part (for organizations with a disaster plan), and in the summary discussions.

Part 2: Simulate a Disaster

For museums with a disaster preparedness plan, choose one person to serve as the "Disaster Master" (DM). Have the DM (working with others, if appropriate) craft a disaster scenario for something likely to happen at your institution. This could be a regional disaster, such as a flood, hurricane, tornado, or earthquake, or a localized incident, such as a burst water pipe. Identify the people who would need to be involved in a response to the chosen incident. (Include a representative of frontline or maintenance staff likely to be the first to discover a localized problem.) We recommend scheduling at least two hours for this group to run through the exercise.

When the group convenes, explain the simulation rules:

- They will read the introductory scenario, and role-play their response as the disaster response proceeds
- The DM gets to specify all variables that are "fictional" in the scenario (e.g., whose phone line is knocked out? Where, exactly, is the water coming in?)
- Where you can, check whether a given step in the process will really work. You can refer to the completed Emergency Supplies checklist from Part 1 to assess the availability of supplies and information. Other kinds of things you can test with this group: do people know where the shut off-

valve is for the gas? For water? If your phone system depends on electricity, where is the nearest pay phone or cell phone you can use if the power is out?

Proceed with the simulation until you have stabilized the situation. During the simulation, and in the wrap-up discussion, evaluate the following points:

- Was it clear who was in charge during the response?
- Were participants familiar with the contents of your disaster plan?
- Is the plan current, and did it help you deal with the simulated disaster?
- Were there materials or information you did not have available, or procedures you needed that were not included in the plan?
- How did you determine priorities for rescuing or salvaging collections material, records, and equipment?
- Was it clear who would communicate with the press, and what information would be released?

Summary

Have the participants write a summary of the activity findings, simulation, and discussion. Address the following points:

- Was staff familiar with the contents of your disaster plan?
- Did they know where to find it?
- Did each person know what he or she should do in this situation, or did they have to stop and figure it out?
- Was it clear who was in charge?
- Did they find the equipment and information they needed to respond effectively?
- Did you discover any weak points in your preparedness, and did you come to any conclusions about how to address them?

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Emergency Supply and Information Checklist

Which of the following supplies and information can you find at your facility? As you inventory, consider: are they easy to find? Stored in one place or in scattered locations? Do you need a key to get to the necessary supplies? Could you find/retrieve them if the power were out?

Protection for People

__ First-aid kits (check contents)
__ Gloves (rubber and leather)
__ Rubber boots and aprons
__ Safety glasses
__ Hard hats

Phone Numbers/Communication

__ Staff, volunteers and key board members
__ Phone tree (who will call whom?)
__ Police/fire/emergency
__ Contractors/services
__ Insurance representative
__ Radio/TV stations
__ Conservation services
__ Walkie-talkies or cell phone(s)

Basic Cleaning Supplies

__ Plastic trash bags
__ Plastic buckets and trash cans
__ Rolls of paper towels
__ Sponges/rags
__ Mop
__ Broom

Business Supplies

__ Blank checks and purchase orders
__ Stationary and blank forms
__ Duplicates of essential office records off-site (paper &/or electronic)

Facilities Repair and Access

__ Flashlights
__ Batteries
__ Plywood to cover broken windows
__ Basic tool kit (hammer, screwdrivers, nails, screws, saw)

Water and Humidity Control

__ Plastic sheeting
__ Scissors
__ Tape (masking and duct)
__ Dehumidifier
__ Hygrometer
__ Extension cords (long, grounded)
__ Portable electric fans
__ Wet/dry vacuum

Recovery Materials

__ Written collections recovery procedures
__ Duplicate records off-site
__ Clipboards
__ Indelible marking pens
__ Laptop computer
__ Camera and films
__ Carts
__ Plastic crates
__ Plastic wrap
__ Zip-lock baggies or equivalent
__ Blank newsprint
__ Freezer/wax paper

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