

# History Nebraska Collections Policy

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# Introduction

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This Collections Policy defines the role of collections in the character and function of History Nebraska (legally the Nebraska State Historical Society and hereinafter "HN"), and clarifies HN's guiding principles that relate to the acquisition, management, use, and disposition of its holdings. This document is compliant with HN's mission, vision, values and goals, as well as the agency's broader formative documents such as the current strategic plan, [code of ethics](#) and enabling legislation. Correspondingly, it serves as a basis for specific collections management policies and procedures (e.g. collecting plans and divisional procedures).

## Mission

*History Nebraska collects, preserves, and opens to all the histories we share.*

HN preserves and interprets Nebraska's past, contributing to the education of its citizens. People are the core of HN's mission.

## Vision

To be the most engaging and relevant historical society in the nation.

## Institutional Values

- We Do It Better Every Time. We are always looking to improve. When we fail, we know why and learn from it.
- We Have Each Other's Back. We work in groups; we support one another to ensure our projects are amazing.
- We Own It. If we say we are going to do something, we do our best to get it done.
- We are Curious. We never stop learning and we encourage curiosity in others.

## Strategic Goals

- Grow Our Audiences
- Increase Access to Collections
- Grow Financial Sustainability
- Expand Outreach & Engagement
- Increase Teamwork & Accountability

# Acquisition Policy

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## Statement of Purpose

HN's collections are central to its mission. Selectively acquiring new materials, deaccessioning those no longer needed and making collections accessible to the public are essential institutional functions. History Nebraska's collections are acquired and maintained for research, exhibition, educational, and comparative use.

## Definitions

**Acquisition** is the discovery, preliminary evaluation, negotiation for, receiving permission to copy (in the case of documentary materials) and taking custody of material(s) for addition to the collections of HN.

**Accessioning** is the formal process used to transfer ownership and record material(s) into the *Permanent* collections of HN. Materials acquired for the Education and Use and Comparative Collections are not accessioned.

## Scope of Collections

The Collections Division of History Nebraska collects items that document the human history of the geographical area that is now called Nebraska. Although the basic principle outlined above guides collecting, the types of items collected can vary greatly.

- The Library/Archives collects resources that contain content of evidential or informational value, whether in holographic, printed, visual, auditory or electronic form. This includes (but is not necessarily limited to) published items, public records, business and association records, individual and family papers, photographs, moving images, sound recordings and multi-media recordings.
- The Objects Collection contains three-dimensional objects and artwork of historical Nebraska significance in all formats.
- The Archeology Collection consists of archeological materials and associated records from Nebraska, and lithic and faunal specimens for comparative purposes.

Items are acquired for inclusion into one of three collections: HN's Permanent Collection, Education & Use Collection, or Comparative Collection.

- Permanent Collection items are those that are highly relevant to the mission of HN and are to be retained for an indefinite period.
- Education & Use Collection items, managed by the Objects Collections Department, may be duplicate to items in the Permanent Collection or be of little relevance to HN's mission, but are needed as props for programming or historic site activities. Due to the nature of their use, it is not expected that these items will be retained permanently and they may be destroyed.
- The Comparative Collections consist mainly of skeletal animal remains and stone samples. The archeological staff uses these collections in identifying archeologically recovered bones and stone debris or tools.

## Acquisition Criteria

The following conditions must be met before materials are acquired by HN.

1. The material must have clear title.
2. If material is for sale, funding must be available.
3. HN must have the resources to properly care for the proposed acquisition.
4. The historical significance of the materials (for permanent collections) must be relevant to HN's mission.
5. Provenance of the materials (for the permanent collection) should be documented.
6. Material for public records must meet the retention schedule.

7. All legal and ethical implications of the acquisition must have been considered and any issues resolved.
8. Acquisition should occur without donor restrictions. Restrictions or conditions may be considered when in the best interest of HN's fulfillment of its mission. The Board of Trustees must approve permanent restrictions. Use and disposition will be at the discretion of HN unless otherwise specified.
9. Copyright will be transferred to HN when possible.
10. Incoming loans shall not be added to the collections.

