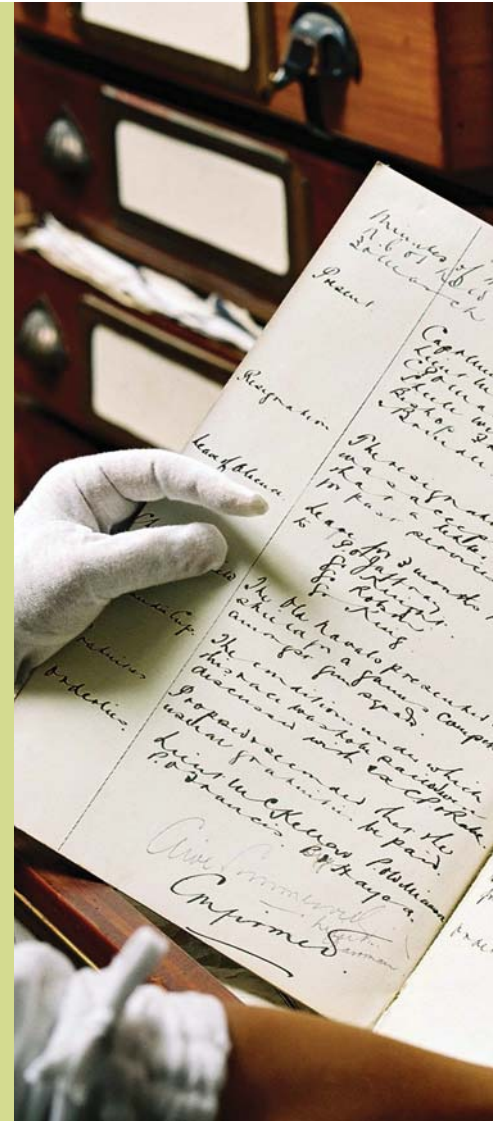




Performance audit report

# Management of heritage collections in local museums and art galleries





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Thanks to the Museum of Wellington City and Sea for allowing us to photograph its storage area.

# Management of heritage collections in local museums and art galleries

This is the report of a performance  
audit we carried out under section  
16 of the Public Audit Act 2001.

April 2006

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## Foreword

Local museums and art galleries are a rich source of information about our social, cultural, and natural history, and help to build greater understanding of our heritage.

Recognising their importance to our society, and the significant amount of public funding they attract, we undertook extensive audit work during 2005 to examine how well local museums and art galleries manage heritage collections and fulfil their stewardship obligations.

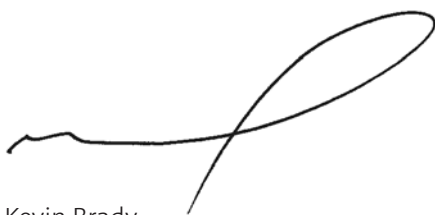
Many people are involved in running and overseeing these institutions – from local authorities and other funding or governance bodies, to directors, staff, and volunteers. All of them play an important role in supporting professional management of heritage collections, and we designed this report to inform and assist them in their various roles.

Sometimes there are not enough resources for museums to do what they need to do. One of our objectives in preparing this report was to promote a better understanding of how collection management supports the core activities of a museum, and to show what resources are needed to meet the obligations of responsible stewardship.

I hope that readers will gain an appreciation of what happens behind the displays and other public spaces of their local museum and art gallery.

This report provides museum staff with an independent assessment of collection management policies and practices against recognised principles of sound collection management, illustrates good practice, and suggests ways for museums and art galleries to work more effectively as individual institutions and collectively as a sector.

I am grateful for the co-operation of the museums and art galleries that we audited, and hope they found the process useful. I would also like to thank the local authorities involved, and our project advisers.



Kevin Brady  
Controller and Auditor-General

5 April 2006

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# Glossary

**Accession record** – A formal record of an object’s acceptance into the permanent collection of a museum or art gallery, along with the associated responsibilities for security and care. The process of accessioning involves assigning a unique number to the object, along with other details, to allow the museum or art gallery to connect the object to its documentation. An accession record will normally include the accession number, date and nature of acquisition, source, brief identification and description, condition, provenance, and value.

**Acquisition** – The process by which legal title to an object is transferred to the museum or art gallery. Acquisition may be by purchase, donation, gift, bequest, collection by staff, or other channels.

**Archives** – The records of individuals or organisations preserved because of their continuing value.

**Cataloguing** – The creation of a full, detailed record of information about an object that shows the object’s significance in the collection and is cross-referenced to other records and files.

**Collection** – A group of objects acquired, documented, stored, and conserved because of their historic, cultural, or educational significance.

**Collection management** – All activities related to the care of the collection, from the time an object is acquired until its disposal. It encompasses the body of museum practices and procedures relating to acquisition, documentation, care, preservation, security, loan, and disposal.

**Condition report** – A formal record of an object’s condition on a specific date. It is a vital component of object documentation, serving as a tool to evaluate the effect of use and wear over time.

**Conservation** – The technical examination, care, and treatment of objects or art works, including the study of the environment in which they are displayed or stored.

**Conservator** – A person competent to undertake the technical examination, preservation, conservation, and restoration of cultural property. A conservator ensures the long-term preservation of art and artefacts by preserving and repairing damage and deterioration. Care of art and artefacts includes environmental preservation, storage, display, handling, and transportation. Conservators play an important role in monitoring and advising on environmental controls, assessing the condition of objects for exhibition and for loan, and providing training in the handling of objects and other aspects of collection care.

**Curators** – Curators have a wide range of duties. They are responsible for directing the acquisition, storage, loan, and exhibition of collections within their

specialist fields, such as natural history or archives. They are also responsible for authenticating, evaluating, and categorising the objects in a collection, as well as overseeing and conducting research and educational programmes, fund-raising, and promotion.

**De-accessioning** – The process used to remove an item permanently from the record of objects in a museum or art gallery collection, usually through return to the donor, sale, exchange, or gift to another museum.

**Facilities report** – A site report received from a prospective borrower before a loan is approved. It should include details of handling and security in transit, arrangements for environmental controls, and systems to ensure the security and proper care of the loaned objects at the exhibition site and in temporary storage.

**Finding aids** – Indexes, registers, guides, inventories, lists, and other media designed to lead archives staff and other users to information about objects in the collection.

**Māori taonga** – In this context, a possession treasured by Māori.

**Preventive conservation** – All actions designed to slow the deterioration of, or address risks of damage to, objects or art works. Preventive conservation seeks to stabilise the condition of the object through effective control of the environment, safe handling and display techniques, appropriate storage, pest control, security, and emergency planning.

**Provenance** – The origin, source, and full history of an object from the time of its discovery or creation to the present day, from which authenticity and ownership are determined.

**Registration** – The process of assigning a unique identity to an object in the permanent collection or in temporary custody, and documenting that object.

**Registry** – In a museum or art gallery the registration function is concerned with the logical organisation of documentation about the collection, and maintenance of access to that information. Registry staff are assigned specific responsibility for maintaining records about objects in the collection. The registry carries out a variety of administrative tasks such as accessioning new acquisitions, preparing loan documentation, and carrying out collection inventories.

**Relative humidity** – A measure of the proportion of humidity in the air. As this proportion changes with temperature, these 2 measurements are usually considered together.

**Stewardship** – The obligations and responsibilities associated with the management of all objects entrusted to the care of the museum.

**Thermohygrograph** – A scientific instrument that records temperature and relative humidity over a period of time, usually daily or weekly.



# Summary

Museums and art galleries are an important part of our society, and their collections represent a significant – and often irreplaceable – public inheritance. (For ease of reading, we generally use the term “museum” to refer to both museums and art galleries.) The responsibilities of museums to their communities, and the roles they play in our society, demand responsible management of those collections.

The Local Government Act 2002 requires local authorities to promote the cultural well-being of their communities. Funding of museums is one important way in which they meet this requirement. It is important that ratepayer funds are well spent, so that heritage collections are well cared for, documented, and accessible to the public.

During 2005, we carried out an audit to examine how well museums manage heritage collections and fulfil their stewardship obligations using public funds. This involved audits of collection management at 13 local<sup>1</sup> museums and art galleries. The audits were undertaken using good practice criteria based on generally accepted principles of sound collection management. We sent each museum a report of the audit findings that confirmed good practice and, where relevant, raised matters of concern or suggested where improvements could be made.

We also identified many examples of good practice for wider use in the museum sector.

The second part of our audit involved examining a selection of funding arrangements between councils and private museums. We focused on the accountability requirements for stewardship of the collection, and the nature and extent of monitoring to ensure the local authority’s interests were met.

## **Our overall assessment of collection management**

We were generally satisfied that museums had in place the necessary components for sound collection management. This included having a clear purpose; collection policies; documentation for registration, cataloguing, and the administration of loans; and systems and facilities for keeping the collection stable and secure.

Museums hold their collections in trust for their communities. Boards of management, museum directors, and their staff were conscious of, and committed to, this stewardship responsibility.

<sup>1</sup> As opposed to national.

While our audit findings were generally positive, we nonetheless found room for improvement in policies or practices. Where appropriate, we made recommendations to the museums we audited in our feedback reports. We identified broad issues and concerns from our analysis of practices in those museums.

## Issues for consideration by museums and art galleries

Our audit identified 6 broad issues for consideration:

- standards and measures for reporting on performance;
- collection development;
- documenting the collection;
- quality of collection facilities;
- asset management planning; and
- the governance and funding of smaller museums and art galleries.

### Standards and measures for reporting on performance

Museums need to work together to draw up agreed collection management standards and related performance measures. Relevant and measurable standards for collection management would enable museums to argue convincingly for resources, plan for the best use of those resources, and provide stakeholders with evidence of responsible stewardship. Standards need to be relevant for both smaller and larger museums, support the principles of professional museum practice, provide benchmarks for the objective assessment of performance over time, and provide the basis for meaningful reporting to stakeholders about stewardship.

### Collection development

A museum collection is the product of past collecting practices, and may not easily fit with the museum's current purpose. Museums face the challenge of building on their unique strengths by interpreting the significance of their collections in the present day context, and defining a coherent collection development strategy for the future. Consultation between museums on strategy and collection planning would promote a collaborative approach to collection development within the sector.

### Documenting the collection

Many museums face the time-consuming task of collecting, consolidating, standardising, verifying, and maintaining object information from records that

are often fragmented, incomplete, and unreliable. The scope of this work is broad. It covers research, digitisation, collection inventories, and data entry. With better knowledge of what they hold, museums will be better able to share information, deliver better services to their communities, take better care of their collections, and make them more accessible to the public. Limited progress is being made on this work, which is hampered not only by short-term funding and competing priorities, but also by a lack of the necessary disciplined and realistic project planning by museums.

### **Quality of collection facilities**

The quality of collection facilities varies from one museum to another. With funding from ratepayers and other sources, many had recently upgraded their storage and display facilities or were planning improvements. Ongoing funding will be needed to bring all museums up to a commonly accepted standard. Better facilities will also widen the network of district and regional museums able to bring to their communities exhibitions of objects or art works of regional and national importance.

Museum archives are a particularly rich source of information about the history of their local communities, and are a well-used and valued resource. Ongoing funding is needed to preserve those archives for future generations and to ensure continued public access.

### **Asset management planning**

Poorly designed or maintained buildings and facilities put collections at risk. Museums – and their governing bodies – need to give more attention to formal asset management planning for their buildings and facilities. This will safeguard their collections and support the delivery of museum services. Asset management planning incorporates risk management, setting service levels, and defining asset standards, and provides a framework for future maintenance and renewal.

### **The governance and funding of smaller museums and art galleries**

Capability within the sector varies widely. Some collaboration occurs, but there is an unmet demand for advice and support. We noted risks to the financial viability and performance of some smaller museums and art galleries. We also noted resource constraints on their ability to meet professional standards and improve the quality of services to their communities. In our view, these limitations raise fundamental questions for the local authorities concerned about long-term governance and funding relationships.

## Priorities for funding and allocation of resources

We found evidence of a positive commitment to the professional management of collections. This was generally supported by the necessary collection policies and practices, and museums were seeking to take advantage of available methods and technologies to improve the quality of collection information.

However, museums rely to some extent on a variety of uncertain funding sources from the community and in the form of voluntary support. This may, for some, limit the ability to take a more active approach to collection management and development, and to make significant progress with ongoing projects.

We identified some areas where funding for additional staff would bring benefits. The 2 priority areas for such funding are:

- improving the quality of collection information; and
- strengthening record-keeping capability.

### Quality of collection information

Additional staff would enable museums to perform a variety of tasks that are often not given high priority when resources are limited. These include addressing backlogs in cataloguing, carrying out periodic inventories, entering paper records into electronic databases, and maintaining collection records. The value of a museum's collection lies in the information about the objects it holds – their origins and associations. Additional staff would enable museums to enhance the quality of this information. This would allow museums to deliver better services to their communities, use available technology to integrate museum processes and make the collection more accessible, and create the necessary basis for a collection development strategy.

These tasks are time-consuming. They are often currently undertaken by temporary staff or volunteers. If significant progress is to be made in the short term, dedicated staff will be needed to tackle this work in a systematic and intensive manner.

### Record-keeping capability

A second priority is to strengthen record-keeping capability. Not all museums have a dedicated registry function. Instead, this role is just one of many different tasks and responsibilities staff undertake. For such institutions, which are often smaller museums, extra staff would lead to more comprehensive and reliable information about the collection, and more focused attention on the range of tasks needed to support good collection management. These tasks include cataloguing, research, inventories, and database management.

### **Obtaining more funds**

The responsibility for seeking additional funding rests with museums, and requires them to prepare a comprehensive, fully costed business case. This should set out the scope of the proposed work, the outcomes sought, the resources required, the standards to be met, and the timetable to be followed. Evidence of a commitment to disciplined project management and accountability would be an important factor in obtaining the necessary funding.

### **Local authority funding of private museums and art galleries**

Our examination of funding arrangements identified weaknesses in accountability relationships. The purposes of funding were generally well defined, but few contracts made stewardship a priority. Reporting of performance and stewardship was weak, performance measures were neither comprehensive nor relevant, and the relationships between local authorities and museums were sometimes distant and often informal.

All local authorities need to seek active assurance about performance and stewardship through their funding contracts. They also need to monitor achievements by requiring regular reporting against objective measures relevant to management of the collection.



# Part 1

## Background

- 1.1 Local museums and art galleries<sup>1</sup> play an important role in our communities as custodians of our heritage. The local museum sector receives significant public funding from ratepayers, central government, and other sources to carry out this role.
- 1.2 We decided to undertake an audit to examine how well local museums manage heritage collections, and fulfil their stewardship obligations, using public funds.
- 1.3 In this Part, we discuss:
- the local museum sector;
  - the roles and responsibilities of local and central government;
  - funding of local museums;
  - our audit approach;
  - how we treated the valuation of collections; and
  - how we report our findings.

### Overview of the local museum sector

- 1.4 New Zealand has a large number of museums and art galleries. They take many forms, have many different purposes, and hold very different collections. According to one estimate, there are as many as 600 museums and art galleries in New Zealand. The *2004 Directory of museums and art galleries* published by Museums Aotearoa<sup>2</sup> lists some 450 museums and art galleries throughout the country. Most are privately owned, but the largest are funded, operated, or controlled by local authorities.
- 1.5 Museums Aotearoa has estimated that museums employ some 3000 people (and a similar number of volunteers), and attract more than 5 million visits from residents and overseas visitors each year.
- 1.6 The local museum is a well-used and popular attraction. In 2002, a survey conducted through the Cultural Statistics programme, jointly operated by the Ministry for Culture and Heritage and Statistics New Zealand, found that heritage activities, especially visiting museums, were popular with New Zealanders. The survey found that in the previous 12 months, an estimated 48% (1.34 million) of New Zealand adults visited a museum.

1 In this report we generally use the term "museum" to refer to both local museums and art galleries, except when discussing an aspect of collection management of particular relevance or application to art galleries alone.

2 Museums Aotearoa is an organisation that represents the interests of the museum sector.

### The role of local museums

- 1.7 Museums define, conserve, secure, interpret, and exhibit our cultural heritage. They care for several million objects. Objects and art works from New Zealand’s social, cultural, and natural history, and archives of local events and community activities, provide a rich source of information about our past. Museums also contribute to social and economic development, as a part of our heritage, education, leisure, and tourism sectors.
- 1.8 While most museum visitors see, and are only aware of, objects or art works on display, these normally represent only a small proportion of the total holdings of any museum. Research has suggested that, on average, the cost of managing and caring for collections makes up two-thirds of the operating costs of museums. Collections are at the core of any museum. Responsible stewardship of these collections imposes a variety of significant obligations on museums, their staff, and their governing bodies.
- 1.9 Museums also play an important role in promoting scientific inquiry and learning. The collections of a museum are widely used by researchers, including genealogists, historians, students, and scientists. They also provide important heritage learning experiences for local schools, with exhibitions and objects from stored collections adding to the children’s understanding of heritage topics. Many of the museums we visited during our audit were taking part in the Learning Experiences Outside the Classroom (LEOTC) programme funded by the Ministry of Education (see paragraph 1.28).

### The changing role of museums

- 1.10 The role of museums in New Zealand is changing, creating debate on how a museum should be defined. The International Council of Museums defines a museum as –
- ... a non-profit making permanent institution in the service of society and of its development, open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits, for purposes of study, education and enjoyment, the material evidence of people and their environment.*
- 1.11 However, in its April 2005 strategy, Museums Aotearoa notes the evolving role of museums. It describes the contributions that museums make to New Zealand society in the following terms:
- Museums are places where New Zealanders and visitors learn about and celebrate our identity.
  - Museums are the guardians or “kaitiaki” of collections on behalf of communities.



- Museums are centres of learning.
- Museums contribute to regional economic development and tourism.
- Museums provide civic and community spaces.
- Museums act as catalysts for creativity.
- Museums are centres of research and innovation.
- Museums help to deepen social well-being.
- Museums strengthen cultural well-being.
- Museums enhance our understanding of the environment.
- Museums respond to New Zealand's international obligations.

1.12 Museums Aotearoa's strategy proposes a revised definition that reflects more clearly museums' relationships with their communities, and their role in promoting the understanding, interpretation, and exploration of heritage resources and the values that attach to them. The strategy notes the changing role of museums, and puts forward various proposals. These include the need for more effective collaboration and use of resources, support for small museums, greater security of funding, and better use of digital technology.

## Government roles and responsibilities

### Role of local government

1.13 Local government has an important role and significant responsibilities for local museums. The Local Government Act 2002 requires local authorities to promote the cultural well-being of their communities. Many local authorities choose to fund museums as one way towards meeting this requirement. As well as funding a number of small local museums, local government also funds, operates, or controls the largest local museums in the country.

### Role of central government

1.14 The Government acknowledges that nationally significant collections are housed throughout the country. It also has an interest in communities having viable museums. Given these considerations, the Government has, since 1994, supported local museums through the Ministry for Culture and Heritage in 2 main ways:

- through the Regional Museums Policy for Capital Construction Projects,<sup>3</sup> a programme to support capital developments at certain regional museums; and
- through an indemnity scheme for touring exhibitions.

<sup>3</sup> Its predecessor was the Policy for Government Assistance Towards Capital Projects at Regional Museums.

### Role of National Services Te Paerangi

- 1.15 The Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa (Te Papa) provides support to the museum sector. Under the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa Act 1992, one function of the Board of Te Papa is –
- To co-operate with and assist other New Zealand museums in establishing a national service, and in providing appropriate support to other institutions and organisations holding objects or collections of national importance.*
- 1.16 This role is performed by a small group within Te Papa called National Services Te Paerangi.
- 1.17 National Services Te Paerangi works with private and public museums, iwi, and related organisations to build capacity, improve effectiveness, and add value to the services they provide to their communities. It does this through partnerships, project planning, training, education, and consultancy, and by providing practical resources and reports. For example, it organises workshops and seminars on governance, sponsorship and fundraising, marketing, and various aspects of collection care.
- 1.18 In November 2002, National Services Te Paerangi launched the New Zealand Museums Standards Scheme. The scheme enables museums or groups of museums to complete a self-review, and obtain an external review by peers, of their performance against a set of best practice standards. The standards cover 5 areas – governance, management, and planning; care of collections and Māori taonga; public programmes; customer service; and relationships with communities. The scheme has several aims, including:
- to encourage all museums to achieve accepted standards in managing their collections, exhibitions, public services, visitors, and resources;
  - to build public confidence in museums as effective organisations responsible for the care of heritage collections;
  - to promote good practice in providing visitors and other users with access to the collections through exhibitions, displays, publications, public programmes, and other activities;
  - to provide a focus for strategic planning, training, and development; and
  - to encourage the development of bicultural policy and practice.
- 1.19 National Services Te Paerangi also publishes a number of resource guides and case studies on aspects of museum management, including collection management subjects, such as preventive conservation, copyright, digitisation, collection care, and emergency procedures.

## Funding local museums and art galleries

- 1.20 The 3 main sources of funding for local museums are:
- local authorities, which commonly meet a proportion of operational costs, including staff salaries (which make up the largest component of day-to-day running costs);
  - central government, through a range of agencies; and
  - trusts, bequests, donations, and revenue-raising by museums.

### Funding by local authorities

- 1.21 We carried out research to estimate ratepayer funding of museums. Our estimate was consistent with the results of a recent Statistics New Zealand survey, *Government Spending on Culture 2000-2004*, which showed total local authority spending on museums for 2003-04 of some \$50 million.<sup>4</sup> Nearly 70% of that amount was committed to funding the museums in the 3 highest spending areas: Otago, Canterbury, and Auckland.<sup>5</sup> As well as ongoing operational funding, local authorities contribute funding for capital projects, such as building refurbishment and other improvements to museum facilities.
- 1.22 We asked local authorities about their financial support for museums. Responses to our survey suggest that there are more than 35 museums operated or controlled by local authorities.
- 1.23 Local authorities also support privately owned museums in various ways. This support includes providing annual funding towards operating costs and capital contributions to upgrade facilities. Other ways in which a local authority may support a local museum is by making a local-authority-owned building available for use as a museum.
- 1.24 The financial statements of local authorities do not always identify such support, particularly where funding is small. We did not carry out a detailed analysis, but we did consider the responses by local authorities to our survey, and conducted an in-house analysis. We estimate that between a third and a half of local authorities are likely to be providing support to private museums in one of the above ways.
- 1.25 We do not comment on whether it is appropriate for local authorities to fund museums. Every local authority must strike a balance between many demands for funding, and this task involves setting expenditure priorities.

