SAMPLE DOCUMENT

Type of Document: Collection Management Policy

Museum Name: Wheelwright Museum of the American Indian

Budget Size: $250,000 to $999,000

Date: 2017

Museum Type: Ethnically/Culturally/Tribally Specific

Governance Type: Private, Non-Profit

Additional notes about this document:

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COLLECTIONS MANAGEMENT POLICY
WHEELWRIGHT MUSEUM OF THE AMERICAN INDIAN
REVISED MAY 2017

I. Acquisitions

The core of the Wheelwright Museum’s collection was developed by Mary Wheelwright and Hastiin Klah and consists of permanent representations of sand paintings rendered on paper by various artists, sand painting tapestries woven by Klah and his nieces, and sound recordings and transcriptions of Navajo religious ceremonies.

Other collections, if developed systematically, have the potential to make the Wheelwright Museum a unique and essential resource for the study of native Southwestern art and culture. In addition to the Klah tapestries, the museum’s textile collection includes contemporary Pueblo textiles commissioned and purchased through the Kate Peck Kent memorial fund, and contemporary Navajo pictorial textiles collected in the field. The Wheelwright holds an important collection of Navajo pottery, consisting of approximately 200 pieces dating from circa 1800 to the present. The archives contain a number of important holdings including the papers of Mary Wheelwright, Washington Matthews, Berard Haile, Byron Harvey III, and John Adair. Photographic holdings include materials from Mary Wheelwright and Washington Matthews, and work by John Adair, Laura Adams Armer, Laura Gilpin, Edward S. Curtis, and others. Over the past decade, the museum has focused on building its collections relating to Navajo and Pueblo silversmithing, lapidary, and related traditions, and has succeeded in developing one of the country’s strongest resources for the study and exhibition of these materials. The careful and selective acquisition of new collections will allow the museum to strengthen its holdings in these areas over the long term, and to avoid problems associated with overcrowding and limited resources for preservation and care.

In establishing a policy of selective acquisitions the Wheelwright strives:
To maximize its ability to care for its collections according to the highest standards of preventive conservation and collections management

To avoid duplicating the efforts of other New Mexico museums and archives by collecting and documenting areas marginally covered or unaddressed by other institutions

To enhance the value of the Wheelwright’s collections to its constituency

To establish itself as an essential destination for anyone interested in Native American art

The Wheelwright’s collecting priorities are as follows:

- The museum was at the time of its founding, and has remained, devoted to the study of Navajo culture. Materials documenting and produced by Navajo people are of primary interest.

- The museum collects materials documenting and made by people of New Mexico’s Rio Grande Pueblos and other native peoples of New Mexico.

- The museum may collect materials documenting or made by other native peoples of the Southwest.

- The museum collects materials documenting and made by Native American artists whose work has been exhibited in its galleries.

- The museum collects primarily contemporary objects in traditional media such as jewelry, textiles, basketry, folk art, and pottery, but may also collect contemporary work in non-traditional media.
- The museum makes a special effort to strengthen its collections of historic and contemporary jewelry and textiles, its manuscript, photographic, and audiovisual archives, and its collection of historic Navajo pottery.

- The museum does not collect historic Pueblo pottery.

- Although it continues to hold collections pertaining to Navajo religion, as described above, the museum no longer actively collects ceremonial materials. With regard to access and care of existing collections pertaining to Navajo religion, the Wheelwright maintains open communication with the Historic Preservation Office of the Navajo Tribe.

- The museum does not own or collect prehistoric materials, human remains, or associated or unassociated funerary objects.

The Wheelwright Museum acquires collections materials according to the following conditions and procedures:

- Materials accepted for the collections must be relevant to and consistent with the museum’s mission, purpose, and activities. They must advance the research, exhibition, or educational goals of the museum.

- The museum will acquire only those materials for which it can provide preservation and care according to the highest professional standards.

