

Code of Ethics for Registrars

INTRODUCTION

The authors of this Code of Ethics for Registrars acknowledge their indebtedness to Museum Ethics, American Association of Museums, 1978, and endorse that report as a statement of basic principles applicable to the ethical issues faced in common by all museum professionals. This Code of Ethics for Registrars has been developed to apply similar ethical principles to the specific activities and responsibilities of museum registrars.

The Registrars Committee of the American Association of Museums accepted and endorsed this Code of Ethics for Registrars on 11 June 1984.

DESCRIPTION OF THE POSITION

Individuals with the title or function of registrar have a varied range of responsibilities and activities. In this document the basic description of the position as defined in the glossary of Museum Registration Methods is adopted “an individual with broad responsibilities in the development and enforcement of policies and procedures pertaining to the acquisition, management and disposition of collections. Records pertaining to the objects for which the institution has assumed responsibility are maintained by the registrar. Usually, the registrar also handles arrangements for accessions, loans, packing, shipping, storage, customs, and insurance as it relates to museum material.”

Registrars are usually specialists in the areas of information management, risk management, and logistics. The primary concerns of registrars are creating and maintaining accurate records pertaining to objects, including those documents that provide legal protection for their museum; ensuring the safety of objects; arranging insurance coverage for objects; and the handling, transporting and control of objects.

THE REGISTRAR, THE RECORDS AND THE OBJECTS

Registrars’ obligations to their museums’ collections, to loaned objects, and to the associated records are paramount.

MANAGEMENT, MAINTENANCE AND PRESERVATION OF THE RECORDS

The records and documents that form a body of information pertaining to the collections and loaned objects are the responsibility of registrars and are the cornerstone of the registrarial function.

The records comprise legal documents establishing ownership or loan status of objects; records of accession, location, donor or vendor, exhibition, and publication. In addition, they may also include photographs, licenses and permits, exhibition bond notices, and historical records. Frequently, curators keep research files on the objects in their domain.

Registrars must maintain records that are meticulously complete, honest, orderly, retrievable, and current. Records should be created in a timely manner and accurately dated. Records must be stored in an archivally and technologically sound and secure manner, both to ensure their preservation and to prevent access by unauthorized persons. The expertise of legal counsel and archivists should be sought without hesitation.

Registrars must protect their museums and the objects in them against the risk of liability through the use of valid documents such as gift, sales, loan and custody forms and receipts; by implementing all aspects of insurance coverage for owned or borrowed objects on premises or in transit according to the terms of their insurance policy or indemnity; and by complying with pertinent laws and regulations governing such things as import and export or the movement of objects or rights and reproductions of objects.

Registrars, through the records maintained, are accountable for the objects in custody of their museums and must be able to provide current information on each object, its location, status, and condition.

MANAGEMENT, MAINTENANCE, AND THE CONSERVATION OF THE OBJECTS

In maintenance and physical care of the collections, registrars must work in close cooperation with curators, conservators, collections managers, and other museum staff, and must be guided by their museums' collections management policies. In management of loaned objects registrars also work in cooperation with exhibition, technical, and security staff, and they must adhere to and enforce the lenders' conditions of loan.

In some museums it is not registrars but curators or collections managers who have responsibility for the physical care of collections in storage. Whichever is the case, the best and most secure environment possible should be ensured for the storage and preservation of objects. The condition of the collections should be reviewed periodically and the expertise of conservators should be sought without hesitation.

Objects in movement are the responsibility of registrars. As risk managers, registrars are responsible for determining and arranging for the correct method of handling, packing, transporting, and couriating objects. They must also consider borrowers' capabilities and facilities. Registrars identify potential risks and complications and act to reduce or eliminate them.

Registrars share the responsibilities for loaned objects in the custody of their museums. They are responsible for their safe movement, temporary storage, and correct disposition. Registrars always must treat loaned objects of whatever value, quality, or type with the same care and respect given to objects in their museums' collections.

Registrars must complete condition reports in an honest and timely manner, be familiar with the terms of their insurance coverage and ensure that insurance reporting is accurate. In filing an insurance claim, all relevant circumstances of loss or damage must be disclosed, even if it appears that the museum is at fault.

ACQUISITION AND DISPOSAL

Registrars must adhere to the acquisition and disposal policies of their museums; if no written policies exist, then registrars should encourage and assist in their formulation. In the absence of written museum policies registrars should develop written procedures for use by their departments to ensure compliance with traditional but oral museum policies. Registrars should obtain the approval of the directors before implementing such procedures, and strive to ensure that the policies and procedures are complied with at all levels within the museums.