<sup>4</sup> Statistics New Zealand, *Government Spending on Culture 2000-2004*, published June 2005, ISBN 0-478-26963-6, page 14.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid*, page 16.

### Funding by central government

- 1.26 For 2005-06, \$9.2 million was allocated for funding under the Regional Museums Policy for Capital Construction Projects administered by the Ministry for Culture and Heritage, to support capital developments in regional museums with nationally significant collections.
- 1.27 Local museums also receive funding from the Lottery Grants Board, through its Lottery Environment and Heritage Committee. The Committee's mission is to foster the conservation, preservation, and promotion of New Zealand's natural, physical, and cultural heritage, by supporting a number of building restoration, museum development, and environmental projects. Funding is given for a range of cultural heritage purposes, including capital works to upgrade museum buildings, improvements to display and storage facilities to enhance collection care or public access, and the purchase of equipment or materials. The Committee may also meet salary and associated costs for specific collection management projects such as data entry, cataloguing, educational resources, and research. Funding from the Committee for the period July 2004 to June 2005 totalled \$6.6 million, with \$2.3 million funded under the cultural heritage output.
- 1.28 A number of museums also receive funding to provide educational services for primary and secondary students under the Ministry of Education's LEOTC programme. The programme aims to provide learning experiences that enrich the curriculum and are not available in the immediate school environment.
- 1.29 Another source of temporary resource funding for museums is the Government's Task Force Green employment programme. The programme aims to help disadvantaged people gain skills and experience to improve their chances of securing permanent work. Some people have been placed in museums, providing short-term resources for a variety of collection management tasks.

### Trusts, bequests, donations, and revenue-raising by museums

- 1.30 Trusts, bequests, and donations are another funding source for local museums.
- 1.31 Some museums also raise their own revenue through admission charges and activities such as shops and cafeterias. Policies on charging for entry, and using facilities for raising revenue, differ markedly from one museum to another.

### Our audit approach

- 1.32 We conducted our audit in 2 parts:
- separate audits of collection management in 13 selected museums and art galleries operated or controlled by local authorities (see paragraphs 1.44-1.46); and

- an examination of arrangements for local authority funding of private museums and art galleries (see paragraph 1.47).
- 1.33 Our primary aim was to provide independent assurance to the 13 museums that we audited about the management of their collections. The first part of our work involved audits of collections management policies and practices in the selected museums against accepted good practice criteria. After our visit, we provided each museum with a report that set out our findings, confirmed sound practice, and, where necessary, made suggestions for improvement.
- 1.34 We also examined funding arrangements between local authorities and private museums. This part of our work aimed to explore accountability and reporting issues associated with these more arm's-length relationships, with a particular focus on the museum's management of its collection.
- 1.35 Our third aim was to communicate the results of our audits to a wider museum audience, and, where appropriate, to raise issues for consideration by the museum sector as a whole, local government, and other stakeholders.

### **Our audit criteria and advisers**

- 1.36 We established our audit criteria by consulting research sources including guidance issued by national associations of museums in Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States of America, and publications on collection management. In New Zealand, we consulted the National Library, Archives New Zealand, and Te Papa. We drew on the museum standards developed for the New Zealand Museums Standards Scheme, and the National Services Te Paerangi resource guides.
- 1.37 To ensure a consistent approach, we used a standard checklist of good practice expectations. We tested this at a local museum to make sure it was relevant and workable.
- 1.38 The checklist was reviewed by 4 museum sector specialists engaged to guide and advise our audit team. All 4 specialists have experience in museum management, in working with local authorities, and in applying collection management theory and practice. The group consisted of:
- the director of an art gallery operated by a local authority;
  - the director of a museum operated by a local authority-controlled trust;
  - a senior collections manager from Te Papa; and
  - the director of a university course in museum studies.

- 1.39 We maintained contact with the Ministry for Culture and Heritage during the course of our audit because of the Ministry's role as the Government's primary adviser on culture and heritage matters.

### Which museums and art galleries did we audit?

- 1.40 For our audit, we selected a mix of large and small institutions, and took account of different governance arrangements, and types of collection. We also chose a mix of museums and art galleries. Principles of good collection management practice apply equally to museums and art galleries. However, they follow some different collection management practices and approaches, which we wanted to examine as part of our audit.<sup>6</sup>
- 1.41 The local-authority-operated or -controlled museums or art galleries we audited receive about \$20 million of ratepayer funding each year.
- 1.42 The museums and art galleries we audited are shown in Figure 1.

**Figure 1**  
Museums and art galleries we audited

Size and type of institution		Name of institution
Small art galleries	2	Eastern Southland Gallery Whangarei Art Museum
Large art galleries	2	Christchurch Art Gallery Auckland Art Gallery
Small museums	3	South Canterbury Museum Whakatane District Museum and Gallery Gore Historical Museum
Medium museums	4	Rotorua Museum of Art and History Puke Ariki Waikato Museum of Art and History Hawke's Bay Cultural Trust
Large museums	2	Otago Museum Canterbury Museum
<b>Total</b>	<b>13</b>	

- 1.43 We examined 6 funding arrangements between local authorities and private museums and art galleries (see Figure 2), involving annual expenditure by local authorities of about \$810,000.

<sup>6</sup> Some museums also hold art works in their collections.

**Figure 2**  
**Funding arrangements we examined between local authorities and private museums or art galleries**

Name of local authority	Name of private museum or art gallery
South Taranaki District Council	South Taranaki District Museum
Waikato District Council	Waikato Coalfields Museum
Ashburton District Council	Ashburton Museum Ashburton Art Gallery
Central Hawke's Bay District Council	CHB Settlers Museum
Wairoa District Council	Wairoa Museum
Gisborne District Council	Tairāwhiti Museum

### How we carried out the 13 separate museum audits

1.44

In each museum, we:

- assessed its mission and goals;
- checked whether it had the necessary collection policies;
- sought evidence of key collection documentation – donor forms, condition reports, and loan documentation;
- interviewed the director, collections managers, registry staff, security and maintenance staff, and curators about their roles, conservation, inventories, collection records, loans, training, and use of, and access to, the collection;
- spoke to conservators (where employed in-house) about condition reporting, collection care, training, display, and storage;
- examined building management systems for environmental control and security, and looked through the display and storage areas to observe climate control and security measures in operation;
- met or spoke to the Māori liaison person or kaumatua about relationships with the museum, care of taonga, consultation, advice, and liaison; and
- spoke to a representative of the governing body, whether trust, management board, or local authority (community or corporate services manager), about relationships with the museum, financial and non-financial reporting, and asset management planning (for the museum building and facilities).

1.45

In each audit, we tested:

- the accuracy of a small sample of collection records, by verifying their location and identity against object descriptions in the collection database;

- the adequacy of loan documentation for selected exhibitions, including condition reporting and loan agreements; and
- the search capability of the collection database.

1.46 For each funding arrangement, we sought evidence of:

- a funding contract, with reporting requirements covering aspects of collection stewardship (and associated performance measures);
- periodic reporting to the local authority against those measures; and
- other aspects of the relationship with the local authority.

1.47 We also talked to the directors, staff, and (in some instances) representatives of the governing bodies of private museums about collection management and the museum's relationship with the local authority.

### How we treated the valuation of collections

1.48 The approval of Financial Reporting Standard No. 3: *Accounting for Property, Plant and Equipment* (FRS-3) by the Accounting Standards Review Board in March 2001 reinforced the requirement that all assets – including museum collection assets (collectively known as heritage assets)<sup>7</sup> – should be valued and included on the balance sheets of museums and local authorities. Where relevant this will include recognising depreciation on heritage assets.

1.49 Not all heritage assets have been recognised on entities' balance sheets – particularly of museums. In some cases, this has led to us issuing qualified audit opinions.<sup>8</sup> This particularly affects stand-alone museums, where heritage assets are pivotal to the entity's report on its financial performance and position.

1.50 Clearly this is not desirable, and we have continued to discuss this matter with the sector. Museum directors have been concerned that a qualified opinion of the museum's financial statements does not necessarily reflect the state of the collection, management systems, and general care of collections. We have agreed that, while the audit opinion must reflect any non-compliance with the financial reporting requirements, the management of collections is as important an aspect of responsible stewardship as is their valuation. Our decision to undertake this work is an acknowledgement of that shared view.

1.51 We did not, as part of our audit of collection management, examine the valuation of collections and other accounting matters related to the way collections are

<sup>7</sup> FRS-3, paragraph 4.38. Some resources are described as "heritage assets" because of their cultural or historical significance. Heritage assets that meet the definition of property, plant, and equipment are to be accounted for in accordance with this standard.

<sup>8</sup> An auditor expresses a qualified audit opinion because of a disagreement between the auditor and the entity, or a limitation on scope.



recorded in financial statements. However, it should be noted that museums are responsible for the management of assets of very significant financial worth.

- 1.52 As noted, only some museums have valued their collections. We were therefore unable to establish the total value of collections for the institutions we audited, nor estimate their value within the sector as a whole. However, valuations that have been completed provide clear evidence of the high financial significance of these community assets.
- 1.53 The assessed values of the art gallery collections we audited exceeded \$300 million. The holdings of the large regional museums would greatly exceed this figure. High-value collections are not confined to the largest institutions. The collections in 2 of the provincial museums were valued at \$27 million and \$17 million respectively, and even the small museums we audited held collections with values that ran into the millions of dollars.

### How we report our findings

- 1.54 Our report outlines some of the challenges facing museums as they seek to improve their practices and services.
- 1.55 We summarise the key findings from our 13 separate audits, illustrate good practice with practical examples, and provide guidance where we considered this to be helpful.
- 1.56 Where appropriate, we made recommendations directly to the museums we audited through separate feedback reports.
- 1.57 The broader issues and concerns that we identified from our analysis of practices in those museums are referred to in this report as “issues for consideration”.



## Part 2

# Meeting stewardship obligations

- 2.1 Museums hold and manage heritage collections in trust for the public. Their stewardship obligations require them to account for these collections, and ensure their proper care and documentation.
- 2.2 Stewardship is the careful, sound, and responsible management of collections entrusted to the care of the museum, held in trust for the public, and made accessible for the public benefit. Responsible stewardship ensures that the objects the museum owns, borrows, holds in its custody, or uses are available and accessible to present and future generations. A museum has legal, social, and ethical obligations to provide proper storage, management, and care of collections in its possession.
- 2.3 In this Part, we summarise our key findings, and note a lack of standards for collection management. We discuss how the 13 museums that we audited recognise and meet their stewardship obligations. In particular, we discuss whether each museum has:
- a clearly defined purpose;
  - a clear relationship between its purpose and desired community outcomes;
  - complied with codes of ethics and legal requirements;
  - effective ways of working with Māori; and
  - standards in place for managing its collection.

### Key findings

- 2.4 All audited museums had a clear purpose that defined the scope, context, and focus for developing their collections. This purpose was consistent with, and supported, the community outcomes sought by its associated local authority.
- 2.5 Museums have an important stewardship responsibility as custodians of heritage assets on behalf of their communities. The museums we audited were aware of, and committed to, these responsibilities.
- 2.6 Responsible stewardship requires museums to be conscious of, and to demonstrate, their commitment to meeting the legal and ethical obligations essential to professional museum practice. Collections policies and practices provided evidence of this commitment.
- 2.7 Many museums hold Māori taonga of significant cultural, spiritual, and historical value to their original owners. Guardianship of these collections imposes a special set of obligations on museums, requiring access to advice on protocols for dealing with Māori objects.

- 2.8 The audited museums recognised their obligations as guardians of Māori taonga. Where relevant to their collections, most had formal structures or arrangements (such as Māori committees, groups, or advisers) that provided for effective participation of Māori in museum planning and decisions. Museum staff were making good use of these arrangements to consult, engage, and seek advice on a wide variety of matters relating to the day-to-day management of their Māori collections. Relationships between museums and Māori advisers or advisory groups were positive.
- 2.9 Although there are various generally accepted, published standards for aspects of collection management, museums had not explicitly defined or adopted these in their policies and procedures.

### Issue for consideration

- 2.10 Museums and art galleries need a set of workable standards relevant to the various aspects of collection management. These standards need to:
- be relevant for both smaller and larger museums and art galleries;
  - support the principles of professional practice;
  - provide benchmarks for the objective assessment of performance over time; and
  - serve as the basis for meaningful reporting to stakeholders about stewardship.
- 2.11 Such standards could most effectively and efficiently be drawn up by a working group from the sector. As a starting point, such a group could usefully draw on existing good practice guidance such as the requirements of the New Zealand Museums Standards Scheme and schemes used overseas for museum accreditation.

### Defining a clear purpose

- 2.12 The purpose of a museum defines its special character, enabling it to build a coherent collection from which to deliver a range of services to its communities and the wider public. A museum's stated purpose should define the way in which it will use and develop its collection.
- 2.13 We assessed whether the stated purpose of each museum we audited defined the scope, context, and focus for managing that museum's collection. We examined documents such as strategic plans, mission statements, and collection policies, to establish the stated goals of the museum. We expected each museum to have clearly defined the scope of its collecting activity for:
- the geographic region of interest (such as Rotorua or South Canterbury);
  - the field of interest (such as a particular artist, species, field of research, or aspect of local history); and

- a particular period of time (such as objects from a particular decade or art works from a specific era).

2.14 All museums had a clearly stated purpose that described the scope, context, and focus for developing the collection. For each, the collecting focus was defined for a district or region, field of interest, and time period. These statements of purpose provided a clear framework for using and developing each collection.

### Relationship between the museum's purpose and desired community outcomes

2.15 We assessed whether there was a clear relationship between each museum's stated purpose and the community outcomes sought by its local authority.

2.16 Under section 10(b) of the Local Government Act 2002, one of the purposes of local government is –

*To promote the social, economic, environmental, and cultural well-being of communities, in the present and for the future.*

2.17 Cultural well-being is not defined in the Act. The Ministry for Culture and Heritage<sup>1</sup> has proposed the following definition –

*The vitality that communities and individuals enjoy through:*

- *Participation in recreation, creative and cultural activities*
- *The freedom to retain, interpret and express their arts, history, heritage and traditions.*

2.18 We expected strategy documents published by local authorities (such as annual plans and Long-term Council Community Plans) to show how local museums furthered the cultural outcomes sought for the community.

2.19 Cultural outcomes were clearly stated by local authorities, and we were able to see how, in each case, the activities of each museum promoted those outcomes.

2.20 However, measures used by museums and local authorities to report on the performance of museums failed to demonstrate fully how those outcomes – especially outcomes about the stewardship of collections – were being achieved. We discuss performance reporting by museums in Part 6.

### Compliance with codes of ethics and legal requirements

2.21 All museums are expected to comply with recognised codes of ethics, and their operations are governed by various pieces of legislation. We examined whether legal, ethical, and other stewardship obligations were clearly articulated by each

<sup>1</sup> See [www.mch.govt.nz/cwb](http://www.mch.govt.nz/cwb).

museum, demonstrating a commitment to manage objects of cultural, historical, and spiritual value to the community in a responsible way.

### Codes of ethics

- 2.22 The professional practice of museums and the behaviour of their staff are governed by widely recognised codes of ethics. These codes have an important bearing on the way museums manage their collections. A code of ethics sets out the legal and ethical responsibilities of a museum for the objects it holds on behalf of its community, and for the way museum staff carry out their work.
- 2.23 The 2 codes most relevant to, and recognised by, New Zealand museums are those produced by the International Council of Museums (ICOM) and Museums Aotearoa.
- 2.24 The ICOM code of ethics outlines standards for the museum profession, in the form of principles supported by guidelines of desirable professional practice. The code notes that museums hold collections in trust for the benefit of society and its development.
- 2.25 The Museums Aotearoa Code of Ethics expands on the ICOM definition and provides requirements for museums, their governing bodies, and their professional staff. It describes the responsibilities that governing bodies and museum staff owe to the collection and to the public who support, fund, and visit the museum.
- 2.26 The collection and its care are placed in the context of the museum's stewardship obligations to hold objects in trust for the public –
- There is a strong presumption that objects once acquired will remain in the museum in perpetuity, maintained in at least the same condition as at entry and held in trust for the public.*
- 2.27 In our examination of museum strategies and in discussions with staff, we looked for evidence that museums were aware of, and committed to, these ethical principles, and were committed to responsible stewardship.

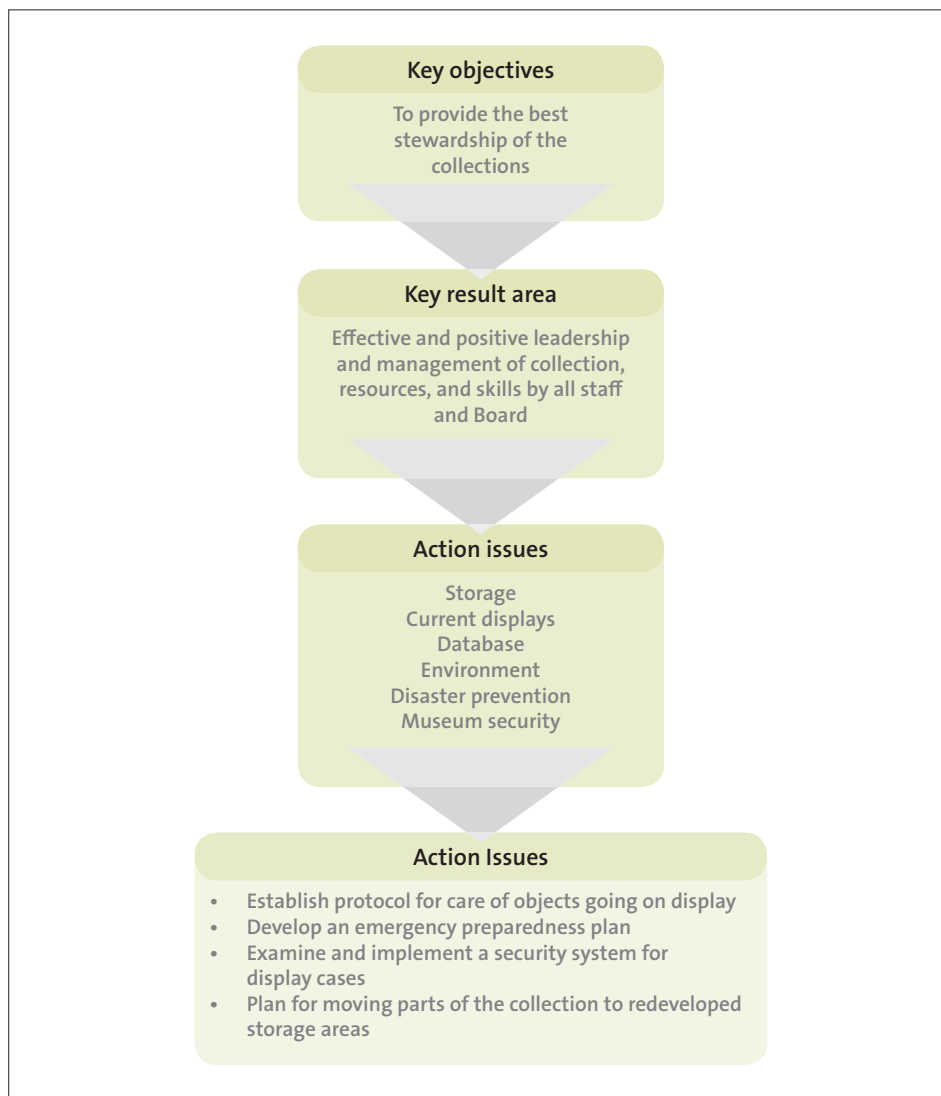
### Principles of responsible stewardship

- 2.28 All museums recognised their stewardship obligations. They were aware of, and committed to, their legal and ethical obligations as custodians of assets on behalf of their communities. Some referred expressly to such principles or ethical responsibilities in their mission statements or collection policies.
- 2.29 A commitment to responsible stewardship provides the public with confidence in the ability of the museum to manage valuable community assets on its behalf. It

also provides past, current, and prospective donors with assurance that their gifts will be well looked after.

- 2.30 There is a close relationship between stewardship and collection care. In one museum this relationship was set out through a clear hierarchy of strategic objectives, key result areas, issues, and actions. These relationships are shown in Figure 3.

**Figure 3**  
The relationship between stewardship and collection care



### Compliance with legislation

- 2.31 Museums generally recognised, where relevant, their responsibility to comply with applicable legislation and conventions. Relevant legislation includes the Antiquities Act 1975, the Wildlife Act 1953, and the Trade in Endangered Species Act 1989. We discuss the implications of the Copyright Act 1994 for museums in paragraphs 2.35-2.42.

### Defining legal status of objects

- 2.32 We assessed whether museums had in place procedures and documentation to define the legal status of objects in their collections – a vital element of responsible stewardship. As well as defining ownership, the legal status of an object will commonly determine the way in which it can be used by the museum – for example, for display, reproduction, conservation, loan, or disposal.
- 2.33 In some circumstances, the legal status of objects can be complex – especially where poor records exist of past accessions, or where the terms of loan agreements are uncertain. These situations can create difficulties in establishing current ownership. One museum told us how poor records had created difficulties in responding to requests to return objects to the families of past donors.
- 2.34 Museums were aware of the need to define the legal status of objects in their custody and the associated management obligations. Our enquiries showed that the legal status of their collections was generally well defined through registration policies and procedures, and documented in records such as certificates of title and donor receipts. We discuss the use of documentation to support proof of ownership in Part 4.

### Copyright obligations

- 2.35 Museums are legally responsible for ensuring compliance with copyright obligations that apply to the use of objects in their collections.
- 2.36 Copyright protects an original work from being copied without the permission of the copyright owner. This legal requirement affects museums in a number of ways, and a wide range of objects held in museums are protected by copyright. These include archives, visual and graphic works (such as paintings, prints, and other art works), and sound recordings.
- 2.37 We sought evidence that museums had policies about applying copyright to objects in their collections. We examined whether agreements with donors or vendors, and loan agreements (including exhibition documentation), contained copyright conditions. We also assessed whether proposals to publish art works or allow reproductions took account of copyright considerations.



