



North East Museums

**Collections Information / Documentation
Policy for Museums and Galleries**

Name of Governing Body: North East Museums Strategic Board

Date for review: November 2029

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1. Introduction

This policy demonstrates how North East Museums (NEM) will carry out documentation to the highest possible professional standards for its museum collections.

1.1 Definition

Documentation (sometimes called Collections Information) is *‘all the information that we collect, create, hold and maintain about our collection and/or collected items. This information can include a broad range of knowledge, such as interpretation, stories, research and recorded conversation’*. (PAS 197: 2009).

1.2 Mission and Values

***Our mission** is to welcome and connect people to the past, present and future of the North East through stories, shared spaces and experiences.*

We will help people understand and act on local and global challenges:

- **Equality** – we will provide a warm welcome to everyone, break down barriers caused by inequality and discrimination and share diverse stories.
- **Wellbeing** – we will use our spaces and services to support people’s physical and mental health.
- **Social mobility** – we will deliver learning experiences, volunteering opportunities and pathways for personal development for people of all ages and backgrounds.
- **Climate** – we will raise awareness about the environment and encourage people to act for a sustainable future.
- **Place** – we will celebrate North East England, inspire local pride and use our resources to support research, innovation and economic regeneration

Documentation at NEM aims to underpin NEM’s mission and commitments. In particular, it underpins the commitment to Place by ensuring the safe, accountable and meaningful recording of the collections which belong to, inspire and represent the region.

Whilst documentation does not always contribute directly to all commitments in an obvious way, it underpins a lot of other work by making collections information accessible and usable by both staff and visitors leading to meaningful interactions with our collections.

1.3 Related Documents

This policy is part of NEM’s Collections Management Framework.

It should be read alongside: Documentation Procedural Manual; Documentation Plan; Collections Development Policy for Museums and Galleries; Collections Care & Conservation Plan; Care of Working Object Policy and Collections Access Policy.

2. Ethical and Legal Considerations

Documentation at NEM will comply with all relative legislative and ethical standards including but not limited to:

- General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) 2018
- Freedom of Information Act 2000
- Museum Association Code of Ethics

3. Professional Standards

The following professional standards will guide documentation practice at NEM:

- Spectrum 5.1 (issued by the Collections Trust). NEM will follow the 9 primary procedures: Object entry; acquisition and accessioning; location and movement control; inventory; cataloguing; object exit; loans in (borrowing objects); loans out (lending objects) and documentation planning. NEM will also work towards meeting the remaining 12 procedures wherever possible. NEM also undertakes to update documentation practices with future iterations of this guidance.
- 'Off the Shelf: a toolkit for ethical transfer, reuse and disposal', Museums Association, 2023

4. Objectives

NEM's documentation should:

- Meet professional standards in collections management.
- Ensure accountability for and security of NEM collections (including loans-in) by having effective records (and therefore, e.g. being able to locate all collection objects).
- Allow for effective sharing and use of our collections both physically and digitally.
- Make sure that the stories connected to objects are recorded, preserved and made accessible to staff, the public and researchers.

5. Principles

NEM will follow these documentation principles to ensure it is effective, accountable and maintains the Spectrum procedures:

- Create and maintain up-to-date records for all objects in NEM's collections to the highest possible standards.

- NEM's Collection Management System (CMS) should be used to record all information and steps in the process of managing our collections and ensuring the correct documentation is present at each stage.
- A minimum standard of inventory information should be recorded on the CMS for each new object in the collections. Where information exists, this should be supplemented by in depth catalogue information. On entry to the collection, all accompanying information about an object should be included in this catalogue record.
- Newly acquired objects should all have full legal title established on entering the collection (including proper transfer of title of acquisitions). Where possible, copyright should also be obtained. Due diligence paperwork should be created and maintained.
- Each object should be labelled with its accession number in order to be easily identifiable. Where possible, photography of each object should also be included on the CMS.
- Where new collections information supersedes previous collections information or understanding about an object, then the old information will also be kept with a clear record of why this has been updated.
- Loans 'In' to and 'Out' from the collection should be fully documented with loan agreements, receipts and insurance arrangements all fully recorded on the CMS.
- Any object leaving the collection (i.e. for loan, transfer or disposal) should also be fully documented with receipts and paperwork stored on the CMS.
- Locations (temporary and permanent) for all objects should be recorded so that they are locatable at all times. Previous locations should be maintained to act as an audit trail. Where staff or volunteers move an object and are unable to update a location, they must inform the curator of its new location.
- Confidentiality of information in our care should be protected at all times.
- Regular review of our CMS to ensure it is fit for purpose and safeguard against future obsolescence.
- Regularly review and update practice in-line with emerging professional standards.
- Maintain a rigorous training and support programme for staff members who use and generate documentation.
- Support our Collections Information Access policy, as outlined in the NEM business plan by being clear and complete where possible.
- Take into consideration the environmental impact of documentation practices at NEM with the aim of creating an ever more sustainable practice; paying particular attention to the impact and long-term reduction of data storage.

6. Accountability and audit

NEM will maintain a level of documentation by meeting the principles described above. This is to ensure the proper care for objects for which it is legally responsible, including loans.

NEM will undertake to audit the collections once a year as directed by its governing body. Supplementary 'spot-checks' or 'mini-inventories' will also take place. The purpose of these activities is to check effectiveness of our documentation systems and the security of the collections, as well as to ensure good compliance.

7. Retrospective documentation

NEM, in common with many museums and galleries, has a backlog of retrospective documentation and areas of historic documentation which would not meet current standards. To address these issues NEM will:

- Update records whenever an object is selected for use (e.g. through loan or exhibition).
- Old records (such as day books, loan books, purchase invoices, object history files) will be collated and digitised to ensure accountability of the collections and avoid the risk of loss.
- The Documentation Plan will be regularly reviewed to set out clear plans and goals to tackle the documentation backlog and make improvements on current records.
- Opportunities for funding, volunteer support etc. will be used to make improvements where possible.

8. Security of Collections Information

Security of Collections Information is ensured by:

- Collections information is primarily stored on the on the CMS. This is backed up by Newcastle City Council (NCC) on a regular basis at a remote site.
- The museum will endeavour to make sure all information held in accession registers and object history files is recorded on the CMS.
- Collection records must be securely stored. A duplicate record should be maintained at a separate site from the original as a security measure.

9. Users of this Policy

Care of the collection is the responsibility of all staff at NEM. Anyone who generates data related to the collection has a responsibility to ensure that it is recorded on the CMS.

Guidelines and procedures relating to documentation practice will be accessible to all staff.

Curatorial staff have responsibility for the creation, maintenance and enhancement of collections records. The Documentation Team has responsibility for the systems and platforms on which these records are made accessible for management and public use and for monitoring the updating of records.

The Documentation Procedural Manual (pending) outlines areas of specific responsibilities but all staff producing documentation must abide by the principles laid out in this policy.

The Documentation Team will provide advice and information to the public and to other museum and archive professionals regionally, nationally and internationally.

This policy is available to all staff, volunteers and freelancers in the following location [Documentation Policy 2024.docx](#). It will be shared with new staff as part of their induction and revised versions will be distributed to all staff.

Contact details for the Documentation Team can be found here:

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