- The museum must be reasonably certain that materials placed in the permanent collections have been acquired in full compliance with laws and regulations of the country or countries of origin, of the United States, and of the relevant states, tribal governments, and local communities within the United States. The museum operates in compliance with the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act [NAGPRA]. The museum will not knowingly acquire materials whose circumstances
of collection were unethical or contrary to the goals and good practices of the museum or the museum profession.

- Collections materials may be acquired through donation, purchase, or exchange with other institutions.

- The director and/or the curator will recommend materials to the Collections Committee of the Board of Trustees for acceptance into the permanent collections. Only materials that have been determined by the director and/or curator to meet the museum’s criteria for acquisition will be presented to the Committee. Immediately following the Committee’s acceptance, the incoming materials are presented to the full board for final approval. Trustees are given an opportunity to view the items before voting.

- All acquisitions must be accompanied by valid legal title. A legal instrument of conveyance setting forth an adequate description of the materials and the precise conditions of transfer must accompany all gifts, purchases, and exchanges, and must be kept on file at the museum.

- Donations of collections materials should be made without restrictions. Restricted donations may be accepted if there is compelling reason to do so and if they are approved through normal museum procedures. Every effort should be made to place a reasonable time limit on the restrictions and to define the conditions for their termination. All mutually agreed-upon restrictions should be completely documented and retained as part of the record pertaining to the donation.
Acquisitions Checklist (Example)

Donor Name________________________________ Accession No.________________

Arrival of potential acquisition:
  { } Assign pending number for tracking and identification purposes
  { } Log information in day book
  { } Add to Collection Committee agenda for next meeting
  { } Find temporary location for items and clearly mark their status as pending

After acceptance by committee:
  { } Note acceptance date in day book
  { } Send Deed of Gift and thank you letter to donor
  { } Create accession record in FileMaker Pro

Begin cataloging and processing checklist…
II. Deaccession

In order to improve the quality of its permanent collections, the museum reserves the right to selectively edit its holdings. The director and the curator may recommend the deaccession of items according to the following criteria:

- Objects that are not within the scope of the museum’s collecting priorities, as outlined above.

- Objects that the director and the curator agree are irrelevant to or inconsistent with the museum’s mission, purpose, and activities; or that fail to advance the research, exhibition, or educational goals of the museum.

- Objects whose condition has deteriorated to the extent that their continued care represents a drain on available resources (including funds, space, and staff time), or whose presence endangers the condition of other objects in the collections.

- Objects whose valid legal title is demonstrated to reside with parties other than the museum, or for which disposition outside the museum is determined to be appropriate (for example, materials claimed by tribal groups under NAGPRA.)

- The deaccession of objects from the permanent collections shall be carried out according to the following procedures:

  - Before any object is deaccessioned from the collection, the curatorial department staff will make a reasonable effort to determine that the museum is free to release the object. In the case of restricted donations, mandatory conditions will be observed until reasonable efforts have been made to contact the donors or their heirs. If there is a question as to the intent or the force of the restrictions, the museum will seek the advice of legal council.
• Recommendations for deaccession are presented to the collections committee by the director and the curator. If approved by the committee, the recommendations are then presented to the board of trustees for final approval.

• The curatorial department staff will record and file all information regarding the disposal of an object with the original records. Full disclosure of deaccessioning transactions must be made available to the public upon request.

• Objects approved for deaccession will be disposed of in the manner that best serves the interest of the Wheelwright Museum. Objects may be disposed of through exchange with or sale to another institution, through public sale, or through donation to another institution. Before offering objects for sale to the public, the museum will make reasonable efforts to place them with other institutions; however the benefit to the Wheelwright Museum’s own collections is the primary consideration in deaccessioning and disposing of objects. Proceeds from the sale of any deaccessioned objects will be directed toward Wheelwright Museum acquisitions or toward the conservation and care of the Wheelwright’s collections.

