



# concern at the core

Managing  
Smithsonian  
Collections

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Smithsonian  
Institution

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## ACRONYMS

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A&I	Arts and Industries Building (Smithsonian Institution)
AAA	Archives of American Art (Smithsonian Institution)
AAM	American Association of Museums
AAMD	Association of Art Museum Directors
AASLH	American Association for State and Local History
AHHP	Architectural History and Historic Preservation (Smithsonian Institution)
ALA	American Library Association
AM/CAAHC	Anacostia Museum/Center for African American History and Culture (Smithsonian Institution)
ARS	Agricultural Research Service (US Department of Agriculture)
ASC	Association of Systematics Collections
AZA	American Zoo and Aquarium Association
CEI	Collections Evaluation Initiative (The Henry Ford)
CFCH	Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage (Smithsonian Institution)
C-HNDM	Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum (Smithsonian Institution)
CIS	Collections information system
CISMC	Collections Information System Management Committee (Smithsonian Institution)
CPB	Smithsonian Institution Capital Planning Board
CRC	Cultural Resources Center (National Museum of the American Indian, Smithsonian Institution)
cu ft	Cubic foot
DCMS	Department for Culture, Media and Sport (United Kingdom)
DOI	US Department of the Interior
ERP	Enterprise Resource Planning
FASAB	Federal Accounting Standards Advisory Board
FASB	Financial Accounting Standards Board
FSG	Freer and Sackler Galleries of Art (Smithsonian Institution)
FTE	Full-time equivalent
FY	Fiscal year
GPRA	Government Performance and Results Act
HCC	Heritage Collections Council (Australia)
HMSG	Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden (Smithsonian Institution)
HSD	Horticulture Services Division (Office of Facilities Engineering and Operations, Smithsonian Institution)
HSM&M	Hays, Seay, Mattern, and Mattern
HumRRO	Human Resources Research Organization
ICOM	International Council of Museums
IG	Office of the Inspector General (Smithsonian Institution)
IMLS	Institute of Museum and Library Services

IRM	Information resource management
IT	Information technology
JPEG	Joint Photographic Experts Group
lin ft	Linear foot
MGC	Museum and Galleries Commission (United Kingdom)
MHS	Minnesota Historical Society
MLN	Museum Loan Network
MSC	Museum Support Center (Smithsonian Institution)
NARA	National Archives and Records Administration
NASA	National Aeronautics and Space Administration
NASM	National Air and Space Museum (Smithsonian Institution)
NBII	National Biological Information Infrastructure
NCFA	National Collection of Fine Arts (Smithsonian Institution)
NCP	National Collections Program (Smithsonian Institution Archives, Smithsonian Institution)
NEA	National Endowment for the Arts
NEH	National Endowment for the Humanities
NFC	National Finance Center (US Department of Agriculture)
NGA	National Gallery of Art
NHB	Natural History Building (Smithsonian Institution)
NHM	National History Museum (United Kingdom)
NMAfA	National Museum of African Art (Smithsonian Institution)
NMAH	National Museum of American History (Smithsonian Institution)
NMAI	National Museum of the American Indian (Smithsonian Institution)
NMDC	National Museum Directors' Conference (United Kingdom)
NMHT	National Museum of History and Technology (Smithsonian Institution)
NMNH	National Museum of Natural History (Smithsonian Institution)
NPG	National Portrait Gallery (Smithsonian Institution)
NPM	National Postal Museum (Smithsonian Institution)
NPS	National Park Service (US Department of the Interior)
NZP	National Zoological Park (Smithsonian Institution)
OCIO	Office of the Chief Information Officer (Smithsonian Institution)
OFEO	Office of Facilities Engineering and Operations (Smithsonian Institution)
OM 808	Office Memorandum 808, Collections Management Policies (Smithsonian Institution)
OMB	Office of Management and Budget
OP&A	Office of Policy and Analysis (Smithsonian Institution)

