

TIP SHEET

Found In Collections (2016)

Found In Collections

Often when we are conducting inventories and/or looking for artefacts in our storage rooms we come across "Found in Collections" artefacts or "FICs". These are artefacts that have missing or no information associated with them. We often ask ourselves "now what?" You have two options: accession the artefact into the collection, or remove the artefact from the collection. But before we make a decision, we must consider the artefact, itself.

What to Consider

Currently, Saskatchewan has no Abandoned Property Law in relation to museums and their collections. Therefore, until someone can legally provide concrete evidence that the artefact belongs to them, FICs are the responsibility of the museum they were discovered in. FIC artefacts are best addressed on an individual, case-by-case basis.

First, you must gather as much information about the FIC artefacts as possible. Ways you can find information about FIC artefacts include:

- Determining if there is any documentation about the artefact at all; even if it is incomplete
- Are there staff members, volunteers, or docents who have been at the museum for a long time and might remember seeing the object?

- Physical location of the artefact: near similar artefacts? Located within a group of artefacts with similar accession numbers.
- Search accession files
- Review exhibit catalogs and/or inventories
- Review old newspaper articles, annual reports, or museum newsletters, that reported donations/loans to the museum
- Review old institutional meeting minutes that discussed collections donations/loans
- Sort through old gift and loan agreements
- Compare object description against prior collection inventories

It is **Best Practice** as you conduct your research to catalogue the artefact and the information you gather about it. Using your museum's cataloguing system, ensure you record all the artefact's information including, but not limited to:

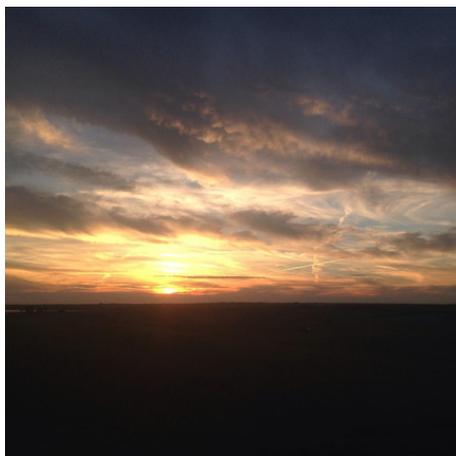
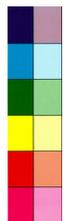
- Object Name
- Category
- Description
- Marks/Labels/Inscription
- Materials
- Measurements
- Location
- Condition
- Photograph of the artefact

Now that you have gathered as much information as possible about the artefact, you must determine the object's future status. Are you going to accession the artefact into your collection (permanent or educational) or deaccession the artefact (for donation, sale or disposal)?

You need to ask yourself and your board of directors:

- Is the artefact relevant to your museum's mission statement or statement of purpose?
- What is the artefact's physical condition
- What is the artefact's value, either scientific, scholarly, historic, or aesthetic for any institution?
- Is object of Indigenous origin?
- Does the artefact contain materials derived from a threatened or endangered species?

Once considering these fundamental factors, the **Reconciliation Process** can begin.



Photograph: Sask Sunset
Artist: Emma Morris
FIC 2017-01 or 2017-999-01
February 9, 2017

The Reconciliation Process

Option One:

If you decided to accession the FIC artefact into the collection, it should be treated as if it was a regular artefact being accessioned into the collection. If you followed **Best Practices**, this will simply mean adding an accession number.

When applying an accession number, it needs to be unique and easily identifiable. If your museum uses the three-part numbering system (Year- Sequence Year-Lot Number), then place the numbers 999 in the sequence year slot as an indicator that the object is a FIC. In you are using an Alphabetical Prefix System, use the letter FIC as the prefix.

For Example:

Three Part Number System: 2017-999-01
Alphabetical Prefix System: FIC-2017-01

Once an accession number is given and all documentation is completed, the artefact is now officially part of the museum's collection.

Example of Accessioned FIC Artefact

Option Two:

Maintaining FICs that do not meet the museum's mission or are inferior duplicates, or are irreparably damaged, or pose a threat to the staff or permanent collection in some way, can be unnecessary and expensive.

If it is determined that disposal or deaccession for sale or gift to another Museum is the best course of action for the FIC artefact, take care to document the objects thoroughly before beginning the process (see **Best Practice**). Remember, to keep a copy of all the information for internal use.

The decision may be made to sell or destroy the artefact. Remember, if you choose to sell the artefact, all funds gained through its sale must be reinvested into caring for the collection.

Whatever you decided, you need to remember that what is the most appropriate procedure for one object may not be the best for another.

