

DOI Museum Property Directives

Title: Cataloging Museum Collections

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Originating Office: Office of Acquisition and Property Management, Department of the Interior (DOI)

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Effective Date:

Expiration Date: This Directive will remain in effect until superseded.

- 1.1 Purpose.** To identify the policy and procedures required to catalog DOI museum property (museum collections) per Part 411 of the Departmental Manual (411 DM), *Identifying and Managing Museum Property*, and detailed in the DOI Museum Property Directives (Directive).
- 1.2 Scope.** This policy applies to all bureaus and offices responsible for managing museum collections housed in bureau and non-bureau facilities.
- 1.3 Definitions.** See Section 1.13 of this Directive.
- 1.4 Responsibilities.** The policy requirements described in Sections 1.6-1.12 of this Directive are the obligation of bureaus/offices responsible for managing museum collections per 411 DM 1.6. Heads of Bureaus/Offices and the bureau/office National/Chief Curator, as applicable, are responsible for ensuring that this policy is implemented in the bureau/office museum program and in the appropriate units of the bureau/office. Curatorial staff, museum property management staff, and other designated personnel, as established in bureau/office policy, are responsible for implementing this policy on a daily basis.
- 1.5 Purpose of Cataloging.** Catalog records serve as the primary source to account for museum objects based on information from accession and other records; to physically locate museum objects within a facility; and to provide intellectual access to museum objects through the associated data that describes their scientific or cultural context. Catalog data are used by curatorial and museum property management staff, exhibit planners, conservators, and others to properly document, manage, and track museum objects; to produce exhibits, publications, and interpretive media; and to support educational programs and outreach. Scientists, students, researchers, tribes and other descendant communities, and the general public use information from catalog records for scientific, historical, cultural, and educational uses.
- 1.6 Cataloging Standards.** The standards for cataloging DOI museum collections are based on DOI policy and professional museum and archival standards. The required standards

to document museum collections are found in Directive 3, *Required Standards for Documenting Museum Property* and are expanded upon in this Directive. The accompanying *Guidance for Cataloging Department of the Interior Museum Collections* (Guidance) provides best practices about cataloging that are not required in the Directives. General requirements are to:

- A. Record catalog data as completely and accurately as possible to:
 - (1) Confirm bureau/office ownership by cross-referencing with the accession record for the object and providing additional information, as available (e.g., an object's distinguishing marks or features.)
 - (2) Ensure that the data are available to generate reports for inventories, assessments, audits, and other activities required by statute, regulation, or policy.
 - (3) Provide access to museum objects for scientific, historical, cultural, and educational uses.
- B. Update catalog data, as needed, to maintain an accurate and current record.
- C. Assign a unique identifying catalog number to an object or group of objects.
- D. Physically label objects or groups of objects, as appropriate, with the assigned catalog number that references the object's documentation.
- E. Catalog museum collections using the appropriate discipline type. Use any bureau/office-specific nomenclature that is applicable to the discipline.
- F. Complete all data fields for which information is available. When mandatory catalog information is not available, the applicable data field must be completed with an appropriate entry (e.g., "Unknown" or "Not Provided.")
- G. Use consistent terminology and formats that meet DOI standards and bureau/office policy.
- H. Photograph all museum objects that are designated as controlled property after the issuance of this Directive.

1.7 Mandatory Catalog Data. The following mandatory catalog data must be recorded for all museum objects. Additional catalog data may be required by bureau/office policy.

- A. Accession number. A unique number assigned to an object or group of objects for a single accessioning transaction.