## Means of Acquisition

Materials and objects may be acquired by abandonment, bequest, copy with permission of the owner, excavation, exchange, field collection, donation, purchase, transfer from a governmental body, or any other method which transfers title to HN from any individual, corporate body, or group.

## Acquisition Stipulations

- All acquisitions to HN's collections must be approved by a majority vote of the Collections Committee (See Appendix C in Collections Policy Supplemental).
- No staff or board member may obligate HN to the acceptance of any materials.
- A record will be maintained on all HN acquisitions. Records will include signed legal documents and documents of transfer, and may include appropriate inventories and historical information.
- HN does not guarantee to store donated material together as a unit. Artifacts, manuscripts, published materials, photographs, moving images, sound recordings, and multi-media recordings will be curated by the appropriate division. The association of dispersed materials will be documented.
- Acquisition of materials does not guarantee that materials will be exhibited or used for any other specific HN project or program.
- Materials in the Permanent Collection will be retained so long as they continue to be relevant and useful to the mission and purpose of HN, and if they can be properly stored, preserved, and used. Deaccessioning (permanent disposal) of materials may be considered when one or more of the Deaccessioning criteria apply (see Deaccession Policy below).
- Gifts to History Nebraska are deductible from taxable income in accordance with the provisions of the federal income tax law. HN is required to fill out Part IV of IRS Form 8283 (Noncash Charitable Contributions) if asked by the donor. Before signing that form, the signatory should insist that the property description and donor information be completed. HN staff and board members cannot make appraisals of the monetary value of materials. (Donors are encouraged to make copies of an appraisal available to HN, to be filed with the donation forms.)
- No materials shall be considered as a possible addition to the Permanent Collections for the sole purpose of selling the materials or exchanging for something else.
- HN is under no obligation to accept materials bequeathed or offered to it except when mandated by Nebraska statute.

- In certain circumstances, HN may require financial support to accompany an acquisition.
- The collecting departments of HN do not accept historic structures or real estate.
- Archeological materials will not be purchased as mandated by the Antiquities Act of 1906, the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, and standards set by the American Association of Museums.
- As outlined in the HN Institutional Values and Code of Ethics (See Appendix B in Collections Policy Supplemental), private purchases or acquisitions by current HN staff that fit the collecting criteria of the agency must be offered to the appropriate department for consideration for acquisition. If the item is selected for acquisition, the donating party will be financially reimbursed if desired. Excepted are books or periodicals generally available for purchase by the public.

## Compliance

- HN complies with legislation affecting the acquisition of collections including, but not limited to, the following: [The Museum Property Act, 51-701 to 51-712](#)
- [The Antiquities Act of 1906](#)
- [The National Historic Preservation Act of 1966](#)
- [Nebraska Public Records Legislation, 84-1214.01](#)

Additionally, History Nebraska acknowledges the importance of the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act ([NAGPRA](#)) and agrees to comply with all aspects of the act and to work cooperatively with all tribes to determine which artifacts fall within the scope of the NAGPRA.

## Deaccession Policy

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### Statement of Purpose

Just as selectively acquiring new materials is essential to build and strengthen HN's collections, it is also important to periodically reevaluate the existing holdings and to remove materials from the permanent collections through the deaccessioning process.

### Definition

Deaccessioning is the process of removing accessioned material from the permanent collections of HN. This process should be cautious, deliberate and ethical.

### Deaccession Criteria

In all instances of potential deaccessioning, the historical significance of an object shall be considered of primary importance and will override any of the other criteria. Material from HN's collections to be considered for deaccessioning must meet at least one of the following criteria:

1. The material is outside the scope of, or is irrelevant to the mission of History Nebraska and its acquisition policies.

