WELCOME!

Museum Skills Lab
Conducting an Inventory

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While we are waiting for everyone to join, please reply to the following question in chat:

What experience do you have with inventories?

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Conducting an Inventory

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Introductions

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Overview

Inventories are important!

Inventory defined

Workflow & logistics

Activity

Inventory in action

After the inventory

Q&A

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Inventories are important!

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Why do an inventory?

It's in the code of ethics for registrars

Grant compliance

Storage upgrade

New director/ curator

Condition check

To tell a great story in your exhibition

AAM accreditation

It's long overdue!

Locate missing objects

Discourage theft

Building move

Never had one!

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Inventory defined

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An inventory is...

- Knowing what you have and where you have it

- Knowing why you have it and what condition it is in

- In the collections management system (CMS) or in someone's brain 🧠

- Required by a good Collections Management Policy (CMP)

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Types of inventories

COMPLETE INVENTORY
(a.k.a. 100 percent, wall-to-wall, or full inventory)

- Whole collection

- Results can be authoritatively reconciled against museum records

- Often funded by grants and is a major undertaking

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Types of inventories

PARTIAL INVENTORY

- By group or category
- Randomized
- Stealth or piggy-backed
- Everyday spot
- Visual
- Salvage

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With all partial inventories,
you will not be able to
definitively reconcile
against museum records.

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Scope: how detailed should it be?

GOOD

- Accession number
- Current location
- Name of staff confirming the location
- Date the object is confirmed in location

This information will help discover missing or misplaced objects.

This information will NOT provide any additional benefits for documentation or preservation.

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Scope: how detailed should it be?

BETTER

Improve documentation (check tombstone information):
- Object titles or descriptions
- Object mediums or categories
- Artists or makers
- Materials
- Measurements
- Dates

Improve condition and housing: condition reports and flag objects for new housing

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Scope: how detailed should it be?

BEST

- Create object photographs
- Mark objects
- Rehouse objects
- Conserve objects

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Not sure what to include in your inventory?

Determine what resources you have. This will help you determine what you can do.

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Poll

What experience do you have with inventories?

Has your answer changed now that you know the different types and scopes of inventories?

Yes/No

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Workflow & logistics

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Team: who does the work?

- Recruit staff

- Create teams (if possible)

- Define roles

- Staff dedicated to the project may be more productive BUT...
  - Inventories require a high level of concentration and involve repetitive tasks
  - Schedule breaks to avoid errors and fatigue caused by routine

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Team: who does the work?

Good
- Someone with basic handling and documentation training

BETTER
- Content expert
- Materials and conditions expert
- Data entry and planning expert

BEST
- Photographer
- Art handler and/or mount maker

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## Schedule: how long will it take?

- More people and more teams = faster *(maybe)*

- May need staggered working times
  - COVID: Social distancing. How many people can safely be in a room?
  - Small storage/exhibition areas
  - Issues with internet connection or limited users on CMS

- Do a test run of one "unit"
  - Multiply duration of the testing phase by number of units to be inventoried
  - Include time for breaks
  - Add a 10% buffer for the unexpected

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Budget: how much will it cost?

- What materials will you need?

- Infrastructure

- Hiring staff

- Perks!
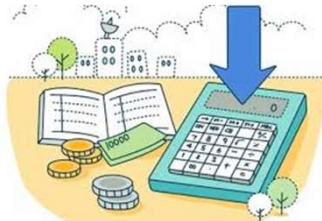
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And more...

- Create an Inventory Manual

- Advocate your needs to museum leadership

- Working with technology
    - Does your museum have a Collections Management System (CMS)?
    - Are all the records for every object currently in the system?
    - How are you going to enter your inventory data into your CMS?
        - Digital: does your museum have WiFi and enough laptops?
        - Retroactively: who will complete this task?

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Activity

Problem solve ahead of time

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What challenges will you face when conducting an inventory at your institution?

Take a few minutes to think of 3-5 potential challenges. Share them over chat.

We'll choose 1-2 of your challenges and problem solve together.

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Tough questions

- How to deal with objects that have mysteriously shown up?
    - Found in Collection (FIC)
        - Assign a tracking number
        - Attempt to reconcile with existing documentation
        - Stop / Accession / Deaccession

- How to deal with objects that are really missing?
    - File an insurance claim
    - Inform authorities
    - Add a location of "missing in inventory"
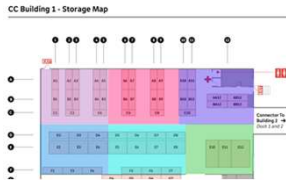
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Inventory in action

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Implementing the inventory

- Work from your records to your objects

- Go from location to location – from room to room
  - Divide location map into "units"

- Empty the room/shelf you are checking and then return objects one by one as they are inventoried.
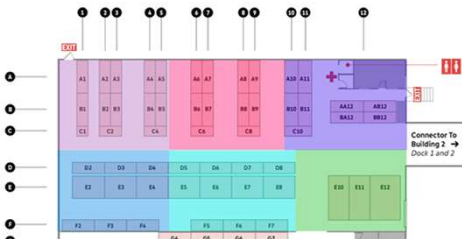
CC Building 1 - Storage Map

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Location map divided into units

CC Building 1 - Storage Map

Three things you will find

1. Objects that match the recorded location – hooray!

2. Objects that are at the location, but have different location entry information or no location entry information.

3. Objects that should be at location, but are missing (temporarily misplaced ☺).

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After the inventory = *before* the inventory

The everyday work of a registrar or collections manager is ongoing preparation for the next inventory:

- Ensure that all policies for acquisition, accession, cataloging, marking, housing, location changes, and condition checks are followed meticulously
- Raise awareness among your colleagues for following procedures
- Use persistence, patience, and politeness

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Takeaways

- With partial inventories, you will not be able to definitively reconcile against museum records.
- To determine the type and scope of the inventory, understand your resources.
- One person can complete an inventory!
- Work from your records to your objects.

What in this presentation can you apply today or tomorrow?

Add your ideas to chat!

Continue the conversation

- Handouts

- UA&M staff are here for you! Please reach out.

- If you can, stick around for Q&A

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