- 2.38 An understanding of copyright principles is fundamental to many activities associated with using a museum's collection. Copyright implications arise commonly:
- when a request is received to photograph or reproduce an object, photograph, or art work in the collection or on outwards or inwards loan;
  - if a museum proposes to publish the image of an object on the Internet; or
  - through the process of documenting the collection and creating catalogues or other printed material, such as posters and cards.
- 2.39 Museum documentation needs to specify clearly how the museum will ensure that the legal rights of copyright owners are protected. This is an important collection management responsibility. Copyright issues are becoming more significant as museums make their collections more accessible to the public.
- 2.40 All museums we audited were aware of their copyright obligations. Agreements with donors or vendors to acquire items for the collection, and loan agreements, contained appropriate copyright provisions. This was particularly important for museums with significant collections of photographs, and with paintings and other art works.
- 2.41 Te Papa has compiled a manual, *The Copyright Act 1994: A Manual for New Zealand Museums*, which outlines how the Act applies to museums. The manual is available from National Services Te Paerangi, which has also published a resource guide on the subject.
- 2.42 Getting copyright permission to publish art works online can be a time-consuming task, particularly for large collections. It needs to be built into project planning. One art gallery employed extra staff for this and associated tasks. It had also consulted closely with the Māori community when preparing images for web publication. The process had taken a number of months as these and other issues were progressively resolved.

### Working with Māori

- 2.43 Museums are guardians of taonga of cultural, historical, and spiritual significance to Māori. This guardianship responsibility imposes a special obligation to recognise traditional Māori ownership of taonga in museum collections, and, as caretaker, to ensure that taonga are treated appropriately. Special considerations may include:
- storage arrangements;
  - security;
  - the design of displays;
  - observing protocol;

- providing access to the collection by iwi, hapū, and whānau; and
- dealing with requests to borrow objects.

- 2.44 We assessed whether each museum had structures or arrangements enabling it to discharge its responsibilities as a guardian of Māori taonga, and to promote consultation with local iwi and other Māori on matters relating to managing Māori taonga. We also sought evidence that Māori are involved in managing, using, accessing, and interpreting objects of cultural, historical, or spiritual significance to them.
- 2.45 Māori committees or advisory groups can play a useful role in endorsing museum policies and procedures for managing Māori taonga. They can also assist and guide the museum in dealing with issues about the repatriation<sup>2</sup> of Māori taonga.
- 2.46 Where relevant, we asked Māori representatives of museum advisory committees or liaison groups about their relationships with the museum, and their involvement in managing Māori taonga on behalf of local iwi and other Māori.

### Responsiveness to Māori taonga responsibilities

- 2.47 Most of the museums we visited had collections of Māori taonga, and all had recognised that they had special responsibilities to ensure that the Māori taonga were treated appropriately, in a culturally sensitive manner. This might involve setting aside an area for the display or storage of Māori taonga, or by putting in place special security measures for the custody of prized Māori artefacts. Spiritual ceremonies commonly accompany significant events relating to Māori taonga.
- 2.48 To provide a stronger focus on these custodianship responsibilities, some museums had set up, or were seeking to set up, a curator position with special responsibility for dealing with the stewardship of their Māori taonga collections. Various benefits were seen in creating such a position, such as:
- forging a closer relationship with the Māori community;
  - promoting the bicultural identity of the museum, strengthening the cultural values of the museum, and demonstrating a commitment to partnership between the museum and the Māori community; and
  - providing a dedicated resource to focus on matters relating to the management of Māori taonga, such as research and interpretation, display, loans, access, security, and storage.

### Structures for consultation and advice

- 2.49 The museums we audited had set up effective structures to work with Māori.

<sup>2</sup> Repatriation refers to the return of Māori taonga to their place of origin.

- 2.50 In most cases, arrangements were in place to support the museums in discharging their guardianship responsibilities, and to serve as sources of advice to staff on managing Māori objects in ways that were sensitive to cultural and spiritual needs.
- 2.51 Museums need ready access to practical guidance. One museum had positive relationships with the local Māori community, but no ready access to advice on handling Māori objects. This had led to uncertainty about the protocols to follow when moving objects within the museum.
- 2.52 Committees or designated liaison people provided useful channels for communication with iwi on matters relating to objects in the care of museums. Museum staff were making good use of advisers for guidance on matters relating to management of their collections, such as loans, interpretation, storage, and display. Relationships were positive, with effective consultation and engagement with Māori communities.
- 2.53 Some museums were also working with local Māori on projects to build up information about their collections, or had employed expertise to strengthen staff knowledge about their Māori taonga collections and the conservation of those collections. For example, at the time of our visit, one museum was working with a local iwi on historical research, using photographs from its collection.
- 2.54 In a joint initiative with local Māori, another museum had identified the conservation needs of important Māori taonga. The museum used this project as an educational opportunity, and to improve access to this part of its collection. The museum had a significant collection of around 80 cloaks and more than 100 kete, in a range of styles, techniques, and materials. In 2002, the museum, in consultation with its Māori advisory group, had employed a Māori textiles conservator to assess and photograph part of this collection. The cloaks were re-housed in improved storage facilities, and the museum started a project to provide increased access to the collection. Through a week-long workshop, it also provided the opportunity for people to learn about woven Māori textiles and conservation techniques.
- 2.55 Māori taonga are also held by iwi, or may be returned to their original iwi owners. Te Puni Kōkiri has noted that, increasingly, some iwi may be looking to manage their Māori taonga in a more active way. However, this raises various issues, such as:
- the design and cost of storage;
  - security;
  - training; and
  - management plans.

- 2.56 There may be opportunities for museums to offer advice on these and other aspects of ongoing management.

### Standards for managing collections

- 2.57 Museums are accountable to their governing bodies, funding agencies, and the wider community for the responsible stewardship of the collections in their custody. Assessing the performance of the museum in meeting the requirements of responsible stewardship demands the use of specific and measurable standards.
- 2.58 These standards enable a museum to demonstrate its commitment to responsible stewardship and its achievements in meeting that commitment. Standards can be used for a range of purposes:
- They enable the museum to establish where its priorities should lie and where it should target its resources. Standards are a tool for planning, and should form the basis for any bid for funding.
  - Reference to standards in museum policies, and in performance reporting to stakeholders, gives prominence to the importance of collection care. It also provides a means of benchmarking performance within the museum over time, and against comparable museums.
  - Along with corresponding indicators of performance, specific and measurable standards enable museum managers to measure the museum's progress in improving the quality of its practices and procedures, and in meeting key objectives over time.

### Using specific and measurable standards

- 2.59 We sought evidence that each museum was using specific and measurable standards to manage its collections, to monitor and report on its performance, and for resource planning and reporting on stewardship.
- 2.60 Museum staff referred to standards, and museum collections policies often contained loose references to "international" or "professional" standards. However, none of the museums we audited had specific and measurable standards for the management of their collections.
- 2.61 There are various generally accepted, published standards for aspects of collection management. Museums had not explicitly defined or adopted these standards in their policies and procedures (as appropriate to their individual circumstances).
- 2.62 The absence of meaningful, objective, and measurable standards was reflected in the variable use of meaningful measures for reporting on the key aspects of collection management (see Part 7).

## Part 3

# Policies for collection management

3.1 In this Part, we discuss policies for the management of heritage collections and their future development, and associated procedures, processes, and practices. We summarise our key findings and raise issues for consideration from our assessment of:

- the origins and development of collections;
- policies and procedures for managing and developing collections;
- acquisition policies and criteria;
- processes for deciding what objects to add to a collection; and
- policies and practices for removing objects from a collection.

### Key findings

3.2 Museum collections have their origins in a variety of sources and contexts. A museum faces the challenge of interpreting the significance of its collection for the present-day public and defining a coherent collection development strategy for the future.

3.3 All museums had policies for managing their collections. These policies were comprehensive and covered the matters needed for ongoing management and future development. However, we found no evidence of formal consultation between museums, either regionally or more widely, about the focus and direction of collection management and development.

3.4 Museums had defined criteria for adding objects to their collections. Key considerations are significance, consistency with the acquisition policy and collecting plan, and the potential to use the added object for the activities of the museum. Processes were well defined to ensure that relevant factors were considered before objects were accepted into museum collections.

3.5 Art galleries had well-established processes for considering and approving proposals to buy new art works. However, the reasons for purchasing individual art works were not always well recorded, nor were acquisition processes always followed.

3.6 Museums had policies for de-accessioning, but none were planning to rationalise their collections.

### Issues for consideration

3.7 Museums have inherited collections from a wide range of sources and contexts, and in different media. To make the best use of these collections, museums

will need to devise collection management strategies around key themes and subjects. They will need to use those themes and subjects to interpret what they currently hold and to define objectives for developing the collection into the future.

- 3.8 Museums would benefit from consulting with other museums on the focus and direction of their collection policies and plans, so as to promote collaboration and make the best use of the network of collections throughout the country.
- 3.9 All museums should draw up training plans to extend staff skills and maintain good practice.
- 3.10 Decisions by art galleries to buy objects or art works should be clearly documented and follow proper procedures, so that the process is seen to be fully transparent and provides evidence that the purchase is relevant to the collection and represents value for money.
- 3.11 Some museums have greater security of funding, more staff, staff with a greater range of specialist skills and experience, or enjoy superior facilities for display and storage. Some collaboration is occurring, but there is an unmet demand for advice and support, particularly for the smaller museums.

### Origins and development of collections

- 3.12 We assessed what museums held in their collections, the origin and evolution of collections, and what challenges that posed for development of the collection.
- 3.13 The collections in our museums have not evolved in a planned, systematic fashion. Instead, they are largely the product of past collecting practices and curatorial preferences, evolving social and cultural tastes, and the origins of the institution. The collections in the museums we visited often held objects or groups of objects from varied and sometimes exotic sources. Some of those objects, such as objects from overseas, may not readily fit with the current stated purpose of the museum.

### Collection strategies

- 3.14 To establish a collection strategy, a museum needs to decide on key themes for future development, and use those themes to define objectives and collecting plans for specific groups of objects within the collection.
- 3.15 Past collecting practices create a challenge for museums. Museums need to identify a coherent, unifying focus for their collections through a systematic and imaginative assessment of the collection's significance in the context of the museum's current purpose and activities. For many, the first step is to assess and document what they hold. We discuss documenting and managing collection information in Part 5.

- 3.16 The work undertaken by one museum – building on a comprehensive inventory of its collection – was a useful approach to interpreting and making best use of what it held in its collection (see Figure 4). The museum set up a collection strategy that provides a possible model for other museums. The strategy can also be used for developing the collection, and for guiding the collection’s use, access, storage, and conservation.

**Figure 4**  
**Example of a collection strategy**

The museum’s collection strategy was based on 7 collecting themes, each defining a field in which the museum has decided to build its collections. These 7 themes have been divided into a set of collecting units (such as a collection of manuscripts relating to a key area of historical interest). Using a common format, the museum had evaluated the significance of each unit, assigned each unit a priority within the broad collection group, specified acquisition objectives and criteria, and assessed storage requirements.

The collecting units provided the basis for a set of collecting plans. The collecting plans provided a practical link between themes and units, and objects in the museum’s collection. They also provided a basis for ensuring that collection development was strategic and relevant. The museum had a programme to strengthen its collection by buying significant items that filled gaps in its collection, or that would directly contribute to future exhibition plans. Consistency with these collecting plans is one of the criteria the museum uses when considering a possible acquisition.

The museum’s themes and units approach has also enabled it to better design its collections information system to meet its objectives for use, access, and conservation. By building classifications for use into the collection structure, the museum aims to promote rational collection development for the future; promote appropriate use of, and access to, the collection; and provide a means for setting priorities for conservation.

## Policies and procedures for managing and developing collections

- 3.17 We assessed whether each museum had a comprehensive and focused collection policy.
- 3.18 A collection policy is a detailed written statement that sets out how the museum will manage and develop its collection to meet its strategic purpose. It should explain:
- the purpose of the museum and its collection goals;
  - what is in its collection;
  - how it plans to manage and develop its collection; and
  - the standards it will follow in caring for objects in its custody.
- 3.19 The collection policy should:
- show how the collection will be used and developed to achieve the purpose of the museum;

- describe what the museum holds in each group of its collection, the significance of the group in the collection, and how it intends to use each collection group (such as through exhibitions or education);
- set out how it will develop its collection, including criteria it will apply when deciding what objects to add to, or remove from, the collection;
- specify the ethical and professional standards it will follow, and legislation with which it must comply, in managing the collection;
- explain how it will care for the collection (such as the preventive conservation measures that will be followed, and special storage or display needs); and
- outline the museum's approach to lending and borrowing objects.

3.20 We examined museum policy documentation to establish whether it covered all necessary aspects.

3.21 Collection policies differed significantly in their coverage. Some museums dealt with aspects of collection management (such as procedures) in separate documents, and some policies described collection tasks, and the roles and responsibilities of staff, in more detail.

3.22 However, all the museums we audited had collection policies that provided the necessary strategic framework for collection management and future development, defining areas of interest, the scope of the collection, and the focus of planned collecting activity. Museum documentation set out how the institution would handle acquisitions, loans, and other relevant aspects of collection use and access.

### **Consulting with other museums about their collection policies**

3.23 We expected museums to have drawn up their collection policies in consultation with other museums in the region, to ensure effective collaboration and efficient use of resources, and to promote the best use of their different collections.

3.24 Museums we spoke to were sometimes aware of the collection focus of other local museums, and would consider this in their own collection planning. For example, one collection policy noted the museum's intention not to collect a group of objects known to be a special part of the collection of another museum in the region.

3.25 On occasion, one museum will offer to another museum an object that fits more properly within that museum's purpose or existing collection. A variety of informal relationships existed between museums (see paragraphs 4.50-4.51).



- 3.26 None of the museums we visited systematically consulted other museums in their regions or more widely on their collection policies and plans. In our view, this would have important benefits, such as:
- promoting the unique role of each museum in the regional and national network;
  - avoiding unnecessary duplication and competition;
  - aligning collecting interests and priorities; and
  - supporting planning for collaboration on public programmes, such as exhibitions.

### Acquisition policies and criteria

- 3.27 Museums acquire objects by buying them, accepting gifts or bequests, or by active collecting, such as archaeological expeditions.
- 3.28 Museums constantly receive offers of objects from members of the public. Auctions also offer unlimited opportunities for museums to add to their collections. These factors make it vital for museums to have a disciplined process in place for deciding what to accept. Every museum should have an acquisitions policy that defines the criteria for what to accept or buy.
- 3.29 For each museum, we assessed whether acquisition practices were consistent with policies, and whether specified processes and acquisition criteria were followed.
- 3.30 Each museum had acquisition policies, with clear criteria for objects that it would add to the collection, to guide collecting activities, promote planned growth, and ensure alignment with its purpose. Criteria for acceptance – such as the condition of the object or its relevance to the museum’s purpose – were defined, as was the process for making decisions.
- 3.31 Museums need to take account of various factors when considering a possible acquisition. They need to be satisfied that the person offering the object (or the vendor) has proper legal title to the object. Other relevant factors are the condition of the object, and whether the museum has room to store it.

### Significance of an object

- 3.32 The most important factor for the museum to consider is whether the object will add value to the object’s collection. This question can be answered by considering its significance.
- 3.33 Significance is about the context of an object – whether the object is rare or representative, and its provenance, meaning, and patterns of use. The

context may have cultural, historical, aesthetic, or scientific aspects. Assessing significance involves making a judgement about the value that an object will add to the collection, and whether acquiring the object will help the museum meet its purpose and promote its activities. Figure 5 shows the form used by the Hawke's Bay Cultural Trust to consider acquisition proposals. This illustrates how significance and relevance to the collection are the main criteria.

**Figure 5**  
Example of a form used to consider acquisition proposals

**INTERIM INCOMING RECEIPT and POSSIBLE ACQUISITION SIGNIFICANCE ASSESSMENT**

**DATE:**                      **STAFF MEMBER:**                      **NUMBER:**

**PURPOSE:**                      **Possible Acquisition Research/Identification**

*In order to maintain museum records, please could you provide the following information if appropriate.*

**DONOR DETAILS**

**TITLE:**

**FIRST NAME:**                      **LAST NAME:**

**KNOWN AS:**                      **INITIALS:**

**DATE OF BIRTH:**                      **PLACE OF BIRTH:**

**ADDRESS:**

**PHONE/FAX/EMAIL:**

**NOTES:**

**DEPOSITOR** *(please complete this section if you are here on behalf of the actual owner of the item/s)*

**TITLE:**

**FIRST NAME:**                      **LAST NAME:**

**KNOWN AS:**                      **INITIALS:**

**DATE OF BIRTH:**                      **PLACE OF BIRTH:**

**ITEM/S:**

**PROVENANCE:** *Background information into ownership of the item and accompanying stories relating to the item.*

**MANUFACTURER:**


**PLACE OF MANUFACTURE:**

**DATE OF MANUFACTURE:**

*The personal information collected on this form is for Hawke's Bay Cultural Trust records and will only be used for the purpose for which it was collected by Museum Collection Staff. Please sign both forms, keep one copy. The other is for the Hawke's Bay Cultural Trust's museum records*



**Figure 6**  
Example of an acquisition justification form



**WAIKATO MUSEUM ACQUISITION JUSTIFICATION FORM**  
(To be attached to accompanying Acquisition Proposal Form)

**Brief background & statement of material:** \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

*(You may append supplementary information if available. This is advised for high value items or items which make unusual demands on museum resources)*

1. This material meets the Museum Acquisition Policy: Yes  No   
 This material meets the departmental collection plan: Yes  No   
 If No, comment: \_\_\_\_\_
2. How does the material contribute to the Museum's research resources and activities? \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_ Not applicable
3. What is the display potential of this material? \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_ None
4. Is this acquisition associated with forthcoming exhibition programmes?  
 Yes  No  Not applicable   
 If Yes, specify: \_\_\_\_\_
5. Conservation: are there any special staff/budget requirements?  
 Treatment: Yes  No  Handling: Yes  No  Packing: Yes  No   
 If Yes, specify: \_\_\_\_\_
6. Storage Requirements: these can be met within dept. resources:  
 (a) storage area Yes  No   
 (b) environmental requirements Yes  No   
 If No, comment: \_\_\_\_\_
7. Concept Leader requirements: these can be met with dept. staff/resources:  
 Yes  No   
 If No, comment: \_\_\_\_\_
8. Legal requirements/obligations arising from NZ/international legislation:  
 None  As follows: \_\_\_\_\_
9. Are there any special issues to be noted which may restrict its use, e.g. Copyright, intellectual property rights, cultural restrictions, patents, etc.  
 Yes  No  If Yes, specify: \_\_\_\_\_
10. Additional comments/information: \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

## Processes for deciding what objects to add to a collection

3.36 Museums and art galleries have different approaches to collecting. We therefore discuss their practices separately.

### Museums' approach to collecting

3.37 Most museums we audited were collecting passively, adding to their collections mainly through gifts, donations, or bequests. There were various reasons for this approach:

- Most museums had limited space to house a significant number of additional objects. Moreover, most had yet to carry out the collection-wide inventory necessary to plan future storage needs.
- The budgets available to most museums for buying objects were small, and, unlike art galleries, museums are less likely to have major sponsors or stakeholders able to assist with funding. As a consequence, most additions to collections were by way of gift or donation.
- Museums were facing a backlog of work to build up and maintain their collection catalogue records, and to transfer manual records into an electronic database. One museum had introduced a moratorium on new acquisitions to enable attention to be given to this work.

3.38 Only one museum had a significant active collecting programme. The museum had the benefit of surplus storage capacity, which enabled it to target gaps in its collection and build up areas of interest through vigorous collecting activity.

### Decision-making processes

3.39 The numbers of objects added to a museum collection can vary significantly from one year to the next. For example, one gift or bequest can involve a large number of individual objects, documents, or photographs. A disciplined approach to collecting is vital to ensure that new objects add value to the collection, are consistent with the purpose of the museum, and can be cared for and housed.

3.40 We examined the processes followed by each museum to decide whether to accept objects into their collections. This decision-making process often involved consultation.

3.41 In the smaller museums, consultation was sometimes informal. In practice, decisions to accept an individual object into a collection (normally by gift) were made by individual staff (normally a curator or collection manager). These staff consider the acquisition criteria and, where necessary, consult with the director informally. In our view, this process was reasonable given the size of the museum and the scale of collecting.

- 3.42 The larger museums followed more formal processes, and applied relevant criteria, to assess whether objects should be accepted into their collections.
- 3.43 The 2 large museums had committees set up to consider whether objects or art works should be accepted into the collection. In one museum, this committee included the collections manager, museum director, curators, and the manager of museum programmes. This ensured that relevant staff throughout the museum were consulted.
- 3.44 Museums sometimes used standard forms for acquisition submissions. This helped to ensure that decisions to acquire objects were fully supported by strong reasons, and that the process was documented in a systematic way. The criteria used in the forms included significance, relevance to the collection policy and collecting plan, relevance to the exhibition programme and research, legal requirements, and storage capacity.

### Art galleries' approach to collecting

- 3.45 By contrast, art galleries develop their collections not only through bequests or gifts but also by buying art works on the market – often at auction or by negotiation with the artist.
- 3.46 Art galleries need to give careful consideration to justifying expenditure on buying art works to add to their collections.
- 3.47 The 2 large art galleries had significant acquisition budgets.<sup>1</sup> Careful setting of priorities by the art gallery director and curators is required to ensure that expenditure represents value for money and contributes to the relevance of the collection. We examined:
- each art gallery's collecting plans;
  - the criteria used to decide whether to buy an art work; and
  - the processes followed to reach that decision.
- 3.48 The 2 art galleries used collection plans as a framework to expand their collections, by adding art works in a particular period, style, or subject, or art works by a particular artist. These plans could serve as a useful model not just for other art galleries, but also for museums.
- 3.49 One art gallery's acquisition policy clearly defined the scope and focus of the collection, serving as the basis for considered collections planning. The art gallery's *Triennial Acquisition Plan for 2004-05 to 2006-07* set out areas of strategic emphasis for acquisitions in each of the 3 financial years. The plan targeted

<sup>1</sup> Both larger and smaller art galleries (which may or may not have acquisition budgets) rely on supporting bodies (typically Friends of the Gallery) and other funding sources, such as trusts or bequests, to provide additional funding when opportunities arise to add to a collection.

areas of focus for the collection for each year. It provided a solid framework for acquisition expenditure. It also provided enough flexibility to take advantage of opportunities to buy – from other funding sources – art works of major importance when they become available. Within these strategic planning areas the curators identify particular artists whose art works they seek to acquire.

- 3.50 The plan specifies estimated purchase costs for the targeted art works. Other funding sources (such as trusts) are approached to provide the art gallery with the means to make unplanned purchases not covered by the acquisition budget.