Objects for acquisition or disposal are proposed, usually by curators, to the relevant museum committees for approval. Registrars' roles in acquisition are generally in an advisory capacity concerning the feasibility of storage, the risk of movement to the object under consideration, and certain legal aspects of the transaction. Prior to issuing an accession number reflecting the date and/or order in which the object was added to the collection, registrars are responsible for obtaining documentation of the decision to acquire the object, the document transferring title of an object to the museum, and the receipt of delivery of an object. Registrars should be aware of, and not contribute to, the violation of tax, wildlife, import, or other laws and regulations governing acquisition of objects by their museums and other institutions with which they are involved.

Registrars should ensure that at least one appraisal of an object is acquired and institute insurance coverage if applicable according to museum policy. In order to prevent their use as an appraisal for tax or other purposes, these appraisals should not be made available to the donor or vendor of an object. Appraisals for tax purposes are the responsibility of the donor, who can be informed whether an object is accepted for the collection, for sale, or for use by the museum.

Registrars' roles in deaccessions and disposals are primarily those of monitoring and documenting procedures. Registrars also should bring to the attention of the curator any object in irreparable condition or one jeopardizing the safety of the rest of the collections. Registrars should verify the museum's legal right to dispose of an object, and inform the curator and other appropriate museum staff of any restrictions attached to an object that may bear on its disposition. When restrictions are attached to an object, legal counsel should be sought so that the museum might be relieved of those restrictions by appropriate negotiation or legal procedure.

Once all the proper approvals have been granted, registrars must amend all the related records to show the date of deaccession, the authority for it, and the method of disposal. Records may also show the disposition of any funds realized through sale or any exchange acquired as a result of deaccession. Donor credit for, and use of funds realized through the sale of an object must comply with the policies of the museum.

AVAILABILITY OF COLLECTIONS AND RECORDS

Museums hold and safeguard their collections for posterity, although they must allow reasonable public access to them on a nondiscriminatory basis. However, registrars must act according to the policies of their museums.

Registrars, along with curators and conservators, must ensure that objects from the collections are examined and viewed in a manner not detrimental to an object. They must also ascertain that a borrowing institution's facilities are acceptable when considering a loan request, so that an object will not be placed in jeopardy.

The records constitute part of a museum's accountability to the public. However, registrars must ensure the proper supervision that sensitive or confidential material in their museums' records is not accessible to unauthorized persons. When in doubt registrars should consult their supervisors or their museums' legal counsel.

TRUTH IN PRESENTATION

Registrars are responsible for creating and maintaining accurate records and updating them in light of new research, and for ensuring that the records reflect insofar as they are known.

HUMAN REMAINS AND SACRED OBJECTS

Registrars must be tactful and responsible in giving access to collections of human remains and sacred objects, and must store, transport, and care for these objects in a manner acceptable to the profession and to peoples of various beliefs.

THE REGISTRAR AS STAFF MEMBER

GENERAL DEPARTMENT

Registrars are visible to the public, the profession, commercial representatives, and government agents in situations ranging from collecting objects from donors and lenders in their homes or museums to negotiating with customs inspectors in cargo sheds. Registrars must behave in a dignified and ethical manner and gain the respect of others by not creating embarrassments either to their museum or their profession. Because of their access to confidential matters and information, it is incumbent upon registrars to be discrete and circumspect in all their communications or actions in an effort to preserve the integrity of their museum.

In all activities and statements, registrars must make it clear whether they are speaking for their museums, their professional association, or themselves. They must be aware that any museum-related action may reflect upon their museums, be attributed to it, or reflect upon the integrity of the profession as a whole.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

Registrars must be governed by their museums' policies on conflict of interest and other ethical matters.

Registrars should be loyal to their museums and not abuse their official position or contacts within the museum community, nor act so as to impair in any way the performance of their official duties, compete with their museums, or bring discredit or embarrassment to any museum or the profession in any activity, museum-related or not.

RESPONSIBILITY TO THE COLLECTIONS AND OTHER MUSEUM PROPERTY

Registrars and their staff must never receive or purchase for their own or another individual's collections or purposes, even at public auction, objects deaccessioned from their museums' collection. Registrar's volunteers and interns should be guided by the codes governing their supervisors.

Registrars should never put to personal use objects in their museums' custody and they should guard information that would enable others to do so. Registrars must never abuse their access to information and to other museum assets by using them to personal advantage. Registrars must be particularly vigilant concerning their knowledge of museum security procedures.

Because of their experience and responsibility as risk managers, registrars are often regarded as authorities in the care and transport of valuable or problematic objects. They must guard against giving the impression that their museums endorse the services of any specific vendor or supplier.

