

## **SMITHSONIAN COLLECTIONS MANAGEMENT GUIDELINES**

**Board of Regents**

**May 10, 1999**

### **I. INTRODUCTION**

#### **A. Purpose**

This Statement provides guidelines and direction for the establishment and maintenance of Smithsonian Institution policy regarding collections management. The Smithsonian develops and adheres to authorized, written collections management policies to ensure the proper physical care and preservation of its collections; provide for the documentation of their identification, location, condition, and provenance; and assure maximum accessibility consistent with their preservation. To carry out these guidelines, the Secretary will establish appropriate directives to provide more detailed policies and requirements to be followed by all Smithsonian units with responsibility for collections.

#### **B. Background**

The Smithsonian develops, maintains, preserves, researches, interprets, and, in the case of living plants and animals, propagates, collections of art, artifacts, and natural specimens. The acquisition, preservation, management, and study of collections have been fundamental to the Smithsonian's mission since its creation, and have been the foundation upon which its reputation rests. Assembled over the past 150 years, the national collections are central to many of the core activities and to the vitality and significance of the Smithsonian. Collections serve as an intellectual base for scholarship, discovery, exhibition, and education. Collections also provide content for Smithsonian ventures such as publishing, licensing, and media projects.

Each Smithsonian collecting unit maintains its own unique collection, purpose, character, and role in the increase and diffusion of knowledge. Among the vast collections are irreplaceable icons of the nation, examples of common life, and scientific material vital to the study of the world's natural and cultural heritage. Smithsonian collections comprise a diverse array, including: works of art, historical artifacts, specimens of life and physical sciences, living animals, photographs, moving images, archival documents, electronic data, audio records, books, and manuscripts. Together, they preserve the past, increase our understanding of society and the natural world in which we live, and support the research that expands human knowledge in the arts, humanities, and sciences alike. The scope, depth, and unparalleled quality of these collections make it imperative to ensure that they are properly preserved and made accessible for current and future generations to behold, enjoy, and study.

### **C. Authority and Responsibility**

The acquisition and possession of collections imposes legal and ethical obligations to provide proper management, preservation and care for the collections and their associated information. To carry out these obligations, the Smithsonian is responsible for assuring that:

- & the scope of each collection supports the Institution and collecting unit mission,
- & collections growth is balanced with available resources,
- & personnel, facilities, equipment, and other resources are reasonably allocated to meet the on-going needs of the collections, and
- & prudent collections management policies are established, implemented, and monitored.

The Board of Regents has ultimate authority for Smithsonian collections, which are dedicated to furthering the Smithsonian's mission for the increase and diffusion of knowledge. The Board of Regents delegates to the Secretary operational authority for the collections. The Secretary is responsible for establishing and overseeing appropriate policies and programs and ensuring compliance with applicable laws and regulations. The Secretary may delegate to the Provost, Under Secretary, collecting unit directors, and other appropriate staff the responsibility to implement established policies and carry out the direct management and care of Smithsonian collections.

A collecting unit may have an advisory Board or Commission, created by the Board of Regents or pursuant to federal statutes, to provide advice and assistance to the Board of Regents, Secretary, and collecting unit directors concerning collections management issues. The role of advisory Boards and Commissions with respect to collections shall be specified in bylaws approved by the Board of Regents. By statute or legal agreement, the Boards of the Archives of American Art, Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, and National Museum of the American Indian have been given sole authority for specified collections management decisions. This authority shall be carried out in accordance with the general policies of the Board of Regents and in applicable directives established by the Secretary to implement these guidelines.

### **D. Ethics**

The Smithsonian recognizes and accepts its fiduciary responsibility to provide proper management, preservation, and use of the collections and associated information it holds for the benefit of the public. Smithsonian staff have legal, ethical, and professional obligations to maintain high levels of honesty, integrity, and loyalty to the Institution. These standards of performance are set forth in the

Smithsonian Standards of Conduct (Smithsonian Directive 103) and professional codes of ethics. All collections management activities must adhere to applicable standards of conduct and professional ethics.

**E. Accounting for Collections**

Smithsonian collections are held for public exhibition, education, or research in furtherance of public service rather than financial gain. They are protected, kept unencumbered, cared for, and preserved, and are subject to the requirement that proceeds from sales of collections are to be used to acquire other collection items. Accordingly, the Smithsonian does not treat its collections as “assets” for purposes of reporting in its financial statements. The Smithsonian adheres to the applicable financial reporting standards governing collections held in public trust.