#### **Purchasing procedures**

- 3.51 With their more significant purchasing budgets, we expected the larger art galleries to have formal and thorough purchasing procedures.
- 3.52 In total, the 2 large art galleries we audited received annual funding from their local authority owners of \$555,000 to buy new art works, with additional funding coming from other parties. We examined the purchasing practices of the larger art galleries for assurance that purchasing proposals were fully considered and decisions properly recorded.
- 3.53 Both art galleries had well-established processes and guidelines for considering and approving proposals to buy art works for their collections. Proposal forms required the relevant curator to provide detailed information about the art work and the artist, and to state the reasons for acquisition (for example, to supplement comparable and related art works in the collection). However, the proposal form used by one art gallery did not require a summary of pricing information (such as recent comparable selling prices and a description of the negotiations followed). We recommended that the art gallery amend its proposal form to include this information.
- 3.54 Proposals were considered at meetings of the art galleries' acquisitions committees where the merits of the proposed purchase were debated.

#### **Decision-making processes**

- 3.55 The reasons for buying art works should be clearly supported and recorded. We examined a selection of acquisition submissions (and associated papers such as minutes of acquisition committee meetings) to determine whether they set out a clear rationale for decisions to buy art works. In particular, we looked for information confirming the reasonableness of the price sought, and evidence that the art work was consistent with each art gallery's collecting plan.
- 3.56 Some acquisition submissions we reviewed either contained little or no information to justify the reasonableness of the proposed purchase price, or failed to show clearly the relevance of the art work to the collection.

3.57 Nor did acquisition documentation always record the debate on the merits of buying a particular art work. We found that, in some instances, decisions on proposed purchases had been made at informal meetings rather than at the scheduled meetings of the acquisition committee. As a consequence, the art gallery did not have a formal and complete record of the debate, nor of the main considerations that gave rise to the decision to purchase.

3.58 We raised these matters in our reports to the art galleries concerned.

### **Policies and practices for removing objects from collections**

3.59 We assessed whether museums had policies for de-accessioning and disposing of unwanted objects from their collections, and whether they were rationalising their collections by applying those policies.

3.60 A de-accession policy provides a basis for the museum to decide what objects it no longer wants to keep, and outlines procedures that will be followed.

3.61 All museums had policies for de-accessioning. However, none was considering significant rationalisation of its collection. This is explained by a number of factors:

- Many museums have yet to establish and document fully what they currently hold in their collections. Until this process is complete they will not be in a position to review whether objects or groups of objects fall outside collection policies, or have no ongoing value or potential use in the collection.
- Codes of ethics and museum convention have created a strong presumption that objects, once acquired, will remain in the museum in perpetuity, and that they will be de-accessioned and disposed of only in exceptional circumstances.
- As tastes and fashions change, objects or parts of the collection that may have been considered of little interest in the past may become relevant.
- Ethical obligations to previous owners or donors demand that museums follow strict procedures for de-accessioning and disposal.



# Part 4

## Staffing

4.1 In this Part, we discuss how museums are staffed and organised to give effect to policies governing the management and development of collections. We summarise our key findings and raise issues for consideration from our assessment of:

- the job descriptions and training of staff with collection management responsibilities;
- the use of volunteers and temporary staff;
- organisation of responsibilities to manage collections;
- how staff work together on activities involving the collection; and
- how museums work together, and share expertise and resources.

### Key findings

4.2 Job descriptions clearly identified the collection-related responsibilities of staff, and those staff had relevant skills and experience. They also received relevant training and opportunities to broaden their competencies. However, not all museums had formal training plans.

4.3 Volunteers and temporary staff are indispensable resources for museums. Some museums rely heavily on them to supplement permanent staff. Many volunteers carry out valuable collection work, helping to look after, and build up knowledge about, the museum's collection. Not all museums had policies and procedures for managing their volunteers.

4.4 Museum staff work together well on collection-related tasks.

4.5 A central registry, or staff assigned to collection responsibilities, promotes consistent practice, oversees collection tasks, and provides a focus on the collection. Competing tasks – particularly the exhibition programme – can easily take priority over, and leave little time for, collection work.

### Issues for consideration

4.6 Volunteers make a significant contribution to the work of many large and small museums. This contribution needs to be acknowledged through appropriate systems and procedures for recruitment, training, supervision, and recognition.

4.7 Museum staff have a range of responsibilities, and analysing how they spend their time can ensure that adequate priority is given to collection management tasks.

## Job descriptions and training for museum staff

- 4.8 We assessed whether job descriptions defined collection management responsibilities, and whether collections staff received appropriate training.

### Job descriptions

- 4.9 We looked at job descriptions for registrars, collections managers, and curators, to see whether:
- the skills and experience sought were relevant to the tasks associated with managing the collection; and
  - collection management tasks were identified as important requirements of the position.
- 4.10 In general, job descriptions clearly defined the collection-related responsibilities and skills required of staff.
- 4.11 Collection management staff – even in the smaller centres – generally had relevant backgrounds or qualifications, including librarianship, museum studies, science, or arts and history, along with experience in museum or art gallery work. Their job descriptions identified collection management responsibilities.
- 4.12 In the one museum where responsibilities were not formally defined, we recommended that this task be given priority.

### Training

- 4.13 We asked museum staff what training they received. We also sought evidence that museums had a plan that set out the training required for specific positions, and that appropriate courses or workshops were scheduled to meet those requirements.
- 4.14 Staff received relevant training and opportunities to broaden their skills. They could participate in workshops with other museums, and be trained in object handling or in using the museum's database. One museum recognised the importance of training by making attendance at specific courses an important performance measure for its curators.
- 4.15 We also considered the need for training in careful handling, which is a crucial element of collection care. Any handling can cause damage, and poor handling will quickly lead to an object becoming unusable.
- 4.16 All museums trained their staff in the careful handling of objects during induction and, sometimes, through periodic refresher training. We saw staff handle objects with care.

- 4.17 In our view, all museums should have training plans for staff to extend their skills and maintain good practice. However, only 3 museums had formal training plans for these purposes.
- 4.18 One museum's in-house training schedule for its staff covered a range of museum processes related to the collection. These processes included using the electronic collections database, accessioning, labelling objects, handling objects, mounting objects for exhibitions, and maintaining security. The museum registrar provided training on various aspects of collection management, such as using the collection database and object handling.
- 4.19 Another museum's in-house training plan was based on systematic assessment of training needs throughout the organisation, ensuring that training was consistent with the needs of each role.

### **Using volunteers and temporary staff for collection-related work**

- 4.20 Volunteers and temporary staff are resources indispensable to the museum sector. We assessed how volunteers and temporary staff were used for collections-related work, including how they were recruited, trained, supervised, and rewarded.

#### **How museums use volunteers and temporary staff**

- 4.21 Volunteers work on a range of collection-related (and other) tasks in museums, and may also greet visitors and help with public programmes. Some volunteers also go on to work in museums as permanent employees.
- 4.22 Museums also use temporary staff – under schemes such as the Government's Task Force Green programme – to supplement their core staffing. Like volunteers, these people often carry out collection-related work, but on short-term contracts. Museums may also receive project funding from agencies such as the Lottery Grants Board to employ staff to carry out specific tasks for a short term.
- 4.23 Seven of the 13 museums we audited were using volunteers for collection-related work. Volunteers were most often used in museums rather than art galleries.
- 4.24 The main reasons given for not using volunteers were the time commitment associated with supervision, and the difficulties in finding volunteers who were suitable.
- 4.25 One of 2 small museums we visited used the equivalent of 1.6 full-time staff in volunteer hours each year. The other museum, with 3 full-time staff, was using 720 volunteer hours a year. In both museums, volunteers and temporary staff

were making a significant contribution to collection management by rehousing and reorganising collections, preparing storage units, and creating finding aids to enhance public access to archives and other collections.

- 4.26 Larger museums also benefit from the use of volunteers. One had 54 volunteers, and many of them were carrying out collection-related work. The number of volunteers was the same as the number of full-time equivalent staff. The museum estimated that this volunteer commitment equated to the saving of some \$250,000 in staff salaries.
- 4.27 Some museums had created positions of honorary curator to acknowledge a volunteer's ongoing contribution and commitment to the work of the museum. Unlike other volunteers, honorary curators may have particular relevant qualifications and work on research projects as well as other collection-related tasks.

### **Reliance on volunteers and temporary staff**

- 4.28 In our view, museums would be making much less progress in rehousing and documenting their collections without volunteers and temporary staff. Many museums rely on the work of these people to carry out a variety of core collection management work, performing many of the tasks of a collections assistant, data entry operator, or assistant registrar.
- 4.29 Volunteer and temporary staff are also helping museums build up valuable knowledge about, and make better use of, their collections.
- 4.30 Volunteers in one museum were preparing indexes, biographical files, map boxes, collection guides, and listings of archival records, as well as compiling retrospective catalogue information. In another, a temporary worker had catalogued and rehoused a collection of architectural plans, some of which are now on display.

### **Policies and procedures for engaging and managing volunteers**

- 4.31 In our view, all museums should have formal policies and follow proper procedures in engaging and managing volunteers. We expected museums to have a volunteer policy, a process for engagement, and an agreement or contract with their volunteers. We also expected volunteers to be given training and supervision in their work.
- 4.32 Of the 7 museums that were using volunteers for collection-related work, 5 had policies governing their engagement and conditions of work. Our discussions with a range of museums indicate that smaller museums are less likely to have these policies.

- 4.33 We talked to volunteer co-ordinators in the museums we visited. Where possible, we also asked volunteers about how they became volunteers and about their work in the museum.
- 4.34 The processes followed by 2 museums for engaging volunteers were particularly well-defined and comprehensive. Processes for recruiting and managing their volunteers were clear, and were closely aligned with those for their permanent staff. These include a formal application process, carrying out reference checks, assessing the suitability of the applicant, entering into an agreement with the volunteer, arranging induction and training, and giving the volunteer an opportunity for feedback and review. The work of volunteers was well supervised, with volunteer co-ordinators acting as points of contact and being responsible for administration associated with their engagement.
- 4.35 Volunteers we spoke to were positive about their work, and about the support and recognition provided by their host museums.

### Organisation of responsibilities to manage collections

- 4.36 There are a number of ways in which museums can organise collection-related tasks. We examined arrangements in each of the museums we visited to see which job responsibilities and organisation structures promoted effective collection management.
- 4.37 Seven museums – principally the larger institutions<sup>1</sup> – had a dedicated registry or staff positions responsible for many of the tasks related to managing the collection. The benefits of centralising the function were consistency of practice, oversight of information systems, and a shared focus.
- 4.38 An alternative arrangement was for all collection management tasks to be assigned to curators. However, this arrangement can lead to other tasks taking priority over collection tasks.
- 4.39 Competing tasks – especially the pressures of preparing and delivering exhibitions – can easily take priority over collection work. One museum had no registry or collection staff. The curators' collection-related tasks were one of a number of responsibilities, and they faced competing priorities with their other work – carrying out research, dealing with enquiries from the public, planning exhibitions, and preparing or delivering other public programmes. They were also on a roster to supervise and assist in a public research centre.
- 4.40 The curators told us they were able to give only limited attention to collection work – such as completing an inventory, photographing the collection, or catching up with cataloguing tasks – and some accessioning had fallen behind. At the time of our audit, they were recording the time spent on their various tasks.

<sup>1</sup> In smaller museums, these tasks are likely to be undertaken along with other duties.

Results from this exercise confirmed the difficulties faced by the curators in giving adequate attention to their collection management responsibilities.

### **Analysing and addressing work priorities**

- 4.41 It is important to monitor and analyse how museum staff spend their time to ensure that adequate priority is given to collection management tasks.
- 4.42 One museum we visited had assigned a weighting to the various objectives for their staff. This established clear expectations about how staff should manage their time, and which tasks should be given priority.
- 4.43 Work associated with organising exhibitions and loan administration can make heavy demands on the time of collections staff, leaving limited scope for other collections tasks. Like many others, one museum needed to carry out significant work to consolidate and document collection records, and to build up its database. The existing registrar's time was fully occupied with exhibition work. This situation led the museum to create an additional registrar's position to undertake exhibition work, freeing up the existing registrar to make progress with the backlog of cataloguing and associated work to build up the collection database.

### **How museum staff work together on collection-related activities**

- 4.44 Many collection-related activities require museum staff to work together. We assessed whether staff were working effectively together on tasks related to collections, by asking collections and exhibitions staff, conservators, and curators how they were involved in activities such as accessioning, planning and delivering exhibitions, and loans administration.
- 4.45 Overall, museum staff are working together well. Staff were collaborating effectively in all aspects of collection-related work. Examples of collaboration included the co-ordination of accessioning tasks, the formation of museum-wide teams to plan and deliver exhibitions, and liaison between conservators, curators, and registry staff on matters relating to inwards or outwards loans.
- 4.46 We observed good illustrations of systems that supported effective collaboration. In one museum, protocols, procedures, and project planning documentation for exhibitions recognised the importance of collaboration between collections and exhibitions staff. An exhibition spreadsheet listed tasks associated with preparing, mounting, and dismantling an exhibition, and associated responsibilities and deadlines. A related form ensured that there was appropriate involvement of collections staff by requiring that object documentation be provided, and that information about the care of objects be displayed.

- 4.47 The checklist used by one art gallery to accession new art works helps it meet its target of accessioning items within a month of submissions being approved. It is also a valuable management tool for ensuring effective collaboration between all art gallery staff – registrars, curators, conservators, the photographer, and others – in carrying out the necessary accessioning tasks in a timely and effective manner. Using the accessioning checklist, registration staff are able to monitor progress (and identify outstanding work) for the various tasks associated with accessioning, such as completing condition reports, data entry, labelling, and photography.

### **How museums work together and share expertise and resources**

- 4.48 There are wide variations in capability from one museum or art gallery to another. Some have good facilities, have greater security of funding, and are able to employ the necessary numbers of staff with relevant skills and experience. Others lack appropriate conditions for proper storage and display, and face uncertain funding. They make do with short-term and temporary workers and volunteers who lack the experience and knowledge to set up systems and processes for sound management of the museum and its collection.
- 4.49 We assessed how museums were working together to share resources, expertise, and experience.

### **Providing advice and support**

- 4.50 Some collaboration and sharing of resources is occurring, but there is an unmet demand for advice and support. Examples of collaboration and sharing of resources include:
- museums passing on unwanted equipment – for example, shelving and computers – to smaller museums with limited resources for buying new equipment;
  - the smaller museums or art galleries seeking conservation advice from the larger institutions; and
  - joint training workshops (sometimes organised by National Services Te Paerangi).
- 4.51 Some regional or district museums took a more active support and leadership role than others – for example, by convening a regional museum group. However, the involvement of the larger museums or art galleries varied. Our discussions with small museums and art galleries identified a strong demand for advice and support.

- 4.52 In its strategy for the museum sector, Museums Aotearoa notes that some larger museums have co-ordinated regional museum groups and provided support to the smaller museums. However, it also notes “...some museums are finding it difficult to know where to find practical advice on day-to-day issues that arise during the course of their operation”. Our findings support this view.
- 4.53 We were told that there is a need for a funded regional liaison service to provide advice and support. This was a particular concern for smaller museums with limited resources and special local requirements.
- 4.54 Some staff in small and larger museums referred positively to the work of the (disestablished) Museums Liaison Service. Formerly funded by the Lottery Grants Board, this advisory service was provided by 4 liaison officers working from the 4 main regional museums. The main benefits of the service were:
- access to realistic, practical, on-the-spot advice suitable for smaller museums and the constraints they face;
  - a link with funding bodies and government agencies; and
  - a source of best practice that drew on a variety of experience in dealing with a wide range of other museums.
- 4.55 Some advice and support continues to be available, but it is provided without funding and on an occasional basis as resources allow.
- 4.56 We note that Museums Aotearoa’s strategy proposes a new programme to provide practical support for small museums. We agree that this concept merits serious consideration.



## Part 5

# Managing collection information

- 5.1 In this Part, we discuss how museums gather, store, and use information about their collections (collection information). Our objective was to assess how well each museum was doing this in order to account for objects in its care (as part of its permanent collection, on long-term loan, in its custody, borrowed, or on loan) and to support its wider activities such as research, exhibitions, education, and other public programmes.<sup>1</sup>
- 5.2 We summarise our key findings, and raise issues for consideration, from our assessment of:
- why museums need a collection information system;
  - what a collection information system should contain;
  - the use of registration documentation to account for collection objects;
  - the administration of loans to and from museums;
  - ways to gather and store collection information;
  - access to and use of collection information systems;
  - retrospective documentation to improve collection information;
  - the use of collection inventories; and
  - converting collection information into a digital format.

### Key findings

- 5.3 The system for recording information about objects a museum holds in its collection fulfils vital accountability and management functions. A collection information system enables the museum to not only account for what it holds, but also to interpret collections in their social and historical context by delivering a variety of services to its community and the wider public. With a thorough knowledge of its holdings and their significance, a museum is better able to draw up an active strategy to develop its collection, build on the collection's strengths, and take steps to strategically add to its holdings.
- 5.4 The museums we audited were using the necessary administrative documentation to record and account for their permanent collections through the processes of registration and cataloguing. However, some had substantial undocumented holdings.
- 5.5 Museums frequently lend or borrow objects that can be of considerable artistic, cultural, or financial value. This movement of objects between museums imposes important accountability obligations on the lending and borrowing institutions.

<sup>1</sup> Good practice in museum documentation is described in a range of texts and articles. Three examples are: *The New Museum Registration Methods* edited by R A Buck and J A Gilmore and published by the American Association of Museums; the *MLA Accreditation Scheme for UK museums*; and *SPECTRUM: The UK Museum Documentation Standard*.

Loan documentation was generally comprehensive, and museums were keeping appropriate records of objects on inwards or outwards loan. In the few cases where practices were inappropriate or needed to be improved, we raised those matters with the museums concerned.

- 5.6 For a variety of historical and other reasons, some collection records were incomplete or unreliable, and information about objects needed to be consolidated and verified. As a consequence, most museums were facing a backlog of cataloguing work to build up a body of complete and accurate object information for some parts of their collections. Although most museums have work under way to address this backlog, only limited progress is being made. Many museums are likely to face years of work to complete the task. It involves describing possibly tens of thousands of objects, including information about their origin and significance.
- 5.7 Museums were recording collection information in electronic databases, or were intending to do so. However, most were not using the databases for the full range of museum applications, and lacked the staff – and sometimes the necessary museum processes – to make better use of electronic tools. This was limiting the potential for more effective management of their collections through access to information about object-related activities. Only one museum had a comprehensive plan setting out how it would use documentation for managing and developing its collection.
- 5.8 Electronic databases offer significant capability to integrate object data and search through the collection. However, a significant number of museums had no manual to standardise documentation procedures. Our checks of museum documentation identified some errors in data. This highlights the importance of accurate and consistent data entry and maintenance.
- 5.9 The quality of collection information generally is variable. Incomplete or incorrect data undermine confidence in the information system and make searching and retrieval unreliable.
- 5.10 Museums were setting up useful initiatives to make their collections more accessible to the public, including providing electronic information about collections.
- 5.11 Most museums had carried out inventories of parts of their collections. However, with limited staff resources, they were often making slow progress, and work to follow up on identified problems was unfinished. Museums had not drawn up a systematic programme of collection inventories to provide ongoing oversight of the collection and associated records.

- 5.12 Most museums had programmes to create digital images of objects in their collections. However, few had a plan for their digitisation projects, and the different approach each was taking lacked the necessary consideration of objectives, resources, quality specifications, priorities, and timetables.

### Issues for consideration

- 5.13 Museums recognise the benefits from improving the quality of information about their collections to provide a comprehensive and reliable resource for staff and the public. However, tackling the backlog of fully documenting their collections is time-consuming. In our view, museums lack the necessary staff to make significant short-term progress.
- 5.14 With more staff, museums would be able to make better use of their electronic collection databases. Building up a comprehensive body of accurate object information that was available electronically would give users greater confidence in the reliability of collection information. There is also scope to link processes within the museum – such as exhibition design, curatorial research, condition reporting, and loan documentation – to make electronic databases a more valuable management tool for consolidating object-related information.
- 5.15 Improvements to the quality of collection information also need to be supported by standard procedures for data entry and maintenance, through documentation manuals.
- 5.16 Inventories are an important component of sound collection management. Priority should be given to carrying out periodic inventories. These should follow a cycle appropriate to the nature of the collection and the resources available, and establish action plans to follow up on the results. Many museums will need additional staff to carry out this work.
- 5.17 Many museums are facing significant work to create full catalogue records of their collections, but they are making limited progress. We identified 2 obstacles – insufficient staff to assign to the task, and the lack of strategic project plans with realistic targets and timetables. More than half the museums we audited use volunteers or other temporary staff for this work. While these people make a valuable contribution to the work of museums, we consider that some museums need more permanent staff to make measurable and consistent progress.
- 5.18 Effective and efficient digitisation demands careful planning to ensure the quality and suitability of images for different purposes, with a defined scope, specific standards for image quality, assigned resources, and a realistic timetable.

## Why museums need a collection information system

- 5.19 Museums record information about objects so they can interpret the significance of their collections and account for what they hold.
- 5.20 A collection information system containing accurate, relevant, and comprehensive information about a collection serves 4 broad purposes. It:
- enables the museum to account for objects in its care;
  - defines the significance of the object in the collection;
  - provides a resource for museum staff and the public; and
  - enables the museum to make the best use of what it holds, and establish a framework for developing the collection.
- 5.21 A museum must know at any time what objects it is legally responsible for (permanent collections and inwards or outwards loans). Object records define the legal status of objects in the museum's ownership or custody, tell the museum where to find an object, and record transactions or activities involving the object (such as conservation treatment or display).
- 5.22 In the event of loss of, or damage to, the collection, the collection information system also provides an authoritative record of what the museum holds.
- 5.23 A museum also records a range of descriptive information about each object to define its place in the collection: its provenance, condition, history, and other related details. Associating objects with their histories or "stories" through this information enables the museum to authenticate objects and define their significance in the collection.
- 5.24 All museum activities draw on information about the collection: exhibitions, research, and educational programmes. Museum staff use this information to plan exhibitions, find suitable objects to make up displays and compile catalogues, arrange education programmes, and answer enquiries from the public, students, or researchers. It is through the museum's collection information system that it provides public access to its collections – by indexes, by references, or on the Internet.
- 5.25 In addition, comprehensive and reliable information about what it holds enables the museum to exploit its collection to the full, and serves as a framework for managing and developing that collection through planned acquisitions and rationalisation.

## What a museum's collection information system should contain

- 5.26 National Services Te Paerangi has prepared a list of typical collection management activities or functions to be incorporated in a collection information system (see Figure 7).

