

Museums Association Code of Ethics

Revised wording – disposal and transfer (section 6, Code of Ethics)

As a result of work carried out by the Museums Association and in light of findings of a recent sector-wide consultation on museum disposal, it has been proposed that some changes be made to the ethical principles which inform this area of museum practice.

The Museums Association's Code of Ethics has been revised to reflect the need to more actively consider museum disposal as an integral part of collections management, and an acknowledgement that transfer and disposal may sometimes be necessary to ensure the sustainability of museum collections. There is growing recognition of the benefits, both to collections and the public, which can result from an approach to managing our collections that includes opportunities for review and development through the use of transfer and disposal.

The new ethical guidance on disposal is designed to:

- Acknowledge responsible, well planned and curatorially driven transfer and disposal as an integral part of collections management
- Recognise the role that transfer and disposal can play in improving the use and care of collections
- Recognise the role that transfer and disposal can play in developing and reinvigorating collections
- Recognise that greater consideration and undertaking of disposal and transfer can help to ensure the sustainability of collections
- Recognise the need for and the provision of clear safeguards to ensure that only responsible disposal takes place
- Ensure that only transfer and disposal that has demonstrable benefits to the collection and the public, and does not damage the trust placed in museums takes place

Below is a revised extract from the section of Museums Association's Code of Ethics that relates to the transfer and disposal of items from museum collections. This extract should be read within the context of the ten key principles that make up the Code. A copy of the Code can be found at: www.museumsassociation.org/codeofethics

The Museums Association is interested in hearing any views on the proposed changes to the Code of Ethics. If you would like to comment on the changes please contact Caitlin Griffiths, The MA's Adviser: Professional Issues: caitlin@museumsassociation.org

Any comments should be submitted by 15th June.

Guiding principles – proposed new wording

The Museums Association's Code of Ethics:

6.0 Collections are a tangible link between the past, present and future. Museums balance the interests of different generations by safeguarding collections, which may include buildings and sites.

Museums develop and implement a collections policy that ensures appropriate standards of care and security for all items entrusted to them, either permanently or on loan.

Museums meet their responsibility to future generations by ensuring that collections are well managed and sustainable. There is a strong presumption in favour of the retention of items within the public domain. Sometimes transfer within the public domain, or another form of disposal, can improve access to, or the care or context of, items or collections. Responsible disposal takes place as part of a museum's long-term collections policy, for sound curatorial reasons and in order to increase public benefit.

6.8 Recognise that formal title and guardianship for the collections is vested in the governing body, which must satisfy itself that decisions to dispose are informed by the highest standards of expertise and take into account all legal and other attendant circumstances.

6.9 Demonstrate clearly how the long-term local and general public interest is served in circumstances in which disposal may be appropriate and ensure that public trust in museums is upheld.

6.10 Keep collections as far as possible in the public domain to maintain public confidence in museums. Give priority to transferring items, preferably by gift, to registered or accredited

museums. Consider donating items to other public institutions if it is not possible for another museum to accept them. Wherever possible do not sell items from a permanent collection, or otherwise transfer them, out of the public domain. (This paragraph excludes material that is being disposed of because it is damaged beyond use, or dangerous, or is being returned to its place of origin or rightful owner.)

6.11 Refuse to undertake disposal principally for financial reasons unless in exceptional circumstances where significant long-term improvements to the collection would result, where the item falls outside the core collection, and only after all other sources of funding have been explored.

6.12 Apply any money raised as a result of disposal through sale, if this exceptional circumstance arises, solely and directly for the benefit of the museum's collection. Money raised should be invested in the long-term sustainability, use and development of the collection (such as by creating or increasing an endowment, making new acquisitions or making a significant capital investment which will bring long-term benefit).

6.13 Base decisions to dispose on clear, published criteria as part of the institution's long-term collections policy, approved by the governing body. Ensure transparency and carry out any disposal openly, according to unambiguous, generally accepted procedures. Incorporate criteria and procedures for disposal in the museum's collections policy.

6.14 Consider, and where appropriate seek the views of stakeholders (such as donors, researchers, and source or local communities) who may have a vested interest in a proposed disposal.

6.15 Openly communicate and document all disposals and the basis on which decisions to dispose were made.

6.16 Apply any money received in compensation for the loss, damage or destruction of objects in the collection solely and directly for the benefit of the museum's collection.

6.17 Consider requests for return of human remains, and other culturally sensitive material with understanding and respect for the beliefs of communities of origin.

For additional, more detailed guidance on all aspects of disposal see the Museums

Association *Disposal Toolkit*