

**Denver Museum of Nature & Science**  
**Ethics Policy Statement**

Approved and Adopted by the DMNS Board of Trustees, April 15, 2008

**Introduction**

The Denver Museum of Nature & Science (Museum), a nonprofit educational entity and a responsible steward of the resources held in the public trust, is committed to public accountability and transparency in mission and operations. The Museum is proud of its contribution to Denver, the State of Colorado, and its many visitors and colleagues beyond the state, and through this statement on ethics, presents certain principles related to ethical conduct upon which it has operated in the past and upon which it will continue to operate in the future.

This ethics statement reflects the highest concepts of ethical and professional practices and endorses in principle the American Association of Museums' Code of Ethics for Museums adopted and revised in 2000, as well as the specific codes of professional disciplines represented at the Museum. Where this statement and discipline specific codes disagree, this statement shall prevail. The statement guides the institution and associated trustees, staff, and volunteers, who legally, ethically, and effectively carry out their responsibilities.

It is understood that all practices and procedures employed in fulfilling the vision, mission, strategic direction, strategic plan and annual plan of the Museum are consonant with but exceed all legal and regulatory requirements as established by international, federal, state, county, and municipal authority. Institutional policy and practice is established through the articles of incorporation, bylaws, agreements with the City and County of Denver, and job descriptions of staff, volunteers, and trustees. The Museum's President directs the implementation of this statement through staff, volunteer, and trustee orientations.

**The Museum in Society**

The Museum, as directed by its mission, is committed to serving its public in science education, providing superior maintenance and security of its assets, both physical and financial, and generating new scientific knowledge through its research program. As such, the Museum:

- Aligns its activities with its mission to promote the public good rather than individual gain.
- Is committed to human and planetary wellness and shall strive to avoid practices and products whose creation or disposal is unhealthy or otherwise detrimental.
- Acknowledges, values, and respects the social, cultural and individual diversity of all people in both its programs and hiring practices. The Museum will use its best efforts to foster accessible exhibits, programs, organizational procedures and operations.
- The Museum recognizes the value of sharing decision making with diverse audiences, communities, donors, members, staff, trustees, and volunteers.
- The Museum provides for the health and safety of its guests, volunteers, and employees through a continuing program designed to reduce and/or eliminate the possible causes of accidents and to create the healthiest environment possible in the fulfillment of the mission of the Museum.

**Collections**

The Museum's obligation to its collections and associated documentation is paramount. The collections are held in the public trust at the highest standards of care for ensuring that collections are preserved and used for educational and scholarly purposes in perpetuity. These stewardship responsibilities are governed by the Museum's Manual of Collection Policies and are guided by the following:

- Acquisitions are made in support of the Museum's mission and must be accompanied by legal title or, in the case of government-owned specimens, documentation establishing guardianship authority over those collections.
- Acquisition decisions are guided by the Long-Term Collection & Research Plan and the Museum's ability to provide space, financial resources, and staff for curation, collection management, conservation, and preservation.
- The Museum shall not knowingly and willfully accept or acquire any object that was illegally imported or illegally collected or that was received under circumstances that would encourage irresponsible damage, destruction, or illegal trade of biota; historic, cultural, and natural sites; or human burial places.
- Decisions concerning human remains and sacred and funerary objects are treated with the respect and cultural sensitivity that emerges from the legal and governing practices of the culture of origin. The unique and special nature of human remains and funerary and sacred objects is recognized as the basis of all decisions concerning these collections.
- The use, acquisition and disposition of living and nonliving animal specimens follows legal, humane, and scientific standards as established by professional organizations.

- Competing claims of ownership that may arise in connection with objects in the Museum's custody shall be handled openly, seriously, responsively and with respect for the dignity of all parties involved.
- The Museum may deaccession collections solely for the advancement of its mission as guided by the Long-Term Collection & Research Plan. Disposition decisions are guided by discipline-specific ethics and practices. Conflict of interest, real or perceived, is to be avoided. Any proceeds that may result from the disposition of collections shall be used only to support new acquisitions or direct care of the collections.
- Only in rare circumstances, those mandated by law, contract, prior agreement, or the advancement of science, will deaccession of the following collections occur: type specimens; iconic, published or illustrated specimens or objects.
- Objects will be presented honestly and accurately in exhibits.
- The Museum retains decision making authority around exhibit content and presentation. Potential conflicts of interest with respect to an individual lender to an exhibit shall be examined.
- Collections shall not be used to promote or endorse external commercial activities.

## **Code of Conduct for Trustees, Staff and Volunteers**

### General Department

- Employment and volunteerism at the Museum involve a position of public trust with great responsibility. In all activities, Museum employees and volunteers must act with integrity and in accordance with stringent professional ethical principles and objectivity in support of the Museum's mission and public trust responsibilities.
- As members of the Museum's team, staff are expected to contribute talents and energies to the environment and quality of the Museum and the Museum's services. Staff are expected to learn and demonstrate the Museum's values, and enhance and support the future of the Museum in our community.
- Relationships between trustees, staff, and volunteers are governed by mutual respect.

