



Smithsonian
Anacostia Community Museum

Anacostia Community Museum Deaccession Plan and Workflow

7 May 2013

The ACM Collections Management Policy provides a clear workflow for Deaccessioning collections. This workflow however is insufficient for the scale of the present deaccession action. Below is the proposed workflow for the current deaccession project including specific personnel requirements and actions as well as guiding principals and a proposed timeline for beginning the project.

This workflow is contingent on ACM obtaining permission to return these community and family history items to the original donors and their heirs as an exception to the methods of disposal in its Collections Management Policy.

The collections currently under review for deaccession and eligible for this exception are items that have existed in an accession limbo for more than a decade. Consisting mostly of unaccessioned, deaccessioned-but-not-disposed, exhibition prop and depleted educational collections, these objects have been recognized by staff over many years as not being part of the permanent collection, though they have continued to have been accounted as such. Most collections were donated by local families and consist principally of household and tourist materials with little enduring or monetary value. We will limit any items or groups of items that may be returned to any individual to a total value of \$5000.

Collections from which these items are drawn include the Henry P. Whitehead collection, the Ethel Payne collection and the Charles Qualls collection. These collections all came to the ACM in the aftermath of the original owner's death. ACM staff frequently worked with the donors to transfer contents of entire apartments, basements or storage units to the museum with little mission-driven selection and differentiation. Where there was differentiation of materials, it was merely for accession. Large quantities of items were kept for educational an exhibition use, though never employed as such.

Additional quantities of objects considered for deaccession are exhibit props and depleted educational collections. These items were acquired by the museum exclusively for active use and were never intended for intermingling with the permanent collection. These items were stored with collections, though, so will be individually considered as part of this deaccession action in order to formally expose them to appropriate scrutiny before disposal.

Deaccession Workflow

1. Collections Identification and Description

Collections information contractor Allison Martin is presently evaluating all collections items previously identified for deaccession. Her research and processing of collections has included the identification of items, basic provenance research, description of previous deaccession activities, and basic cataloguing (including naming and photography—Workflow attached as Attachment B).

2. Review of collections for cause for deaccession.

Allie's identification and reporting will result in a report that includes all known information about the item in question, its known provenance and accession information, photographs and preliminary deaccession report information. Items for deaccession will be grouped by accession lot/collection with as thorough a collection description as possible. These reports will be distributed to Collections Committee Members individually for evaluation and addition. In many cases, I will be asking specific committee members to contribute to reporting on specific collections for evaluation by the Committee as a whole. These contributions will include collection descriptions, justifications for initial acquisition, evaluation of material value, and expectations for future research and exhibition use.

3. Presentation to the Collections Committee as a whole

Following this period of review, evaluation materials will be collated and presented to the Collections Committee at dedicated deaccession evaluation sessions. The Committee will individually evaluate each item based on the presented justifications for deaccession. Close minutes will be taken recording discussion and additional justification for deaccession. Additionally, the committee will evaluate the proposed methods for disposal and advise these. From this meeting, the final deaccession report will be compiled for approval by the Collections Manager and Senior Curator for submission to the Director for approval.

4. Disposal Process

Following the presumed approval by the Director the disposal process will be initiated including communication with SI collecting units, communication with local and regional museums with similar missions, preparation for shipment or disposal, communication with original donors and families and full documentation of the disposal. Records for deaccession will be maintained as part of the permanent object record per ACM Collections Management Policy.

- a. Initial disposal will be offered to SI units including the NMAAHC, NMAH, NMAfA and others as appropriate. Distribution of collections data will be through a restricted Google spreadsheet. Notifications will be sent and timed to 4 weeks for inquiry and transfer.
- b. Secondary disposal for items not acquired by SI units will be to local African-American history and culture museums. These institutions are believed to be most interested in the items offered in this deaccession action. The spreadsheet of items will be distributed with a four week window for review and acceptance of collections.

- c. Tertiary disposal will be the proposed return of collections to donors or their heirs. Initial contact will be made based on information on Deeds of Gift and additional information in the accession file. If this information is not current, we will attempt various avenues of research for contacting the individuals, or if they have died, their heirs. All correspondence will be sent via FedEx confirmed delivery and will have a timed response window of four weeks. In the event that donors have multiple heirs, all heirs will be contacted and each heir must positively indicate which of the heirs will receive the items. ACM will not return items if there is any disagreement or dispute between heirs as to where the items should go.
- d. In the event that items are not accepted by any of these three mechanisms, the presumption is that, based on the low value of the items, the next avenue of disposal is witnessed destruction per ACM CMP.

