

# Appendix B: Collections Advisory Committee

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# Appendix B: Collections Advisory Committee

## B.1 Collections Advisory Committee

### B.1.1 *Why do we need a Collections Advisory Committee?*

The Collections Advisory Committee (CAC) is a best museum management practice that ensures accessions and deaccessions are reviewed and appropriate. More importantly, a review committee composed of impartial and disinterested individuals provides for checks and balances. The CAC protects the superintendent and park staff from possible accusations of partiality, self-dealing, or vested interest.

Two laws specifically authorize the NPS to deaccession and accession: 54 U.S.C §§ 102501-102504, Museums, formerly known as the Museum Properties Management Act, and the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA), P.L. 101-601 (1990), (codified at 25 U.S.C. §§ 3001-3013 [Supp. 1997]); 104 Stat. 3048-3058. These laws require a systematic review that meets the highest standards of the museum profession.

### B.1.2 *What is a Collections Advisory Committee?*

A CAC provides direction for accession and deaccession of park museum collections through a systematic review process, including consultation with appropriate experts, that meets the highest standards of the museum profession. Comprised of park staff representing multiple disciplines, the committee provides recommendations based on factual information regarding a proposed accession or a proposed deaccession.

Most professional museums have a collections advisory committee. The guidance provided by this committee, combined with a well-written and up-to-date Scope of Collection Statement, should ensure the museum collection is clearly relevant to the park's mission.

### B.1.3 *Are parks required to have a Collections Advisory Committee?*

Yes. A CAC is required to review all proposed new accessions other than scientifically generated archeological and natural history field collections and their associated records from NPS-administered land. The CAC should review any miscellaneous items “found in collection.” See *Museum Handbook*, Part II, Chapter 2, Accessioning, for types of accessions and their definitions.

All deaccession transactions for items outside the Scope of Collection, candidates for voluntary destruction or abandonment, and non-museum property accessioned in error require CAC review. Accessioned in error includes those items that do not fit the definition of museum property, such as living history items or exhibit props. See *Museum Handbook*, Part II, Chapter 6, Deaccessioning, for types of deaccessions and their definitions.

**See Figure 1 for the 2017 memo requiring a Collections Advisory Committee.**

#### **B.1.4** *How does a park establish a Collections Advisory Committee?*

The committee lead, typically the custodial officer, should recruit other park staff to serve on the committee. When committee membership changes, the memo establishing the committee must be updated to reflect the addition or removal of any member.

A committee should have good representation from different park divisions and/or other parks across various disciplines. Some regions may require regional representatives on the committee. A diverse committee will allow for enlightened discussions reflecting different viewpoints. It will also eliminate any appearance of curatorial self-interest unduly influencing the park's accessions and deaccessions.

**See Figure 2 for a sample memo establishing a Collections Advisory Committee.**

#### **B.1.5** *Who are members of the Collections Advisory Committee?*

The CAC must include at least three members. One member must be a curator at or above the GS-1015-11 level. The other members of the committee must not be under the supervision of the curator or custodial officer. If the park doesn't have a curator at or above the GS-1015-11 level, the park must appoint a curator from another park, center, or regional office. There is no maximum number of members for the committee, although no more than five members is recommended. Check with your regional curator for any specific guidance on committee composition.

A CAC is typically led by the custodial officer for museum collections and includes park staff who represent relevant disciplines, such as interpretation, natural resource management, and archeology. Committee members may also include subject matter specialists from neighboring parks, centers, and/or the regional office.

The members of the committee must be federal employees due to Federal Advisory Committee Act (FACA) considerations (41 CFR §§ 101- 6.1004). On a case-by-case basis, the superintendent or committee members can request a nonfederal specialist or a Native American partner to review a transaction. The superintendent may ask the specialist to record comments and recommendations on a Specialist Review Form (Figures 3 and 4), but the nonfederal specialist cannot serve on the committee.

Possible sources for committee members may come from the park, center, or regional office; NPS cultural preservation and archeological centers; Harpers Ferry Center; other parks; and other government agencies. It is advisable to have one or more members from outside the park. Committee members should be chosen from the following list of specialists or others as needed:

- curator (a minimum of one at GS-1015-11 or above)
- anthropologist
- archeologist
- archives technician
- archivist
- biologist

conservator  
cultural resource specialist  
ethnographer  
exhibits specialist  
facility manager  
geologist  
historical architect  
historical landscape architect  
historian  
integrated resource manager  
museum specialist  
museum technician  
natural resource specialist  
park ranger (interpretation, law enforcement)  
paleontologist  
tribal liaison

#### **B.1.6** *What is the role of the superintendent?*

NPS museum property is accountable property. The accountable officer for museum property is the superintendent. See NPS Personal Property Management Handbook #44 <https://www.nps.gov/policy/DOrders/RM44.pdf>. Superintendents have the overall responsibility for museum collections and museum records. The superintendent establishes the committee and approves or disapproves all accessions, incoming and outgoing loans, and deaccessions. The superintendent must sign all legal documents that transfer ownership (title) or custody of museum property.

