

Ortonville Community Historical Society

Deaccessioning Policy

Adopted by the OCHS Board of Directors on December 6, 2023

Deaccessioning is the process by which an object owned by OCHS is permanently removed from the collection to sell or otherwise dispose of it.

There are several reasons why OCHS may want to remove an object from its collection. This document defines the process OCHS uses to authorize deaccessions.

The benefits of using this formal process are:

- It creates clarity on the process, which reduces tension and improves cohesion among the member volunteers.
- It defines who is authorized to make the deaccessioning decisions, and gives those decision-makers guidance on important factors to consider.
- It reduces accidental disharmony between OCHS and donors, as it ensures OCHS does not dispose of objects that are “on loan”.
- It ensures pursuit of OCHS’s mission is maintained.
- It protects the 501(c)3 charitable organization status of OCHS.
- It protects the assets of OCHS from unauthorized disposal.

Deaccession Process Summary:

- 1) A member who believes one or more objects should be deaccessioned creates a Deaccession Request, documenting why the deaccession is being considered, proof of clear title to the objects, and recommended method of disposal.
- 2) The Board of Directors reviews the Request, ensures everything is in order, and votes whether to proceed.
- 3) The objects are disposed of in the manner described in the Request, and OCHS records are updated.

Creating the Deaccession Request

The Deaccession Request will contain the following information:

- Description of object(s)
- Reasoning for deaccessioning
- Verification of Legal Status
- Physical Examination results
- Object Evaluation
- Proposed Disposal Method
- Stakeholder notification

Description of objects

Describe the objects under consideration for deaccessioning. More than one object can be included in the same Request.

Reasoning for deaccessioning

There are several reasons why OCHS may want to remove an object from its collection.

- The object is no longer consistent with the OCHS mission or collecting goals.
- The object is of poor quality and lacks value for exhibition or study purposes.
- The physical condition of the object is so poor that restoration is not practicable or would compromise the work's integrity or the artist's intent.
- OCHS is unable to care adequately for the object because the object's particular requirements for storage or display or its continuing need for special treatment for proper and long-term conservation.
- The authenticity or attribution of the object is determined to be false or fraudulent and the object lacks sufficient aesthetic merit or historic importance to warrant retention.
- The piece is a duplicate that has no value as part of a series.
- The work may have been stolen or illegally imported in violation of laws in which OCHS is located, such as the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act; or the work may be subject to legal claims, such as with works misappropriated under Nazi rule.

Document the appropriate reasons for this case.

Verification of legal status

Staff verifies that OCHS possesses official legal title of the work and checks records to ascertain if there are any restrictions that exist in the original gift, bequest, or purchase which may hinder or limit disposal options, including transfer of copyright or trademark. Many items in the museum are "on loan", as opposed to being owned by OCHS, and this would constrain disposal options.

Document the findings of the paperwork search.

Physical examination results

Object evaluation

Document the monetary value of the objects, including the method used to assess value. Outside appraisers may be needed if the objects have a high value and are to be disposed of via sale, auction, transfer, or exchange for value in kind with another institution.

Proposed Disposal method

Disposal is defined as the transfer of ownership by OCHS after an object has been deaccessioned. There are several potential methods of disposal:

- Donate the object to another museum, library or archive for educational purposes
- Exchange of the object for another object with another museum or non-profit institution
- Reallocate to educational programs, to be used for hands-on demonstrations, school outreach programs, or testing for conservation research. In this case it is understood the work will be subject to physical destruction over time.
- Physical destruction – Objects that have deteriorated may be disposed of via physical destruction. Human remains or certain items of religious or cultural sensitivity might need to be handled in a prescribed way to meet legal requirements or cultural standards. Works damaged beyond reasonable repair that are not of use for study or teaching purposes may be destroyed.
- Repatriation – in the case of objects found to be illicitly held by the museum.
- Return to donor. This should be accompanied with a warning to the donor about tax complications, since a tax deduction can be given for a portion of the object's value upon donation and the return of the work to the donor may result in an audit or at least IRS claim on the deduction value previously received.
- Private sale / public auction, in a way that ensures OCHS obtains fair market value for the object. Except in instances where deviation is intended to advance an appropriate public benefit, such as deaccessioning for sale to another public museum, objects deaccessioned for sale will be disposed of by the most profitable means.
- To protect OCHS's 501(c)3 status, objects cannot be transferred to any OCHS member, relative or their associates. Doing so can create a potential Conflict of Interest in violation of IRS regulations covering 501(c)3 organizations.
- Loan the object to an individual or organization, with a defined return date.

Document the disposal process that will be used in this case, and who will do the actual disposal work.

Stakeholder Notification

Document any stakeholders that should be notified (or have already been notified) about the deaccessioning, even if OCHS clearly owns the item and is not required to do so. It is good practice for museums to promote transparency in its acquisitions, accessioning, deaccessioning, and disposition procedures. This helps maintain healthy community relations by heading off potential negative public opinion.

Board of Directors Review

The creator of the Deaccession Requests submits it to the OCHS Board of Directors, who review the Request with the intent to vote to accept/deny at the next Board meeting. The Board should ensure:

- The Request is complete, and the judgement calls contained therein are reasonable
- The deaccessioning is aligned with OCHS's mission.
- The deaccessioning disposal method will not threaten OCHS's 501(c)3 status, or other potential liabilities.
- The deaccessioning of an object should be undertaken with a full understanding of its significance, its character, and any loss of public trust that might result from such action.

The Board may ask the petitioner for more information. Eventually the Board shall vote to approve/deny the Request and authorize the execution of its actions.

If the deaccession is approved:

- The people named in the Request who are to execute the disposal will complete that assignment.
- The collections manager will modify catalog and accession files and database entries to reflect the change in status of the objects. The records will not be deleted or removed but maintained intact for future reference.
- The Board will notify the Membership at the next General Membership meeting.

References

The following sources of information were used to assist in the creation of this policy:

Association of Art Museum Directors, *AAMD Policy on Deaccessioning – June 9, 2010 Amended 10/2015*, accessed 25 September 2023, <https://aamd.org/sites/default/files/document/AAMD%20Policy%20on%20Deaccessioning%20website_0.pdf>.

Form 1023: Purpose of Conflict of Interest Policy, accessed 24 September 2023, <<https://www.irs.gov/charities-non-profits/form-1023-purpose-of-conflict-of-interest-policy>>.

International Council of Museums, *Guidelines on Deaccessioning of the International Council of Museums*, accessed 25 September 2023, <https://icom.museum/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/20170503_ICOM_standards_deaccessioning_final_EN-v2.pdf>.

The Henry Ford 2019, *Employee Handbook Policies and Procedures*, accessed 23 September 2023, <<https://www.thehenryford.org/documents/default-source/default-document-library/employeehandbook.pdf>>.