**Figure 7**

### Typical activities or functions to include in a collection information system

Database/item entry	Item name, description, ownership, provenance, history, research details, images
Acquisition	Date acquired, acquisition method, report, source, cost, transfer of title, accession details
Location and movement	Collection locations, item's current location, item's previous location, movement history, items in specified location
Conservation management	Examinations, condition report, treatment, conservation history, cost
Licences and rights	Copyright ownership, permission requests, licences granted
Insurance and valuation	Valuations, insurance details, risk management
Loans	Loans in, loans out, loan number, location, date, period, agreements, overdue
De-accession and disposal	Reason for de-accessioning, method of disposal, approval, date
Multimedia capabilities	Imaging, video, audio
Public access	Physically on site, through website
Data management	Data entry standards, vocabulary control, searching, indexing, thesaurus, bilingual capacity (including Māori language) and classification systems

### Use of documentation plans

- 5.27 The challenge for any museum is to integrate, or create relationships between, object-related information that is in different formats and has been prepared in different parts of the museum for different purposes and functions.
- 5.28 A documentation plan can provide a valuable framework for defining how the museum will address its documentation needs in an integrated way. This ensures that efforts to expand and improve object records are closely aligned with collection management objectives. This plan should:
- specify what the documentation system is designed to achieve;
  - describe existing documentation procedures (who is responsible for what activity, for what purpose, and what records are created);

- analyse documentation flows and procedures against the aims and objectives of the museum's documentation system to identify gaps and duplication of effort, and assess how easily records can be used and information cross-referenced and retrieved; and
  - determine what staff, equipment (such as computers, cameras, or scanners), or facilities are needed to address any needs arising from this analysis, how long this project will take, and what resources will be needed.
- 5.29 A documentation plan should also serve as a framework for managing, and for developing, a museum's collection. It should also set out actions, including the timetable, for dealing with any documentation backlogs. A guide to writing a documentation plan is outlined on the website of the Museum Documentation Association.<sup>2</sup>
- 5.30 Only one museum that we audited had such a documentation plan. The plan encompassed all aspects of collection development and care, and set out clearly the purpose and functions of documentation activities and of different records. It explained how the museum intended to use object information to improve preservation, aid understanding and interpretation, improve accountability, and promote access and use.

### Use of registration documentation to account for collection objects

- 5.31 Museums account for what they acquire and hold, and the status of objects in their collections, through descriptive information known as registration documentation.
- 5.32 Registration documentation records the legal status of an object within the museum or on loan, that object's movement, and its care by the museum. Good registration records will provide clear evidence of legal ownership or possession, identification of objects by a unique number that allows object information and physical location to be easily retrieved, history of ownership, and status (for example, on loan, in storage, on display, or under treatment).
- 5.33 Documentation for the registration function should commonly include:
- Object entry documentation, for recording and monitoring new objects entering the museum until they are formally accepted into the collection (through accessioning) or returned. This documentation commonly consists of a temporary custody receipt, recording that the object is in the custody of the museum.

<sup>2</sup> See [www.mda.org.uk](http://www.mda.org.uk).

- An accessions register, which records all objects formally accepted into the custody of the museum, assigns a unique and permanent identification number to the object, and may contain some descriptive information about the object.
- A certificate of title that records the legal transfer of ownership to the museum from the donor, seller, or other source. In other circumstances, the ownership of objects may be defined by a loan agreement, trust deed, or other document.
- An index of donors that provides a record of members of the community who have given objects or art works to the institution.
- Records that show the location and movement of objects in the museum's collection, or of objects on loan or borrowed.<sup>3</sup>

### Completeness and reliability of registration documentation

- 5.34 Museums were using registration documentation to account for what they held in their collections, although some past records were incomplete or unreliable. All museums were using documentation to support accessioning and cataloguing tasks, although not all recorded the full range of information about object status. This documentation included object receipts, donor agreements and indexes, certificates of title, condition reports, and loan agreements.
- 5.35 Object receipts and other legal agreements with the donor or vendor should clearly record the legal conditions associated with the transaction. A good example of one such agreement was the form used by one art gallery to record the acceptance of gifts or bequests. The form records the transfer of title to the art gallery, and the art gallery's associated obligations and rights to care for, preserve, display, store, reproduce, and lend the object. It also records the art gallery's commitment to acknowledging the gift, and recognises the obligation to offer the work back to the donor should the art gallery seek to dispose of it.
- 5.36 All museums maintained an accession register that recorded the formal acceptance of an object into the permanent collection and allocated it a unique number. Objects were labelled to match the object to the associated accession documentation.
- 5.37 All museums acknowledged that some past records were neither complete nor reliable. This reflects the collecting and cataloguing practices at the time, and, for some objects, the absence of contextual information about provenance. All museums were improving the quality of their collection information.

<sup>3</sup> We discuss loan documentation more fully in Part 6.

## Administration of loans to and from museums

- 5.38 Museums often lend or borrow objects, and must be able to account for all objects on inwards or outwards loan. Museum exhibitions most commonly draw on objects or art works from their own collections, but will also use selected items borrowed from others. Museums are responsible for caring properly for any objects they borrow.
- 5.39 Nearly all the museums we audited were involved in lending or borrowing objects, and many were displaying borrowed items at the time of our visit.

## Value of objects on loan

- 5.40 Objects on loan may be very valuable in artistic, cultural, and financial terms. The institutions most likely to have active lending programmes are the larger art galleries. At the time of our audit, one art gallery had recently borrowed a group of art works from another public art gallery. This group of art works had a total insured value of more than \$3 million.
- 5.41 Art galleries may also, on occasion, borrow highly valuable art works of international note from overseas institutions for special exhibitions.
- 5.42 The objects or art works borrowed by smaller museums or art galleries may also have a high artistic, cultural, and financial value. Two exhibitions in one district art gallery – one a display of quilts from overseas and another showing art works by various artists – had insured values of about \$450,000 and \$350,000 respectively.
- 5.43 Some collections also hold objects borrowed on long-term loan, such as Māori artefacts or art work collections. Long-term loan agreements may impose specific conditions on the objects' use and care while in the custody of the museum. These conditions cover matters such as storage, display, or reproduction. Careful recording and filing of such agreements is vital so that the museum can properly account for its obligations as custodian.
- 5.44 In each museum, we examined the documentation associated with objects borrowed or on loan.

## Loan documentation and monitoring of objects on loan

- 5.45 The loan documentation we examined was comprehensive, and museums were monitoring the status of objects on loan. The documentation included necessary details about the period of the loan, care, insurance, copyright, security, environmental conditions, transport, and handling. Museums had adequate control over inwards and outwards loans. In Part 6 we discuss in more detail the process for administering loans, in particular, the responsible care of objects on loan or borrowed.



- 5.46 Museum systems for monitoring objects on loan were mostly paper-based, although some were using, or planning to use, electronic databases for this purpose. This should make loan administration simpler and more systematic.
- 5.47 Loan documentation should be drawn up for the display of art works in community exhibition facilities. Some art galleries may provide a community venue for local artists to display their art works. Three such venues did not prepare documentation for such exhibitions, leaving them exposed to possible liability in the event of any dispute. One museum that ran an adjoining art gallery acknowledged the difficulties of determining responsibility for damage to art works put on display there with no loan agreement in place with local artists. This had led, on one occasion, to the museum having to accept insurance liability when it was unable to demonstrate proper care of a local art work damaged while on display.

### Proper care of objects on loan

- 5.48 Museums or art galleries should not lend objects unless they can be confident that they will be properly cared for. Three museums or art galleries were lending art works to be displayed in their local authorities' council offices. Concerns were expressed about the risks associated with this practice. The director of one art gallery that had abandoned the practice told us of paintings being damaged or lost as a result of this practice.
- 5.49 We share the concerns about this practice, which was inconsistent with collection policies and the collection care procedures followed by the 3 institutions.
- 5.50 All 3 institutions defined in their collection policies the purposes for which they would permit art works to be lent. Display in council administration areas, or in the offices of councillors or council managers, did not meet those criteria.
- 5.51 This practice also put the art works at risk of damage, which was a concern expressed to us by museum staff. Those concerns had led the conservator at one art gallery to recommend basic precautions to be followed for the care of paintings lent to the council for display in its buildings and offices.
- 5.52 However, such precautions cannot provide substantive assurance that paintings will be properly cared for and the necessary security measures followed. This was especially the case in public areas, but also in the offices of elected members or council staff. Nor did the environmental conditions meet the art gallery's requirements. Wherever we found this practice, we recommended that it cease.

### Ways to gather and store information about collections

- 5.53 Historically, information about collections has been recorded in a variety of paper-based systems. These are often spread throughout the museum in card indexes, donor lists, accession registers, curators' notes, and exhibition material. Museums,

therefore, worked from a number of information systems, which often made it difficult to assemble a complete body of information about an object, its history, and its use.

- 5.54 The advent of database software – and in particular the creation of electronic systems designed specifically for museum use – provides museums with the opportunity to manage their collections and collection-related activities in an integrated manner.
- 5.55 We examined the collection information system used by each museum, how it was used, and whether it was meeting the needs of the institution. We also met a major supplier of collections management software for museums to discuss the use of electronic databases.

### Use of electronic records

- 5.56 Electronic records offer significant benefits for gathering and storing collection information. Museum staff process a variety of object-related information, such as donor files, reference files, curators' notes, catalogue indexes, exhibition catalogues, receipts, accession registers, loan agreements, media articles, donor cards, and condition reports.
- 5.57 In their original format, these records met specific purposes. They tended to be created and maintained in different formats and sometimes in different parts of the museum, leading to the fragmentation of information about any given single object. This often results in a situation where there is no central, single point of access to comprehensive information about an object and its history in the museum.
- 5.58 In a museum, electronic databases offer significant benefits over paper-based systems because they provide:
- the ability to efficiently link and consolidate information in different media or formats, regardless of where the information may have been created or maintained in the museum. (In practice, this involves the capability to import, export, and link records – such as condition reports, treatment records, loan agreements, images, and exhibition catalogues);
  - shared access and use by museum staff for searching and retrieving specific information, and for reporting;
  - the ability to provide templates for key forms, field formats, and a thesaurus,<sup>4</sup> standardising the way records are prepared by different staff and over time;

4 A thesaurus is a controlled list of standard terms that can be used to conduct word searches on a database – for example, electronic databases on the market include hierarchical structures and authorities for specific data, such as natural history collections, and authoritative references such as Chenhall's Nomenclature.

- the capacity to use data entry sequences and authorities to control and enforce mandated procedures in accordance with museum policies – for example, to ensure that all accessioning tasks are completed in sequence;
- staff with the capability to update information more readily and efficiently – for example, to record changes in the status of an object, such as when it is lent or put on display;
- better security of information than manual records (providing there is appropriate back-up);
- the capacity to be adapted to provide public access to the collection (for example, through the use of kiosks or by publication online); and
- the ability to configure the information system to meet changing needs for reporting or data gathering.

### Transferring records from paper systems to electronic databases

- 5.59 Museums are transferring collection records from paper systems to electronic databases. All the museums we audited were using electronic collection databases, or were intending to use them, to gather and hold information about their collections.
- 5.60 The electronic collection databases that we saw had the capability to integrate information about objects or art works, providing a comprehensive overview of object status and condition. Through embedded templates, authorities, and field descriptions, they also impose important disciplines on collection management activities. One art gallery, for example, used a diary system within its database to schedule tasks such as condition reporting and photography of new accessions.
- 5.61 Purpose-designed software is likely to contain useful templates for drawing up museum documentation, such as loan agreements or condition reports. It will probably have a built-in thesaurus for object description and classification. This promotes consistent data entry and assists searching. When museums consider what electronic system will best meet their requirements, the benefits of such features need to be balanced against factors such as cost, training needs, and complexity.

### Making full use of the capability of electronic databases

- 5.62 Museums generally have yet to make full use of the capability of electronic databases to manage their collections. Electronic systems are increasingly being used to gather, store, and retrieve information about the collection. However, in most museums much of this capability is, as yet, unused. As a result, most museums continue to use some paper-based systems alongside their electronic collection database. Some were making more use of their electronic systems than others.

- 5.63 In particular, electronic collection databases offer the means to centrally handle information about object-related activities in one application, including accessioning, exhibition history, loans, condition reporting, control of movements, and location.
- 5.64 None of the electronic collection databases we examined held comprehensive object-related information. Loan documentation, condition reports, and exhibition materials were most commonly held in separate paper files.
- 5.65 Nor were museums routinely establishing electronic links to this documentation. Most commonly missing from electronic collection databases – either as stand-alone fields or linked documents – were curators' notes, exhibition records, and other research information. Registry staff in one art gallery told us that, without these links, they constantly had to manually cross-reference exhibition records to the central electronic collection database.
- 5.66 Along with the ability to search information about the entire collection, a major benefit of any electronic collection database lies in the ability it gives staff to link related information about an object. This facility offers benefits of carrying out relational searches, retrieving and linking associated information, monitoring the condition of objects over time, controlling and documenting location and movement, monitoring the status of loans, and undertaking a variety of other collection-related activities.

### Transferring data to electronic format

- 5.67 The task of transferring collection information to an electronic collection database and verifying that data demands a significant amount of staff time. The task is often being undertaken by temporary staff or volunteers, or alongside competing priorities for permanent museum staff.
- 5.68 Barriers to the purchase of museum-specific software, or to the better use of such software, are cost (for example, to purchase additional user licences) and limited staff time to enter, maintain, and update data.
- 5.69 Limited staff resources to enter data – and deal with other aspects of museum administration – were particularly severe in some small museums we visited. Some museums had made more progress than others in upgrading the quality of their information management.
- 5.70 If significant progress is to be made in the short term, more staff will be needed to tackle this work in a systematic and intensive manner. At the time of our visit, one art gallery had begun a project to check and standardise its electronic collection database, bringing together object-related information into object files. The

project was expected to take 2 to 4 years, given the competing demands on the time of registry staff.

- 5.71 More staff for data entry and cataloguing, and better integration of object-related processes throughout the museum – for example, exhibition design, curatorial research, condition reporting, and loan documentation – will enhance the use of electronic databases for a variety of management activities. Electronic access to object information also creates opportunities for museums to make their collections available to the public online, either through kiosks at access terminals or through the Internet.

### **Achieving consistent data entry**

- 5.72 The use of electronic collection databases highlights the importance of consistent data entry procedures. Many different museum staff create and record information about the collection for different purposes. For example, curators plan exhibitions, conservators or registrars prepare condition reports, and registrars or collections managers accession objects, administer the database, and prepare loan and exhibition documentation.
- 5.73 In most museums, temporary staff or volunteers also carry out a variety of collection management tasks with object records. It is unlikely that information will be recorded consistently unless clear procedures are followed.
- 5.74 Delivering the benefits of an electronic collection database to the various users relies on the museum having data that is accurate and comprehensive.

### **Documentation procedure manuals**

- 5.75 A documentation procedure manual contains instructions to standardise the recording of information about the collection, and has major benefits, including:
- ensuring continuity of practice and standardisation of procedure in all parts of the museum;
  - providing clear guidance to staff; and
  - providing a permanent record of the documentation system.
- 5.76 All museums should have a manual that provides staff with step-by-step guidance on exactly how to use the information system, how to enter data, and how to obtain information when needed. Among the activities demanding consistent recording are accessioning, location and movement control, loans, and condition reporting. With strict procedures for data entry in place and followed, users can have confidence in the accuracy and completeness of information held in the electronic collection database, and make best use of that information in their everyday work.

- 5.77 We asked each museum whether it had a documentation or data entry manual.
- 5.78 Many museums had no manual to standardise documentation procedures. Only 6 of the 13 museums had such a manual. While museum database software may be specified to provide some guidance on data entry conventions and nomenclature, manuals are important because they reflect and recognise both the processes of the individual museum and the composition of the particular collection. Manuals are also important for standardisation, and to reduce the risks of differing practices as staff change.

#### **Effects of poor quality data entry**

- 5.79 Object data should be entered into the collection information system in a format that enables users to readily search for the information they need. Our tests of object documentation and discussions with museum staff made us aware of the effect of data errors on the utility of the information system. These errors had come about through the failure to follow established data entry practices, or from changes in such practices over time, and included:
- the interchangeable use of database fields;
  - the use of inconsistent terminology for object description; and
  - the use of multiple object numbers for accessioning or cataloguing.
- 5.80 All such errors reduce the confidence of users in the information system and make searching and retrieval more difficult.
- 5.81 The effect of poor quality data was also highlighted when we carried out checks of sample records (see paragraph 5.87).

### **Access to, and use of, collection information systems**

- 5.82 The main benefit of computerised collection records is the ability to search for specific information. In examining how documentation was prepared and used in each museum, we assessed whether collection information met the various needs of museum staff, and the public.

#### **Access to, and use of, collection information by staff**

- 5.83 Collection information is used by 2 main groups of museum staff:
- registrars or collection managers – who gather, store, and maintain descriptive information about objects, their location, and condition; and
  - curators – who need access to information about the collection to plan exhibitions and answer queries from the public.

- 5.84 We assessed how well these information needs were met by:
- testing, for a small sample of objects in each museum, the accuracy of object descriptions, accession numbers, and locations recorded in the collection database; and
  - asking curators how they use the collection information system.
- 5.85 Electronic collection databases will become a more valuable reference tool as the quality of information and access is improved. In most museums, some or all of the object records were stored on an electronic collection database, and curators told us that they used these databases.
- 5.86 However, museum staff did not rely fully on this source to obtain information about the collection. Sometimes they referred to the museum's card indexes, used their own personal knowledge of the collection built up over time, or made a physical search through the storage areas. As more collection records are entered into electronic databases, that information becomes more relevant and reliable, and wider computer access is provided for museum staff, we would expect these electronic records to serve, more often, as the primary reference source for curators in their everyday work.
- 5.87 In most museums, we verified the location of a small sample of objects using the collection records. However, our checks also revealed some instances of deficiencies in the quality of those records, including:
- missing descriptive details;
  - object records that did not always show the correct physical location;
  - errors in data entry, confirming the importance of following consistent and well-defined data entry procedures; and
  - inconsistent object descriptions or nomenclature, sometimes making initial searches unsuccessful.
- 5.88 In one museum, some objects had no identifying number, or were not recorded in the card index, making it necessary to carry out a physical search of the collection area to locate them. Reliable paper records are critical to creating a useable electronic database, and our audit confirmed the need for the museum to verify its paper records before transferring them to an electronic system.

### **Improving public access to, and use of, collection information**

- 5.89 The other main user of collection information is the public. Many museums have only a small proportion of their collections on display. That figure is as low as 0.5% for one large museum. Making the rest of their collections accessible is an important task.

- 5.90 Museums were actively exploring ways to make their collections more accessible to the public. This included publishing information in an understandable format.
- 5.91 Improving the quality of collection information systems will help to provide better public access to collections, by providing reliable and comprehensive records of a museum's holdings and digital images to complement the object description.
- 5.92 Five museums, including the 2 large art galleries, offered the opportunity for the public to view images of their collections online. Other ways in which access is provided include tours of the museum, libraries, and kiosks for searching the electronic collection database.
- 5.93 An important part of most museum collections is their large, valuable archives of material about the history of their regions. Of particular interest to students, historians, and researchers, this material includes community records, local newspapers, maps, and photographs. The public has supervised access to this material.
- 5.94 Public access was well organised and supervised at the museums we visited, with a variety of finding aids in paper or electronic format. This included indexes, microfilm readers, catalogues, booklets, and data sheets. The services provided by museums through these public research centres were well used and valued.

### **Use of retrospective documentation to improve the quality of collection information**

- 5.95 The term "retrospective documentation" refers to the process of tackling backlogs or gaps in basic documentation to ensure that a museum knows the identity and location of all items for which it is responsible. Retrospective documentation also involves continually improving incomplete, inadequate, and inaccurate documentation and producing new information about collections.
- 5.96 All the museums we audited recognised the need to improve the quality of information about their collections. We asked them about their problems with collection information, and how those had come about.

### **Status of collection information**

- 5.97 The museums we visited faced common problems with the completeness and accuracy of their records:
- Knowledge about what was held in the collection was sometimes poor. Some museums had inventories under way in parts of the collection to provide this base information. However, in others, no resources are available to do this work. We discuss the importance of collection inventories in paragraphs 5.112-5.125.



- Successive curators and museum directors may introduce new practices in registration, numbering, and description that make it difficult to identify and trace objects. Changes in the way objects are accessioned and catalogued make it difficult to catalogue and link different object information sources (such as donor indexes, accession registers, object labels, and loan agreements). In some instances, this has left museums struggling to work from information held in different (and sometimes conflicting) documentation systems.

5.98 In many museums, past collecting and recording practices had created a situation where information about objects was fragmented or held in different parts of the organisation. Information was sometimes incomplete, poorly linked, and unreliable. This means that present-day staff must refer to different information systems to carry out core tasks such as retrieving object details, locating an object, or monitoring loans.

### Benefits from improving collection information

- 5.99 Improving the quality of collection information has a number of benefits for museums, including:
- improving the ability of curators and other museum staff to enter and retrieve information;
  - improving information about the collection and making it more accessible to the public – for example, by using it to plan fresh exhibitions;
  - being able to review the collection against the purpose of the museum and its collection policies; and
  - more systematic monitoring of object status and condition.
- 5.100 We saw evidence of the benefits of improving collection information – for example, cataloguing and re-housing a social history collection in one museum, proofreading object data in another, and indexing archives to create findings aids for the public in a third.
- 5.101 Good collection documentation also makes the work of museum staff much easier. Our checks of sample collection records confirmed the importance of accurate and comprehensive records to support the everyday work of curators and registry staff.

### Progress in dealing with retrospective documentation

- 5.102 We asked what museums were doing to improve their collection information.
- 5.103 Retrospective documentation is recognised as a priority by museums. However, limited progress was being made. We identified 2 related factors as the primary

barriers to museums significantly reducing their cataloguing backlog – a lack of dedicated staff and a lack of project management.

5.104 To address cataloguing backlogs, museums rely on the limited time available to permanent staff after carrying out their main work, temporary staff engaged with short-term project funding (where short-term funding is available), or volunteers. These resources do not provide the dedicated effort needed to make significant progress. For example, when one museum assessed its progress in reducing its cataloguing backlog, it concluded that the task would take several years. Other museums also face years of work to complete documentation of their collections.

5.105 Museums Aotearoa’s strategy for the museum sector notes –

*Much of the work of documenting our nation’s heritage has been chronically under-resourced. Many institutions within the sector have not had the resources to maintain a consistent approach to documentation.*

*The work in some major museum institutions to record their collections given the present level of resourcing available is likely still to take several years.*

5.106 Our findings confirm this view. An increase in permanent staff is needed if significant results are to be obtained within a reasonable time.

### Strategies for improving retrospective documentation

5.107 In our view, museums need to take a disciplined, project-based approach to dealing with cataloguing backlogs. While all museums were facing a backlog of cataloguing work, only 3 had set strategic priorities and adopted a supporting planning framework to tackle the task in a systematic way.

