TAKING STOCK OF ROLLING STOCK:
HOW TO CONDUCT A COLLECTIONS INVENTORY

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WHY CONDUCT A COLLECTIONS INVENTORY?

- If you know what you have, you can take better care of it.
- Primary responsibility of a museum is preservation and care of objects.
  - Accountability of objects is paramount to this responsibility
- Ensure your collections are within scope
- Identify most valued items
ADDITIONAL REASONS TO INVENTORY:

- Opportunity to update locations
- Identify conservation needs
- Basis for planning and budgeting projects
- Retrieve information after a loss
- Aid in security
- Assess available space
- Aid in research
TYPES OF INVENTORY

- Wall-to-Wall or Complete
  - Entire museum, every object
- Section-by-Section
  - Select a group/type on which to focus
- Spot
  - Checks accuracy of records, very limited
WALL-TO-WALL SHOULD BE CONDUCTED FIRST

- Then sections and spot-checks are done on a schedule to stay on top of changes in the collection.
WHAT IS AN IDEAL INVENTORY SCHEDULE?

• Annually, if possible
  • At the very least, rotating sectional inventories should happen every year.

• Loans should **absolutely** be inventoried annually
  • Helps avoid losing contact with lender
  • Avoids abandoned loan issues

• Areas constantly used should be inventoried annually- such as processing and registration areas and exhibits prep.
  • Wherever objects temporarily pass through
WHERE TO BEGIN?

It’s possible for one person to conduct an inventory...

But, ............
that .............
is .............
very ..................
slow ............
and ..................
tedious.

SO...
THINGS TO CONSIDER

- More broad in scope, the more time & resources will be needed.
- BUT, the broader the inventory, the more it will pay off later.
QUESTIONS TO ADDRESS

• Will it be possible to close galleries or “freeze” storage areas?
• Will it be possible to limit activities, or must the museum continue with business as usual?
• Can you dedicate existing staff/volunteers to the inventory, or should temporary, separate help be acquired?
• Do records exist for each object electronically, or will you be adding many new records for uncatalogued things?
• Is there enough room in storage to examine things in situ, or must they be moved for examination?
• Will you include accessories, like mounts and frames?
MORE QUESTIONS...

- If photos will be included, what kind of quality will you need?
- Will data be directly input into computers, or done on paper and entered later?
- Will inventory staff be trained to do everything or will specific people be assigned specific tasks?
- How will previously undocumented objects be numbered?
- What equipment do you already have, and what needs to be procured?
  - Measuring tapes
  - Gloves
  - Pencils
  - Clipboards
  - Cameras
DEVELOP SET GOALS

- Suggested minimum information needed for each object
  - Number
  - Name
  - Location
  - Dimensions
  - Photo
  - Quick Description
  - Condition assessment?
PRINT A LOCATION WORKSHEET

- Create a list of items that live in a certain box, on a shelf, etc.
- This will be your basis for comparison
HOW DO I DO THAT?

• Search a specific location - it shouldn’t matter what kind of database you have
• Print a list of just that location
• You may want to print all locations ahead of time
WORK BOTH DIGITALLY AND MANUALLY

• Enter directly into computer database, and also
• Have a paper check-off sheet
  • Know where left off
  • Take notes for needs
DEVELOP A CODE SYSTEM

- Object Needs
  - Photo
  - Conservation
  - Mount
  - Numbering
  - Permanent Location
  - Cataloging
DEVELOP GUIDELINES FOR STAFF

- Vocabulary used in records
- Object handling procedures
- Condition assessment guidelines and nomenclature
- How to document objects with multiple parts
- How to document objects without numbers or other information
DO A TEST RUN

• Estimate average time it takes to go through one object.
• Then can calculate time needed for entire inventory.
  • You of course may have to adjust as you go.
ONCE YOU’RE READY TO BEGIN: ESTABLISH AN INVENTORY TEAM

- Reader
- Recorder
- Handler
• Reads existing information from catalog or ledger
RECORIDER

• Enters new information into system or on paper
HANDLER

- Handles and moves objects around
RECONCILING RECORDS

- Ideally, you’ll have a 1-to-1 comparison
  - Object have records
  - Records have objects
WHEN THINGS DON’T MATCH

- If undocumented objects are found, then assign a number
  - Temporary ID Number
  - Found in Collection Number
FORMULA FOR GOOD INVENTORY MAINTENANCE

Record object movement when it is moved +

Update collection records ASAP +

Do this 100% of the time =

ACCURATE INVENTORY
HELP & ADVICE

• Connecting to Collections:

• American Alliance of Museums:
  • [www.aam-us.org](http://www.aam-us.org)

• Museum-L:
  • [LISTSERV@HOME.EASE.LSOFT.COM](http://LISTSERV@HOME.EASE.LSOFT.COM)
  • Put “SUBSCRIBE MUSEUM-L” in the subject line
QUESTIONS?
THANK YOU!

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