The superintendent or center manager may not sit on the collections advisory committee as this creates a conflict of interest. The superintendent could potentially benefit personally from the actions or decisions that are made. As the accountable officer, the superintendent must avoid even the perception of a conflict of interest.

The superintendent makes the final determination on all acquisitions and deaccessions and justifies the decision in writing. In the event of differences of opinion between committee members, the superintendent may choose which recommendations to accept. If the superintendent disagrees with committee recommendations, the committee lead documents the decision and consults the regional curator for higher level review.

#### **B.1.7** *What is the role of the custodial officer?*

The custodial officer is designated in writing as the staff member responsible for the physical care and documentation of the museum collection and is typically the committee lead. The custodial officer may be the GS-1015-11 museum curator, or a collateral duty staff member assigned responsibility for the museum collection.

Custodial officers recommend accessions, loans, and deaccessions to the superintendent and are responsible for justifying and documenting these transactions. They are responsible for accessioning and cataloging the collection, deaccessioning items in the collection, and conducting the annual museum property inventory and completing and updating the NPS Checklist for Preservation and Protection of Museum Collections on Museum Facilities. The custodial officer often supervises other staff who are doing the work.

#### **B.1.8** *What is the role of the committee lead?*

The committee lead provides the committee with factual and impartial information on the proposed accession or deaccession, which includes but is not limited to, description, images, provenance, condition, and any other pertinent information. The lead also ensures the committee is familiar with the park Scope of Collection Statement and any restrictions or legal issues.

The committee lead:

- prepares the accession or deaccession documentation package for review by the CAC
- consults with subject matter specialists as needed
- assembles the committee either by phone, videoconference, or in person
- documents the meeting with the date, location, and the attendees
- assigns a notetaker to record notes during discussion
- provides the committee's recommendations/opinions in writing to the superintendent
- coordinates any appeal to the regional office

**Note:** Some parks do not hold formal meetings. Members send their signed responses to the committee lead.

#### **B.1.9** *What is the role of a committee member?*

The committee members will review and make recommendations to the superintendent concerning all proposed:

- additions to the collection through gift, purchase, transfer, exchange, loan, and items found in collection
- deaccessions of objects determined to be outside the Scope of Collection
- deaccessions of objects that involve voluntary destruction or abandonment, and non-museum property

The committee operates under a documented set of procedures to ensure all decisions are fair, open, and in the best interests of the public. Committee members must record their comments and document any consultations with other specialists using the Specialist Review Form, or similar document. See B.2 on documentation.

Committee members may recommend for or against all the objects in an accession or deaccession. They may also recommend against an accession or deaccession of individual

objects, while agreeing with the remainder of the proposal. The committee does not have to reach consensus.

#### **B.1.10** *What procedures should the Collections Advisory Committee follow?*

The committee lead distributes copies of the documentation package(s) to other members, including nonfederal individuals who are advisors to the committee. The committee lead schedules the meeting, if needed, and documents the meeting (date, location, names of attending members). The committee lead submits each committee member's signed Specialist Review Form, or similar document, and any comments of nonfederal specialists to the superintendent.

Each member receives a copy of the documentation package(s) for review before the meeting. Members should review the *Museum Handbook*, Part II, Chapter 2, Accessioning, or Chapter 6, Deaccessioning, as appropriate. Committee members may consult with subject matter specialists who are not on the committee regarding specific items. Each committee member records comments on the review form, or equivalent, and documents any consultations with other specialists.

The final documentation package is printed on acid-free paper. Once approved by the superintendent, the package is filed in the accession or deaccession file, as appropriate. Even if the action is not approved, retain disapproved accessions and deaccessions in the park's official museum records.

#### **B.1.11** *How often should the Collections Advisory Committee meet?*

The CAC meets at regular intervals, or as needed. If all the committee members are not at the same location, meetings can be by phone or videoconference. Members can also e-mail their responses if a formal meeting is not required.

## **B.2 Collections Advisory Committee Documentation**

#### **B.2.1** *What documents should the committee members complete?*

Committee members must complete a Specialist Review Form, or similar document, to document their decisions and recommendations in writing.