- B. Catalog number. A unique identifying number assigned to an object or group of objects. Other considerations for assigning catalog numbers are:
- (1) Component parts of objects are cataloged as a single unit and assigned one catalog number (e.g., a coffee pot and lid; multiple bones that comprise a vertebrate skeleton.) A letter is added to the catalog number to identify the component parts (e.g., 101a and 101b.)
 - (2) Pairs and sets of objects, in which all parts are nearly identical (e.g., a set of identical plates), are cataloged as a single unit, assigned one catalog number, and a lower case letter is added to the catalog number to identify each separate piece.
 - (3) Objects cataloged as a lot or bulk are documented in a single catalog record and are assigned one catalog number (e.g., a bag of undecorated pottery sherds, a bag of fossil fish scales, or a bulk soil sample collected from the same provenience.)
 - (4) Curatorial or museum property management staff may provide a group of catalog numbers to a contractor or permittee for objects collected and adequately quantified under a written contract, permit, or other agreement. The catalog numbers must be tracked to ensure proper assignment of numbers to objects and avoid duplication of numbers. Unused numbers must be identified for reassignment, as appropriate.
- C. Discipline. The field of academic study by which DOI museum collections are classified and reported. These disciplines are archeology, archives, art, biology, ethnography, geology, history, and paleontology.
- D. Object or scientific name. The name of the object based upon recognized discipline-specific standards (e.g., *Art & Architecture Thesaurus*, *Nomenclature for Museum Cataloging*, *Dana's System of Mineralogy*, and *Integrated Taxonomic Information System (ITIS)*.)
- E. Unit acronym and/or identifier. If the catalog number in Paragraph 1.7B in this Directive does not include the unit acronym or other identifier that references the Federal administrative unit managing the object or group of objects, this information must be entered elsewhere in the catalog record.
- F. Controlled property status. A determination of whether an object or group of objects is controlled property as defined in Directive 21, *Inventory of Museum Collections*, Paragraph 1.6A. (See also definition in Section 1.13 of this Directive.)

- G. Item count or quantity. The number of objects in a catalog record. A “1” is indicated for the item count of a single object even if the object has component parts. If the object is cataloged by lot, the total number of objects in the lot must be entered. For bulk objects, a count of the number of storage containers (e.g., box, bag, linear feet, or vial,) which corresponds to the unit of measure and the type of bulk storage container, must be recorded.
- H. Current location. The physical location of the object(s) in storage, on exhibit, or in an administrative office space progressing from the most general location to the most specific (e.g., building name and/or number, room name and/or number, cabinet number, and drawer or shelf number.)
- I. Description. A brief written account obtained through physical examination of an object that identifies the object’s distinguishing and significant features.
- J. Condition. A description of the physical condition and completeness of the object obtained through physical examination, including an assessment of its stability and state of preservation. The physical condition of the object must be identified as good, fair, or poor.
- (1) Good means the object is in stable condition with no active deterioration.
 - (2) Fair means the object has slow but active deterioration and is in need of minor conservation treatment or cleaning to bring it to stable condition.
 - (3) Poor means the object is in need of major conservation treatment to stabilize or eliminate the rate of deterioration.
- K. Date cataloged. The date on which the object was cataloged using a standardized date format.
- L. Cataloger. The name of the person who entered the catalog record. If the name of cataloger is not known, use “Unknown” or “Not Available” as appropriate.
- M. Additional mandatory catalog data for archeological objects:
- (1) State site number. The official state site number systematically assigned to the site, such as the Smithsonian trinomial system or the value assigned from the relevant state site numbering system (e.g., CA-MRN-14.)
 - (2) Field site number. The number assigned to an archeological site by the investigator at the time that the object was collected and which is not the state site number.

- (3) Site name and/or place name. The distinctive name assigned to the site from which archeological objects were collected (e.g., Flowerdew Hundred.)
- (4) Within-site provenience, including collection/excavation unit. The location from where an object was collected as documented by the original collector, including level.
- (5) Site location information, which must be recorded according to DOI or bureau/office geospatial standards and include one or more of the following formats as provided by the collector:
 - (a) Latitude and longitude.
 - (b) UTM coordinates.
 - (c) Township/range/section.
- (6) County of origin.
- (7) State of origin.
- (8) Country of origin (if other than the United States).