• The deaccession of materials for the purpose of returning them to Indian peoples will be carried out through consultation with tribal councils or other official representatives, and in conformity with stated museum policy, all pertinent legal regulations, and the Wheelwright Museum’s responsibility as a public trust.
III. Collections care and management

It is the responsibility of the director and the curator to ensure that the collections are adequately documented, protected, and conserved given the resources available.

No collection item shall be removed from its permanent location without proper documentation of the movement.

Proper care and protective measures shall be taken to ensure the safety of the collections at all times.

The curator shall ensure that all collections records are created, completed, updates, maintained, and preserved in keeping with professional museum standards.

The curator is responsible for monitoring the condition of collections objects, including conducting periodic condition surveys, and for seeking appropriate conservation treatment when necessary.

The curator shall maintain an inventory control system. An inventory of the collections shall be performed annually.

Upon discovery of a missing item or the suspicion of such a loss all relevant records and storage locations will be reviewed to determine if actual loss has occurred. If a loss has occurred the director and local police are contacted immediately.

The curator shall maintain a procedures manual on all aspects of collections care and management.
IV. Loans

The Wheelwright Museum makes loans of objects and other materials to qualified institutions and individuals. Loans are subject to the following conditions:

- The curator and the director are responsible for decisions concerning loans of Wheelwright Museum material. Loans are made at their discretion, and are subject to their approval. Most loans are made to institutions that can demonstrate the ability to provide proper care for museum materials. Prospective borrowers will be required to provide a Standard Facilities Report, as well as any other documentation deemed necessary by the curator and the director.

- On rare occasions, museum materials will be released solely to qualified individuals who are under contract to the Wheelwright Museum for work associated with museum programs. Such work typically includes conservation, photography, or research that cannot be performed at the museum. The release of materials to these individuals is done at the discretion of the curator and the director, and is solely for the purpose of furthering Wheelwright Museum programs. Formal loan agreements as well as condition reports, including documentary photographs, are completed by the curator and the collections manager prior to the release of, and upon the return of, any museum materials.

- Loans of museum materials are usually made for a period of one year or less. Requests for longer-term loans will be reviewed by the curator and the director on a case-by-case basis. Loan extensions must be reviewed annually, and must be documented in writing. The collections manager is responsible for monitoring deadlines associated with loans.

- If a loan is made at the borrower’s request, the borrower will cover all costs associated with packing, shipping, appraisal, and conservation. Loaned materials will be insured by the borrower’s wall-to-wall, fine arts policy. The museum reserves the
right to charge fees for curatorial staff time and other expenses associated with the loan.

- Loans made at the request of the museum (for example, release of materials to contractors for conservation, photography, or research) will be insured by the Wheelwright’s wall-to-wall fine arts policy. The Wheelwright will pay costs associated with packing and shipping of these materials.

- Loaned material may not be altered in any way, unless prior agreement is made and documented in writing.

- No loan will be made when, in the judgment of the curator and the director, there is substantial risk to the safety of the material requested.

- All outgoing loans will be covered by a properly executed agreement setting forth the rights and responsibilities of both parties, and will be properly registered. The collections manager is responsible for maintaining written documentation on all outgoing loans, including (but not limited to) loan agreements, condition reports, and certificates of insurance.

For exhibitions and other programs, the Wheelwright borrows extensively from other institutions and from private parties. Loans to the museum are subject to the following conditions:

- The Wheelwright Museum borrows works of art, archival materials, and other items for exhibition. However the museum may also borrow materials for research or to advance its other programs. All loans must be requested in writing by either the curator or the director. Loans are managed by the museum’s curatorial department, and are subject to the approval of the curator and the director.

- All incoming loans will be covered by a properly executed agreement setting forth the rights and responsibilities of both parties, and will be properly registered. The
collections manager is responsible for maintaining written documentation on all incoming loans, including (but not limited to) loan agreements, condition reports, and certificates of insurance.

- The curator and the director must approve unusual restrictions placed on a loan by a proposed lender. If such restrictions are approved, the curator is responsible for assuring compliance.

- The museum will not borrow materials that, in the judgment of the curator and the director, may not withstand travel, handling, or changes of climate.