**See Figures 3 and 4 for Specialist Review Forms.**

#### **B.2.2** *Who completes a Specialist Review Form?*

Each CAC member completes a Specialist Review Form, or similar document. A Specialist Review Form provides a description of the proposed accession or deaccession, and other pertinent information needed to complete an objective review. The committee lead provides a description and history or provenance for the objects. The form should include the acquisition type for accessions and the deaccession type and proposed disposition for deaccessions along with any images.

For accessions, the description should include how the proposed acquisition will be used, the condition of the objects, and whether similar or items exist in the museum collection. It should address any potential concerns such as copyright, NAGPRA, or hazardous materials. See the list of questions to consider in B.2.3.

Each committee member must complete the following fields on the review form:

Comments: justification for opinion/recommendation

Accession/Deaccession: Yes or No.

Name, Title, Signature, and Date

The review form is submitted to the committee lead and included in the final documentation package submitted to the superintendent for final review and approval/disapproval. The committee lead may submit a summary of recommendations to the superintendent, but each member must sign a Specialist Review Form, or similar document.

### ***B.2.3 What do I need to consider when completing a Specialist Review Form for proposed accessions?***

Evaluate proposed accessions using the criteria in the following questions. When reviewing the package of information on the accession, it is important to consider all aspects, including any additional criteria.

- Does the item fit within the park's Scope of Collection Statement?
- Is the item essential to fulfilling the park's mission?
- Will the item enhance interpretation at the site?
- Is the proposed accession site-specific?
- Does park enabling legislation require the park to preserve and maintain certain types of objects and archives?
- Does the item add information about the collection that would be of value for research and education?
- Does the park have museum storage space?
- Does the park have the staffing and funds to manage the item according to NPS museum standards now and in the future?
- Are there many similar items already accessioned and maintained as museum property?
- Is the proposed accession currently in good condition? (Consider completeness, damage, inherent vice, conservation needs, etc.)
- Are there provenance concerns? (NAGPRA, nepotism, etc.)
- Does the proposed accession come with clear copyright? (no restrictions)
- Did the source of the proposed accession acquire the item legally, and is there clear title?

- Is the item hazardous or made of potentially hazardous materials? (e.g. asbestos, uranium, live gunpowder, black mold, arsenic or other pesticide residues, flammable cellulose acetate or cellulose nitrate film and negatives, medical objects, drugs/chemicals)

**See Figure 5 for a checklist to use when considering proposed accessions.**

#### **B.2.4** *What deaccessions must be reviewed by the Collections Advisory Committee?*

A CAC is required for proposed deaccessions involving items that are outside the Scope of Collection and candidates for voluntary destruction or abandonment, and non-museum property accessioned in error. See *Museum Handbook* Part II, Chapter 6, for types of deaccessions and their definitions.

**Note:** All disposition methods for Outside the Scope of Collection must be reviewed by the CAC, including transfers and exchanges between NPS units.

**Note:** The CAC is not the Board of Survey.

#### **B.2.5** *What do I need to consider when completing a Specialist Review Form for proposed deaccessions?*

Similar to reviewing potential accessions, committee members should be thoughtful about their review of proposed deaccessions. Some questions to consider when reviewing deaccessions include:

- Are the items proposed for deaccessioning cataloged?
- Has the regional curator been consulted about the proposed deaccession (optional)?
- Is the proposed deaccession consistent with relevant laws and with current DOI and NPS policies?
- Has the appropriate documentation been provided for the proposed method of disposition?
- If the proposed deaccession type is Outside the Scope of Collection, is the disposition method appropriate?
- Is there supporting documentation provided in the proposed deaccession package, including but not limited to catalog data and a written justification?
- Is the proposed deaccession hazardous or made of potentially hazardous materials?
- Does the proposed deaccession take into consideration any community requests for items to stay in the museum, region, or local area?
- Were the items mistakenly accessioned into the museum collection?
- Does the proposed deaccession take into consideration the need to safeguard against loss of scientific, associational, evidential, artifactual, informational and/or monetary value represented by the items?

- Does the proposed deaccession avoid the perception that the museum is deaccessioning items in exchange for objects of lesser importance?
- Does the proposed deaccession avoid the perception the action is being made in accordance with current fads or fashions (for example, furniture of a certain period is no longer in high demand)?
- Does the proposed deaccession preserve the integrity of scientific collections?
- Does the proposed deaccession and subsequent disposition appear to benefit NPS employees and their relatives in any way?

See **Figure 6** for a checklist to use when considering proposed deaccessions.

See **Figure 7** for a sample memo to use for documenting non-museum property that was accessioned in error.