N. Additional mandatory catalog data for biology, geology, and paleontology specimens:

- (1) Type specimen. The single specimen designated as the name bearer for a taxonomic species.
- (2) Collecting locality.
 - (a) Collecting locality name and/or place name. The distinctive name assigned by the collector or existing place name of the location where the specimen(s) were collected.
 - (b) Latitude and longitude, UTM coordinates, or township/range/section, as provided by the collector. This geographic location information must be recorded according to DOI or bureau/office geospatial standards.
 - (c) Collection unit. The name of the entity that owns or administers the land where the specimen(s) was collected (e.g., park or refuge.)
 - (d) County of origin.

- (e) State of origin.
 - (f) Country of origin (if other than the United States).
 - (g) Formation (geology and paleontology only). The basic lithostratigraphic unit (the geological formation) from which the specimen(s) was collected, including member and other subunits as appropriate.
 - (h) Geochronologic age (geology and paleontology only) - The age of the rock unit from which the specimen(s) originated, such as Era, Period, Epoch, or other geological time unit as appropriate. This field is called Period/system in ICMS.
- (3) Collector(s). The name of the person or organization that collected the specimen(s).
 - (4) Collector's number (field number). The number the collector designated for the specimen(s).
 - (5) Collection date. The full date on which the specimen(s) was collected in the field using a standardized date format.
 - (6) Preservative and/or preparation. The method used to preserve or prepare the specimen(s) for curation.
- O. Additional mandatory catalog data for archives. These data are mandatory when using the Archives Module in the Interior Collection Management System (ICMS.) Refer to bureau/office policy to determine if the Archives Module is mandatory. If the Archives Module is not used, the catalog record must include all of the information in Paragraphs 1.7O.(2)-(6) (see Guidance that accompanies this Directive for where to insert the information in a catalog record.)
- (1) Local collection number. The numerical designation used in the ICMS Archives Module to identify an archival collection in its entirety such as all records made or received by a single records creator. It is analogous to the record group number in standard archival terminology.
 - (2) Collection title. The title of the record group being described.
 - (3) Date(s) documents were created. The date or time period from which the documents came into existence.
 - (4) Scope and content. A description of the collection that summarizes the contents and describes the types of records and information included.

- (5) History of the organization or person who created the record group. A brief description of the life or practices of the subject(s) included in a record group. For resource management and compliance records, provide the name of the organization or person who created the record group at a minimum.
- (6) Organization and/or arrangement. The configuration of the files and materials contained in the collection, and the method and reasoning behind the organization.

1.8 Catalog Records in ICMS. All catalog records must be entered into ICMS per Directive 18, *Interior Collection Management System (ICMS)*. If a non-bureau facility does not use ICMS, bureau/office staff must work with non-bureau facility staff to determine a method to transfer catalog data into ICMS.

- A. One catalog record and catalog number must be created in ICMS for each object or lot. (See Paragraph 1.7.B of this Directive.)
- B. ICMS includes an accommodation for older collections that may lack the mandatory data required in Section 1.7 of this Directive. When mandatory catalog data are not available, the data field must be completed with an appropriate entry (e.g., “Unknown” or “Not Provided.”)
- C. ICMS contains data fields that must be completed in order to save a record, but that are not mandatory per this Directive. Data fields that are identified as “mandatory” in ICMS must be completed to ensure a catalog record is not saved as a draft catalog record.

1.9 Paper-Based Catalog Records. If only a paper catalog record exists for an object or lot, the information should be transcribed into ICMS to create a digital catalog record.

1.10 Long-Term Preservation of Catalog Records. All museum records, including catalog records, must be managed appropriately to ensure their preservation against loss of physical or digital integrity, fire, water, pests, or theft at bureau and non-bureau facilities. Catalog records must be permanently retained by bureaus/office units.

- A. Paper-based catalog records. Paper-based catalog records that have not been transcribed to a digital record (e.g., original catalog cards) must be stored in an appropriate locked, fireproof cabinet, safe, or vault. Additional materials that support the catalog record (e.g., photographic prints, negatives, and transparencies, spreadsheets, and other documents) must also be stored with the catalog records.

