



Best Practices

GLOSSARY

The BC Museums Association gratefully acknowledges the financial assistance granted by the Government of Canada, through the Department of Canadian Heritage under the "Canadian Arts and Heritage Sustainability Program (CAHSP) - Capacity Building Component for Heritage Organizations.



Glossary

Access	Those with the authority to make use of collections areas for purposes of collections management.
Accession	The act of transferring legal and physical control of artifacts to a museum, or records and manuscripts to an archives; (n.) the materials that have been transferred.
Accession Number	The unique number assigned to an artefact from which year of donation – number of donor – item in the collection - can be derived. Based upon the standard method for numbering artefacts e.g. 2005.001.001 (Year of Donation – Donor Number – Item in Collection).
Accessions	The artefacts and items making up the society's permanent collection, properly documented through collections controls or the act of processing and recording an addition to the permanent collection.
Acculturation	The adoption of a different culture.
Acid Free	The term applied to products with a neutral pH and to alkaline-buffered products.
Acoustics	The total effect of sound, especially in an enclosed space.
Acquisition	Artefacts acquired by the governing society and forming the collection.
Advisory Board	A groups authorized to provide advice and recommendations intended to shape policies and decisions undertaken by a host organization. Advisory boards do not have inherent governing authority themselves, but rather provide expertise that enable the governing authority to make informed decisions.
Affiliated Museum	A museum that is associated with a larger organization; i.e. a subsidiary of a corporation, educational institution, or part of a government department.
Annual General Meeting	A public meeting held once a year to provide board members with an opportunity to account for the previous year's activities and expenditures. This includes a review of financial statements.
Annual Report	A formal report prepared annually by the directors or management of an organization concerning its operations and financial position.



Glossary cont'd...

Appraisal	The process whereby artefacts are evaluated based upon the society's mandate for inclusion into the collection.
Archive	A building or place in which public and some private records are kept, including photographs, maps, prints, sketches, letters, diaries, manuscripts, financial records, etc.
Artefact	A physical object produced, shaped, or adapted by human workmanship.
Artificial Collection	A body of archival material deliberately brought together for some reason other than regular daily activities. A scrapbook is one example of an artificial collection.
Audit	Formal, periodic check of accounts or records to verify their correctness.
Bequest	A gift left by will to an individual or an institution, such as a museum.
Business Plan	A commercial policy or practice; a detailed scheme or method for the accomplishment of a goal.
By-law	A law or rule adopted by an institution for governing its own meetings and affairs.
Catalogue	The practice of documenting all known information about an artefact including donor information, description of item, historical background, location and all other relevant information, thereby providing ease of access for use in interpretation.
Cataloguing	Identification of characteristics of an object or objects and of assigning it one or more categories or classifications in an organized system.
Category	The main heading for purposes of classifying objects into their general use. Sub-categories break down categories further towards specific use.
CHIN	Canadian Heritage Inventory Network. All forms of collections management must be CHIN compatible to ensure a form of standard methodology.
Code of Ethics	A framework of personal and institutional obligations and standards that govern all members of the museum profession.



Glossary cont'd...

Collection	A group of artefacts or specimens which are associated in some way, due to similarities in the nature of the objects.
Collection Mandate	Part of the collections management policy that defines the basic principles for accepting objects into the collection based on the museum's mandate.
Collections Care	The overall way in which those responsible for collections treat the artefacts as a collective trust of the society, ensuring proper methods of artefact documentation, conservation, standards and long-term preservation.
Collections Policy	The written and approved procedures adopted by the society for purposes of acquiring and preserving collections of artefacts.
Community	Commonly refers to people living in the same geographical location. A broader interpretation includes people who share a common interest, objective, language, profession, religion, tradition, economy, history or other identifying trait.
Community Programming	Opportunities provided by museums for community members to participate actively in the preservation, study, and interpretation of their cultural and natural heritage.
Compensation Package	A combination of money and services, such as career counselling in place of salary when an employee is discharged from employment.
Condition Report	A record of an artefacts condition whereby any characteristics are described through documentation and continued analysis over time in order to learn of an object's deterioration or continued wellbeing and stability.
Conflict of Interest	When an individual benefits personally from information gained while acting in the public trust.
Conservation	Methods of care for artefacts that ensure survival. Conservation is often handled through consultation with qualified professionals. It is highly advisable that collections staff and volunteers take courses in both artefact and archival care and handling.
Constitution	Documents in which the laws and principles of an organization are written.