### **B.3 List of Figures**

**Figure 1:** Memo to Regional Directors from Associate Director, Cultural Resources, Partnerships and Science, dated April 13, 2017

**Figure 2:** Sample Memo Establishing Park Collections Advisory Committee

**Figure 3:** Specialist Review Form: Accession

**Figure 4:** Specialist Review Form: Deaccession

**Figure 5:** Specialist Review Checklist for Proposed Accessions

**Figure 6:** Specialist Review Checklist for Proposed Deaccessions

**Figure 7:** Sample Memo for Accessioned in Error

### **B.4 Bibliography**

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Weil, Stephen E., editor. *A Deaccession Reader*. American Association of Museums, 1997.

Wood, Elizabeth, Rainey Tisdale, and Trevor Jones, editors. *Active Collections*. Routledge, 2017.

**Figure 1: Memo to Regional Directors from Associate Director,  
Cultural Resources, Partnerships and Science, dated April 13, 2017**



**United States Department of the Interior**

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE  
1849 C Street, N.W.  
Washington, DC 20240

**APR 13 2017**

H30 (2260)

\*\*\*ELECTRONIC COPY ONLY – NO HARD COPY TO FOLLOW\*\*\*

Memorandum

To: Regional Directors

From: Associate Director, Cultural Resources, Partnerships, and Science *Stephanie DeBuccia*

Subject: FYI Collections Advisory Committee Required for Museum Accessions

This memorandum serves as a reminder that the update to the 2006 Park Museum Collection Storage Plan requires parks to establish collections advisory committees for new acquisitions to park museums. Collections advisory committees evaluate the appropriateness of new acquisitions by determining if the items fit the Scope of Collections (SOC) and if they can be managed according to DOI and NPS standards. Due to the growth in NPS collections, many parks are facing storage capacity issues and must carefully evaluate the feasibility of new acquisitions and the parks' capacity to responsibly care for them.

Use of a committee to provide subject matter expertise and impartial evaluation is a common museum practice, which protects park managers and their staff from possible accusations of partiality, self-dealing, or vested interest, and is a key aspect of a strong museum program. Since 2000, committee review has been required for deaccessions, and some parks that receive numerous donations on a regular basis are already using committees to review accessions.

Guidelines for establishing a collections advisory committee are currently found in Chapter 6: Deaccessioning, of the *Museum Handbook*, Part II. Similar guidelines will be included in an update of accessioning procedures in Chapter 2 of the Handbook.

Please ensure that park managers are aware of this requirement. Questions regarding this memorandum may be directed to Museum Registrar Kathleen Byrne at 304-535-6204 or [kathleen\\_byrne@nps.gov](mailto:kathleen_byrne@nps.gov).

## Figure 2: Sample Memo Establishing Park Collections Advisory Committee



### United States Department of the Interior

#### NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

Interior Regions < >

<Park Name>

Address

City, State, Zip



<File Number>

<Date>

Memorandum

To: Regional Curator, Museum Program

From: Superintendent, <Park>

Subject: <Park> Museum Collections Advisory Committee

A Collections Advisory Committee has been established for <park>. The Committee reviews the appropriateness of acquiring new collections or deaccessioning collections. This Committee is composed of impartial and disinterested individuals providing for checks and balances. It protects the superintendent and park staff from possible accusations of partiality, self-dealing, or vested interest. The members of the group are required to be federal employees.

The members of the <park> Museum Collections Advisory Committee are:

Name, Title, Park

Name, GS-1015-11 Curator, Park, Center, or Office

Name, Title, Park

Name, Title, Park, Center, or Office

Please direct any questions to Committee Lead, <name> at <phone number> or <email>.

<Name>

Superintendent

## Figure 3: Specialist Review Form: Accession

US Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

\_\_\_\_\_  
Accession Number

# Specialist Review

---

Your comments here (or attached) show that you have reviewed the proposed accession for conformity with the laws authorizing NPS accessions and the accessioning guidelines in the *Museum Handbook*, Part II, Chapter 2, Accessioning, and have given your best professional advice about this transaction.

---

**Description of Proposed Accession:**

**Acquisition Type:**

**Comments (attach additional comments if necessary):**

**Accession Recommended:** Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

**Name:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Title:** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Signature**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Date**

## Figure 4: Specialist Review Form: Deaccession

US Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

\_\_\_\_\_  
Deaccession Number

# Specialist Review

---

Your comments here (or attached) show that you have reviewed the proposed deaccession for conformity with the laws authorizing NPS deaccessions and the deaccessioning guidelines in the *Museum Handbook*, Part II, Chapter 6, Deaccessioning, and have given your best professional advice about this transaction.

