

# Glossary

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**Accessioning:**

Formal process used to accept legally and to record a specimen or artifact as a collection item (Malaro, 1998); involves the creation of an immediate, brief, and permanent record utilizing a control number or unique identifier for objects added to the collection from the same source at the same time, for which the institution accepts custody, right, or title.

**Audience survey/study:**

Collecting data from the museum's actual and potential audiences to determine their composition. Used to assess the effectiveness of the museum's activities and services.

**Audience:**

Groups of people who use the museum's services. Audiences can be defined by the types of services they use and how they use them (e.g., visitors, subscribers, researchers, program participants, Web-site users); by their demographic characteristics (e.g., families, school groups, seniors, culturally specific groups); or by special interests (e.g., aviation, Civil War reenactment, coin collecting, genealogy).

**Audit:**

An examination of the records with the intent to verify, possibly including a reconciliation of objects to records or records to objects.

**Bylaws:**

Legal documents that describe matters delegated to the governing authority, such as membership categories, the logistics of scheduling and holding meetings of the corporation and the governing authority, committee charges, and provisions for amendments. Self-regulatory provisions for the governing authority, such as membership in the organization, attendance requirements, and termination, also are in the bylaws.

**Cataloguing:**

Creation of a full record of information about a specimen or artifact, cross-referenced to other records and files, including the process of identifying and documenting these objects in detail.

**Collaborative effort:**

A formal arrangement to work with other organizations on the planning, development, or implementation of exhibitions and public programming.

**Collecting plan:**

A plan that identifies what the museum wants to

acquire over a period of time. Distinct from a collections plan (see below), which also considers deaccessioning, resource allocation, partnerships with other museums, and other aspects of building and sustaining the collections.

**Collections management policy:**

A written document, approved by the governing authority, that specifies the museum's policies concerning all collections-related issues, including accessioning, documentation, storage, and disposition.

**Collections management:**

All the activities that relate to the administration of a museum's collections. These include the deliberate planning, development, and documentation of collections.

**Collections plan**

A plan that guides the content of the collections and leads staff in a coordinated and uniform direction over time to refine and expand the value of the collections in a determined way.

**Collections planning:**

The process of developing the content of a collections plan.

**Collections policy:**

A written document, accepted by the governing authority, that specifies the museum's policies concerning all collections-related issues, including accessioning, documentation, storage, and disposition.

**Collections:**

Groups of objects and their associated information, collected with purpose and maintained in order, managed in the public trust for the purpose of documentation, research, and education.

**Community:**

The geographic area and its associated population in which the museum exists.

**Current audience:**

The groups or individuals who actually use the museum services.

**Deaccession:**

The process of legally removing accessioned objects from the museum's collection. Deaccessioning per se does not affect the museum's ownership of an object but it does mean that the museum no longer holds the object in the public trust.

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**Directors and officers liability insurance:**

Insurance coverage for the exposure of directors, officers, and trustees to claims from donors, governing authority members, beneficiaries, state attorneys general, staff, and others, alleging mismanagement.

**Disaster preparedness plan:**

Written policies and procedures intended to prevent or minimize damage to collections, archival materials, or organizational records resulting from disasters.

**Disaster:**

An unexpected occurrence inflicting damage and having long-term adverse effects on museum operations.

**Disposal:**

The process of physically removing a deaccessioned object from the collection.

**Diversity:**

Inclusion, valuing and appreciating all characteristics and experiences that define each of us as individuals including, but not limited to, race, ethnicity, gender, age, religion, disability and/or sexual orientation.

**Docent:**

A person who teaches in a museum and is usually a volunteer.

**Field collecting:**

For archaeological, biological, or paleontological material, the process of collecting material from their original site (e.g., archaeological or paleontological excavation).

**Financial resources:**

The income and expenses of the museum.

**Focus group:**

Interview studies involving a carefully selected sample of 8-10 individuals whose demographic and psychographic characteristics are of special interest to the museum. A planned but informal discussion carried out with the small group of visitors or community members to discuss a predetermined topic in their own terms.

**Formative evaluation:**

Testing carried out during development, including prototype building, testing comprehension of label copy, etc.

**Friend/auxiliary:**

An organization whose purpose is to work solely on behalf of the museum.

**Front-end evaluation:**

Collecting data from potential visitors to determine their level of interest and knowledge about a subject before an exhibition or program is developed.

**Full-time staff:**

Employees who work 35 hours or more per week.

**General liability insurance:**

Insurance coverage that pertains, for the most part, to claims arising out of the insured's liability for injuries or damage caused by ownership of property, manufacturing operations, contracting operations, sale or distribution of products, and the operation of machinery, as well as professional services.

**Governing authority:**

The entity that has legal and fiduciary responsibility for the museum (this body may not necessarily own the collection or the physical facility) and may include not-for-profit boards, appointed commissions, governmental bodies, and university regents. Names for a governing authority may include: Board of Trustees, City Council, Commission, Board of Directors, Board of Managers, Board of Regents,

**Head of governing authority:**

The elected or appointed head of the executive body to which the director reports. For institutions that are part of a larger non-museum parent organization, the head of the governing authority is considered to be the individual within the larger parent organization to whom the director reports/is responsible. For example, the head of the governing authority might be the dean or provost of a university, the director of parks and recreation for a city government, or the military post commander for a military museum.

**Human resources:**

All of the people, paid and unpaid, who regularly work at the museum.