OPMB	Office of Planning, Management, and Budget (Smithsonian Institution)
SAA	Society of American Archivists
SAAM	Smithsonian American Art Museum (Smithsonian Institution)
SAO	Smithsonian Astrophysical Observatory (Smithsonian Institution)
SCMRE	Smithsonian Center for Materials Research and Education (Smithsonian Institution)
SD 600	Smithsonian Directive 600, Collections Management
SERC	Smithsonian Environmental Research Center (Smithsonian Institution)
SFS	Smithsonian Financial System
SIA	Smithsonian Institution Archives
SIC	Smithsonian Institution Council
SIL	Smithsonian Institution Libraries
SIRIS	Smithsonian Institution Research Information Systems
SITES	Smithsonian Institution Traveling Exhibition Services
SPS	Smithsonian Photographic Services
sq ft	Square foot
STRI	Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute
TIFF	Tagged image file format
TMS	The Museum System
UHC	Steven F. Udvar-Hazy Center (National Air and Space Museum, Smithsonian Institution)
USDA	US Department of Agriculture
USGS	US Geological Survey (US Department of the Interior)
USNM	United States National Museum (Smithsonian Institution)

## COLLECTIONS MANAGEMENT DEFINITIONS AND TERMS

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The following terms are used in this report as defined here. These definitions are generally consistent with those found in Smithsonian Directive 600, Collections Management (SD 600).

**ACCESS** — the ability of the general public, scholars, and Smithsonian staff to use Smithsonian collections and related information.

- ∞ Physical access denotes the ability to have direct contact with collections.
- ∞ Intellectual access means the ability to obtain information about collection items, either onsite or electronically.

**ACCESSION COLLECTION** — a collection category that contains items that a unit legally owns, has formally accessioned, and intends to retain for an indefinite period of time.

**ACCESSIONING** — the formal process for recording the addition of an item or group of items to a unit's accession collections.

**ACCOUNTABILITY** — formal responsibility for ensuring that collections management is carried out consistent with Smithsonian and professional policies, practices, and standards and that performance objectives are accomplished.

**ACQUISITION** — (a) the act of gaining legal title to a collection item or group of items that may subsequently be accessioned or designated for non-accession status (such as educational, study, or consumptive use); or (b) an item that a collecting unit has obtained and added to its collections.

**ARCHIVES** — (a) the noncurrent records of an organization or person, preserved because of their continuing value; or (b) an office responsible for acquiring, preserving, and providing access to such records.

**CATALOGUE** — a set of records that identifies, names, classifies, numbers, and describes each item (or sometimes group of items, such as a lot) in a unit's collections.

Catalogue records contain *enhanced (enriched) information* (such as social, cultural, and historical context, provenance, scientific characteristics, and significance) that goes beyond the documentation in registrarial records (see also *Registration*).

CATALOGUING — a methodical classification of collection items, usually with descriptive detail, that systematically integrates intrinsic physical and museum-generated transaction information with cultural, historic, and scientific information.

CIS — see *Collections information system*.

COLLECTING PLAN — a framework for guiding acquisition and disposal decisions. Typically the plan addresses factors such as the desired size and composition of collections relative to a collecting unit's mission, resources, and use priorities. See also *Collecting scope statement*.

COLLECTING SCOPE STATEMENT — a document that specifies the parameters (such as subject, geographical location, and time period), goals, and objectives for collecting by a collecting unit. The parameters derive from the unit's mission, programs, existing collections, and users. The statement may also define the types of items that will be acquired to fulfill the purposes of the collection.

COLLECTING UNIT — an entity that acquires and manages collections. Per SD 600: a Smithsonian museum, archive, library, or research office that has been specifically delegated the authority to acquire and manage collections.

COLLECTION — a group of items with a common base of association (such as geography, theme, donor, or culture).

COLLECTIONS CARE — activities intended to protect the long-term integrity of collection holdings and their associated documentation. Typical activities include identifying, recording, and locating collection items; storing them in safe environments; conserving or restoring them when necessary; ensuring safe and responsible use; and routinely assessing their condition. See also *Conservation, Condition assessment, Inventory, Inventory plan, Maintenance, Preservation, and Profiling*.

COLLECTIONS CARE STAFF — the personnel responsible for *Collections care*. Examples of collections care job titles are archivist, librarian, conservator, registrar, museum registration specialist, museum/library/archives specialist (conservation), museum/library/archives technician (conservation), and museum technician (general).