- B. Digital catalog records. Digital catalog records must be preserved regardless of original format and in a manner that is consistent with evolving best practices. Standards to be followed for long-term preservation are:
- (1) All digital catalog records must be stored in an accessible format on a secure server or other appropriate storage media.
 - (2) Digital catalog records must be migrated to new formats as technology advances in order to prevent obsolescence of formats, the inability to access data, and loss of information.
 - (3) A complete and current backup of all digital catalog records must be maintained at an offsite facility with appropriate environmental controls, security, and emergency management to prevent data loss.
 - (4) Digital catalog records must be backed up on a regular schedule as defined in bureau/office policy.

1.11 Reducing Cataloging Backlog. Curatorial and museum property management staff, often working in conjunction with staff who authorize permits, ensure compliance, and perform other related duties, must:

- A. Prioritize resources to reduce the unit's cataloging backlog.
- B. Ensure that new accessions meet the unit's Scope of Collection Statement.
- C. Ensure that collections generated under permits, contracts, and other agreements include requirements to catalog the objects in those collections.

1.12 Photography as an Important Supplement to Cataloging. Photography is required for all museum objects that are designated as controlled property after the issuance of this Directive. Photography supports the long-term management of museum objects and, therefore, is strongly recommended for objects that are not controlled property.

- A. Museum objects are photographed during cataloging to:
- (1) Describe an object by visually documenting its characteristics (e.g., size, colors, materials, and condition, including deterioration and damage.)
 - (2) Provide a visual record to supplement legal title and custody documentation.
 - (3) Assist in recovery efforts if an object goes missing.
 - (4) Enhance public access and research opportunities.

B. Basic photography standards for catalog records.

- (1) Digital photography
 - (a) High-resolution digital photographs must be taken in formats designated by bureau/office procedure that follow technical guidelines established by the National Archives and Records Administration (see Puglia et al. in Section 1.14 of this Directive.)
 - (b) A placard or similar device noting the catalog number and a measurement scale must be photographed with each object.
 - (c) The image(s) must be attached to the object's catalog record in ICMS or the information management system used to catalog bureau/office objects. If the image(s) cannot be attached, the file name and/or number of each image taken must be referenced in the object's catalog record.
 - (d) A master copy of each image in an uncompressed digital file format must be backed up and maintained at an offsite facility with appropriate environmental controls, security, and emergency management to prevent data loss.
- (2) Film-based photography. Many museum objects have been photographed using film resulting in a print, negative, and/or transparency. Photographic prints, negatives, and/or transparencies must:
 - (a) Be preserved using archival-quality containers, including clear polyethylene sleeves for negatives and transparencies.
 - (b) Be stored in spaces with appropriate environmental controls, security, and emergency management to prevent loss.

1.13 Definitions. Many of the following definitions are taken directly from 411 DM and therefore refer to museum property. Museum property and museum collections are synonymous in these definitions.

Accessioning - The formal, documented process to legally add an object or group of objects to a museum collection. A single accession transaction occurs when one or more objects are acquired in the same manner, from one source, and at one time.

Archival quality - The material properties inherent in a medium permitting its preservation under controlled conditions (e.g., acid-free paper.)

Backup - A copy of electronic data, usually located on a server, external computer drive, or other storage medium, which must be housed at an offsite facility with appropriate environmental controls, security, and emergency management procedures to prevent data loss.

Bulk - A unit of measure used to quantify materials that cannot be separated into individual objects (e.g., a bag of environmental samples or soil; a container of unsorted microbiological specimens or microfossils.)

Completeness - The state of being entirely whole. Determining the completeness of museum objects is an item-level assessment based on the percentage of the object that is present and whole. It is recorded as Complete, Incomplete, or Fragment whereby Complete means that 100 percent of the object is present; Incomplete means that greater than 50 percent but less than 100 percent of the object is present; and Fragment means that 50 percent or less of the object is present.

Controlled property - For museum collections, the term includes an object or group of objects that is especially sensitive; has high intrinsic or scientific value; is especially vulnerable to theft, loss, or damage; is valued at or above a threshold value established by each bureau/office; is a museum firearm; or is a short-term, incoming loan (for inventory purposes only). The catalog record must indicate whether an object has been designated controlled property. Examples of objects that have been designated controlled property are objects on public exhibit, type specimens, and artwork with a high appraisal value.