5.108 Allocation of additional funding, or the reallocation of existing resources, should be subject to approval of a well-argued business case, based on a project plan. A properly prepared plan that includes costs would provide an important discipline for museums, and help to ensure that there is accountability for outcomes. It should define the scope of the work, estimate the resources required, set out the data standards to be met, and set realistic timetables for completion.

5.109 There are difficulties in estimating the effort required for different parts of the collection or for specific objects. For example, one donation may include a large number of objects, all of which need to be individually described, labelled, and housed. Furthermore, some cataloguing work is more time-consuming than others. In most museums, some objects or collections are well documented, while minimal documentation is available for others.

- 5.110 These factors, and the lack of dedicated staff, make project planning difficult. However, without a considered approach to this time-consuming work, competing priorities for staff and the scale of the work needed will make it difficult to achieve results, targets are unlikely to be realistic, and completion of this task will continue to be deferred.
- 5.111 The challenges faced by one museum to improve the quality of its collection documentation are typical. However, the museum's strategic and disciplined approach to addressing those issues has given it a strong framework for making measurable progress. This is illustrated in Figure 8, which describes the approach taken to address the museum's cataloguing backlog.

### Figure 8

#### One museum's approach to addressing a cataloguing backlog

The museum faces a significant backlog in cataloguing work and other tasks to make its collection information more accurate and comprehensive. Limited information is held for some objects, and, in the past, different numbering systems were used for different collections. Some accession registers contained limited information. Object information was recorded in different formats and with different indexes, held in different folders, and included deposit records, accessions sheets, and donor receipts. For any cataloguing task, object information needed to be retrieved from different sources. We examined how the museum was tackling the task of assembling and rationalising this information.

The museum has taken a systematic approach to assessing the extent of this work. This began with an analysis of the nature and extent of the task, and of the obstacles to dealing with the backlog. The museum identified the shortcomings with documentation of the museum's collection, and noted that many objects had not been recorded in the electronic collection database. It also changed the division of workload among its collections staff to free up resources for this work.

In 2001, the museum analysed in detail the resources needed to eliminate the backlog of registration and cataloguing tasks. The plan provided a rational outline of work required (such as verifying object descriptions, checking locations, and entering and checking data) and likely timetable for it to be completed.

An inventory of the collection has been important in identifying outstanding cataloguing work. This process has involved reconciling location and object details to the database record, and filling out object descriptions. Associated work includes preparing object lists and linking object records to information sources held in other software applications (such as text documents), databases, or paper records.

A museum report of September 2004 summarised the results of the inventory to date. The museum has used this data to define project outlines for ongoing collection management work and specify project objectives, staff assigned, tasks, output targets, and timelines. The museum has imposed a moratorium on all new acquisitions so as to tackle its backlog.

Project plans – such as that for recording, updating, and verifying object data – are also translated into specific, time-bound objectives for staff.

### Use of collection inventories

- 5.112 We asked whether museums had carried out inventories<sup>5</sup> of their collections, the results, and follow-up action.

<sup>5</sup> An inventory may also be known as a collection survey, stocktake, or audit.

- 5.113 Most museums had carried out inventories, but generally only of parts of their collections. Some were carrying out inventories at the time of our audit.
- 5.114 Collection inventories serve a number of important accountability and management functions:
- They are a record of what the museum holds and is responsible for in legal terms and for insurance purposes.
  - They verify object documentation, such as location descriptions and consistency between accession numbers and objects. The results of an inventory will tell the museum about the quality of collection information, and identify areas where further work is needed. In addition, an inventory provides an opportunity to enhance object records – for example, by adding digital images to descriptive information in the collection database.
  - They provide a means of monitoring the condition of objects and determining conservation needs, including future storage requirements.
  - They provide the basis for a review of the relevance and significance of the collection to inform collection development, and identify objects or collection groups for possible de-accessioning.

### Planning and conduct of collection inventories

- 5.115 To produce meaningful results, collection inventories need to be well planned and systematically conducted. A well-planned inventory will produce meaningful results on which action can be taken.
- 5.116 On moving to a new building, one art gallery had carried out a full inventory of its collection, using codes to classify problems found in the course of the work. These codes enabled registry staff to analyse the results in a systematic way, and to group issues into categories for follow-up action. The codes were for:
- condition;
  - location;
  - numbering;
  - storage; and
  - documentation.
- 5.117 Figure 9 shows the format for the data collection sheet used by the art gallery's registry staff to carry out the inventory, with illustrative entries to show how results are compiled for analysis and follow-up action.

**Figure 9**  
Example of a data collection inventory sheet\*

Location	Code	Problem	Suggested action	Action taken	Completed
Box 16 – BAY 8	SQ	Contents list incorrect	Print new listing	-	-
Box 17	NL	Current location listed as Box 14 – BAY 9B	Initiate search	Located in Box 14 – BAY 9B	15/3/05
Box 18	WL	Found, but not listed at this location	Update location record or transfer work back to correct location	-	-
Box 19	CQ	Hinge detached	Refer to conservator	-	-
Box 20	DQ	Works not identified individually or listed	Formal listing and numbering required	-	-
Box 21 – BAY 1	IN	Labels do not match accession number	Check accession register, object data sheet	-	-

Key: CQ – Condition Query; WL – Wrong Location; IN – Incorrect Numbering; NL – Not Located; SQ – Storage Query; DQ – Documentation Query.

\* From Collection Inventory 2005 – Art Works on Paper.

- 5.118 Our analysis of the inventory results showed that most of the problems identified related to the accuracy of documentation, with some mismatches between object labels and database records.
- 5.119 Inventories should be well planned, with a view to the information to be gathered and analysed. Poor planning and record-keeping will directly affect any benefits from an inventory. We were told at one museum that the former director had conducted a full inventory of the collection, but had left behind few written records and no report. The museum was again beginning an inventory of parts of the collection to build up the museum's knowledge of its collection.
- 5.120 Ideally, every museum should have a forward schedule of inventories, enabling it to verify what it holds, check the accuracy of object records, monitor progress with ongoing collection work, and review its collecting plans. Only one of the museums we visited – one of the larger art galleries – had a programme for scheduling inventories of its collection.
- 5.121 The art gallery had a clear policy, objectives, and procedures for its inventory programme. Different approaches had been considered, with an estimate of the associated resource requirements. The art gallery has a 2-yearly inventory cycle for each of its permanent locations. In addition, having regard to significance and risk, a 6-monthly stocktake is undertaken of high-value art works and of art works on

long-term loan. Worksheets are used to record the results of inventory checks by codes, enabling easy analysis and follow up.

- 5.122 Because of the size of their collections, museums, in particular, face a challenging task to carry out inventories of their collections, and may need to schedule this over several years.

### Assigning priority to periodic collection inventories

- 5.123 As a result of limited staff numbers and competing tasks, museums are not assigning the necessary priority to periodic inventories of their collections. However, in some cases, inventories had been in progress for months or even years, with competing work priorities limiting progress. This was particularly the case where museums relied on temporary staff to carry out this task, or where it was being undertaken by curators along with other competing responsibilities.
- 5.124 The experience of one museum illustrates the difficulties of assigning adequate resources to inventories. In that museum, an inventory of part of the collection had been started in 1998 when a contractor was employed for 12 months to assist with the job. In late 2001, the museum engaged temporary staff to continue the job. However, at the time of our audit, significant parts of the inventory and associated documentation were yet to be completed. This was expected to take another 2 years.
- 5.125 Problems raised in inventories should be followed up promptly with appropriate action. In practice, effective and timely follow up requires additional resources, which may not be available. Our analysis of inventory results in one museum showed that much follow-up work remained outstanding. In another, we were told that the recent inventory had revealed that as much as a third of the collection needed minor conservation work. This would require a major reallocation of resources.

### Converting collection information into a digital format

- 5.126 Digital images of objects are an integral part of museum documentation. They:
- are a means of accounting for objects or art works by providing a record and visual identification in the event of loss;
  - through association with descriptive records, enable users to more readily search for and identify items in the collection database;
  - enhance the usefulness of condition reporting by showing the nature and location of damage;
  - broaden public access to the collection (in particular for rare and fragile items) while minimising the risks associated with physical handling; and
  - enable publication and reproduction.


### Benefits of adopting a digital format


- 5.127 All museums had digitised, or were in the process of digitising, their collections. Benefits we noted included:
- visual identification to aid electronic searching;
  - enabling staff to find objects more quickly by using images to mark the location of objects in storage bays;
  - verification of object condition to accompany loan documentation or conservation treatment; and
  - meeting growing public expectations by providing enhanced access to the collection (in particular through the Internet), and providing the facility for reproduction.
- 5.128 Digital images can also be used as an effective tool for planning and designing exhibitions. Time is saved because staff do not need to physically search storage areas to choose the most suitable object for an exhibition.
- 5.129 Figure 10 shows a digital image of an object, and how the object was used in an exhibition at a museum we visited. The first picture shows the museum's object record, which includes the digital image and information about the object. The exhibitions programmer viewed the object record and selected the object as being suitable for the planned exhibition. The second picture shows how the object was displayed in the exhibition. Using digital images in the planning stage assisted the programmer to design the exhibition display to best effect.

### Planning the digitisation process

- 5.130 We examined the way museums were going about the digitisation process. We expected each museum to have drawn up a plan outlining the objectives of the process, and to have used that plan as the basis for its programme.
- 5.131 Museums were approaching the task in different ways. These different approaches included taking images of all new acquisitions, of exhibitions, of objects in a selected part of the collection, or as part of an inventory.
- 5.132 Most approaches lacked a considered rationale. There was little evidence that careful thought had been given to the purpose, priorities, specifications, or timetable for completion. A well-thought-out plan should specify clearly:
- the objectives to be met by the digitisation programme;
  - the resources needed (for example, will museum staff carry out the work or will a professional photographer be used?);
  - the technical specifications for image quality (such as resolution, image dimensions, file type, and file size) as required for the defined uses and as compatible with museum software and hardware;

**Figure 10**  
Using records of images to design exhibition concepts

Object		13:19:08 21 OCT 2005
1 record		Page 1
<b>Accession No</b>	1996.22.841	
<b>System ID</b>	19556	
<b>Primary Maker (name only)</b>	Maud Jackson	
<b>Name/Title</b>	Moss green women's cardigan	
<b>Primary Prod Date</b>	1950s	
<b>Collection</b>	Norma Evans Clothing Collection	
<b>Controlling Inst</b>	Rotorua Museum of Art & History (Rotorua)	
<b>Media/Materials</b>		
<b>Part</b>	0 - Whole	
<b>Media/Materials</b>	Wool/Fabric	
<b>Measurement</b>	520mm	
<b>Reading</b>	510mm	

Thanks to the Rotorua Museum of Art and History for the use of these images.



- image specifications, to allow for changes in technology, and ensure suitability and the maintenance of archival quality for long-term storage;
- the required equipment and facilities, including back-up and security;
- requirements for logical and efficient integration with other museum activities;
- the scope of the project (whether the entire collection or only selected objects will be digitised); and
- how images will be arranged and linked – to catalogue records, website, and other finding aids – to allow searching and browsing.

5.133 Without a clear project plan, valuable staff time may be wasted, images may not serve the various intended purposes, work may have to be duplicated in the future, and targets for completing the task may not be met. A considered approach would ensure that images meet the standards expected of users, the value of the investment is maximised, and benefits are realised within a defined time. A project plan may also help win support for the museum's business case seeking funding for this work.

5.134 One museum had taken a particularly well-considered approach to digitising its collection with images of a publishable standard. The museum's plan contained clear specifications, and the project was integrated into its core business. Careful consideration had been given to the purpose, use, and format for images from the collection, as well as processes for image capture, input, and storage. Timetables and resources (staff and technical) had been estimated, and the digitisation programme was designed as a workflow concept. The museum had an in-house photographer responsible for providing images for collection documentation and exhibitions.



## Part 6

### Caring for the collection

- 6.1 Caring for a collection is about taking actions to protect an object or art work from deterioration, damage, or loss, to ensure its long-term stability, and to extend its useful life. We assessed whether museums had the necessary systems, and were following the proper processes, to care for their collections.
- 6.2 In this Part, we summarise our key findings and raise issues for consideration from our assessment of museum practices in:
- controlling and monitoring the museum environment;
  - protecting collections by proper use of and access to storage and display areas;
  - managing risks from pests;
  - keeping collections secure;
  - planning for the active conservation and treatment of objects;
  - the role of conservators in the care of collections;
  - the care of collections when moving or relocating them;
  - the care of objects on loan;
  - asset management planning to maintain the condition of buildings and collection facilities; and
  - planning for emergencies.

#### Key findings

- 6.3 Improvements in standards of collection care not only prolong the life of a museum's own collections but also give other heritage institutions, in New Zealand and overseas, the confidence to lend objects or art works. This enhances the community's access to culture and heritage.
- 6.4 Significant expenditure has been made, or is planned, to improve environmental controls and the quality of systems and facilities for displaying and storing some collections. However, our observations in the museums and art galleries we audited point to an uneven standard of facilities. More expenditure is needed to bring all museums to a minimum acceptable level.
- 6.5 Museums need to control and monitor their environments to maintain the long-term stability of their collections. Most had systems and equipment for this purpose. However, in some cases, improvements were needed.
- 6.6 Some museums were in the process of refurbishing storage areas, to improve access and install better facilities for long-term care. Changes to building design require the careful relocation of collections, and planning for re-storage. These changes were being well managed, with appropriate attention given to object care and the varying storage needs of the collection.

- 6.7 However, not all storage and display facilities met accepted standards and more expenditure is needed. Museums were aware of the need for better systems and equipment for environmental control and monitoring, and were seeking ways to make the necessary improvements.
- 6.8 Managing the risks of damage to the collection from pests involves a number of measures for prevention, treatment, and monitoring. Museums were aware of the risks, and a number of measures were in place. However, a more comprehensive approach was needed that covered prevention and ongoing monitoring, to provide the necessary assurance that controls were effective.
- 6.9 Most museums had good security measures in place, with monitoring of public display spaces and controlled access to collection storage areas.
- 6.10 Most collection storage areas were well organised, with objects shelved securely and easy access for museum staff. Improvements were needed to storage areas in some museums, and useful projects were under way to re-house objects.
- 6.11 Comprehensive loan documentation defined the responsibilities of borrowers and their obligations for the proper care of loaned objects. Facilities reports were widely sought to support loan requests and provide assurance to the lender.
- 6.12 Only 5 museums had a current asset management plan, and only 3 plans incorporated all necessary components – risk assessment, service objectives, and performance standards.
- 6.13 Natural disaster, fire, and other events pose significant risks to collections, making emergency planning a vital aspect of collection care. Most museums had an emergency plan, although not all were complete. The others were intending to draw up a plan.

### Issues for consideration

- 6.14 The quality of facilities for collection care varies from one museum to another, and consideration needs to be given to promoting more consistent compliance with accepted standards. We observed that, in some museums, limited storage space is, or is becoming, an ongoing constraint to collection growth.
- 6.15 Archives of local history represent a valuable resource for local communities and the general public. These are well used, but are often made of fragile materials. Sustained spending is needed to continue to preserve and ensure continued access to collections for future generations by making use of electronic media for data collection and storage.

- 6.16 Although security measures were generally adequate, some museums should consider the benefits of having a staff presence in their public areas. In some circumstances, this would provide useful deterrence against damage or theft.
- 6.17 Poorly maintained buildings, and failures of facilities, building systems, or services, put collections at risk. More than half of the museums we audited had no asset management plan for the building and facilities in which their collections were housed. In our view, consideration should be given to risks, services, and asset standards to provide the necessary information for scheduling and funding future maintenance and capital expenditure.
- 6.18 The safety of collections is at risk from a variety of events such as fire and flooding. All museums should give priority to comprehensive emergency plans to ensure that they are properly prepared for any contingencies.

### Controlling and monitoring the museum environment

- 6.19 Preventive conservation focuses on controlling the environment in which an object is used, handled, stored, transported, and displayed.
- 6.20 Museums need to control their environment in order to maintain the long-term stability of their collections. In accepting an object into its permanent collection, a museum assumes responsibility for all aspects of its care. It has similar responsibilities to care for objects on loan.
- 6.21 The key to effective, long-term preservation of the collection is to create a stable physical environment. An object's survival is affected by the materials from which it is made, and by exposure to climatic extremes. Rapid changes in temperature or relative humidity can cause some objects to expand or contract, or create an environment favourable for mould. Any such changes shorten the life of the collection. Systems or processes to control the environment are designed to maintain the long-term stability of the collection, by slowing down or preventing the chemical reactions that cause decay.
- 6.22 Being able to meet high standards of collection care may also help a museum attract funding and encourage donations of objects to its collection.

### Environmental controls

- 6.23 The 3 principal aspects of the museum environment requiring close control are temperature, relative humidity, and light. The natural deterioration of all materials over time is hastened by fluctuations and extremes of temperature<sup>1</sup>

1 Changes in temperature result in changes in relative humidity, making temperature control an important aspect of creating a suitable environment for the collection. Temperatures should also be kept as constant as possible, and some objects, such as photographs and photographic negatives, may need to be stored in a cool environment. For most objects temperatures should be maintained between 18 and 24 degrees Celsius throughout the year, with daily fluctuations kept at a minimum.

and relative humidity,<sup>2</sup> and by exposure to light.<sup>3</sup> Stable temperature and levels of relative humidity, and controls of light levels, have been proven to slow chemical deterioration.

- 6.24 The environment of the museum should be monitored regularly to ensure that temperature and relative humidity remain within desired limits. The performance of air conditioning systems needs constant monitoring, and some lenders will demand evidence of readings for temperature and relative humidity over a period of time before agreeing to lend objects from their collections.
- 6.25 The main equipment used for environment monitoring is the thermohygrograph. Monitoring records should be examined regularly and summary reports prepared, to provide assurance that temperature and humidity are maintained within set limits.
- 6.26 We asked about each museum's systems and equipment for controlling its environment, looked through the storage and display areas in each museum, and sought evidence of monitoring.
- 6.27 In most museums environmental controls met accepted standards. Most control systems met the necessary requirements for display and storage.
- 6.28 Systems and equipment used for controlling and monitoring the museum environment differed in complexity – those in the larger museums and art galleries were generally more complex than those in smaller institutions.
- 6.29 Air conditioning systems in some museums are flexible, and can be adjusted for daily changes in the weather or to meet the specific needs of particular groups of objects on display at the time or in a particular storage area. Other museums commonly used portable dehumidifiers to control the environment. In some museums, building design maintains a stable environment for the collection without the need for active controls.
- 6.30 Some museum areas needed better control of light, temperature, and relative humidity. Museum staff were aware of these problems, and were seeking ways, or already taking steps, to make the necessary improvements.

2 Relative humidity is the amount of water in the air expressed as a percentage of the maximum amount of water the air can hold at the current temperature. High relative humidity can cause damage to a variety of museum objects, and creates an environment where mould and insects can thrive. The level of relative humidity can be controlled by air conditioning, thermal insulation of the building, ventilation, or using dehumidifiers. A relative humidity in the range of 50%–55% (+/- 5%) is a recommended level for the storage and display of most collections.

3 Some materials – such as paper, paint, photographs, plastics, and textiles – are sensitive to excessive light levels, which cause discolouration or, in some cases, disintegration of the fabric. The main measures to prevent such damage are to reduce lighting in display and storage areas, and to limit the length of time objects are on display.

- 6.31 Museums were aware of the need to store some objects from their collections in a special environment.

### **Monitoring the stability of the museum environment**

- 6.32 Museums were monitoring the stability of their environment. Monitoring equipment was widely used to ensure that controls were working effectively, and that a stable environment was being maintained. Where we found evidence of past problems with the museum environment (such as evidence of fluctuations in temperature or humidity), we examined environmental readings to verify that those problems had been resolved, or were being managed. Museum staff were aware of the problems we identified, and adequate monitoring was being undertaken.
- 6.33 Monitoring the exposure of objects on display is an important component of collection care. Best practice requires museums to monitor the exposure of objects in their collection to conditions that may speed up their deterioration. For example, objects or art works made of certain materials are at particular risk if exposed to light for long periods. The systematic assessment carried out by one museum provides a good illustration.
- 6.34 The museum analysed and reported on the risks to objects currently on display, making recommendations where these needed to be replaced and removed to storage. The analysis focused especially on fragile media able to be exhibited for only restricted periods. The report followed a clear methodology for its risk assessment, identified those items most likely to sustain damage in their current display conditions, and proposed a refreshment schedule (or options such as changes to lux<sup>4</sup> levels or redesign of the display area) to minimise those effects. Clear criteria were used to determine priorities for action – the level of risk posed by current lighting levels, the significance of the object in the collection, its condition, and its importance to the display.

### **Proper use of, and access to, storage and display areas**

- 6.35 Keeping storage areas clean, well organised, and pest-free, and protecting collections with appropriate packaging, is the most cost-effective way of minimising the risks of physical damage. Suitable shelving and packaging not only support and protect objects from damage, but give staff safe and easy access to the collection.
- 6.36 We looked through each museum's storage area. Most were well organised with easy access, and museums often had programmes under way to repack objects using inert materials to slow down chemical deterioration. One museum had

4 Lux is a measure of light intensity.

prudently assessed its projected storage needs and made a significant investment in additional storage capacity to allow for the collection to grow in the future.

- 6.37 In a few museums, we found storage areas that were cramped or provided poor access. We saw evidence of work under way to reorganise storage areas, packaging, and shelving. We were impressed by the dedication of staff and volunteers to these tasks, and with the improvements they had made.
- 6.38 Some storage areas offered limited capacity for future growth in the collection. Museums were aware of this problem, and were taking steps to create more space – including refurbishing buildings, relocating the collection, and applying strict criteria to new acquisitions. In a few cases, parts of the collection were stored off-site. For some museums, limited storage space is an ongoing problem.
- 6.39 We also viewed bays for loading and unloading objects entering or leaving the museums, and equipment for moving objects within the museum building. These were generally adequate and met the museums' needs.