Glossary cont'd...

Conventions	The need for standardization of data descriptions has led to the development of international agreements. For example, “The Dublin Core” is a 15-element metadata element set intended to facilitate discovery of electronic resources. It has attracted the attention of formal resource description communities such as museums and libraries.
Copyright	Legal title or ownership in the creation of an object or work of art.
Corporate Sponsor	A business organization that donates money or other resources toward an activity or undertaking.
Credit Line	Written acknowledgement of ownership used by museums in labelling objects.
Critical Online Mass	A term that defines a stage of online content that occurs when the depth and breadth of the subject matter is profoundly rich and when many contributors with expertise participate in the development of the content.
Culturally Sensitive Materials	Cultural materials are sensitive when their storage, access, handling, display or interpretation by museums has the potential to impact the sensitivities of people who know the use, history and meaning of these materials. Examples include ancestral (human) remains, burial objects, ceremonial artefacts, and religious material.
Curator	One who is responsible for researching, interpreting and preparing exhibits from museum collections.
Database	A computerized system that allows for the permanent retention of all knowledge assembled upon collections or the ability to access the location of documentary materials.
Deaccession	The act by which artifacts are permanently removed from the society’s collection in an ethical manner.
Deaccessioning	The formal process of permanently removing an object from the museum’s collection.
Deed of Gift	A document that transfers legal title of ownership that is used by museums to record a gift by a donor.
Deficit	An amount by which the total falls short of what is required, an excess of liabilities over assets, a shortage.
Demographic	Pertaining to the statistics about the life of people and communities.



Glossary cont'd...

Destination Marketing Organizations	Specialists in promoting a region. Examples of DMO's include Tourism BC, Canadian Tourism Commission and local tourism offices. These organizations will often coordinate marketing and research and are usually government departments, crown corporations or non-profit organizations.
Digital Camera	A camera that stores images digitally rather than recording them on film. Once a picture has been taken, it can be downloaded to a computer system, and then manipulated with a graphics program and printed. Unlike film photographs, that have an almost infinite resolution, digital photos are limited by the amount of memory in the camera, the optical resolution of the digitalizing mechanism, and, finally, by the resolution of the final output device.
Directors Insurance	Insurance that protects board members from legal liability. Liability resulting from injuries to third parties or damage to property.
Docent	A person, usually a volunteer, trained as a guide or lecturer to conduct groups through a gallery or museum.
Documentation	The identification of all relevant material for purposes of cataloguing.
Donor	The individual who has made a gift of an item to the society's collections.
DVD	Short for Digital Versatile Disc or Digital Video Disc, a type of optical disk technology that holds a minimum of 4.7 GB of data.
Endorsement	A confirmation of support for a particular project or service.
Endowment Fund	A fund which earns interest, which is set aside for a specific purpose.
Ephemera	Miscellaneous printed and published materials, such as advertisements, posters, broadsides, cards, and brochures. These were originally created for short-term use, but are often historically valuable as illustrations of past events.
Evaluation	An appraisal or assessment, setting of a value or worth on an object, service, or event.
Exhibit	A means of presentation and interpretation for public viewing purposes using some combination of objects, text, graphics, props, furniture or architectural elements to create a physical space dedicated to the exploration of specific themes and messages



Glossary cont'd...

