



## Questions to Ask About Choosing Objects on Exhibit

Vermont Historical Society Webinar

January 2020

### I. Considering the Exhibition Theme

- a. What is your exhibition theme and what stories do you want to tell? What is your thesis?
- b. How does the object fit with your theme and thesis?

### II. Provenance & Quality

- a. What story does the object tell? What information do you have about it?
- b. Is the object the “best” for the information/story you are trying to convey? Is it supremely relevant to your theme?
- c. What is the likelihood that the story is accurate? Can you do additional research to support or debunk its story?
- d. Do you have clear title to the object or is its ownership murky?
- e. Do you need to do additional research to support the object? How much time will that take – is reasonable to expect that you will get answers?
- f. Is the object difficult or problematic in any way? What is your interpretation plan to frame and/or mitigate that?
- g. Is the object visually interesting or unique?

### III. Overall Condition

- a. Is the object fragile in any way? What is its overall condition?
- b. Will it hold up to being on exhibit for the length of time you have planned? Consider light, temperature, support, and other factors.
- c. Will it need ongoing support while on exhibit? (ie, regular cleaning, page turning, etc.)
- d. Does it need conservation or stabilization before going on exhibit? If so, do you have the resources to do so?
- e. Could you use a replica/reproduction instead of the original?
- f. Is the exhibit off-site, or are you loaning objects to another institution? What risks are there for the object in transportation? Can the object be transported safely and securely?

#### **IV. Logistics**

- a. How large is the object? How heavy is it? Will it fit in your exhibit space? Will it fit through doors? How do you plan on transporting it to your exhibit space? How many people do you need to transport and install it?
- b. Do you have the cases, ropes, or other housing materials to put it on public display?
- c. Do you have a clear plan for installation based on your assessment of its condition, or do you need to spend time experimenting?
- d. Do you have a place for it to wait prior to its installation, or a place for it to go back to after it's on exhibit (if it's a new object)?

#### **V. Miscellaneous**

- a. Do you have plans to photograph the object before, during and after exhibit?
- b. Are you able to update collections databases and records with exhibit information?
- c. How does the object help with marketing? Is this object especially exciting or important, and you want to make sure people know it's on exhibit?
- d. Are the object's donors still connected to your organization?

#### **Additional Resources**

Agents of Deterioration:

<https://www.canada.ca/en/conservation-institute/services/agents-deterioration.html>

National Park Service: Using Museum Collections in Exhibits:

<https://www.nps.gov/museum/publications/MHIII/mh3ch7.pdf>

Glasgow Museums: A Practical Guide for Exhibitions:

[https://www.britishcouncil.in/sites/default/files/guidelines\\_for\\_museum\\_display.pdf](https://www.britishcouncil.in/sites/default/files/guidelines_for_museum_display.pdf)

Smithsonian Exhibits: Guide to Exhibit Development

<http://exhibits.si.edu/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/Guide-to-Exhibit-Development.pdf>