

Expanding Our Understanding of Collections Access



Children learning to create patterns while weaving.

- ✓ Some audiences, such as people with impaired hearing or eyesight, may wish to access collections in other ways that involve audio or tactile experiences.
- ✓ You may consider creating multimedia tours of your exhibitions or creating 3D prints/reproductions of collections objects that people can handle.
- ✓ Being aware of the different physical abilities of your audience, and any requirements under the Americans with Disabilities Act, is just one more way you can strive for enhanced accessibility of collections.

Further Recommendations

- ✓ In order to ensure access to your collections is done in a safe and systematic way, you should include a statement on collections access and use in your Collections Management Policy.
- ✓ Having a system and the necessary paperwork for tracking access and use will not only protect you legally but will also protect the collections from issues such as theft, mishandling, copyright infringement, and damage due to over-use and exposure.
- ✓ Documenting different types of access to your collections will also give you great information that can be used in strategic planning, grant proposals, or board meetings.
- ✓ Working with collections, you will always have to strike a balance between preservation and access, as both are essential to the functions of a museum.
- ✓ A great resource for answering your questions about collections Access is the National Parks Service's *Museum Handbook Part III: Museum Collection Use*.

Maidu carrying basket on exhibit at the University of Colorado Museum of Natural History.



Collections Access Matters

By Jesse Dutton-Kenny, University of Colorado Museum of Natural History | 2016

Why Access Matters

- ✓ Museum collections are held in the public trust. This means we have an obligation to provide access to the collections, while also balancing their preservation and protection.
- ✓ Access to collections can mean either physical or intellectual access for such purposes as research, exhibition, education, and community engagement.
- ✓ Making collections accessible in many different ways (for example: online, in exhibits, in classrooms) will attract public interest and encourage new audiences to visit.



North American indigenous basketry on display at the University of Colorado Museum of Natural History.

Know Your Audience

- ✓ Who are you making these collections accessible for? The best place to start thinking of enhanced accessibility of your collections is to define your audience and sort out which different kinds of access will be most feasible and appropriate.
- ✓ For different audiences, the means of access will be very different. That will necessitate different protocols and strategies be used.
- ✓ For different audiences, you may also need to consider the idea of different levels of access. Some groups will hold beliefs about who has access to certain types of knowledge and who may view certain materials. It is important to respect those beliefs and make the necessary accommodations, whenever possible.



Weaving the World Into a Basket exhibit.

Different Ways to Provide Access

- ✓ Physical Exhibits
- ✓ Online Exhibits
- ✓ Visible Storage
- ✓ Collections Tours
- ✓ Research Visits
- ✓ Online Databases
- ✓ Educational Programming
- ✓ Public Talks
- ✓ Classroom Engagement
- ✓ Community Consultations
- ✓ Reproductions
- ✓ Derivative Works



Cleaning basketry in preparation for an exhibit.