When recommending the services of conservators, appraisers, packers, shippers, customs brokers, or others, whenever possible registrars should offer the names of three qualified vendors to avoid favoritism in recommendations.

PERSONAL COLLECTING AND DEALING

Registrars must be governed by the policies of their museums, which usually are designed for curators and directors. If at the time of their employment their personal collections are the similar to those of their museums, registrars should submit an inventory of their collections to the appropriate official and update their inventory in a timely manner. As to objects they acquire after they are employed; registrars may be required to give the museum the opportunity to purchase such objects at their acquisition cost for an appropriate period of time. In no case should registrars compete with their museums in any personal collecting activity. They should never act as dealers or for dealers.

OUTSIDE EMPLOYMENT AND CONSULTING

In any situation where registrars work for another organization, an individual, or themselves on their own time, such work should not interfere with the performance of registrars' duties for their museums. The nature of the employment should be disclosed to and cleared by their director and should conform to their museum's relevant personnel policy.

GIFTS, FAVORS, DISCOUNTS, AND DISPENSATIONS

Registrars often use the services of commercial companies. They must not accept gifts of more than a trifling nature, such as unsolicited advertising or promotional material, so that their judgment will not be impaired when selecting a vendor. Such selections should be made upon merit and not for personal reasons of obligations.

Registrars must not accept personal discounts from vendors who do business with their museums. Registrars must also avoid any appearance of being influenced by gifts or dispensations provided by vendors or services.

TEACHING, LECTURING, WRITING, AND OTHER CREATIVE ACTIVITIES

Registrars should teach, lecture, write, and perform related professional activities for the benefit of others in the profession or those aspiring to such a position. They should also contribute to the general public understanding of museum registration.

Registrars should enhance their own knowledge in all registration matters, ensuring that they are up to date with current methods of records management, object care and handling, packing, transporting, insurance, personnel, and financial management, as well as changes in the laws affecting museums and their collections.

Registrars should obtain the approval of their director and conform to their museums' policies on questions of use of official time, royalties, and other remuneration for such activities.

FIELD STUDIES AND COLLECTING

Because legal and ethical problems can arise more frequently in fieldwork, registrars must be particularly zealous in completing accurate and timely records. Registrars must monitor compliance with local, state, national, and international laws, as well as with their museums' acquisitions policies. They must also be sensitive to ethnic or religious beliefs.

THE REGISTRAR AND THE MUSEUM MANAGEMENT POLICY

PROFESSIONALISM

Although the governing board of the museum is ultimately responsible for the museum, the director is the chief executive officer.

Registrars must carry out their duties according to established guidelines and under the directions of their supervisors, who may be the director, the assistant director, or curator of collections, or an administrative manager. In no case should they take direction from members of the governing board, who should confine their directives to the chief executive officer of the museum. If guidelines or delegations of authority are unclear registrars should seek written clarification.

Registrars should not be required to reverse, alter, or suppress their professional judgment to conform to a management decision.

When a disagreement arises between the registrar and the director or other supervisor, the registrar should consider documenting the difference of opinion, but should also conform to the grievance procedures of the museum. Only when asked to falsify records or in some way compromise legal and ethical standards should the registrar consider writing a report to the governing board of the museum, and then only with the full knowledge of the museum director.

INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS AND INTERMUSEUM COOPERATION

While registrars must strive for excellence in registration methods, they should understand that professional role within the total context of their museum and should act cooperatively and constructively with colleagues in the furtherance of their museums' goals and purposes. It is important for registrars to obtain the respect and trust of colleagues in their own and other museums.

Intermuseum cooperation may take the form of providing safe storage for duplicate sets of collections records, of providing the services of conservation or preparation of objects for transport, of consolidation of shipments or safe storage for traveling exhibitions between sites. Such cooperation may also take the form of providing professional help and temporary storage of objects or records in the event of fire, flood, or other disaster. When objects or records are so taken into their museums' custody, registrars should ensure that valid documentation of the terms and duration of the custody arrangements is provided.

Code of Practice for Couriering Museum Objects

Courier Policy

The consideration of using a courier is based on certain primary facts, which are that:

- ✧ Certain museum objects are of a fragile nature, whether by construction or formation, size, materials used, deterioration by age or abuse, and/or require special handling or installation techniques.
- ✧ Certain museum objects are irreplaceable, rare and unique, politically or culturally sensitive, of extreme artistic, historical, scientific worth, or of extreme value for other reasons.
- ✧ Certain shipping routes may prove dangerous to fragile museum objects because such routes expose the object to careless handling, excessive movement, changing and/or extreme temperatures, and other human and/or natural hazards.

