



Standards for the Care of First Nations and Métis Collections

Approved - January 2001 Amended - April 2009

Museums Association of Saskatchewan - 422 McDonald Street - Regina, SK S4N 6E1 - 1-866-568-7386

The following standards have been developed to guide museums in the care of their First Nations and Métis collections, especially non-Aboriginal museums that do not have the cultural knowledge and expertise related to these collections. As with other collections, museums should be telling the stories behind the items in their First Nations and Métis collections. Museums can increase public understanding about their approach to caring for these collections by writing labels that tell the story behind the object.

These standards provide museums with specific objectives or actions for more appropriately caring for all of their First Nations and Métis collections. The standards regarding sensitive items are particularly critical, as there is a cultural imperative to address the needs of these items. The definitions and examples will provide some assistance in recognizing and identifying potentially sensitive or sacred items. It is difficult to provide strict guidelines for these items because what is sensitive or sacred varies from nation to nation, and is dependent on the circumstances surrounding the object. However, the standards should provide sufficient assistance to help museums take the initial steps and seek the help of appropriate individuals.

Disclosure and Participation

1. An inventory of all the First Nations and Métis collections in the museum should be provided to *MAS* so it can be made available to First Nations and Métis communities upon request.
2. Mailing lists for information and promotional materials should include First Nations and Métis groups and organizations.
3. Offer First Nations and Métis people opportunities to participate in the documentation of First Nations and Métis collections. (Regarding assistance in identifying resources or people when documenting the collections, contact the *Gabriel Dumont Institute*: 917 22nd St W, Saskatoon SK S7M 0R9, telephone: (306) 242-6070, fax: (306) 242-0002, toll free telephone 1-877-488-6888 or website: <http://www.gdins.org/home.html> or the *Saskatchewan Indian Cultural Centre (SICC)*, 2553 Grasswood Rd E, Saskatoon, SK, S7T 1C8, telephone: (306) 373-9901 or fax: (306) 955-3577, website: <http://www.sicc.sk.ca/>)
4. Offer full participation to First Nations and Métis people in the planning, development and production of exhibitions about First Nations and Métis items and storylines.
5. Ensure language and terminology used by the museum in relation to its First Nations and Métis collections is accepted by contemporary First Nations and Métis communities.
6. Ensure First Nations and Métis people are actively involved in the management and governance of the museum. The First People's and Saskatchewan Museums Committee will develop a written strategy for involving First Nations and Métis people in museums, especially with respect to sensitive items.





Repatriation

7. Ensure human remains are not held in museum collections.
8. Immediate re-interment of human remains, both partial remains and whole skeletal remains, should occur.
9. Immediate re-interment of items known to be funerary items should occur; reproductions of funerary items should not be made or used in museums. (To re-inter human remains or funerary items, contact the *Saskatchewan Indian Cultural Centre (SICC)*, 2553 Grasswood Rd E, Saskatoon, SK, S7T 1C8, telephone: (306) 373-9901 or fax: (306) 955-3577, website: <http://www.sicc.sk.ca/>)
10. *MAS First People and Métis Repatriation Guidelines & Procedures*, which is a working draft allowing for continual development, will be consistent with the recommendations of the *World View Task Force* guidelines on Museums and First Peoples, which states, "The treatment, use, presentation and disposition of sacred and ceremonial items and any other items of cultural patrimony should be decided on moral and ethical grounds with the full involvement of the appropriate First Nations as equal partners." (1992)

Sacred/Sensitive

11. Exhibits and programs at or about undeveloped sacred sites are not to be created or offered.
12. Undeveloped sacred sites are not to be promoted by the museum to visitors.
13. Museums are responsible for promoting respectful behaviour at developed sacred sites.
14. Full participation of First Nations and Métis people should be encouraged in the planning and development of programming at developed sacred sites.
15. Museums are encouraged not to participate in the development of sacred sites without consulting with the respective First Nations & Métis community.
16. Written policy should exist that prevents First Nations and Métis items that may be considered sensitive from being photographed, numbered, exhibited or used in programming.
17. Sensitive First Nations and Métis items should be stored in a separate location from the rest of the collections.
18. There should be restricted access to sensitive items, with access granted only to traditional practitioners.
19. A written policy prohibiting the active acquisition of sensitive items by institutions not under First Nations or Métis jurisdiction may be necessary, unless mandated with the full involvement of the appropriate First Nations or Métis as equal partners.

Training

20. There should be mandatory training for volunteers, staff and board members related to the First Nations/Métis collections, protocols and history. Training should include protocols, history and ceremony regarding the sensitive item(s) in question. Aboriginal cultural awareness should be on-going and required.

For further information, contact the *MAS* office in Regina at 780-9279 or toll-free in SK 1-866-568-7386.

DEFINITIONS AND EXAMPLES

The information included in this section will provide useful tools in the museum's efforts to understand and implement the standards related to the care and interpretation of First Nations and Métis collections.

"Sensitive" Items


The term "sensitive" can be described as:

- ◆ Anything used in ceremony
- ◆ Anything that a person used that reflected the spiritual power of that person
- ◆ Items found at grave sites
- ◆ Items found at sacred sites, left as offerings
- ◆ Cultural items that have on-going historical and/or cultural importance to an Aboriginal community
- ◆ Items are sensitive when their treatment by a museum offends or arouses the sensibilities of the people who know and understand the use/history/meaning of the item.

Examples of "sensitive" items include but are not limited to:

Medicine bundles	False Face masks
Pipes and stems, associated pipe bags	Rattles
Eagle feathers and fans	Bone whistles
Drums (except those made for display)	Sweetgrass
Human skeletal remains	Painted tipis
Items known to be grave goods	Backrest banners
Ceremonial bundles	Hawk feather fans
Umbilical cord packages	Staffs
Items with red ochre on them	Headdresses
Moccasins with beading on the bottom	
Items known to come from a sacred site that were left as an offering at the site	
Material that was left to the elements after a Sun Dance	
Pieces of cloth or leather tied together and filled with tobacco or medicine	
Pictographs and petroglyphs in rock, and stones known to come from effigies or used for ceremonial purposes	





Note: The sensitivity and/or sacredness of items, sites, etc is dependent upon the culture and context from which they come. Even within a particular culture, the sensitivity and/or sacredness may be dependent upon an individual, a family or a group of that culture, and they should be consulted. The items listed are frequently considered sensitive and/or sacred. If a museum holds one or more of these items in its collections and has no specific information about the sensitivity and/or sacredness of these items, they should seek out help and treat these items in a sensitive and respectful manner according to the standards.

Developed Sites

A developed site is a natural environment site that will:

- ◆ have existing facilities
- ◆ have programming
- ◆ be under the authority of a registered group (e.g. the provincial government, municipality, etc)

Traditional Practitioners

Traditional practitioners may be described as:

- ◆ Individuals who are recognized by the community as Elders and respected for their cultural expertise
- ◆ Individuals who practice the traditional rituals of their people and are knowledgeable about the use/storage of sacred items
- ◆ Respected Elders
- ◆ Pipe Holders
- ◆ Cultural Elders
- ◆ Oskapeweous/Oskhapewis (translation: a person who gives assistance)