General Observed Categories for Deaccession Collections

1. Items of known provenance selected for deaccession.
2. Items of known provenance previously deaccessioned.
3. Items of known provenance that were never accessioned.
4. Items of known provenance that are exhibition props.
5. Items of unknown provenance and undetermined accession status.

Principles for Deaccession.

1. The ACM has no intention to wantonly divest itself of collections. Whether intended for the first collecting mission of the museum or the new one, we believe items collected and held by the museum have intrinsic value and are essential tools to describing and documenting our constituent communities. Deaccession of collections is undertaken in order to better care for all collections and to provide a tighter representation of the curated description of community history and makeup. The current program for deaccession is strictly addressing previous deaccession identifications and activities in order to review these actions for proper alignment with ACM and SI policy and to formally proceed with deaccession having undertaken all due diligence in research and description of collections.
2. All collections previously identified for deaccession are presumed to be worthy of deaccession. The items previously identified for deaccession are presumed to have been deaccessioned. That being said, for each item or assemblage of items, during the course of review the reviewing staff members must write a statement describing the reason for deaccession. This statement should reflect collecting goals, mission, condition of the items, and the ACM's capacity to care for the items.
3. Items the reviewing staff member believes should not be deaccessioned require a proposal for accession that includes justification for keeping/accepting the object that reflects ACM collecting goals, mission, condition of items and capacity to care for the item. Items being retained with the collection require this statement of

- justification which will be reviewed again as a separate action of the collections committee (because items have frequently already been deaccessioned or were never accessioned, so we'll need to formally admit them to the collection).
4. Per ACM policy, an affirmative recommendation for deaccession to the Director requires the unanimous consent of the Collections Committee. However, given that we are presuming that many of these objects (most, in fact) have *already* been deaccessioned, items that receive a majority vote for deaccession are extraordinarily unlikely to be readmitted to the collection by a later vote of the same body. Items identified for deaccession by a mere majority of the Collections Committee will be submitted to the Director separately and action taken at her discretion. In all cases, the Committee will make every effort to reach a consensus decision.
 5. ACM and SI policies allow for multiple methods of disposal of collections. The nature of the items being deaccessioned in this instance as well as the nature of ACM collections in general, however, narrows the range of options for us. The primary and secondary avenues of disposal will remain transfer to other SI collecting units and to other local, public museums. In the event that no other unit wished to accept the object, the tertiary avenue for disposal of individual items valued at less than \$5,000 will be the return of the item to the donor or the donor's heir. Return to donor as a disposal method is rare, though this method may be approved in appropriate limited circumstances. It is our belief that the unique relationship between a community museum and its constituents requires this option for disposal for these particular items in order to preserve the trust, collaboration and sympathy of the communities which it serves.
 6. In the event that the donor or their heirs cannot be located or do not wish to have the items returned to them, the fourth method for disposal will be sale at auction when the sale of items can be expected to generate an amount that exceeds the costs of preparation and sale. In all cases, standard operating procedure as outlined in SD600, the SD600 Implementation Manual and ACM Collections Policy will be followed.

VIII. DEACCESSIONING AND DISPOSAL

Deaccessioning is the process used to formally approve and record the removal of an object or group of objects from the museum's Accessioned Collections. Disposal is the act of physically removing an object or group of objects from the museum's Accessioned Collections.

Deaccessioning is an important decision which no museum should undertake lightly. A museum exists to serve the public, and to be truly effective, it must maintain the confidence of these beneficiaries. The museum must be ever aware of its role as steward of the collections for the benefit of the public.

As a general rule, objects are acquired for ACM collections only when there is a good faith intention to retain the material for an indefinite period of time. Collections are retained as long as they continue to serve the goals and objectives of the ACM and can be properly maintained and used.