Lending and borrowing institutions must agree that:

The museum that owns the object may determine that a courier is necessary to lessen the hazards inherent in the object itself, and may specify the transportation method and/or route to preserve the object from loss by damage or theft and/or to assure that the object will not receive such wear as would cause future problems in the museum's efforts for preservation.

Both the lending and borrowing museum are fully cognizant of and in accord with the limitations and requirements of third parties to the loan (such as insurance companies, transport companies, and forwarding companies) and are in agreement about which museum will take responsibility for actions not covered by such third parties.

The lending and borrowing museums accept that:

- ✧ The care of museum objects is the top priority in the shipment, except in life-threatening situations.
- ✧ The requirements of a courier will be established and agreed upon by the lending and borrowing museum by the time the loan agreement is signed and accepted.
- ✧ The courier, acting as an agent of the lending museum, has full authority to act in protection of the object until the object is officially released to the borrowing museum.
Therefore:
 - ✧ The courier designated must be a museum professional (understanding the condition of the object and its special requirements, familiar with packing, trained in handling, and, as applicable, experienced with transport procedure), in whom the lending museum reposes complete trust for execution of a courier-related duties.
 - ✧ The museum which selects the courier is, in effect, bonding that person for knowledge of the problems of the object and of the transit, for ability to withstand the rigors of travel, and for taking full responsibility for protecting the object.
 - ✧ The courier will be made aware of and understand the responsibilities entrusted to him/her, and of all known possible hazards which might be encountered in transit.
 - ✧ The lending and borrowing museums must agree in advance on costs related to the courier, on which museum shall pay for them, and on the method of reimbursement for expenses whether foreseen or unforeseen.
 - ✧ The shipment of a museum object will not become the basis for unrelated travel or activity.

Courier Procedures

Who selects a courier?

The decision to select a courier should be made in consultation among the director, curator, registrar and conservator or by one of these, in accordance specified in museum policy.

Who is qualified to be a courier?

Directors, curators, registrars, conservators, and, in certain cases, senior preparators, should be the only people eligible to serve as couriers. People who serve as couriers must be those who are experienced in handling museum objects.

The courier must possess certain qualities: firmness, patience, stamina, and the ability to make intelligent decisions quickly. If the object is to be hand-carried, the courier must have the physical strength to do so. The courier should not carry any luggage while hand-carrying an object. He/she must possess packing skills, be able to make condition reports and effectively use a camera, and be familiar with shippers, brokers, customs, surface transportation, and airport and airline procedures.

Borrower and Lender Agreements and Responsibilities

The agreement to courier an object should be included as part of the loan agreement or a separate written agreement. If the lender has special requirements (that the object be a hand-carry, that it travel flat, that armed guards be required from the door of the aircraft to the door of the museum, that first-class travel is necessary, that an extended stay by the courier at the borrower's institution is required, or special installation instructions) these should be stipulated in writing at the outset. The borrower should clearly outline its courier procedures regarding all flight details or surface arrangements, arrival, unpacking, condition reporting, and installation, as they apply. All arrangements should be understood by all parties well in advance of the shipping date, including back-up plans for sudden schedule changes. Hotel accommodations and terms for daily expenses should be clearly set forth as part of the formal agreement. It is incumbent upon both borrowing and lending museums and their appointed couriers to make every effort to adhere to cost-effective planning and implementation of courier expenses.

Arrangements

The borrowing and lending institution registrars or loan officials make the arrangements for the loan and courier in accordance with accepted practice and the loan agreement.

The registrar or borrower's representative must meet the courier upon delivery. The courier must know exactly where he/she is to be met when arriving. For international shipments, the borrower's customs broker must be at plane-side if possible to supervise off loading while the borrower is bringing the courier to cargo to meet the broker and shipment. The borrower should not move the shipment until the courier is present unless an emergency develops. The borrower's broker must make incoming customs clearance arrangements so that the object is not jeopardized at the airport by having their crates opened for inspection. The borrower must provide suitable vehicles to get the courier and the shipment from the airport to the museum, and provide personnel at the museum to help off-load the truck. If courier and object are in separate vehicles, they should travel in tandem.

Once the courier is satisfied that the object is safely stored, the borrower should assist the courier in getting to his/her hotel, and should inform the courier how and when to return to the museum to

unpack the object. Twenty-four hours should be designated for object acclimatization. The borrower should provide help to unpack, prepare and install the object as necessary, and should initial the courier's condition report.

The borrower must provide secure storage for the courier's objects. The borrower must recognize that the courier has authority over the object until the courier is satisfied with its disposition. The courier should act cooperatively with the borrower's staff and accommodate shipping arrangements and installation schedules.