**Integrated pest management (IPM):**

The coordinated use of pest and environmental information with available pest control methods to prevent unacceptable levels of pest damage by the most economical means with the least possible hazard to people, property, and the environment. IPM programs apply a holistic approach to pest management decision-making, taking advantage of all appropriate pest management options, including, but not limited to pesticides.

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**Interpretation:**

The media/activities through which a museum carries out its mission and educational role:

- Interpretation is a dynamic process of communication between the museum and the audience.
- Interpretation is the means by which the museum delivers its content.
- Interpretation media/activities include, but are not limited to:
  - exhibits, tours, Web sites, classes, school programs, publications, outreach.

Internal supporting groups are part of the museum itself, either as an informal association or by appointment by the governing authority. They serve at the pleasure and under the direction of the museum's governing authority.

**Long-term loan:**

A loan with no specified ending date of material that the museum will not actively be using for a large part of the loan period. (Sometimes also called "permanent" loan.)

**Mission:**

Articulates the fundamental reasons why the museum exists and is used to guide the museum's operations.

**Multiple-site facility:**

An organization with one or more non-contiguous sites in addition to a headquarters entity.

**Parent organization:**

The overseeing organization (such as an historical society or university) which is responsible for the fiduciary control of the museum.

**Part-time staff:**

Staff who work less than 35 hours per week.

**Planning:**

The creation of policy and written plans. Thomas Wolf (*Managing a Nonprofit Organization*, 1990) lists two essential prerequisites of planning as, 1) an evaluation/assessment of the organization's current position, and 2) a clear vision of the organization's future expressed through a statement of mission and goals. These prerequisites apply to all types of planning, whether it is long-range, disaster, exhibition, marketing, or program.

**Potential audience:**

Groups of people who could, but are not yet, using the museum's services.

**Preparation:**

In biological collections, the process of stabilizing or cleaning a specimen. For example, preserving an animal as a fluid specimen, stuffing a bird or mammal skin, or removing a fossil from the surrounding rock.

**Proprietary keyway:**

A special lock system whose keys can only be purchased through one supplier, and then only with a signature card by an authorized person. Keys cannot be purchased or copied at local stores.

**Public experience:**

What happens physically, intellectually, and emotionally to the public when it comes in contact with the museum either by word-of-mouth, through media references, or directly (visiting the museum).

**Public involvement:**

When the public actively participates with and supports the museum financially and/or with physical presence, for example, as corporate sponsors, donors, trustees, advisors, visitors, volunteers, members, friends, or collaborators.

**Public perception:**

The public's impression, knowledge of, and feelings about the museum. These create your museum's image and establish the role your museum has in the community.

**Purpose:**

The museum's broad guiding principle as stated in its governing documents.

Research: Includes two types: applied—for the purpose of identification, reference, or solving a particular problem, or for acquiring information for the development of a program or publication; and pure—for the purpose of acquiring new knowledge or adding to knowledge. All museums are expected to engage in applied research, some museums may engage in pure research.

**Risk management:**

A program of risk control that includes analyzing the probability of risk to museum collections, facilities, visitors, and staff as well as planning and implementing appropriate preventive measures and response methods.

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**Special events:**

Concerts, festivals, or special seasonal programs.

**Special exhibitions:**

Usually short term, temporary exhibitions.

**Summative evaluation:**

Determining the effectiveness of an exhibition or program after its installation.

**Supporting group:**

A group whose primary purpose is to support the museum, but who has no governance authority and responsibility for the museum. The group may provide financial support, volunteers, expertise, or advocacy to complement the knowledge and skills of the governing authority. Supporting groups may be called, for example, advisory boards, friends, guilds, or auxiliary boards.

- Internal supporting groups are part of the museum itself, either as an informal association or by appointment by the governing authority. They serve at the pleasure and under the direction of the museum's governing authority.
- External supporting groups are informal associations or separately incorporated nonprofit entities. They are independent of the museum in their own governance. Often there is a letter of understanding, a management agreement, or other document detailing the relationship between an external supporting group and the museum's governing authority.

**Target audience:**

Groups of people that the museum wants as primary users and for whom it designs programs and services.

**Temporary deposit:**

Objects left temporarily in the museum for other than loan purposes— for attribution, identification, examination for possible gift or purchase.

**Title:**

The possession of rights of ownership in personal property. Separate rights of possession include copyright interests, trademark rights, and any specific interest that the previous owner may have reserved.

**Tours:**

Any type of tour of the exhibitions, including school, self, audio, and guided.

**Visitor evaluation:**

Obtaining valid and reliable information from visitors

that helps in the planning of exhibitions and programs and in determining the extent to which the activities are meeting their intended objectives. Can include observation (tracking) studies, questionnaire, interviews, community meetings, and focus groups. Visitor evaluation can be carried out before (front end), during (formative), and after (summative) exhibition or program development.

**Visitor services:**

Facilities or services that provide comfort to visitors, including the checkrooms, dining area, first aid stations, information desk, restrooms, seating, signage, telephone booths, and water fountains.

**Visitors:**

Groups and individuals who go to the museum's physical facilities to use the museum services.

**Volunteer:**

An individual who offers time and service to the museum for no salary or wage.

**Written agreement:**

Document between a museum and another organization (government agency, corporation, or another nonprofit organization) that defines ownership of assets (e.g., land, facilities, collections), fiscal responsibilities, employment and contractual arrangements, and lines of authority. A written agreement with a supporting group usually details the degree of autonomy for both parties in fiscal and programmatic matters. These documents are the bedrock of an organization's legal status.