COLLECTIONS DOCUMENTATION — see *Collections information*.

COLLECTIONS INFORMATION — documentation of the intellectual significance, physical characteristics, and legal status of collection items and the collections management processes and transactions they undergo. Documentation of collections is an ongoing process, with information residing in a combination of manual files, electronic information systems, and media formats. In this report, the terms “collections information” and “collections documentation” are used interchangeably, unlike in SD 600, which gives them distinct definitions.

There are two broad categories of collections information:

- ∞ Registrarial, which encompasses administrative information on both owned collection items and items temporarily in a unit’s custody (see *Registration*).
- ∞ Catalogue, which encompasses information that goes beyond registrarial documentation (see *Catalogue*).

COLLECTIONS INFORMATION SYSTEM (CIS) — a central, computerized system (including hardware, software, and databases) for maintaining organized information on the collections of one or more collecting units for purposes of collections management. The system also provides access to this information by Smithsonian staff, outside scholars, and the public.

COLLECTIONS MANAGEMENT — the deliberate acquisition, maintenance, preservation, documentation, provision of access, and disposal of collections. Collections management includes the universe of collections-specific functions, ranging from routine physical care through development of high-level collections policy.

**COLLECTIONS MANAGEMENT PLAN** — an operational document that sets forth how a unit will carry out its collections management policy and the collections-related elements of its strategic plan. The plan covers the universe of collections-specific functions and presents short- and long-term strategies, priorities, initiatives, performance targets and measures, and timelines.

**COLLECTIONS MANAGEMENT POLICY** — a detailed written statement that identifies the purpose, goals, and collecting scope (see *Collecting scope statement*) of a collecting unit, explains how these influence the unit's collections activities, and outlines standards of accountability for care, access, and other functions.

**COLLECTIONS RESEARCH** — a process through which items are studied, identified, and organized according to discipline-specific principles. The objectives of this process are to verify, augment, and enrich (enhance) existing documentation for these items, as well as to increase knowledge within a discipline more generally. See also *Catalogue*.

**COLLECTIONS RESEARCH STAFF** — the personnel with primary responsibility for documenting collections, as well as performing some supervisory functions. Examples of collections research job titles are archaeologist, museum curator, botanist, zoologist, museum specialist (anthropology), museum technician (anthropology), and museum specialist (general).

**CONDITION ASSESSMENT** — a systematic, regular determination of the physical state of collection items or groups of items, including the nature and extent of damage, deterioration, and risk conditions.

**CONSERVATION** — an examination of the condition of items, assessment of treatment options, provision of physical and chemical treatment, and complete documentation of such activities (see also *Collections care* and *Preventive conservation*).

**COST RECOVERY** — a fee established by a service provider that is intended to recoup all or part of the costs of providing a service, without generating a profit. The costs in question can be direct (for example, postage fees) or indirect (for example, labor costs).

**CYCLICAL INVENTORY** — an inventory that occurs according to a predetermined schedule (see also *Inventory*). A cyclical inventory may involve an entire collection or a part, determined using statistically sound sampling methods.

**DEACCESSIONING** — a process used to formally approve and record the removal of a collection item or group of items from a unit's accession collections (see also *Accession collection*).

**DIGITAL RECORDS** — documentation stored on and retrievable only through electronic media. Synonymous with electronic records.

**DIGITIZATION** — the process of capturing both text and image information on collections in electronic form.

**DISPOSAL** — the process of physically removing deaccessioned or other non-accession collection items from a collecting unit, often accompanied by transfer of title to another entity.

**ELECTRONIC RECORDS** — see *Digital records*.

**ENHANCED (ENRICHED) INFORMATION** — documentation about a collection item or group of items that goes beyond registrarial information. See *Catalogue and Registration*.

**INVENTORY** — (a) an itemized listing of a unit's collection items, groups, or lots and their current physical location; or (b) the process of developing and maintaining such an itemized listing. An inventory must provide sufficient information to permit a unit to maintain physical control over its collections and should be updated regularly (see *Inventory plan*). Per SD 600, the minimum inventory information that should be available for each item or group of items is an identifier number, brief identifying description, and current physical location.