- The collections manager will receive, unpack, and inspect borrowed materials upon their arrival at the museum. If the lender has not provided a written condition report for each item included in the loan, the museum will assume that the items are in the same condition as when they left the lender’s custody. The museum’s collections manager will make a condition report, which will serve as the original record of condition.

- The museum will bear the costs of all loans made at its request, including packing, shipping, appraisal, conservation, and insurance.
V. Access to Collections

The museum will make every effort to ensure that its collections are accessible to individuals with legitimate research interests. Access to collections is subject to the following conditions:

- In most cases, access to the collections will be limited only by available space, available staff time, and the established safety and security requirements of the collections. However at the request of the Navajo Nation, collections pertaining to Navajo ceremonial practice including permanent renderings of dry paintings, sound recordings of chants, and tapestries depicting dry paintings will not be made available to the general public. The museum restricts the use of these materials to Navajo singers (medicine men) and their apprentices.

- All access to collections requires an appointment. Request for access to collections must be made in writing, and must include a description of the researcher’s proposed project.

- Each perspective researcher must complete a “Request for Access to Collections” form. Information contained in this form will help determine the level of access to be granted.

- The museum reserves the right to request references from researchers who are not known to the curatorial staff either by acquaintance or by reputation.

- All access to collections is subject to close supervision by the curator or the collections manager.

- Admittance to collections storage areas and removal of materials from storage for study is at the discretion of the curator.
• Collections records are accessible to the public at the discretion of the curator. In general, the catalog may be used by researchers and others interested in the collection, however due to the sensitive nature of accession records, access to these is strictly controlled and allowed only when there is a compelling, legitimate reason. Accession records must then be edited to exclude information irrelevant to the request. Decisions by the curator regarding access to the collections records can be appealed to the director.

• The museum requires a copy of any publication resulting from research in its collections.

• Researchers must properly credit the museum for research assistance. The museum’s credit line is “Wheelwright Museum of the American Indian, Santa Fe.”

• A charge for staff time may be assessed at the discretion of the curator, and with the approval of the director.
VI. Library Use

The Wheelwright Museum’s research center is intended first and foremost as a facility to house and care for collections. The library is a collections area that houses unique and rare materials. These materials require the same level of protection as objects housed in the vault or displayed in the galleries. All library users share responsibility for keeping its contents safe. Although the library’s reading room is used for meetings, lectures, and other events, this is not its primary function: it is simply a practical response to the fact that, because the museum is small, it has no other meeting space available.

The decision has been made to serve refreshments in the library during openings, meetings, and special events. Doing this exposes collections to the risk of insect and rodent infestation, and to damage from spills. Because the museum’s staff is small and does not include a housekeeping crew, all library users must help to keep areas where food is served meticulously clean.

In addition to use by museum staff and Friends, the Wheelwright’s library is available without charge to local non-profit arts organizations for meetings during business hours.

The following terms apply to all groups who meet in the library:

- Food and drink are restricted to the foyer. No food and drink may be consumed in the reading room except by permission from the director, who will consider special requests on a case-by-case basis.

- Library tables used for food service must be covered with plastic.

- Groups using the library are responsible for their own set up and clean up, including setting up and putting away folding chairs. (Museum staff will move wooden library tables and chairs. One week’s advance notice is required for this service.)
• All food, drink, napkins, cups, utensils, etc. must be removed from the library at the end of each meeting. Wastebaskets must be emptied and their contents taken outside to the dumpster. *No food waste may remain in the building.*

• All food particles, crumbs, and spills must be removed from all surfaces, including tables and floors. Brooms, mops, and vacuum cleaners are available from curatorial staff.

• Large spills must be reported to curatorial staff immediately.

• Staff members hosting meetings or other events are responsible for organizing their own clean-up efforts.

• Museum staff members are not available for clean up of events hosted by the Friends or by other organizations.

• Any group failing to comply with these terms may be restricted from using the library.