

Disposal of Deaccessioned Objects

Hooray! You've deaccessioned the objects that you needed to... Now what? Disposal of deaccessioned objects does not need to be a scary process. Here are a few of the most common ethical methods of disposal.

Sale by auction

Selling deaccessioned objects at auction is an accepted form of disposal in museums around the world. Developing a relationship with a trusted local auction house is a great way to ease this process. Be aware that funds from the sale of deaccessioned objects must go back into direct care of collections or acquisition of new objects that are more suited to the collection.

Transfer to another institution

A common reason, especially during Active Collections work, to deaccession objects is that they do not fit the mission of the collecting institution. The deaccessioned object may better fit the collecting scope of another local historical society near you, for example. First, **ask** whether the institution would like this object. If they do, great! You can proceed with gifting it to them. If not, move on to one of the other options for disposal

Transfer to your institution's education collection

Objects that don't fit your mission or duplicates that are taking up space in collection storage may still have value in a hands-on educational collection that requires a lower standard of care. If the deaccessioned object is in safe handling condition, it may be a great fit for your education collection. Be aware that education collections are made up of consumable objects – they will deteriorate over time with handling, but they add value as touchpoints to history.

Destruction

If an object is significantly deteriorated to the point that it has lost its historical value, is posing a danger to other collection objects or to staff, or is unable to be transferred or sold, the most ethical method of disposal is witnessed destruction. You should ensure that the method of destruction does not pose a risk to staff and keep clear records of the process.

Here are some examples of unethical or incomplete disposal of deaccessioned objects:

- Throwing an object away in a dumpster (May erode public trust in institution)
- Mailing an object to another institution without prior communication (Shifting the burden)
- Sale of an object to a board or staff member (Conflict of interest)