

EXT 027: MUSEUM COLLECTION POLICY

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Objective:

To provide a clear and consistent framework for the acquisition, management and development of the Shire of Esperance Museum Collection. The purpose of the Collection is to create a set of physical and digital resources relating to the Esperance region that can be used to:

- enrich knowledge, understanding and experience of the history of the Esperance Region;
- interpret the history and development of the region;
- conserve historical resources for the benefit of the community and future generations;
- provide a historical education and research facility for the community.

Policy:

All Collection activities will follow best practice principles of museum collection acquisition and management and adhere to the following core principles;

1. Council is committed to establishing sustainable partnerships with community groups and organisations to communicate the rich social, cultural and natural history of the Esperance region.
2. Council accepts that it has a responsibility to provide for the long-term care and preservation of the Museum Collection and assets that document or portray the social, cultural and natural history of the Esperance region.
3. Council will facilitate the strategic role of the Museum as a catalyst for cultural development by directing funding for the management and storage of the Museum Collection subject to financial and physical constraints.
4. The Museum will only acquire Indigenous cultural items of significance to the region in circumstances where the item has provenance and in consultation with the local Indigenous Community.
5. Council will exercise due diligence to establish the valid ownership of an item. No item will be acquired, whether by purchase, donation, loan, bequest or exchange, unless Council is satisfied that a valid title of ownership is held.
6. To be considered for acquisition by purchase or donation an item must be of a quality and condition that is relevant to this policy.
7. No items should be acquired with conditions or restrictions on how they may be used or displayed in the future.
8. No item shall be acquired from significant heritage sites and buildings where acquisition and removal would diminish the significance of the place, except in circumstances where the item is at risk.
9. Items will only be acquired when the Museum can provide appropriate resources and storage to ensure their safety.
10. Council will maintain appropriate insurance on both the Museum building and contents.

Acquisition Principles

The Museum collects items that are relevant to the Esperance region, with an emphasis on items that hold provenance and significance to the region and related to people closely associated with the area at key periods in history. Items having provenance and significance to the Esperance region are considered for acquisition from pre-European settlement to present day within a historic and thematic scope.

Acquisition is dependent on the availability of supporting documentation or other evidence of the provenance and significance of the item.

In some exceptional cases items may be acquired without provenance or significance to the Esperance region if the item was typically used in the region or if the item interprets the history of the region.

Accessioning is the formal process of documenting an item into the Collection.

Assessment of Significance

The assessment of significance is the process of researching and understanding the meaning and value of items and collections. Items will be assessed to determine their significance before being accepted into the Collection.

Four primary criteria and four comparative criteria are used to assess significance. The primary criteria are historic, aesthetic, scientific/research potential and social/spiritual. The comparative criteria evaluate the degree of significance and these are provenance, representativeness or rarity, condition or intactness and interpretative potential.

The assessment of significance can also be used to help decide whether an item should be deaccessioned from the Collection.

Deaccessioning

Deaccessioning is the formal process of removal of an item from the Collection. Deaccessioning of any item is not lightly undertaken and is carefully considered before actioning.

Possible reasons for deaccessioning items include:-

1. The item is damaged beyond repair or requiring conservation disproportionate to its significance;
2. Repatriation of cultural material to an Indigenous community with proof of a valid claim;
3. The item is deemed to represent an occupational health and safety risk;
4. The item no longer relates to the acquisition principles;
5. Duplication in the collection;
6. Appropriate storage space no longer being available; and
7. Theft or loss.

Where possible the original donors or donor descendants will always be notified that their item has been identified for deaccessioning with a view to returning the items or negotiating a mutually agreeable alternative.

Method of Disposal

The methods of disposal in order of desirability are:

1. Return to the donor or donor descendants.
2. Transfer or exchange to another appropriate organisation.
3. Sale with proceeds retained by the Museum.
4. Destroy or recycle.

Shire of Esperance staff, volunteers or elected members may not purchase, or otherwise obtain, deaccessioned items outside of formal processes. An exception would be if the staff member, volunteer or elected member originally donated the item.

Loan Principles

No items will be accepted on indefinite or long term loan. Loans in or out may only be arranged for fixed periods and for specific purposes.

Loans will be accepted/permitted for a period of up to twelve months for the purposes of exhibition or research to /from appropriate institutions, or as determined by the Chief Executive Officer.

Loans will be accepted or made on a case-by-case basis, ensuring all loans are returned by the date indicated on the loan documentation.

With the agreement of both parties loans can be re-negotiated prior to the return date.

The Museum reserves the right to request the return of the item if the need arises.

Ethics

The Esperance Museum will only acquire items having a legal and ethical provenance and in accordance with State and Federal law and international agreements between Australia and other countries.

The collection of items will always be conducted in accordance with the standards of the Code of Ethics of Museums Australia Inc. and National Standards for Australian Museums and Galleries.

Definitions:

Accession – refers to the process of documenting an item for inclusion in a museum collection.

Acquisition - refers to the process of obtaining legal possession of an item for accessioning into a collection. Acquisitions can be by donation, purchase and bequest.

Collection – includes physical objects and archives. Archive material includes items such as photographs, documents, audio files, digital files artworks, published items, community organisation records.

Deaccessioning - refers to the process of removing an item from a museum collection and the recording of the disposal of this item from a collection.

Item – can be a physical object or archive material.

Ownership - refers to an item or collection where a clear legal title, without restrictions or conditions, has been established. The Esperance Museum seeks to obtain clear legal title for all items acquired for its collections.

Provenance - The origin and/or subsequent history of the material can be thoroughly documented and authenticated. Assessment of museum collection material includes documentation of its known chain of ownership.

Significance - refers to the historic, aesthetic, scientific and social values that an item or collection has for past, present and future generations.

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