Exit Records	Documents that record the movement of objects out of the museum and record their condition on leaving the premises.
FAM Tours	Familiarization tours for industry members to make them familiar with your area or institution. These are usually provided free of charge or at a significant discount.
Fiduciary	Given or held in trust; an obligation to discharge trust duties and to manage the property of others with the same diligence, honesty and discretion that a prudent person would exercise in managing their own affairs.
First Nations Authority	The individual, or group of individuals, who have the authority to make decisions concerning a particular object or cultural issue.
Fiscal Management	The financial management of an institution including allocating resources through budgeting, monitoring use and impact.
FIT	Short for Free Independent Traveller. Term is used to describe individuals that travel on their own or in small family groups. Most tourists in Canada fall under this category.
Focus Group	Group of people asked to discuss or express an opinion about a particular subject for evaluation purposes.
Formative Evaluation	The examination of a project or product while it is still in the planning or design stage, to help determine how it will develop.
Gift	A voluntary transfer of property without consideration of monetary value. To qualify as a gift, property, in the form of cash or a gift-in-kind, is transferred by a donor to a registered charity; the cash or property is given voluntarily; and the donor is transferring property to the charity without expecting anything in return. See Registered Charities and Income Tax Act, brochure RC4108 available on the CCRA web site.
Gift-In-Kind	Gifts of objects or services rather than money.
Gigabyte	An electronic memory measurement 2 to the 30 th power (1,073,741,824) bytes. One gigabyte is equal to 1,024 megabytes. Gigabyte is often abbreviated as G or GB.



Glossary cont'd...

Governing Authority	The legal entity accountable to the public and to the museum community for the policy, financing and administration of the museum.
Historical Context	The story of an object: who, what, when, why, and where. Asking these questions assists in determining suitability of an object for retention and provides museums with enriched possibilities for interpretation.
Human Resources	The management area that deals with the basic task of defining and analyzing jobs in organizations, including both paid and volunteer positions. Its function is to help the museum achieve its objectives by employing staff and volunteers effectively.
Hold Assets In Trust	To be responsible for the ownership of property in the interests of the public.
Hygrometer	An instrument for measuring relative humidity. Artifacts and archives can be harmed by air that is too moist or too dry.
Inbound Tour Operators	Specialists in bringing tourists into an area. They may sell directly to consumers or be hired by Outbound Tour areas to coordinate local activities.
Information Management	The process of matching information needs with information resources. The information management system deals with how information is recorded, stored, accessed and shared, and the technology used to accomplish these things.
Internship	A training position in which a student or graduate acts as an assistant to a professional.
Interpretation	Making use of the collection for purposes of exhibition and education. The process by which we determine what items may highlight a particular historical aspect of our history.
Inventory	An itemized list of objects or the act of physically locating objects in a collection in order to verify location and quantity at a given time.
JPEG	Short for Joint Photographic Experts Group, and pronounced jay-peg. JPEG is a lossy compression technique for colour images. Although it can reduce files to about 5% of their normal size, some detail is lost in compression.
Legal Title	The possession of rights of ownership in property.



Glossary cont'd...

Liability	A debt or responsibility for which one is often legally bound.
Linguistic	Referring to the study of languages.
Loan	Items borrowed and documented for use in interpretive exhibitions.
Location	The physical location where an item is stored and easily accessed.
Lossy Compression	Refers to data compression techniques in which some amount of data is lost. Lossy compression techniques attempt to eliminate redundant or unnecessary information. Most video compression technologies, such as MPEG, use a lossy technique.
Lux	A measurement of light levels; the unit of illumination in the metric system, equivalent to the illumination of a surface of one square meter which is uniformly distant from a point.
Mandate	The area of authority or responsibility that the museum creates for itself.
Manuscripts	Unpublished handwritten or typed documents. In archives, manuscripts are usually defined as the personal papers of individuals or private groups, as opposed to the records of a business, government agency, or other public institution.
Marketing	A management process based on the museum's mission that is concerned with identifying, anticipating, and satisfying the needs of its users. Activities are undertaken to promote programs and to create a positive, professional public image.
Megapixel	One million pixels. The term is used in reference to resolution of a graphics device, such as a scanner, digital camera or monitor.
Mission Statement	A succinct statement of purpose of why the museum exists and what it is set up to accomplish.
MPEG	Short for Moving Picture Experts Group, and pronounced m-peg. The term refers to a family of digital video compression standards and file formats.
Museologist	One who practices museology, the study of museums, museum administration and philosophy.



