

FROM IDIOSYNCRATIC TO INTEGRATED: STRATEGIC PLANNING FOR COLLECTIONS

Collections planning applies the proven principles of strategic planning to museum collecting. A collections plan provides a rationale for choices and specifies how they will be achieved, who will implement them, when that will happen, and what it will cost. In thus abandoning ad hoc, idiosyncratic collecting, museums are better positioned to manage change, from tightening resources to new intellectual directions.

As with all planning, the process is as important as the document that is produced. There is no one way to do it—rather, the process should grow out of the culture of the specific museum. Addressing intellectual or conceptual tensions within the museum must be part of that process—tensions between legacy collections and new collecting directions, between current stewardship needs and building collections for the future, between passive collecting and planned collecting, and between unique, institutional responsibilities and shared, collective responsibilities. At the same time, on the organizational side, the museum must work through the often conflicting perceptions and motivations of curators, managers, and trustees. While such issues may be unsettling or distracting, they must not become obstacles to change.

For most museums, the biggest challenge is developing an intellectual framework that articulates the rationale for or theory of the collections. As difficult as it may be to develop such a framework, it is critical to planning, establishing the compelling and shared vision that defines the museum's collecting and providing the context for making decisions.

In the final analysis, the goal of collections planning is simple: integrated, strategic collecting tied to the museum's mission and intellectual goals.