For Examples:

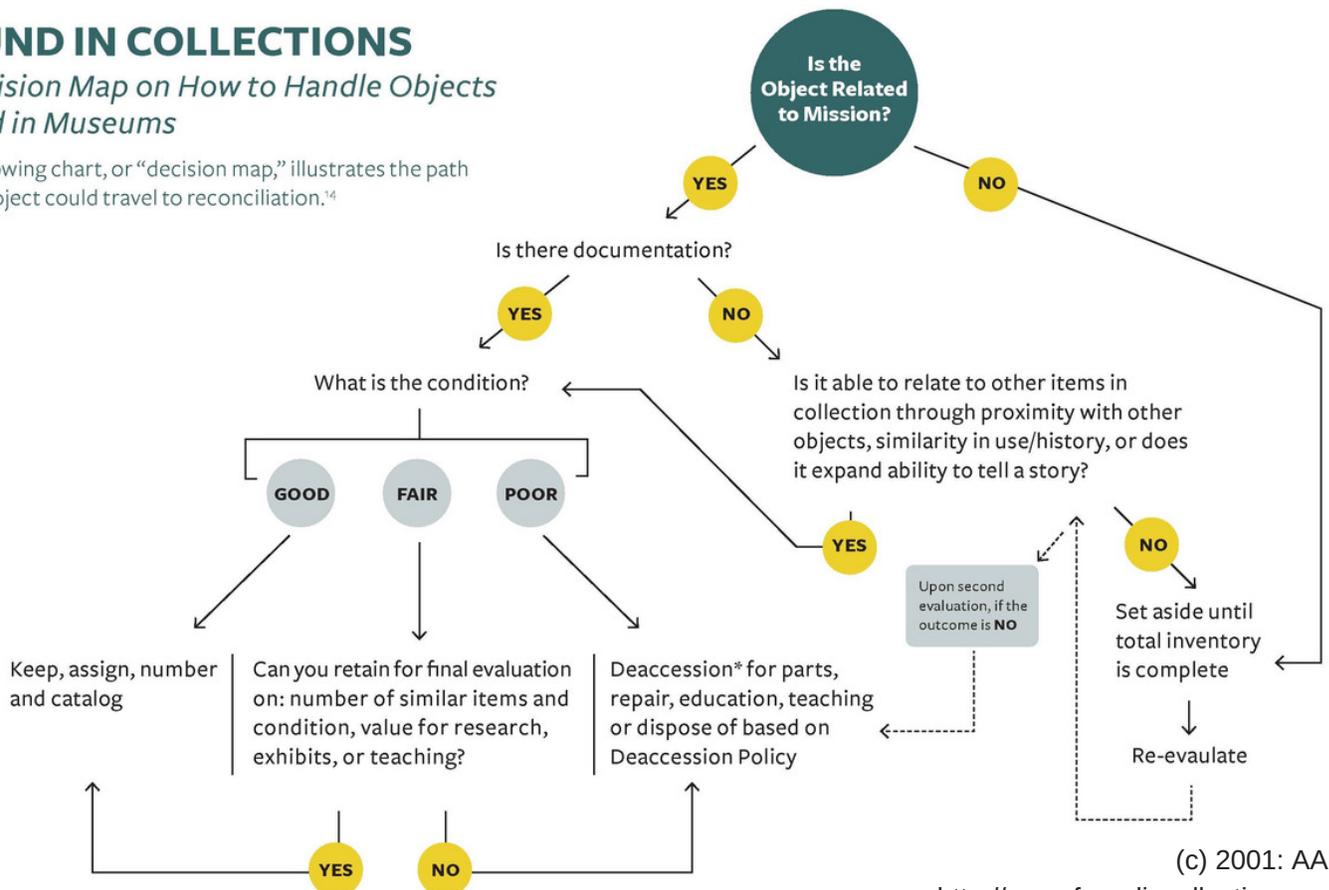
- Artefacts of Indigenous origin, or artefacts containing organic materials may require unique disposal methods.
- Artefacts that could potentially endanger staff or the permanent collection may require more expeditious decisions.

If you are uncertain as to how to proceed, set aside all your FIC objects, making a "don't know" pile from which you can **reconcile** artefacts as you have time and as you determine the best course of action for each item.

FOUND IN COLLECTIONS

A Decision Map on How to Handle Objects Found in Museums

The following chart, or "decision map," illustrates the path an FIC object could travel to reconciliation.¹⁴



(c) 2001: AAM

<http://www.foundincollections.com>

Conclusion

While finding artefacts without or with limited documentation in your collection can seem problematic, there are solutions available to deal with them. It is in your best interest to investigate the artefact and catalogue it as you find information about it. You and your Board of Trustees will then have all the information you need to make a decision: to Accession or Deaccession.

For More Information, See:

Buck, Rebecca. "Found in Collections." *MRM5: Museum Registration Methods 5th Edition*. The AAM Press, 2010. Pg. 109-118

Caltin-Legutko, Cinnamon and Stacy Klinger. "Stewardship: Collections and Historical Preservation." Rowan Altamira, 2012. Pg. 78-81

"Collections Documentation Manual for Saskatchewan Museums." *Museums Association of Saskatchewan*. 2014.

"Found in Collections" Wikipedia. 27 May, 2016. Website:
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Found_in_collections

Simms, Melinda. "Found In Collections: A Reference Guide for Reconciling Undocumented Objects in Historical Museums." *Museum of Pop Culture (US)*. 2016.
Website: <http://www.foundincollections.com>

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