Glossary cont'd...

Museum	“A non-profitmaking, permanent institution in the service of society and of its development, and open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates, and exhibits, for the purposes of study, education, and enjoyment, material evidence of people and their environment” (International Council of Museums, 2001).
Non-Profit	An organization without share capital whose activities are not directed toward the accrual of profits for the gain of its members. A non-profit organization must use all funds placed at its disposal to further the objectives for which it was established.
Object Name	The actual name of what an object is, rather than a well-known nickname or qualified by additional attributes.
Oral History	The oral record (usually an audio tape) or written transcript of a planned and recorded oral interview.
Outbound Tour Operators	Companies that sell tours to places outside their local area.
Pixel	Short for Picture Element, a pixel is a single point in a graphic image. Graphics monitors display pictures by dividing the display screen into thousands (or millions) of pixels, arranged in rows or columns. The pixels are so close together that they appear connected.
Policy	A statement which outlines a principle or course of action. Policy defines how the museum’s public trust is to be fulfilled, provides trustees and staff with the authority and guidance they need to do their jobs, clarifies expectations, and provides a concrete method of accountability.
Portal	A web site or service that offers a broad array of resources and services, such as e-mail, search engines, and on-line shopping malls. The first web portals were online services, such as AOL, that provided access to the web, but by now most of the traditional search engines have transformed themselves into web portals to attract and keep a larger audience.
Preservation	The act of keeping something safe from deterioration or destruction.
Program	An event or activity based on the museum’s collections or exhibits, designed to provide opportunities for further learning and enjoyment.
Programming	A term that encompasses all efforts the museum makes to identify and serve its audiences including public programs, exhibitions, and publications.



Glossary cont'd...

Protocols	Informal or formal partnerships or relationship arrangements. For example, these often exist between First Nations and museums for the purpose of exhibit, research, education, funding, and public programs.
Provenance	Has a different meaning depending on whether you are referring to an archives or a museum. Museum: history of the artefact and any known adaptations of the object for a special purpose. Archives: person or agency that created the material.
Purchase	Artefacts acquired by the Society through the physical outlay of monies, and still requiring the society to properly document their associations to the museum's collections mandate by recording all known relevant information.
Relative Humidity	The ratio of water vapour present in the atmosphere compared to the amount required to saturate it at the same temperature
Release Form	Used to authorize an activity. A release form indicates consent and limits liability.
Repatriation	The process of returning cultural objects from museum collections to the culture, nationality or country of origin.
Repository	A place where archival materials are stored.
Restoration	Any steps taken to return an artefact or archival material to its original condition.
Skeletal Record	A highly scaled back description and record of donation of an object to provide some access to it. Often used when there is a heavy backlog or much other museum activity that interferes with the day-to-day curatorial obligations to the collection.
Sound Recordings	Aural information on discs, magnetic tapes, cylinders, or other media. Sound recordings are not created for the purpose of recording history.
Source	The person, organization or similar society from whom an artefact has been received, either as a gift, transfer or purchase.



Glossary cont'd...

Standard	A prescribed method of describing artefacts in a collection. The use of standards makes for a control of descriptions providing many individuals the ability to understand the documentation. Standards thereby eliminate independent observations, terms and terminology that are only uniquely understood to one individual.
VFR	Visiting Friends and Relatives, a very important segment of the tourist market, usually they are also FIT.
Visual Records	Material composed of images rather than words. Photos, films, and paintings are common examples.