2. The material lacks physical integrity (it is incomplete, broken, or in poor and unsalvageable condition) or it has deteriorated to the degree that it cannot be used for exhibit or research purposes.
3. The historical evidence that led HN to accept an object has been proven false.
4. The material has been unaccounted for or stolen and remains lost for at least five years.
5. The material is duplicate in that HN's collections contain other examples of the same type of material that are sufficient or better suited to the needs of the agency.
6. HN is unable to preserve the material properly.
7. The material constitutes a physical hazard or health risk to staff, the public, or other collections.
8. There exists a more appropriate repository for the material.
9. It is discovered that the material has an unethical or illegal provenance.
10. The material must be removed from the collection to comply with national and/or state legislation.
11. The material will be destroyed for the purpose of scientific study.
12. To comply with current State records retention schedules.

## Compliance

Curators may recommend deaccessioning of material from HN's collection if, in their judgment, one or more of the deaccessioning criteria have been met. Deaccessioning recommendations must be reviewed and approved by a majority vote of the Collections Committee, the Associate Director for Collections, the Director/CEO, and the HN Board of Trustees before any actions are taken. The Collections Committee will be composed of the Collection Curators and other appropriate staff. See Appendix C in the Collections Policy Supplemental for rules governing the Collections Committee.

## Restrictions

Before any material from the HN's collections are recommended for deaccessioning, reasonable efforts shall be made to determine whether HN has the legal authority to do so.

If HN signed IRS form 8283 at the request of a donor (see Acquisition Stipulations above), Form 8282 needs to be filed by HN if the donated property is being disposed of within two years after the donation. A copy of the form should be sent to the donor.

## Disposition

Material or objects approved for deaccessioning from HN's collections will be handled or disposed of in one of the following methods:

1. Transferred to the use collections of HN, which are managed by the Objects Collections Department, the Archeology Collections Department, or the Library/Archives, as appropriate
2. Transferred to another museum, library, archives or public educational institution, with preference to Nebraska institutions
3. Exchanged with individuals, organizations, institutions or other sources for objects appropriate to HN's collections
4. Donated to a charitable institution (e.g., a thrift store or local theater company) if its intrinsic or monetary value is so low as to make burdensome the effort of finding an institutional home for it or offering it for sale

5. Sold at public auction or sale. (Archeological materials will not be sold)
6. Destroyed

Good faith efforts shall be made for the disposition of any material deaccessioned from HN's collections within one year of deaccession approval. If disposition cannot be arranged, no more than two 1-year extensions may be approved by the Collections Committee. After such time the material shall be discarded. HN will properly care for deaccessioned material until disposition occurs.

## **Conflict of Interest**

Items from HN's collections shall not be given, sold, or otherwise transferred, publicly or privately, to employees past or present or their immediate families or representatives. Items from HN's collections shall not be given, sold, or otherwise transferred, publicly or privately, to sitting or former HN Board or NSHS Foundation trustees or their immediate families or representatives under any terms different from those extended to the general public.

## **Proceeds**

When it is determined that deaccessioned material from HN's collections will be sold, it will be done so publicly. HN may contract with a qualified appraiser to assure the best price. All proceeds resulting from the sale of deaccessioned material from the collections of HN shall be deposited to the credit of the Nebraska State Historical Society Collections Trust Fund to be used solely for the acquisition, conservation, or preservation of HN's collections.

## **Documentation of Deaccessioning**

A record of all materials which have been deaccessioned from the collections shall be kept current and may be distributed in response to any responsible inquiry.

## **Culling Material from Archival Collections**

In some cases, individual archival collections may be culled of superfluous materials contained therein as part of the practice of archival processing. While the disposition of such culled materials are not subject to the same formal process of deaccessioning as other collection items, the same deaccessioning criteria and methods of disposition listed above are employed.

## **Use of Collections**

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Use of the collections is a pivotal part of HN's efforts to open to all the histories we share. HN shall promote the use of the collections for educational purposes by staff and the general public, while taking into account departmental procedures, privacy issues, and current "best practices" in regards to preservation and security.

Collections are most readily accessible to all via exhibits, the Library/Archives reference department, public programs, and the agency's website. Access to collections in storage by members of the general public is subject to departmental procedures and the preservation concerns of specific collection items.