Curatorial Staff - A DOI employee who has the appropriate knowledge, training, experience, and direct responsibility to manage the nature, scope, and content of bureau/office or unit museum property. This may include museum curators, museum specialists, and museum technicians, as well as staff possessing expertise in an academic discipline along with requisite museum training and experience.

Digitize - The process of creating an electronic copy of a physical letter, photograph, negative, record, or other type of textual or visual object.

Interior Collection Management System (ICMS) - The mandatory DOI-wide information management system used to provide DOI-wide consistency in accounting for, documenting, reporting on, and providing physical and intellectual access to bureau/office museum property.

Linear feet (archives only) - A measurement for descriptive and control purposes of shelf space occupied by archives. For vertical files (archives filed on edge), the total length of drawers, shelves, or other equipment occupied. For archives filed horizontally (flat or piled up), the total vertical thickness.

Lot - Two or more objects of a similar type that are collected at the same location, at a single point in time, and are cataloged as a group under a single catalog number. A lot is established according to appropriate discipline-specific rules.

Museum collection / Museum property - A subset of personal property, including objects, works of art, and/or archives, that is retained for long-term preservation, study, and interpretation consistent with statutory requirements, its relationship to the mission of the respective bureau/office, or other appropriate factors. A museum collection/museum property is acquired according to a rational plan, such as a Scope of Collection Statement. It consists of all accessioned, unaccessioned, cataloged, and/or uncatalogued objects; and all museum objects under control of a facility, unit, or bureau/office. Museum property is synonymous with and referred to as “museum collection(s)” in the DOI Museum Property Directives, as a standardized term that is used by museum professionals.

Museum property management staff - A DOI employee with delegated responsibilities to manage museum collections/museum property on a regular basis who does not have specialized training in professional museum work. This may include archeologists, archivists, historians, interpreters, property management specialists, rangers, resource management specialists, or others who manage museum property as a collateral duty.

Museum records - Records created to manage museum property, such as accession, catalog, loan, deaccession, and inventory records. These records must be appraised through agency record schedule procedures. Museum records are not museum property.

Nomenclature - A system of terms used to name objects in a particular discipline.

Non-bureau facility - Any facility, which a specific bureau/office does not own and/or operate and maintain, that houses the bureau/office’s museum property. This includes facilities of other bureaus and offices within DOI, other Federal agencies, and entities outside of the Federal government, such as a museum or university.

Object - A physical item of museum property. It includes art and history objects, archeological artifacts, ethnographic objects, archival items, and natural history specimens.

Preservative - A chemical added to material to prevent oxidation, fermentation, or other deterioration, especially deterioration caused by bacteria. Ethanol is a common preservative for many biological specimens

Provenience - For archeology, it is the specific geographic or spatial location, either two-dimensional or three-dimensional, where an object was found. Within-site provenience is the specific geographic or spatial location where an object was found within a specific archeological site. For history and ethnography, provenience is the specific location from where an object was collected or acquired, such as the Truman Home.

Record group (archives only) - A collection of documents that share the same provenance (i.e., have the same records creator.)

Type specimen - The specimen or object designated as the name bearer for a taxonomic species for natural history specimens or object class for archeological objects. It is strongly recommended that all type specimens are identified as controlled property. For natural history disciplines, type specimens (including holotypes, lectotypes, neotypes, and syntypes) are the international standard of reference for biological nomenclature and must be held in trust for science. Non-fixed type specimens (including paratypes, allotypes, topotypes, and plastotypes) are not formal name bearers and are identified as controlled property at the discretion of the curator of record. For the discipline of archeology, examples of type specimens include specific whole or fragments of pottery or lithic blades that are the name bearers of a culture period.

Unit - A bureau/office organizational entity, such as an accountability area, administrative unit, center, laboratory, museum, office, park, school, site, refuge, or repository, which manages museum property.

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