Acquisition fact sheet

Acquisition is the formal process of obtaining legal possession by purchase, donation or through bequest of an item.

Information about the object including its name, a short description of it, the date on which it was acquired and from where it was sourced are recorded in a register along with a unique registration number for each object.

The Acquisition or Accession Register

The Register is an official record of the organisation.

It should contain concise and accurate details of each object in a form readily accessible by others.

Information on every object should be accumulated rather than be modified or erased. It might be necessary to do this if a new cataloguing system is installed or when an object is deaccessioned, stolen, lost or destroyed.

The Register operates to document each object over time.

The best procedure for amending records in the Register is to rule through previous information with pencil, initial and date it and then add the new information.

The Register can be used as a base for inventories and stocktaking, but it's preferable to make a copy to avoid the Register being marked with crosses, checks resulting in a difficult to read or unusable record.

The acquisition procedure

In taking possession of an object the donor is issued with a numbered receipt and the object tagged with the same receipt number.

The object is then referred to the Acquisition Committee. The object is checked against the Collections Policy to confirm that the offered object meets the acquisition criteria.

Once the decision is made to acquire the object, the donor should be sent two Deed ofGift forms which, when signed, confirm the formal transfer of the object from an individual's possession to the museum. One signed copy is kept by the donor and the other is kept by the museum as a record of the transfer.

The signed copy of the Deed of Gift form should be in the Museum's possession before the object is formally acquired as it is the primary reference for proof of ownership of the object.

Once the process is complete send the donor a letter thanking them for their gift and for supporting the organisation. An object information form can also be sent to the donor at the time of acquisition.

The newly acquired object should be given an acquisition number at this stage and recorded in the Acquisition Register along with other object details.

The registration number should be applied to the object in a discreet area

If you use a receipt register the registration number and the decision to acquire the object should be recorded in the appropriate column.

If the object was purchased, retain the receipt place it, or a copy, in the object file or with the catalogue sheet.

Numbering systems

There are a range of different numbering systems suitable for acquisition procedures.

The two-part system based on the year of acquisition and the sequential number of the acquisition in museums with large general collections. A teapot which is the fifth object acquired in 2014 becomes 2014/5

If the teapot has more than one part, for example the pot and the lid, add part numbers, so that the pot becomes 2014/5-1 and the lid 2014/5-2

Some organisations favour a numeric system combined with punctuation notation to express information about a particular object. For example the 147th object in a museums agricultural collection would receive the number: AG.147 or the 27th glass negative in a museum's photographic collection would be numbered as: GN.27

In choosing a numbering system, ensure it is carefully documented and explained with examples in the standard procedure file.

You might also like …

Museums Australia (Victoria), The Small Museums Cataloguing Manual

mavic.asn.au/resources

Powerhouse Museum, A Simple Guide to Labelling Museum Objects

powerhousemuseum.com/pdf/preservation/A_Simple_Guide_to_Lablling_Museum_Objects.pdf

Museums & Galleries of NSW, Deed of gift form

mgnsw.org.au/sector/resources/online-resources/collection-management/deed-gift-form/

Museums & Galleries of NSW, Acquisition register template

mgnsw.org.au/sector/resources/online-resources/collection-management/acquisition-register-template/