## Outgoing Loans

Collection objects are also made available through outgoing loans to qualified institutions for the purpose of exhibit, research, and/or other interpretive endeavors. HN's outgoing loan procedures are available in Appendix D of the Collections Policy Supplemental.

All outgoing loans must be approved by a majority vote of the Collections Committee. Loans are made for a period of not less than fourteen (14) days or more than two (2) years. Loans may be renewed upon request. History Nebraska will not loan any items from the collections permanently. HN will not loan items to individuals.

Institutions requesting loans must meet certain environmental, display, and security standards; a completed copy of the American Alliance of Museums General Facility Report will be required with the loan request when deemed necessary.

The borrower may be required to purchase wall-to-wall insurance coverage for loaned objects and shall name History Nebraska as an insured and loss payable. A certificate of insurance shall be provided. Valuation of objects for insurance purposes will be determined by History Nebraska and/or qualified appraisers.

## Internal Use of Collections

Use of collection items by HN or Foundation staff and trustees is limited to activities that directly support our mission, such as exhibition, research, and public programming. Use of collection items for the sole purpose of personal enjoyment, such as furnishing offices, use as props in theater productions, etc., is prohibited.

## Preservation of HN Collections

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Preservation consists of those steps taken to assure the physical protection of items in our collections with emphasis on proper storage, handling, conservation and exhibition techniques and the adequate documentation of these activities.

## Care of HN Collections

Standards for the care of objects in storage, on exhibit, being used by researchers, undergoing preservation or conservation treatment, and on loan will strive to conform to current best practices in the appropriate field. These standards will apply to climate control, storage and exhibit space, documentation, monitoring, housekeeping, handling, security, and pest management. These activities are governed by departmental procedures.

## Access to HN Collections in Storage

With the exception of behind the scenes tours for members of the public, access to the collections in storage is typically limited to collections staff and is governed by departmental procedures. Access to collection storage areas is limited to select maintenance, security, and administration staff for the purpose of maintenance, security, and emergency issues.

## Risk Management

Risk management shall include the thoughtful review of potential hazards to collections including preparations for mitigating the effects of natural disasters, vandalism, theft, human error, mechanical or operational failure, and deterioration. Each building shall detail

mitigation procedures in a disaster recovery plan. As a state agency, HN is self-insured and does maintain a list with the state Risk Management office of objects on loan to the agency. The lender determines the insurance replacement value of objects on loan to HN and insured under HN's policy. In some instances, it may be necessary to contract with an independent appraiser for valuation of said objects.

## Conservation

Conservation is the treatment and/or stabilization of collection items by qualified conservators. Items will be selected for treatment by curatorial and conservation staff.

## Incoming Loans

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Upon approval of the Collections Committee, the divisions of HN may borrow objects from other institutions or individuals for the purpose of exhibition, research, and, in some cases, curatorial storage by state statute or for hire. Incoming loans will be recorded with an incoming loan agreement and loaned object shall be stored and handled in the same manner as HN collection objects. Transportation and insurance coverage for loaned objects shall be according to the wishes of the lender. Permanent incoming loans are not accepted.

## Documentation of HN Collections

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The acquisition, management and use of all collection materials are documented according to current professional standards. Such documentation includes, but is not limited to, accession and deaccession records, correspondence relating to acquisitions, research materials, catalog records and other finding aids, loan records, researcher access requests, permission and use records, documentation of conservation treatments, and exhibit files. Documentation may be in paper, microfilm or electronic form, or any combination thereof. All documentation relating to collections is considered permanent record of History Nebraska and is subject to the preservation, privacy and access protections and protocols of other agency permanent records. In the event that any collections documentation should be deemed non-current by curatorial staff, they will be subject to HN's Records Retention Schedule.

## Review of the Collections Management Policy

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The Collections Management Policy shall be reviewed by January 1st of every even numbered year. Collections management staff shall review the policy. If changes are considered necessary, these changes will be submitted in writing to HN leadership. The policy will then be submitted to the Board of Trustees for their approval. Collection managers may propose warranted changes to the policy at any time during the biennial cycle.