**INVENTORY PLAN** — a document that sets forth methods, cycles, and procedures for inventories. Per SD 600, the inventory plan must identify and provide for regular inventories of valuable, sensitive, and significant collections. See also *Inventory* and *Cyclical inventory*.



ITEM(S) — any object, document, or other material acquired for accession, non-accession, supplementary, or study collections. (“Item” is also used as a unit of measure for some types of archival collections.)

LOAN — the temporary physical transfer of an item(s) for an agreed purpose and subject to specific conditions relating to care and use, all of which are spelled out in a loan agreement.

MAINTENANCE — the routine actions that support collection preservation and access, such as monitoring storage and exhibition conditions, organizing a collection in storage, and performing general housekeeping.

METADATA — “data about data” that enable end users to conduct comprehensive searches efficiently and with confidence across multiple databases. Metadata provide concise information on what is in the databases and employ common terms across databases — key terms are used to describe, locate, and manage information and objects (documents, databases, collections, computer programs, etc.). See also *Thesaurus*.

METADATA STANDARDS — define what types of information belong in a database and the structure of the information. See *Metadata*.

OBJECT(S) — three-dimensional items (such as biological specimens, historical artifacts, and works of art) that are part of accession and non-accession collections.

OPPORTUNITY COST — the implicit cost (opportunities or benefits forgone) that result from a decision to pursue a particular course of action rather than an alternative course of action.

PLAN — a formulated or organized method of accomplishing a goal or completing a task.

POLICY — a principle or set of principles that establishes directions, guides decisions, and provides a framework for plans and related actions.

PORTAL — a gateway or point of entry that provides access to databases at multiple collecting units (see also *Metadata* and *Collections information system*).

**PRESERVATION** — the protection and stabilization of collections and associated information through a coordinated set of activities aimed at minimizing chemical, physical, and biological deterioration, and at preventing loss of intellectual, aesthetic, and monetary value.

**PREVENTIVE CARE** — see *Preventive conservation*.

**PREVENTIVE CONSERVATION** — a holistic approach that focuses on establishing and maintaining conditions conducive to the long-term protection of collections, rather than the treatment of individual items. See also *Conservation*.

**PROCESSING BACKLOGS** — acquisitions over which a unit does not have full control because registrarial information is not available (see *Registration*).

**PROFILING** — a systematic evaluation of a unit's collections using a set of variables such as condition, arrangement, and level of documentation. Profiling yields quantifiable measures of the status of collections care, documentation, and access.

**PUBLIC TRUST** — a fiduciary relationship whereby a trustee holds property that must be administered for the benefit of the public. In the case of collections at the Smithsonian, the trustees are either the Smithsonian Institution or the individual collecting units.

**REGISTRATION** — (a) the process of developing and maintaining an immediate and permanent means of identifying, locating, and tracking the transactions and movements of an item for which a collecting unit is responsible; or (b) the logical and systematic organization of documentation and provision of access to that information. Examples of registration information are acquisition details, legal status, brief physical description sufficient for identification, location, condition, and processes and transactions undergone since acquisition.

REGISTRATION SYSTEM — embodies the central file of records for all collections in the custody of the collecting unit. The records contain such documentation as information on the acquisition process, incoming and outgoing loans, and items left in the unit's temporary custody. Per SD 600, each unit is required to have registration information on each item (or group of items) sufficient to know the full content of the collections in its custody, to maintain physical control, and to ensure long-term preservation.

SIGNIFICANCE ASSESSMENT — determination of the relative importance of collection items or groups of items to a unit's mission and/or programs. The assessment can be conducted independently or as a variable in *Profiling*.

SPECIMEN — a biological organism (or part of one) or naturally occurring material.

STANDARD — a measure agreed upon within the museum, library, or archive profession to which collecting units are expected to conform, and by which professional practice can be assessed.

STEWARDSHIP — sound and responsible management of collections entrusted to a collecting unit's care. Collections stewardship is carried out through the systematic development, implementation, and review of policies, plans, procedures, and practices to meet the goals and purposes of the collecting unit and its collections.

THESAURUS — a list of common subject headings, terms, words, or descriptors that collecting units use in their electronic databases to facilitate searches by users across multiple databases (see also *Metadata*).

