

Information Management in Museums – What is an Information Policy?

Information is a core asset for museums - used strategically and managed effectively, information protects and enhances the museum's activities and its reputation.

What is an information policy?

An information policy should outline the principles which an organisation uses to manage all of its information, the steps taken to ensure compliance with the relevant legislation, and the responsibilities of staff towards information at the various levels of the organisation. It outlines the wider context in which other related policies such as a **records management** policy function.

Why should you have an information policy?

An information policy will provide you with the context for making decisions on the use and management of information resources, and will inform museum-wide decisions which have an impact on these activities. It should take account of legal, political, economic, professional, ethical and user requirements.

The **risks** of not having an information policy include:

- ✗ Loss of focus on core priorities for information, leading to diversion of vital resources
- ✗ Information service users being hindered by inconsistent provision
- ✗ Staff being unable to deal with legal and ethical issues relating to information use

The **benefits** of developing and implementing an information policy enable museums to ensure that:

- ✓ Information is accessible and available for sharing
- ✓ Quality of information matches users' needs
- ✓ Museum staff know and exercise their responsibilities for information
- ✓ Information related priorities are clearly identified and acted on

See Information Policy Framework (Alice Grant Consulting, 2009)

Preparing the way

Developing an information policy means **preparing for change**. The **Information Policy Toolkit** at www.museuminfo-records.org.uk/toolkits/InformationPolicy.pdf gives detailed information and guidance on the different stages involved:

- Identifying an appropriate decision making forum
- Getting a mandate
- Agreeing your approach and assigning responsibilities
- Finding out about your museum's information needs
- Finding out about your museum's information assets
- Developing and maintaining your information policy

Writing your policy

Your museum's information policy should not be a long and complex document. Its value lies as much in the process of developing and agreeing it, as in the document itself.

Although your policy should be specific to your museum, there is no need to reinvent the wheel. Other museums may have information policies you can reference and use with permission, as might other knowledge-based institutions such as universities. The **toolkit** also includes links to example policies which you may find useful.

Once agreed, your policy must be made available to all staff, through normal communication channels such as your museum's intranet or shared drive. Embedded within it should be the requirement that it is reviewed on a regular basis by the designated forum or committee.

Next steps

Visit www.museuminfo-records.org.uk to learn more about Information Management and Records Management in museums, and to access further resources and training materials you can adapt and use free of charge.