### Conflict of Interest

Museum trustees, staff, and volunteers shall:

- Never abuse their official positions or their contacts within the museum community for personal gain, or in any way that may impair the performance of their official duties, compete with the Museum, or bring discredit or embarrassment to the Museum or to the profession.
- Maintain high moral standards of honesty, integrity, and loyalty to the Museum and shall refrain from any private or personal activity that might conflict, or appear to conflict with the Museum's goals, purposes and operations.

### Responsibilities to the Collections and other Museum Property

- To avoid conflicts of interest, real or perceived, deaccessioned Museum objects shall not be given, or sold publicly or privately, to members of the Museum community (current Museum employees, unpaid staff [emeritus curators, research and department associates], volunteers, members of the Board of Trustees) or their representatives.
- In the event of public sale of deaccessioned Museum objects, members of the Museum community are prohibited from participating due to the appearance of a conflict of interest.
- No staff should use for any personal purpose any object or item that is a part of the Museum's collections or under the guardianship of the Museum.
- Use of Museum property, both physical and intellectual, supplies or other resources including the name and reputation of the Museum except for official business is not allowed unless authorized in writing by the appropriate DMNS representative.
- Curators are strongly discouraged from collecting in the same field that they collect for the Museum. Staff cannot compete with the Museum in creating personal collections. Potential conflicts must be disclosed to the Chief Curator.
- Staff may provide estimates of value of the Museum's collections for internal Museum purposes only. Staff will not provide monetary appraisals of objects for external parties.
- Staff should be circumspect in referring the public to outside suppliers or services such as appraisal, conservation and restoration. Whenever possible, more than a single source should be provided so that no appearance of personal favoritism in referrals is created.
- While loans of objects owned by a Trustee or staff member can be of great benefit to the Museum, it should be recognized that exhibition can enhance the value of the exhibited object. Therefore, sole consideration of the Museum in asking for and accepting such loans shall be the prospective benefit to the public in alignment with the Museum's mission.

### Outside employment, consulting and intellectual property rights

- All practices and procedures with regard to outside employment are outlined in the Employee Handbook of the Denver Museum of Nature & Science.
- Activities that conflict with curatorial or other staff responsibilities or that could cause staff to favor personal or outside interests over those of the Museum must be avoided.
- All work created by any employee in the course of his or her employment at DMNS constitutes works made for hire and is the physical and intellectual property of DMNS unless otherwise governed by contract, publication agreement, employee agreement, or law.

### Gifts, favors, discounts and dispensations

- Staff should be permitted to retain gifts of trifling value (less than \$50) from associates, the public, and constituents, when acceptance does not impair their judgment or otherwise influence decisions. Meals, accommodations and travel services while on official business may be accepted if clearly in the interest of the Museum.
- Museum employees have the right to accept and retain gifts that originate purely from personal or family relationships. It must be recognized that genuine personal gifts may originate from individuals who have a potentially beneficial relationship with the Museum. In such cases the staff members are obligated to protect both themselves and the Museum by fully disclosing the circumstances to the Museum President or designee.

### **Museum Governance**

The governing body of the Museum, the Board of Trustees, serves the public interest as it relates to the Museum, and must consider itself accountable to the public as well as to the institution. In all cases, the Board acts as the ultimate legal authority for the Museum, and stands responsible for the formulation and maintenance of its general overall policies and standards. The Board is responsible for the following:

- Establishing the vision, mission and strategic direction, and approving the strategic plan, objectives and budget.
- Empowering the President to fulfill and manage the day-to-day operations of the Museum.
- Conducting Museum business as a board, committee, or subcommittee or otherwise in conformance with the bylaws or applicable resolutions.
- Filing with the Board a statement disclosing personal, business or organizational interests and affiliations and those of persons close to them that could be construed as creating conflicts of interest.
- Disclosing situations that arise for action by the Board where there is a possible conflict or appearance of a conflict of interest. In those cases where the Trustee is present when a vote is taken in connection with such a question, he or she must abstain. In some circumstances Trustees should avoid discussing any planned actions, formally or informally, from which they might appear to benefit.
- Taking no advantage of information they receive during their service to the institution if their personal use of such information could be detrimental to the Museum.
- Ensuring sufficient funding for protection of the Museum's assets and delivery of its programs and services.
- Ensuring no policies or activities jeopardize the Museum's non-profit status.
- Providing financial protection for trustees, staff, and volunteers for liabilities resulting from Museum activities.

### **Collaborations and Fundraising**

The Museum adheres to the following precepts with respect to collaborations and fundraising:

- The Museum welcomes appropriate cooperation with similar organizations to further its preservation, research, and educational goals.
- The Museum is in ultimate control of educational content in exhibits and programs. The recognition of external donors or sponsors is secondary.
- The Museum will acknowledge corporate support but will not specifically endorse any corporation, its products or services.
- The Museum's reputation is one of its most precious assets and in no way shall any sponsorship diminish that reputation. In the case of some breach of morals, the sponsorship shall be dissolved.
- Those involved in fundraising must do so with honesty as to need and must use funds for a donor's intended purposes. Opportunities and advantages shall be promised to donors equally.
- All donor-related records and documents shall be confidential, except as required by law.
- The Museum shall keep standard accounting records.
- Those authorized to spend funds must do so with impartiality, honesty, and in the Museum's best interest.