Prudent collections management includes judicious consideration of appropriate deaccessioning and disposal. Periodic review, evaluation, deaccessioning, and disposal of existing collections are intended to refine and improve the quality and relevance of the collections with respect to ACM's mission and purpose. Deaccession and disposal procedures are designed to ensure thoughtful, well-documented consideration of each proposed collection item in the context of the long-term interest of ACM, the general public, and the object itself.

A. Authority and Procedure

All deaccessioning and disposal actions require the approval of the Director, upon recommendation of the Collections Committee. Deaccession procedures are as follows:

1. The Senior Curator will write a proposal to deaccession to the Registrar which
 - a) articulates the reasons for removal of the object(s) from the collections, and
 - b) outlines a specific disposal plan for the object(s).
2. The Registrar will review the proposal to confirm that
 - a) the museum holds title to the object, and
 - b) there are no restrictions bearing on the deaccession and disposal of the item(s) in question. Guidance should be sought from the Office of General Counsel if it is deemed necessary.
3. The Registrar will submit the proposal to deaccession and the proposed disposal plan to the Collections Committee, which must unanimously approve the recommendation.
4. The Director makes the final decision in writing on all deaccession and disposal

proposals.

In accordance with SD 600, if the estimated value of a single object or a group of objects considered for disposal is more than:

- \$10,000, the museum must obtain a written, independent appraisal or informed estimate of fair market value
- \$100,000, the museum must obtain two written, independent appraisals or informed estimates of fair market value and approval of the deaccession and disposal from the National Collections Coordinator, the Office of General Counsel, the Under Secretary for History, Art, and Culture, and the Secretary
- \$500,000, the museum must obtain two written, independent appraisals or informed estimates of fair market value and approval of the deaccession and disposal from National Collections Coordinator, the Office of General Counsel, the Under Secretary for History, Art, and Culture, the Secretary, and the Smithsonian Board of Regents.

B. Deaccessioning Criteria

In determining whether to deaccession an object from the Accessioned Collections, the following criteria should be considered:

- whether the object is relevant to the mission and activities of the museum
- whether the object has research, exhibition, or education potential
- whether the museum is able to preserve the object properly
- whether the object has deteriorated beyond usefulness
- whether the object is duplicative or redundant of collection material
- whether disposal would provide the means for improving or strengthening the collections or otherwise furthering the goals of the museum
- whether the object would be appropriate for consumptive research or educational use

C. Methods of Disposal

The museum may dispose of objects by a variety of methods, including donation, transfer, exchange, sale, repatriation, and destruction, as further explained below. The appropriate method of disposal is determined by the circumstances of each case.

- Offer to other Smithsonian collecting units. In accordance with SD 600, Smithsonian collecting units shall have the right of first refusal for collection items proposed for disposal except as otherwise stipulated by authorizing legislation or other restrictions. Such transfers are without financial compensation, except when a collecting unit disposes of a collection item acquired through purchase.
- Exchange with another museum or public educational institution for an object to be accessioned into the ACM collection.
- Donation to another museum or public educational institution.
- Use as non-accessioned objects for tours, demonstrations, conservation practice, or other educational purpose.
- Witnessed destruction certified by the Senior Curator and the Registrar.

- Sale, preferably at public auction.
- Under no circumstances will ownership of ACM collections be transferred to any Smithsonian Regent or advisory board member, officer, employee, volunteer, or their relatives.

The disposal plan, written by the Registrar, circulated with the proposal to deaccession an object, should address the following questions:

- Have the relevant Smithsonian collecting units been contacted in connection with any right of first refusal?
- If disposal by exchange is recommended, what are the details of the proposed exchange? What is the need for the object to be received in exchange?
- If disposal by sale is recommended, what are the details of the proposed method of sale?
- If donation is recommended, who is the intended recipient and how will distribution be made?
- If destruction is recommended, what is the justification for the recommendation and what are the proposed procedures to be followed?
- If funds are realized from a deaccession, what available objects will be purchased with the funds?
- Does the action warrant notification of the donor, donor's descendants, or other third parties?

If the Registrar believes a sale to be prudent, the disposal plan provided to the Collections Committee will include rationale, alternatives, and method, with an outline of the use of proceeds and the impact of sale upon the museum and the Smithsonian Institution. Proceeds realized from the sale of collections must be designated for additional collection acquisition.