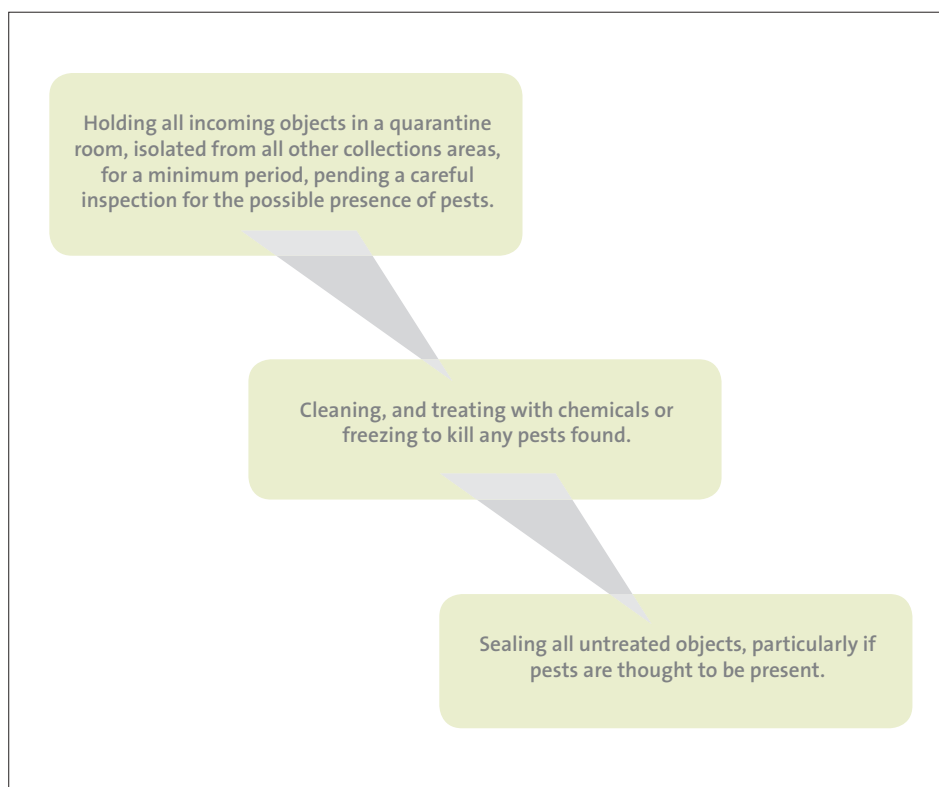
### Managing risks from pests

- 6.40 Pests pose a significant risk to a museum collection. The most common pests are insects and rodents, for which some objects are a rich source of food and nesting material. The dirt and dust that can easily accumulate in display and storage areas can encourage pests and increase the risks of damage.
- 6.41 Managing the risks from pests involves prevention, treatment, and monitoring. A prudent approach to managing the risks posed by pests is likely to have 3 components:
- prevention (sometimes described as “integrated pest management”), which involves controlling the museum environment through climate control, strict housekeeping, and monitoring;
  - treatment, which involves fumigation with chemicals and other active measures; and
  - monitoring, to check for the presence of pests.
- 6.42 We examined what precautions each museum was taking to manage the risks to their collection from pests. We looked for evidence of a comprehensive pest management programme, with an emphasis on prevention, periodic treatment (where necessary), and ongoing monitoring.
- 6.43 All museums we audited were alert to the risks posed by pests, and most had a pest management programme involving prevention, active treatment, and monitoring. However, not all programmes included all the necessary measures for comprehensive prevention and control.



- 6.44 Good housekeeping is critical to preventing and controlling pests. Regular cleaning of display and storage areas is one simple but vital measure to keep the museum free of pests and to detect infestations. Good housekeeping will also minimise the need for more active and interventionist conservation. This should be a crucial task for museum staff.
- 6.45 Museums were using dust covers to provide some protection. Curators make frequent visits to storage areas in their everyday work, during which they may notice the presence of pests. However, from the job descriptions we examined, museums were not giving the necessary priority to housekeeping as part of regular and systematic monitoring of the collection. Collections staff did not identify this as one of their key responsibilities when we talked to them.
- 6.46 One museum, by contrast, had made housekeeping an important task for its registrars and conservator. It specified the following schedule of duties in the job description –
- Routinely check environmental conditions in storage ... clean high use storage areas fortnightly ... maintain a regular cleaning schedule for all storage areas ... check random objects in storage and sensitive objects weekly.*
- 6.47 These staff confirmed the importance given to regular cleaning of display and storage areas as part of their work. All museums should consider giving this work similar importance in defining the duties of collections staff.
- 6.48 Prevention also involves stopping pests from entering the museum. Pests can enter the museum on the clothing of staff or visitors, through open doors, and with incoming collection items. Although all museums recognised this risk, only 5 museums had facilities or procedures that, in our view, provided adequate controls. Two museums we visited told us they had encountered problems with rodents. Eradication took one of them 3 months.
- 6.49 Some museums have no designated area where staff can isolate and inspect incoming items. Two institutions – a museum and an art gallery – had procedures that were simple, thorough, and effective, and followed a logical sequence (see Figure 11).
- 6.50 Both institutions had clear means for objects to enter the collection, and the process by which the decision was made to accept an object into the collection was well documented. Part of that documentation was a written condition report that the museum conservator was responsible for preparing for each incoming item.

**Figure 11**  
Example of pest inspection procedures



- 6.51 Monitoring for pests is a necessary part of any management programme. Traps and bait stations should be used as an ongoing check for the presence of insects and rodents, and we often found these as we walked through museum storage areas. Most, but not all, museums were following this basic monitoring procedure.

### Keeping collections secure

- 6.52 We assessed whether each museum had adequate security arrangements for its collection to prevent physical damage or loss through vandalism, theft, or fire.
- 6.53 Varied security measures were in place, including:
- camera surveillance outside museum buildings and in display areas;
  - restricted access to storage areas;
  - cabinets and display cases locked and fitted with alarms;
  - surveillance of public research and archival centres; and
  - appropriate signage.

- 6.54 Where necessary, we raised with museums any concerns we had identified with the security of their collections.
- 6.55 Special security arrangements may also be needed for particular exhibitions. For example, one museum, as part of its loan agreement with the borrowing institution, insisted on a staff presence in the display area in which objects from its collection would be displayed.
- 6.56 Security can easily be overlooked, and regular reviews reinforce its importance to collection care and the need for vigilance. It is important for museum security to be given the attention it deserves. Being inconspicuous, it is one aspect of a museum's operations that may easily be neglected. We were told of 2 cases where strict security arrangements came about only after incidents of damage.
- 6.57 Periodic reviews of security should form part of ongoing museum management. This highlights security's importance and identifies areas of risk. We reviewed reports of security arrangements in the museums we visited. These gave useful weight to the importance of security to collection care, and recommended improvements.
- 6.58 A security presence in museums and art galleries can be a useful measure for deterring unwanted behaviour and complementing electronic surveillance. The greatest risks occur with large numbers of visitors and hidden display areas. Not all museums employ staff or security personnel to provide a presence in display areas, although this role can readily be combined with the function of providing information services to visitors. We recommend that consideration be given more widely to this additional security option.

### Planning for active conservation treatment of objects

- 6.59 We asked museums whether they:
- knew what objects or art works needed treatment to repair damage or halt deterioration to ensure their future stability; and
  - had a remedial conservation programme with clear priorities, budget, and timetable.
- 6.60 Few museums have set priorities for treatment, or have drawn up a programme for remedial conservation. Ideally, all museums should have a programme for treating selected objects in their collections. We found that objects generally received conservation treatment only in preparation for display. Only 2 institutions had identified priorities for conservation treatment, although, in others, staff were sometimes aware of work that needed to be done.

- 6.61 Conservators told us their work was dominated by a variety of collection-related tasks – in particular, inspecting and reporting on the condition of objects when preparing for exhibitions and for the approval of acquisitions and loans. There were only a few specific instances where significant other remedial conservation work was being undertaken.
- 6.62 It was not clear when this work would be done. Only one of the museums we audited had a conservation programme that scheduled forward work, including the remedial treatment of selected objects. It reports progress against the plan monthly, and completes condition assessments as one of the performance indicators against which it reports to its local authority owner. The conservation programme gives an overview of conservation tasks associated with a variety of collection activities, and their effect on staff resources.
- 6.63 We identified no significant risks to the condition of collections from the lack of a conservation programme. An emphasis on protection and environmental controls has led to improvements in the quality of care, although more expenditure is needed. While conservation programming is recognised good practice, our observations of storage facilities and the condition of collections did not identify urgent, or significant, unidentified risks to the condition of objects. Nor were any such concerns raised with us by staff.
- 6.64 Conservation treatment is time-consuming and expensive, making it impractical for many museums to do large-scale conservation work. We did not reach the view that this was putting collections at risk. Museums were actively seeking to improve the conditions for storage and display, with funding support from local authorities and other sources. We observed that more spending is needed to improve facilities in some smaller museums, and this should be given priority. We endorse the emphasis in the sector on protecting their collections through ongoing improvement in their facilities.

### **Preservation of museum archives**

- 6.65 Museum archives contain valuable community records of local history, which are well used by the public. Ongoing expenditure is needed to secure and preserve these records to ensure that they remain available for public access and use. In the collections we examined, local history and community archives were most at risk. These archives often represent an irreplaceable record of local history, and are a rich resource for historians and researchers, as well as local communities. Museum archives are well used and valued by local communities and visitors.
- 6.66 Archives are made up of media such as newspapers and film which deteriorate over time and with use, and include large numbers of photographs and negatives.

Many museums faced the challenge of continuing to provide access without exposing such material to the risks of damage through repeated handling. Some progress is being made to transfer newspapers, photographs, and negatives to longer-lasting media (such as microfilm, CD, or DVD) to provide improved public access that is compatible with longer-term preservation. However, funding for such work is often sporadic, and much work remains to be done to preserve and provide better access to these collections.

### **Role of conservators in the care of collections**

- 6.67 Four institutions that we audited employed conservators – the 2 largest museums and the 2 largest art galleries. Others engaged conservators for specific projects, such as to provide advice on storage options or remedial treatment. We discussed with the conservators their role in managing the collections.
- 6.68 Conservators were involved in a variety of collection-related work, including:
- inspecting objects entering the museum collection for evidence of pests;
  - providing advice on storage;
  - working with building services staff to monitor environmental controls;
  - training museum staff in collection care and object handling; and
  - advising on the suitability of objects for loan or display, and assessing and reporting on their condition as part of that process.
- 6.69 Relationships between conservators and collections staff were close, with evidence of effective collaboration on common matters such as approving acquisitions and loans, and preparing objects for display.

### **Care of collections when moving or relocating**

- 6.70 Continual improvement in storage and display facilities is part of every museum's ongoing work to meet higher standards of collection care. At the time of our visits, many museums were making changes to their display and storage facilities, had recently done so, or were planning to do so. Careful consideration should be given to the preservation needs of the collection, to ensure that objects are preserved until finally re-housed and that new facilities will provide a stable environment for long-term care.
- 6.71 Situations requiring the movement of collections included careful planning for the care of objects. The movement of collections as part of facilities upgrades was well planned, and considered the need for careful transportation and appropriate re-housing in suitable storage.

- 6.72 We talked to museum staff and looked at plans for new facilities to assess whether they gave adequate consideration to these needs. We were satisfied that they did. The following examples show how one art gallery and 2 museums had planned for such changes.
- 6.73 The art gallery's plan contained detailed requirements for moving objects to an off-site facility, with specific directions for packing, transportation, and relocation as appropriate to the needs of the different art works in the collection.
- 6.74 The impending relocation of parts of one museum's collection was, again, supported by careful planning and design, taking account of object type, use, and access. Planning incorporated careful recording of changes in location, to ensure that objects could readily be found during and after the move.
- 6.75 A second museum had engaged a conservator to assess and report on the environmental requirements for housing a recently donated collection of valuable art works. The conservator's report made recommendations about lighting and other climatic conditions necessary for the proper care of the art gallery's new collection.

### Care of objects on loan

- 6.76 Museums have custodial responsibilities for the care of objects on loan, just as they do for objects in their permanent collections. Loan agreements should specify the conditions under which an item should be handled, transported, displayed, and stored, and its condition should be assessed and reported to the lender.
- 6.77 We examined loan documentation for evidence that museums lending objects or art works were setting loan conditions (such as insurance cover, facilities reports, packing instructions, quarantine) and procedures (condition reporting) that defined clearly the responsibilities of borrowers, and set specific requirements for care in transit and while in the custody of the borrower.

### Loan agreements

- 6.78 Loan agreements were comprehensive and contained the necessary requirements for proper care, including details of:
- how the object was to be used;
  - assurance as to procedures for handling, transportation, and unloading;
  - insurance arrangements;
  - the environmental conditions in which the object should be transported, displayed, or stored (light levels, and controls of relative humidity and temperature);
  - security measures at the borrower's facilities;

- preparation of condition reports, and requirements for reporting damage; and
- copyright.

### Condition reports

6.79 Condition reports were widely used by lending and borrowing museums to record the condition of an object or art work when it entered or left the institution, and often when it was selected from storage for display. These reports are an important means of monitoring the care of an object when in use, and make it possible to evaluate changes in condition over time.

### Facilities reports

6.80 Facilities reports give the lender important information about the ability of the borrower to provide appropriate care. Before agreeing to a loan request from other museums, it is common practice to obtain a facilities report from the borrower. This is a detailed document that describes the conditions under which the objects will be cared for by the borrower, and typically provides the lending institution with details of:

- facilities within the museum building for unloading objects entering the museum, moving objects, and storing and displaying objects;
- handling and packing practices, including the use of trained persons;
- security systems and measures for fire protection;
- controls of the museum environment – in particular light, temperature, humidity, and air quality; and
- insurance arrangements.

6.81 Facilities reports are an important part of the loan agreement, a vital source of assurance for the lender, and an important demonstration of the borrower's contractual commitments.

6.82 Facilities reports were widely used, and were a key condition of loan agreements between institutions.

### Asset management planning

6.83 Local authorities need to plan for the maintenance and renewal of assets used to deliver services to their communities,<sup>5</sup> including buildings that house museums or art galleries. Asset management is the cycle of activities associated with planning for, creating, operating, maintaining, replacing, rehabilitating, and disposing of assets.

<sup>5</sup> For example, Part 1 of the Local Government Act 2002 requires a local authority to manage the asset implications of changes in services and standards, and set out how the maintenance, renewal, and replacement of assets will be undertaken.

### Risks to collections from poor building design or maintenance

- 6.84 Poorly designed or maintained buildings place the collections housed in them at risk. Few of the museum collections we looked at were displayed and stored in facilities expressly built for the purpose. They were usually held in older buildings or in general-purpose facilities that had been adapted for museum use. This can create risks not present in a building or facilities built specifically for museum use.
- 6.85 Building failures, such as loss of air conditioning or a leaking roof, pose serious risks to the collection. Many of the museums we visited had, in the past, encountered minor flooding that had threatened parts of their collections, although significant damage had not occurred. This is a particular risk for storage areas located below ground.

### Planning to consider risks, services, and standards

- 6.86 Asset management planning for museums and art galleries should consider risks to the collection and the delivery of services, desired levels of service, and the standards to which assets are to be maintained. The outcome of this asset management planning process should be a considered assessment of, and financial forecast for, maintenance and renewal requirements over the life of the building, and of its services and facilities.
- 6.87 Asset management plans based on service levels and collection management standards, and applying the principles of responsible risk management, should provide a framework for each museum's programme of maintenance and renewal. As part of each audit visit, we asked whether the local authority – or trust – had a current asset management plan for the building occupied by the museum and its associated facilities. We examined each plan to establish whether it:
- assessed the risks to the collection and museum services;
  - defined levels of services to be delivered; and
  - set performance standards for the assets required to deliver those services.
- 6.88 The results of our analysis for the 13 museums and art galleries we audited are shown in Figure 12.

**Figure 12**  
Analysis of asset management planning

Assessment criteria	Total (out of 13)
Had a current asset management plan	5
Had assessed risk to its collection	4
Had defined service levels	4
Had set performance standards for its assets	4

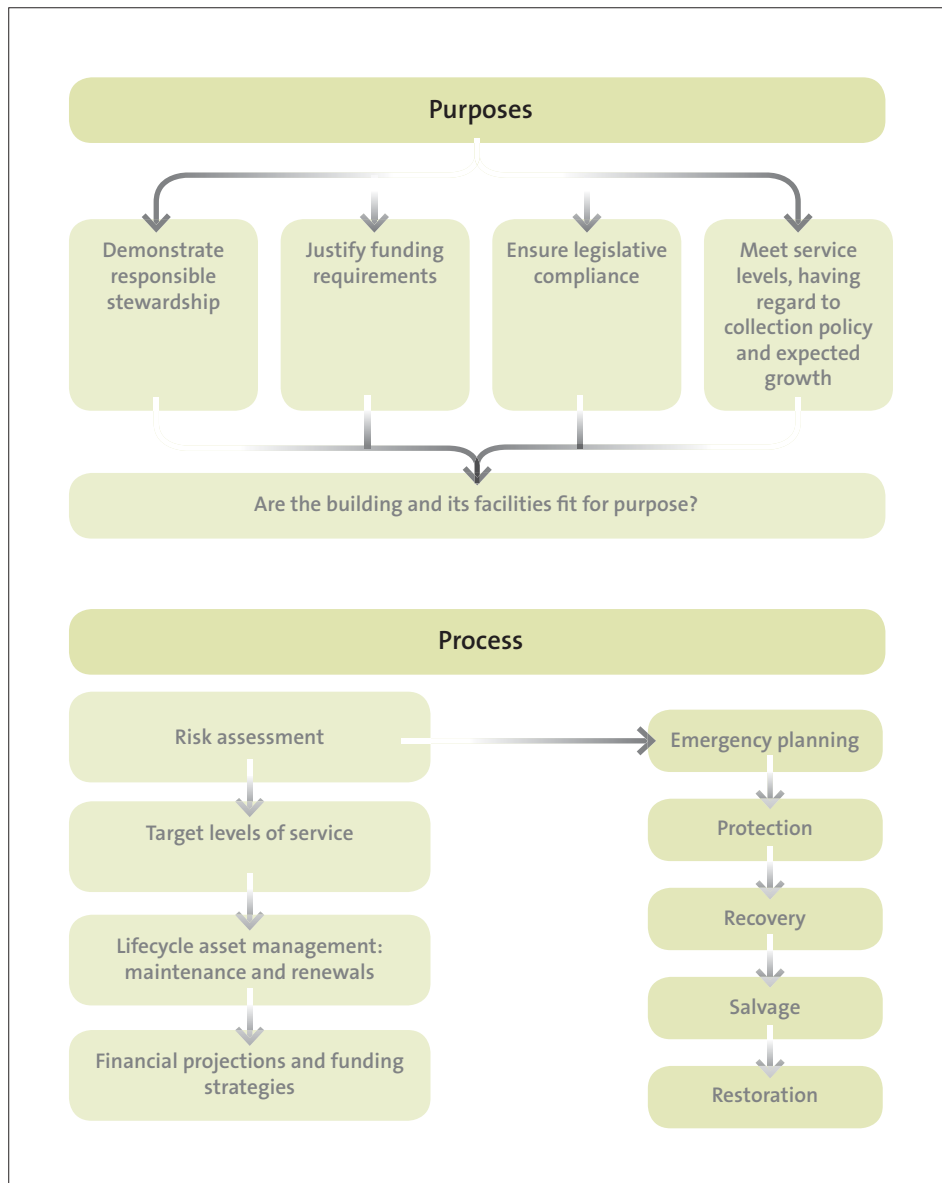


- 6.89 Only 5 of the museums had current asset management plans for the buildings in which their collections were housed. Only 3 of those plans incorporated the 3 important components of risk assessment, service objectives, and performance standards.

**Example of a useful asset management plan**

- 6.90 The plan drawn up for one art gallery is a useful model for other museums. The plan identifies and assesses the likely consequences of risks to the art gallery, assigning a priority to each. Risks to the collection identified as being high include natural disaster, fire, or flood, and damage through incorrect handling of art works by staff. Existing controls are identified and their adequacy assessed.
- 6.91 The plan lists 10 service criteria, such as quality, responsiveness, capacity, and reliability. For each of those criteria, current, minimum, medium, and high levels of service are defined. Within each of these criteria, actual levels of service include objectives for the management of the art gallery's collections. These include buying important art works, enhancing access to the collection, expanding storage facilities, and maintaining security and climate controls.
- 6.92 Taken together, the analysis undertaken by the art gallery and its local authority owner forms a useful framework within which to determine investment priorities. Lifecycle management plans outline what investment is needed to maintain assets at the agreed levels of service, having regard to legislative requirements, cultural heritage values, use, and quality of facilities.
- 6.93 The plan documents the current known condition of the building and its facilities, and sets out a strategy for addressing an expected increase in storage and display needs. Explicit standards and specifications identify requirements for the art gallery's facilities – climate control, security, storage, conservation facilities, and stand-by power. The results of condition assessments are used to draw up a work programme and funding strategy, including ongoing maintenance requirements and planned renewals.
- 6.94 We recommend that museums give priority to drawing up an asset management plan for the buildings in which their collections are housed, and associated facilities. Figures 13 and 14 outline a suggested asset management framework, levels of service, and asset standards.

**Figure 13**  
A suggested asset management framework for museums and art galleries



**Figure 14**  
**Planning for levels of service and asset standards**

<b>Levels of service</b>
Storage and display of collection meet museum conservation standards
Increase numbers of visitors by enhancing public access to collection
Ensure compliance with legislation and museum standards
Develop the collection
Enhance the visitor experiences through quality of exhibitions
Use assets efficiently
Generate opportunities to earn revenue
Meet visitor expectations through excellent customer service
<b>Asset standards</b>
Capacity and appearance of displays and other public museum facilities meeting visitor expectations of use and access
Systems for preventative conservation including security and environmental controls meeting requirements for responsible collection care and stewardship
Facilities create opportunities for income-generating activities and encourage support from sponsors, stakeholders to supplement core funding
Facilities enable museum to deliver exhibitions and public programmes to meet visitor expectations
Acquisition plan and funding provide means for collection growth

## Planning for emergencies

- 6.95 In any emergency, the first priority for a museum is to ensure the safety of its staff and members of the public on the premises. A secondary priority is to prevent damage to the collection, or, if this is not possible, to respond quickly and effectively by treating damaged objects to prevent further damage or loss. Sound planning is essential to provide the best possible protection for collections in an emergency, and for their recovery and salvage after a disaster such as flood or fire.
- 6.96 Emergency planning also involves managing risks to the collection, and includes:
- identifying and assessing the likelihood and probable effect of risks to the collection; and
  - identifying those objects in the collection of greatest significance to the museum, and those most vulnerable. It is these objects that should be retrieved or dealt with first when salvaging a collection. In an emergency, a list of priority objects will also ensure that best use is made of limited time and resources.