**II. POLICY GUIDELINES**

Applicable Smithsonian directives on collections management shall include the following policies. Prudent exceptions to these policies may be permitted in appropriate cases when in the best interests of the Smithsonian. The Secretary will establish guidelines and a process for review and approval of requests for exceptions.

**A. Acquisition**

Collections may be acquired only in accordance with established authority and only when consistent with applicable law and professional ethics. Applicable federal, state, local, and international laws, treaties, and regulations will be observed and documented. Each collecting unit must ensure documentation of legal title of collection items acquired.

All collections acquired must be in compliance with the Smithsonian Institution Policy on Museum Acquisitions (May 9, 1973) and Smithsonian Policy on Collecting Biological Specimens (February, 1992).

**B. Deaccession & Disposal**

Collections may be deaccessioned and disposed of only in accordance with established authority and only when consistent with applicable law and professional ethics. Applicable federal, state, local, and international laws, treaties, and regulations and any other applicable restrictions will be observed and documented.

Prudent collections management includes judicious consideration of appropriate deaccessioning and disposal. The periodic review, evaluation, and deaccessioning and disposal of existing collections is intended to refine and improve the quality

and relevance of the collections with respect to the Institution's mission and purpose.

The Secretary will establish guidelines and a process for review and approval of proposed deaccessioning of collections, which shall include approval by the Board of Regents of significant deaccessions. The Secretary will report annually to the Board on all deaccessions that have occurred during the reporting period.

Smithsonian collecting units shall have a 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 museum disposes of a collection item acquired through purchase.

Proceeds realized from the disposal of collection items must be designated for additional collection acquisitions.

### **C. Native American Human Remains and Objects**

Smithsonian repatriation of Native American and Native Hawaiian human remains and objects is governed by the requirements set forth in the National Museum of the American Indian Act, 20 U.S.C. § 80q et seq. (1989), as amended (the "NMAI Act"). The Secretary will establish guidelines for implementation of the requirements of the NMAI Act.

Any Native American or Native Hawaiian collections whose repatriation is not required by the NMAI Act shall be managed in accordance with generally applicable directives established by the Secretary.

### **D. Preservation**

The Smithsonian shall provide the necessary preservation, protection, and security for all collections acquired, borrowed, and in the custody of the Institution including their associated information. Activities that involve collections must not compromise the preservation requirements of the collection items.

### **E. Risk Management & Security**

The Smithsonian shall endeavor to minimize and control the level of risk of loss or damage to collections through established collections management practices.

Except in extraordinary circumstances, the Smithsonian does not insure its own collections while they are in the care and possession of the Smithsonian. Collections on loan to the Smithsonian and Smithsonian collections on loan to or in the custody of others will be insured in accordance with guidelines and directives established by the Secretary.

**F. Inventory**

In order to safeguard Smithsonian assets, assure compliance with applicable laws and regulations, and promote efficient use of resources, Smithsonian collecting units must establish and implement a cyclical inventory plan and maintain accurate and current inventory records in accordance with the guidelines and directives established by the Secretary.

**G. Access**

The Smithsonian will provide reasonable open and equal access to its collections and collections information consistent with its stewardship responsibilities. Physical and intellectual access to the collections must be balanced against preservation and protection concerns. Access to collections and collections information may be restricted due to resource limitations, security, object availability, intellectual property requirements, applicable restrictions, and preservation constraints.

**H. Loans**

As a general rule, Smithsonian collections will only be lent for research, educational and other non-profit purposes. Smithsonian collections may not be lent for commercial purposes or private pecuniary gain. All loans to or from the Smithsonian must adhere to applicable federal, state, local, and international laws, treaties, and regulations.

Collection loans that are part of an affiliation with another organization shall be governed by the Affiliation Policy adopted by the Board of Regents in September 1996 and applicable affiliation guidelines established by the Secretary.

**I. Documentation**

The Smithsonian seeks to provide the widest dissemination of collections information consistent with the stewardship responsibilities for its collections, associated information, and intellectual property rights. Collecting units must maintain documentation of the historical, scientific or aesthetic significance; legal status; provenance; and the use and management of its collections and collections in their custody, in accordance with directives established by the Secretary.

The Secretary will establish guidelines and standards for collections documentation that will ensure appropriate legal and intellectual control of the collections.

**J. Intellectual Property Rights**

Smithsonian collections may be subject to intellectual property rights that may be owned by the Smithsonian or others. The Smithsonian will manage its collections in a manner to avoid any infringement of intellectual property rights while promoting the widest possible dissemination of information about the collections.