D. Deaccessioning and Disposal Documentation

The records of a deaccession and disposal shall be maintained by the Registrar in the museum's Accession file. These records must include:

1. the original proposal for deaccession
2. the disposal plan
3. the Collections Committee recommendation to the Director
4. the Director's approval and all other required approvals
5. documentation of the disposal, including any correspondence, receipts, or transfer agreements, etc., concerning the donation, transfer, exchange, sale, or destruction of the object.

Appendix B: Exemption approval



Smithsonian
Anacostia Community Museum

May 25, 2013

Memorandum

To: Richard Kurin, Under Secretary for History, Art and Culture
From: Camille Akeju, Director, Anacostia Community Museum *CA*
CC: Bill Tompkins, National Collections Coordinator, National Collections Program
Craig Blackwell, Associate General Counsel, Office of General Counsel
Re: Exception to ACM Collections Management Policy: Deaccession Policy

Richard,

Exceptions to the Collections Management Policy (CMP) of the Anacostia Community Museum (ACM) may be approved by the Director after consultation with the National Collections Coordinator and the Office of General Counsel and approval by the Undersecretary for History, Art, and Culture (ACM CMP, November 2010). ACM has consulted with the National Collections Coordinator and the Office of General Counsel and now seeks your input on and support for our deaccession exception.

Under ACM's CMP, the museum can dispose of deaccessioned collections through transfer to another Smithsonian collecting unit, exchange with another museum or public educational institution, donation to another museum or public educational institution, use by ACM for educational purposes, sale, or witnessed destruction (Section VIII, C. Methods of Disposals).

This exception will allow ACM to deaccession and dispose of a number of collection items that were donated by local families and which consist principally of household and tourist materials with little enduring historical value. These items have existed in an accession limbo for more than a decade. Consisting mostly of unaccessioned, deaccessioned-but-not-disposed, exhibition prop or depleted educational collections, these objects have been recognized by staff over many years as not being part of the permanent collection, though they have continued to have been accounted as such. This deaccession action will both clarify the status of these objects and strengthen ACM's permanent collections.

With respect to disposal, ACM cannot make educational use of these items and they have little value and are not candidates for sale. ACM will first offer the items to other Smithsonian collecting units, in accordance with SD 600, and will then seek to place the items in local and regional museums with similar missions. ACM anticipates, however, that it will not be able to dispose of the majority of the items in this manner. In that event, ACM would be left with witnessed destruction as the only disposal option under its CMP for these community and family history collections.


Unless you have objections, I will approve an exception to the ACM CMP to permit the Museum to return these community and family history items to the original donors or their heirs. This method of disposal will be used tertiary to transfer to other Smithsonian collecting units or donation to local and regional museums with similar missions and collections. ACM acknowledges that, as stated in Section 12.7.10 of the SD 600 Implementation Manual, return to donor as a "disposal method is rare." The ACM Collections Manager believes this method is appropriate in these circumstances given the nature of the specific collections. Items from these collections will have very little meaning to other collecting institutions, but may have personal, family and nostalgic value to the original donors or their heirs. We believe disposal through return to our constituent-donors is consonant with our role as a community museum.

ACM will not return items to any Smithsonian employee, even if the employee is the original donor or an heir of the original donor. Additional safeguards consistent with ethical practice will include limiting any items or groups of items that may be returned to any individual to a total value of \$5,000.00, requiring positive identification of donors or their legal heirs, and advising individuals of the possible tax implications of returns. In consultation with the National Collections Program and the Office of General Counsel, we believe this method of disposal is an appropriate solution to dispose of these deaccessioned collections that do not reflect current mission, programmatic, and collecting priorities in a manner consistent with our status as a community museum and consistent with professional ethical standards.

We are eager to proceed with disposals as part of an ongoing grant from central Collections Care Initiative funding. Please let me know if you require further information or if you have any questions about the collections in question or the deaccession and disposal process.

Following review of this request, I support the deaccession and return of the above stated community and family history collection items or groups of items to the original donor's or the donor's heirs (limiting any items or groups of items that may be returned to any individual to a total value of \$5000), only following an offer to transfer to other Smithsonian collecting units and local or regional museums with similar missions and collections, and believe that an exception to the current disposal methods is warranted in this specific case:

Approve Disapprove


Richard Kurin Date 6/5/2013
Under Secretary for History, Art and Culture