---

**Description of Proposed Deaccession:**

**Deaccession Type:**

**Disposition Type:**

**Comments (attach additional comments if necessary):**

**Deaccession Recommended:** Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

**Disposition Recommended:** Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

**Name:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Title:** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Signature**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Date**

**Figure 5: Specialist Review Checklist for Proposed Accessions**

|  |  |
|--|--|
| Does the proposed accession fit within the park’s Scope of Collection Statement?   | YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Is the item essential to fulfilling the park’s mission?  | YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Will the item enhance interpretation at the site?  | YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Is the proposed accession original to the site?  | YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Does park enabling legislation require the park to preserve and maintain certain types of objects and archives?  | YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Does the item add information about the collection that would be of value for research and education?  | YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Does the park have museum storage space?   | YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Does the park have the staffing and funds to manage the item according to NPS museum standards?  | YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Are there many similar items already accessioned and maintained as museum property?  | YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Is the proposed accession currently in good condition? (Consider completeness, damage, inherent vice, conservation needs, etc.)  | YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Does the item have well documented and authentic provenance?   | YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Does the proposed accession come with clear copyright? (no restrictions)   | YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Did the source of the proposed accession acquire the object legally, and is there clear title?   | YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Is the item better suited to another collecting institution that would make it accessible to the NPS and the general public?   | YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Is the item hazardous or made of potentially hazardous materials? (e.g. asbestos, uranium, live gunpowder, black mold, arsenic or other pesticide residues, flammable cellulose acetate or cellulose nitrate film and negatives, medical objects, drugs/chemicals) | YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO <input type="checkbox"/> |

**Figure 6: Specialist Review Checklist for Proposed Deaccessions**

|  |  |
|--|--|
| Are the items proposed for deaccessioning cataloged?   | YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO <input type="checkbox"/>                                 |
| Has the regional curator been consulted about the proposed deaccession (optional)?   | YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO <input type="checkbox"/>                                 |
| Is the proposed deaccession consistent with relevant laws and with current DOI and NPS policies?   | YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO <input type="checkbox"/>                                 |
| Has the appropriate documentation been provided for the proposed method of disposition?  | YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO <input type="checkbox"/>                                 |
| If the proposed deaccession type is Outside the Scope of Collection, what is the disposition method?   | YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO <input type="checkbox"/>                                 |
| Is there supporting documentation, including but not limited to catalog data and a written justification, provided in the proposed deaccession package?  | YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO <input type="checkbox"/>                                 |
| Is the proposed deaccession hazardous or made of potentially hazardous materials?  | YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO <input type="checkbox"/>                                 |
| Does the proposed deaccession take into consideration any community requests for items to stay in the museum, region, or local area?   | YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO <input type="checkbox"/><br>N/A <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Were the items mistakenly accessioned into the museum collection? (The mistakenly accessioned property must not fit the definition of museum property as defined in the glossary of the Cultural Resource Management Guideline.) | YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO <input type="checkbox"/>                                 |
| Does the proposed deaccession take into consideration the need to safeguard against loss of scientific, associational, evidential, artifactual, informational and/or monetary value represented by the item?                     | YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO <input type="checkbox"/>                                 |
| Does the proposed deaccession avoid the perception that the museum is deaccessioning items in exchange for items of lesser importance?   | YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO <input type="checkbox"/>                                 |
| Does the proposed deaccession avoid the perception the action is being made in accordance with current fads or fashions (for example, furniture that is out of fashion)?   | YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO <input type="checkbox"/>                                 |
| Does the proposed deaccession preserve the integrity of scientific collections?  | YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO <input type="checkbox"/>                                 |
| Does the proposed deaccession and subsequent disposition appear to benefit NPS employees and their relatives in any way?   | YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO <input type="checkbox"/>                                 |

## Figure 7: Sample Memo for Accessioned in Error



### United States Department of the Interior

#### NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

Interior Regions < >

Address

City, State, Zip



<File Number>

<Date>

Memorandum

To: Superintendent, <Park>

From: Collections Advisory Committee, <Park>

Subject: Accessioned in Error, (Park Accession-Number/Park Catalog Number)

The Collections Advisory Committee (Committee) recommends the removal of <describe object(s)> that was accessioned in error into the museum collection.

<Object name(s) was accessioned and cataloged (Park Accession-Number/Park Catalog Number) into the park's museum collection on <date>. <Describe the circumstances for the accessioned in error>.

The Committee has reviewed and recommends the <object(s)> be removed from museum property and noted as Accessioned in Error. The Specialist Review forms providing recommendations from each Committee member are attached.

Indicate your approval to remove the <object(s)> from the museum collection by signing below.

---

Superintendent

Date