

5. Collections Stewardship

Railway museums, like all museums preserving and utilizing collections, should strive to adopt and follow accepted standards in caring for these collections and assuring their long-term survival.

5.1 A comprehensive, written Collections Management Policy must address all aspects of the institution's collections, and relate care and treatment of collections back to the institution's mission.

- 1. Written collecting criteria includes:**
 - a. What the museum will collect, and why
 - b. How each collection will support the museum's mission
 - c. How each collection and its individual items will be used and cared for (e.g., research, display, operation, education, outreach, etc.)
- 2. Categories of collections should be developed, as the artifacts of railway museums are typically grouped into discrete types of related objects that form the basis for evaluating levels of care, utilization, and documentation. These categories may include the following, and can include further subsets:**
 - a. Vehicles of all types, i.e., railway, highway, etc.
 - b. Three-dimensional artifacts (large or small items) that are able to support the museum's mission
 - c. Architecture and archeological sites such as buildings, architectural fragments, remains, and historical structures preserved for the express purpose of supporting a museum's educational mission
 - d. Engineering works such as trackwork, ballast, right-of-way, bridges, tunnels, signal systems, overhead wire, and related items
 - e. Documentary collections such as manuscripts, corporate records, timetables, and paper ephemera
 - f. Graphics collections including photographic images, prints, and drawings; engineering documents including prints, tracings, and reproducible; and fine art
 - g. Museum archives including corporate records of the institution, including board minutes, financial records, publicity items, and collections documentation
 - h. Special collections of those objects rare or unique enough to warrant special recognition and care. Includes items that are extremely valuable, associated with important persons or events, or extremely fragile and/or hard to care for
 - i. Storage collections including artifacts or equipment that may have been acquired specifically in order to be saved from destruction. As adequate care may be especially lacking for items in this category, a basic level of caretaking should be established at the outset before such items are accepted. Separate documentation justifying each item's value and relevance to the collection may be desired before accepting additions to this category
- 3. Artifact and equipment categories by use may also be developed to reflect the museum's operational needs and the responsibility to preserve the collections for the public and for future generations. For example, as operation of historic rail vehicles is a primary interpretive experience at many railway museums, vehicles are often categorized in terms of their intended use, such as:**
 - a. Accepted for display in the permanent collection
 - b. Accepted for operation/use in the permanent collection
 - c. Accepted for trade
 - d. Kept for consumption/disposal
 - e. On short- or long-term loan or lease
 - f. Kept in storage and/or for study