Accompanied Shipment

An accompanied shipment is one in which the courier agrees to oversee other museum loans in the same shipment, but is not responsible for overseeing packing, unpacking, or making condition reports. Museums and couriers should have a written agreement regarding the accompaniment of their objects, clearly stating what the courier is expected to do about other objects, with respect to both responsibility and authority.

Responsibilities of the Courier

The courier constitutes a continuous chain of accountability for the object, from the hands of the lender to those of the borrower. The implication is that the courier can take efficient, rapid, on-site action to preserve the object from, of through, high-risk situations in transit. Secure and expeditious movement of the object can reduce high risk to lower levels of risk.

Responsibilities to the Object

The courier for witnessing and supervising packing, unpacking after the acclimatization period, transportation, and examination of the object at the beginning and end of shipment. The courier must stay with the shipment, physically and personally or via constant contact with centers of authority in direct control of the shipment (i.e. customs brokers) where physical presence by the courier is restricted.

The courier must do all that may be necessary to keep delays or possibilities of delays to a minimum. The courier is responsible for anticipating, solving, and reporting unforeseen problems. In the event of a major change in weather, for example, the courier must decide whether it is advisable for the shipment to proceed.

The courier must have no conflicting obligations or reasons for couriating an object. The courier's family/friends must not travel with the couriated shipment; the courier must not be required nor requested, nor allowed to visit other locations for personal or museum matters before the object is safely delivered; and the schedule of shipment of the object must not be forced to meet appointments nor to ease the courier's trip at the expense of the object.

Skill, Knowledge, and Abilities

The courier must understand and uphold the museum's standards as stated in institution policies. The courier must have vocational knowledge, founded upon practical experience in museums, to understand how these policies relate to "real life" circumstances. The courier must also understand the performance expectations of the borrower.

The courier should join in the pre-evaluation of shipment difficulties: dropped cases, fork-lift hazards, major temperature and humidity variations, palletization and containerization problems (i.e. objects that were wet, excessively heavy, or loose in the container with museum crates), insecure strapping, unscheduled unloading, etc.

The courier must have knowledge of the object's construction techniques, material, and condition, and must understand the sensitivity of materials and techniques to the varying conditions of transit. He/she must be able to recognize condition problems that require examination or treatment by a conservator.

The courier must know exactly where the object is going, to whom, and by what means, including alternate/back-up routes if schedules are delayed, altered, or canceled.

The courier should have available from his/her institution or from the borrower:

- ✧ A copy of the loan agreement
- ✧ Business and home addresses, telephone and fax numbers of principals (both borrowers and lenders)
- ✧ Schedules of transit, including alternates
- ✧ Insurance restrictions, and a copy of the certificate of insurance
- ✧ Numbers, sizes, weights, and object checklists
- ✧ Handling instructions
- ✧ Condition reports
- ✧ Photographs of objects
- ✧ Copy of customs invoice

The courier should leave an itinerary with the registrar's office.

The courier should be prepared in advance for delays, cultural differences in conducting business, language barriers, international telephone and telegraphy procedures, possible strikes, and different local and national holidays.

The courier must understand and appreciate the support functions, procedures, restrictions, and authority of carriers, forwarders, customs agents, airport security, lenders and borrowers. The courier must understand the extent of his/her own authority and responsibility, and ascribe neither too little nor too much authority to someone else.

The courier must have a sound knowledge of government regulations that can limit or curtail courier action (i.e. restricted entry).

Information should be given only to priority individuals directly involved in the transit of the object and with justified need to know. The courier should not tell them anything more than is necessary for them to do their job.

The courier should have some knowledge of shipping, including under-seat sizes, storage areas on board aircraft, and how to seal truck and container locks properly.

The courier must record any container numbers for crated objects, should know position numbers within aircraft, and be seated on the aircraft loading side to watch for unscheduled unloading of crates.

The courier must carefully read and understand every document or receipt before signing it, requesting translations when necessary.

The courier must take neither alcohol nor medication that might in any way impair his/her physical mobility and/or ability to make decisions.

The courier should keep accurate accounting of expenses, including copies of all receipts.

Responsibility to the Borrower

- ✧ The courier must know the borrower's requirements.
 - ✧ The courier is representing his/her institution and as such should conduct himself/herself fairly and ethically.
 - ✧ The courier should expect to travel coach class unless hand carrying an object.
 - ✧ The courier should not make last-minute changes of plan unless essential to the shipment, but if necessary then the borrower should be immediately notified.
 - ✧ No arrangements should be made that would cause unnecessary risks, complicated timetables, or extra expenses.
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