- 6.97 Defining roles and responsibilities of museum staff in an emergency is another aspect of emergency planning. Crucial roles for protecting the collection include:
- the building services manager (to co-ordinate building support services and organise materials for salvage);
  - the registrar (to take a record of the damaged objects that keeps track of the collection as objects are salvaged, moved, or sent off-site); and
  - a conservator (to inspect the condition of objects, assess the nature of the damage, set priorities for treatment, and decide on suitable salvage procedures).
- 6.98 We sought evidence of emergency plans containing policies and procedures to protect and salvage the collection in the event of an emergency.
- 6.99 Nine museums had an emergency plan, although 4 of those were not complete. The other museums intended to prepare an emergency plan. This task should be given priority, so that all museums are properly prepared for any contingencies.
- 6.100 One museum had singled out “type” specimens and key collection items for priority salvage, and had labelled them for easy identification in an emergency. This was a prudent and realistic strategy for situations where staff may have time to save only a few objects from the collection.
- 6.101 Electronic records can readily be backed up off-site, providing important security. As already discussed, most museums and art galleries were using electronic collection databases to store records, or were going to do so.
- 6.102 However, paper records such as accession registers and article receipts are not readily copied. In many smaller museums, these could be lost in a significant disaster. For art galleries, digital images of the collection can be an important security measure – especially where only paper records are kept. One small art gallery prudently photographed its collection to provide a safe record for insurance purposes in the event of loss or damage.

## Part 7

# Reporting on performance

- 7.1 In this Part, we discuss how museums are reporting to the local authority or governing body, and how they are assessing performance. We summarise our key findings and raise issues for consideration from our assessment of whether museums were:
- reporting regularly and transparently on collection management expenditure and activities; and
  - using performance standards and measures to enable a proper assessment of their performance in managing their collections.

### Key findings

- 7.2 All museums were reporting regularly on expenditure. However, the reporting format used by some museums made it difficult to establish how resources were assigned and used.
- 7.3 A variety of indicators were being used to measure and report on the management of collections, with no common approach taken. Individual museums were providing little assurance about the management of their collections, with limited reporting on activities such as collection care and documentation.
- 7.4 The New Zealand Museums Standards Scheme is giving museums the opportunity to benchmark their performance against a set of expectations for sound museum management, and review reports provide valuable feedback.

### Issues for consideration

- 7.5 Museums need to review the format of their reporting to provide more useful information for stakeholders about how they assign and use their resources to carry out their activities and perform their functions. Activity-based reporting, using data recorded about the time that staff spend on different tasks in the museum, would give readers better information about resource use and priorities.
- 7.6 Museums need to identify performance measures relevant to the management of their collections, to use for internal and external reporting on the different aspects of stewardship and performance. This task can most effectively be addressed by museums collectively, and will require consideration of standards and measures of performance, and information collection and analysis.
- 7.7 We recommend that museums participate in the review processes facilitated through the New Zealand Museums Standards Scheme, as a source of independent assurance and performance benchmarks for the management of their collections.

- 7.8 We also encourage museums to initiate, among themselves, periodic audits of collection management and other activities as a means of fostering collaboration, promoting the transfer of good practice, and providing assurance.

### **Is performance reporting regular and transparent?**

- 7.9 We assessed whether museums were reporting regularly and transparently on collection management expenditure and activities.
- 7.10 All were reporting regularly on expenditure and activities. Local authorities or governing bodies (as appropriate) were receiving regular financial reports and summaries of museum activities. We analysed these reports to establish whether they showed how museums were:
- using their resources to carry out different museum activities – including collection-related tasks; and
  - performing against measures directly relevant to the management of their collections.

### **Clarity of performance reporting**

- 7.11 Museums used different formats for budgeting and reporting. Some reporting provided a much clearer overview of museum resource use and activities than others. All the reporting formats we reviewed could have been more transparent and easier to analyse.
- 7.12 Some museums recorded costs by input, with the main input category being staff salaries. This practice made it difficult to tell how resources – in particular, time that staff spent on the varied tasks of curators – were being assigned and used. Analysing how staff spend their time will help museum managers determine the desirable allocation of resources to particular tasks and museum services.
- 7.13 The way in which some museums classified expenditure also left it unclear how costs were associated with particular museum activities, such as setting up exhibitions, carrying out research, answering queries from the public, or cataloguing the collection.

### **Benefits of activity-based reporting**

- 7.14 Activity-based reporting would give readers more useful information about resource use and priorities. Some reports had a stronger focus on reporting by activity, providing a more useful overview of how resources were allocated and used.
- 7.15 We did not examine in detail how museum staff were assigning their time, or how that information was compiled for reporting. However, systems for recording

staff time will be needed if museums are to improve their reporting to show how resources are being used to carry out different activities and perform key functions.

- 7.16 Earlier in this report, we observed that museum staff commonly face competing priorities, noting that other responsibilities could be at the expense of core collection management. Better reporting would help to reveal areas where staffing or funding needs to be reviewed, and show the relationships between different activities in the museum.

### Can performance be properly assessed?

- 7.17 We assessed whether museums were using performance standards and measures to enable a proper assessment of their performance in managing their collections. We analysed museum plans and performance reports to assess the extent to which they were reporting on matters relating to the management of their collections.
- 7.18 The management of collections is at the core of a museum's functions and activities. Reporting on performance in the various aspects of collection management:
- provides assurance to stakeholders about stewardship;
  - measures progress against objectives and standards, identifying areas for improvement; and
  - ensures that the role and importance of the collection is appropriately recognised by management within the museum, and by external stakeholders.

### Variety of performance standards and measures

- 7.19 Museums were providing little assurance about the management of their collections. The 13 museums we audited were using a variety of different measures to report on the management of their collections, with some more relevant, specific, and measurable than others. In the Appendix, we list the different performance standards and measures that we found in use and the aspect of collection management to which each belonged. These aspects of collection management fall into 6 broad groups:
- development;
  - use and access;
  - preventive conservation;
  - documentation;
  - resources and training; and
  - relationships with iwi.

- 7.20 However, each museum was using few standards and measures relevant to its own collection management. Some reporting was confined to recording visitor numbers, exhibitions, and public programmes, with no reference to collection management. With little or limited reporting on this area of museum activity, funding providers may have little awareness of the nature, extent, and implications of the work required to care for and document the collection.

### Scope for museums to work together on performance reporting

- 7.21 There is scope for museums to work together to identify useful performance standards and measures. As noted in Part 2, museums have few standards for the management of their collections. A sector-wide project would need to:
- identify a comprehensive set of specific and widely accepted and applicable standards and measures as a basis for assessing performance;
  - show how these standards and measures can be used to assess and report on their collection management, with the objective of providing assurance to external stakeholders on the different aspects of stewardship and performance; and
  - define ways to collect and verify performance information (such as system audits and inventories).
- 7.22 Soundly based performance reporting would enable museums to measure their progress in meeting their objectives over time. Performance standards for managing their collections might include:
- the accuracy of sampled object documentation, including descriptive information and location, as assessed by an annual audit;
  - meeting deadlines for accessioning and approving loans;
  - the number of objects on the collection database with an associated image;
  - the number of objects packed in inert materials;
  - meeting parameters for climate control; and
  - the condition of sampled items as established by periodic inventories.

### Peer reviews

- 7.23 There is considerable potential for museums to work collaboratively, share good practice, and promote improvement through peer review. Periodic reviews also provide important assurance about museum management to councils, governing bodies, and other stakeholders.



7.24 An independent assessment of collection policies and practices has a number of benefits:

- confirming good practice;
- identifying areas for improvement;
- suggesting practical ways to overcome problems;
- transferring knowledge; and
- encouraging collaboration.

### **Review under the New Zealand Museums Standards Scheme**

7.25 One means for museums to assess their performance is through a review under the New Zealand Museums Standards Scheme, developed with the museum sector by National Services Te Paerangi. This scheme enables museums to measure their performance against accepted standards of practice. Participation in the scheme involves a self-review and peer review, and the manual serves both as a guideline and tool for self-assessment.

7.26 Seven of the 13 museums had taken part in the scheme, or were preparing to do so. We examined the reports of the reviewers, which contained useful findings and suggestions for improvement. Participation is particularly valuable for smaller museums. They are less likely to have comprehensive policies and procedures in place, and may rely on unqualified volunteers with limited experience in museum management. We recommend participation in the scheme as a valuable means of benchmarking performance and setting action plans for the future.

### **Periodic audits**

7.27 We also encourage museums to consider carrying out periodic audits among themselves, possibly in exchanges with similar institutions. Such audits would be a cost-effective way to foster collaboration, promote the transfer of good practice, and provide assurance.



## Part 8

# Local authority funding of private museums and art galleries

- 8.1 In this Part, we discuss funding arrangements between local authorities and private museums.
- 8.2 This was the second part of our audit. Our objective was to assess the nature of these funding arrangements, including accountability requirements for stewardship of the collection, and the nature and extent of monitoring by the local authority to ensure that its interests are met.
- 8.3 We examined a selection of 6 funding arrangements (see Figure 2), involving total annual expenditure by 6 local authorities of \$810,000. The annual funding ranged from \$42,000 to more than \$400,000, and made up a significant portion of the income for each museum. Each museum also raised funds from other sources.
- 8.4 For each funding arrangement, we sought evidence of:
- a clear specification of the purposes of, and outcomes sought from, local authority funding;
  - a contract between the local authority and the museum (or museum governing body) that set out the expectations of the funding local authority, and the museum's obligations for, and need to provide assurance on, responsible stewardship of the collection; and
  - accountability arrangements that incorporated periodic reporting to the local authority and provided relevant assurance on management of the collection.
- 8.5 We did not examine each local authority's justification for funding the museum concerned.
- 8.6 We talked to local authority staff responsible for administering each funding arrangement. We also spoke to museum directors, staff, and (in some instances) members of the governing body about the museum's relationship with the local authority.
- 8.7 We summarise our key findings and raise issues for local government to consider from our assessment of:
- ways that local authorities support private museums and art galleries;
  - types of funding arrangements;
  - relationships between local authorities and private museums; and
  - challenges for smaller museums with limited resources.

## Key findings and issues for local government

- 8.8 The 6 museums depended on local authority funding to meet ongoing operational expenses. In all but one instance, local authority funding of the museum was governed by a contract for services. Three of the 6 funding commitments were for more than a single financial year, which provided important certainty for the governing body and museum staff.
- 8.9 Each local authority had defined broadly the purposes of their funding and the outcomes sought, but these were not reflected in performance expectations and measures for reporting. Only 2 contracts made stewardship of the collection a specific priority.
- 8.10 Reporting of performance and stewardship was weak. None of the 6 museums used comprehensive and relevant performance information to support accountability reporting. In some cases, the relationships between the local authority and the museum were distant or informal, and the local authority received little or no assurance about the use of funding to support the services (including care of the collection) delivered by the museum.
- 8.11 In our view, local authorities need to seek active assurance about the performance and stewardship of the museum through specified conditions in funding contracts, and regular reporting against objective measures relevant to management of the collection.
- 8.12 We also noted risks to the financial viability, performance, and capability of smaller museums.
- 8.13 District and community museums hold important collections of local history, along with significant community archives. However, we consider that, because of their limited resources (including a lack of professional staff, inadequate facilities, and insecure funding), some small museums face significant challenges to meet professional standards for the management of their collections.
- 8.14 Funding, governance, staffing, planning, and facilities are all crucial for responsible stewardship. Museums need adequate resources and facilities to care for, and make best use of, their collections. If they have limited resources available to meet stewardship obligations and increase the quality of services to the community, then it raises fundamental questions about long-term governance and funding.
- 8.15 In some cases, a closer relationship with the associated local authority may bring benefits to both the museum and the local authority, through systems support, sharing of expertise, closer oversight, and greater certainty of funding.

- 8.16 We recommend that all local authorities that provide funding to museums put in place systems to monitor their interests in the responsible stewardship of heritage collections held for the benefit of their communities. That monitoring relationship should consist of:
- a clearly defined and specified funding purpose and statement of outcomes sought by the local authority;
  - reporting to the local authority on the delivery of services, and providing assurance on stewardship of the collection; and
  - a service contract that:
    - reflects the specified funding purpose and outcomes;
    - makes funding contingent on an approved business plan or work programme;
    - identifies collection care as a priority; and
    - contains requirements for periodic reporting against relevant measures of performance, including matters related to management of the collection.

### **Ways that local authorities support private museums and art galleries**

- 8.17 A large number of private museums receive funding from local authorities to meet operational expenses or capital costs. This support is often essential to their day-to-day operations.
- 8.18 We estimate that as many as half of all local authorities are providing operational funding to private museums. This funding varies in size from small annual contributions to local heritage bodies, to significant funding commitments to regional, provincial, and district museums.
- 8.19 Museums can also benefit indirectly from their relationship with the local authority. These benefits can be both financial and non-financial. For example, a local authority may own the building in which the museum is housed, relieving the museum of some responsibility for meeting maintenance costs. Other local authority support can include access to advice on meeting legislative requirements, information technology services, and participation in local authority-run training workshops.
- 8.20 Local authorities need to have the necessary means to ensure that such funding is well spent. An association with a private museum may also expose a local authority to criticism in the event of adverse publicity about the stewardship of a community collection in the museum's custody. These factors support the need for an informed and structured accountability relationship.

## Types of funding arrangements

- 8.21 Figure 15 summarises the 6 funding arrangements between local authorities and private museums or art galleries. In all 6 instances, the purpose and outcomes sought from funding arrangements were broadly specified (for example, in annual plans, or Long-term Council Community Plans).

### Figure 15

#### Summary of what was specified in the 6 funding arrangements

Assessment criteria	Total (out of 6)
The local authority had broadly specified the purpose and outcomes of the funding	6
There was a funding contract	5
The museum was reporting periodically to the local authority	2

### Use of contracts

- 8.22 Five of the 6 local authorities had a contract with the museum or art gallery they were funding.
- 8.23 The funding contract is an important accountability document. It records the obligations of the local authority as the funding provider, and the responsibilities of the museum for delivering services and caring for the collection.
- 8.24 The absence of a contract defining this relationship leaves the formal obligations of the museum – and the local authority – unclear, and leaves the local authority without the formal means to obtain the necessary assurance about stewardship. These obligations should cover all aspects of collection care, including the environment in which objects are displayed and stored, security, and the integrity of the building in which the collection is housed.
- 8.25 It is common practice for councillors to be represented on, or otherwise involved with, the governing bodies of community organisations, and this was the case with some of these museums. This representation can help keep the local authority informed of museum activities.

### Monitoring of contracts

- 8.26 We examined the 5 contracts and how they were being monitored. We expected each contract to link performance to museum plans or programmes, and specify collection care as an important priority. We also sought evidence that contracts were monitored through periodic reporting by museums on their performance and stewardship.

- 8.27 Few contracts made collection care a priority, and most contracts were not being adequately monitored. All 5 contracts made funding conditional on local authority approval of a business plan, budget, or work programme. We endorse this approach, but saw no evidence to confirm that it was followed in practice.
- 8.28 Three of the 5 contracts were for multi-year funding, which provided important certainty for museum planning.
- 8.29 Only 2 contracts made care of the collection and other aspects of stewardship a priority. One referred only to visitor numbers and resident satisfaction levels. The other 2 contracts were not sufficiently specific in their requirements to provide the basis for useful reporting on collection care.

### **Relationships between local authorities and private museums**

- 8.30 Relationships between local authorities and private museums were often informal and sometimes distant. Only one of the 5 local authorities with an annual contract was receiving periodic information during the term of the contract about the museum's management of its collection.
- 8.31 The contract with one local authority contained a commitment to monitor the museum's performance against the performance indicators in the museum's business plan. However, no such monitoring was taking place. The museum advised that it was reporting to its own board periodically against specific performance measures. Our discussions with the board and the local authority resulted in an agreement for quarterly reporting against similar measures to meet the local authority's own requirements. We recommend this approach.
- 8.32 Although 5 of the 6 local authorities received an annual report from the museum, the reports did not always contain reference to collection management activities and issues. We were not provided with any evidence that local authorities were using the reports to review the museum's performance and capability, or the amount of its annual funding.

### **Accountability arrangements**

- 8.33 Only one of the 6 local authorities had in place accountability arrangements that met our expectations for effective service specifications and monitoring. The summary of those arrangements (in the next 2 paragraphs) outlines what we would expect from the accountability relationship.
- 8.34 The local authority kept an active oversight of its museum, ensuring that councillors and staff were fully informed. The contract between the local authority

and the museum made stewardship of the collection a priority, specifying 3 areas of responsibility for the museum:

- protection, preservation, and maintenance of the collection;
- access to the collection for viewing and research; and
- delivery of specified services as outlined in the museum's business plan.

8.35 The museum is required to report each 6 months to the local authority. One of the reporting requirements is that the museum must report any incidents of note, positive or negative, that may affect the collection. If required, the Museum Director will appear before the local authority to speak about any matters in the reports.

### **Risks of being poorly informed**

8.36 Another funding arrangement illustrated the risks that arise when a local authority is poorly informed of matters affecting the funding relationship.

8.37 In this example, local authority staff responsible for monitoring the funding had little knowledge of the museum and its activities. The funding contract provided for the local authority to receive an annual report and business plan that contained detailed information about managing the museum. We saw both these documents, but were told that neither was presented to the local authority for its information or consideration. The local authority was receiving no other periodic reports from the museum.

8.38 A recent independent review of this museum concluded that it needed to develop a new vision, that it lacked trained staff, and that the collection was housed in a building that provided neither the necessary security nor environmental controls for proper collection care. Our discussions with the museum and our own observations confirmed these concerns.

8.39 However, because of the distant relationship, the local authority was unaware of the museum's concerns or the possible implications. This put the local authority's own funding at risk, and limited any opportunity to work with the museum to address the challenges it was facing with its limited resources.

### **Challenges for smaller museums with limited resources**

8.40 We had discussions with a selection of smaller public and private museums in the course of our audit, and especially in our examination of funding arrangements. Concerns were raised about the long-term financial security of some museums, and their capability to improve the delivery of museum services and meet museum standards.



- 8.41 Some smaller museums with limited resources face challenges to maintain and improve services and meet standards. This may raise fundamental issues about local authority governance, funding, and capability.
- 8.42 Without such support from the local authority, some museums would probably find it difficult to continue operating. Many museums receiving local authority funding are small, and may have limited access to other funds to meet operating expenses.
- 8.43 Local authority funding does not cover all costs for museums, and they need to seek other funding sources. Their limited resources and limited access to additional funding sources may create fundamental challenges for the smaller museum. Challenges include:
- Low and insecure base funding can make it difficult for museums to plan with certainty, and fundraising tasks can distract their few staff from day-to-day museum work.
  - There is a reliance on volunteer and part-time staff to perform core tasks. Without trained and qualified staff, there may not be the capability to prepare and maintain collection management policies and systems for staff, financial, and information management, including the recording and maintenance of information about the collection.
  - Display and storage facilities may not have the necessary security and environmental controls to provide proper care of the collection. In our visits – mainly when we visited small community museums – we were told about, or found evidence of, collections at risk through being housed in conditions where security was weak, building design or maintenance was poor, or environmental controls were inadequate.
  - Some museums have difficulties in meeting professional museum standards, and have limited prospects of doing so without additional resourcing.
- 8.44 These challenges raise questions about the most effective model for longer-term governance and funding relationships with such bodies.
- 8.45 While we were carrying out our audit, we were aware that 2 local authorities were reviewing the governance and funding of museums. In one case, this review had led the local authority to take over the museum's operations. A closer relationship between local authorities and museums would help to identify where there may be a need for similar reviews of governance, funding, and capability.



# Appendix

## Performance standards and measures used by the museums we audited

Aspect of collection management	Performance standard/measure
<b>Development of the collections</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rationalisation of the collection in consultation with other museums or galleries</li> <li>• Add x artworks to the collection</li> <li>• Acquisitions consistent with purchasing plan</li> <li>• 25% of artworks acquired are by artists from the local community</li> <li>• Not fewer than 10 sought-after items added to both natural sciences and humanities collections acquired at competitive market rates</li> <li>• Actively seek external funding for research projects relating to museum collections by submitting at least 4 well-considered applications</li> </ul>
<b>Use of, and access to, the collection</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use of the collection for exhibitions</li> <li>• Presenting the collection to underscore its strength, scope, and quality</li> <li>• Collection available for loan</li> <li>• Responding to inquiries, and loan requests</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 10% of the museum's collection is to be on display at any one time</li> <li>• The number of exhibitions based on the permanent collection</li> <li>• The number of loans made from the collection</li> <li>• All inquiries acknowledged in specified timeframe</li> <li>• Loans processed within 2 months of receipt</li> <li>• Facilitate access to the collections – satisfy 80% of all requests for items and information</li> </ul>
<b>Preventive conservation</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Control of the museum environment</li> <li>• Disaster preparation policy and plan</li> <li>• Conservation survey</li> <li>• Storage</li> <li>• Condition reporting</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maintain humidity and temperature at set levels</li> <li>• Meet targets for treatment and condition reporting set out in conservation programme</li> <li>• Write a disaster policy and plan</li> <li>• Complete conservation survey of objects in one of the museum's collections, identifying priorities for treatment</li> <li>• Implement a conservation programme based on priority needs</li> <li>• Pack and re-store objects within a defined collection group by a specified date</li> <li>• Target number of condition reports completed for loans exhibitions</li> <li>• All incoming material into the museum is held in isolation and checked to ensure the material contains no pests</li> <li>• 90% (aim 100%) of artefacts and specimens are housed in conditions appropriate for their type and material to international standards</li> <li>• Collections are safe through the use of effective security measures and internal systems and processes – no damage or theft occurs</li> <li>• Maintain 80% compliance with standards overall; security 80%, climate control 80%, fire protection 100%, lighting 60%</li> </ul>
<b>Resources and training workshop</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Number of staff attending specified training course</li> <li>• Object handling training given to relevant staff by specified date</li> </ul>
<b>Relationship with iwi</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maori Advisory Committee meets at least quarterly and actions issues raised, 4 meetings held each year</li> </ul>



# Publications by the Auditor-General

Other publications issued by the Auditor-General recently have been:

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- Progress with priorities for health information management and information technology
- The Treasury: Capability to recognise and respond to issues for Māori
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- Achieving public sector outcomes with private sector partners
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- Inquiry into certain aspects of Te Wānanga o Aotearoa
- Cambridge High School's management of conflicts of interest in relation to Cambridge International College (NZ) Limited
- Inquiry into the sale of Paraparaumu Aerodrome by the Ministry of Transport
- Annual Report 2004-05 – B.28
- Electricity Commission: Contracting with service providers
- Ministry of Justice: Performance of the Collections Unit in collecting and enforcing fines
- Local Government: Results of the 2003-04 audits – B.29[05b]
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