

Chapter 74

Assessing Risk and Safeguarding Rare Library Materials During Exhibition Loans

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ABSTRACT

Rare book and archival materials on loan to libraries and other cultural heritage institutions are very often historically significant, highly valuable, and frequently irreplaceable. Lenders minimize risks present during exhibitions loans of these valuable materials by identifying and addressing possible threats during the loan review process. This article provides information on specific ways special collection libraries assess and limit risks presented during exhibition loans to better safeguard important cultural heritage materials.

INTRODUCTION

Special collection libraries are the keepers of cultural heritage treasures. First edition books, medieval manuscripts, and troves of archival documents sit safely on their protected shelves. As an outreach strategy, special collections libraries develop exhibitions to highlight the bibliographic and historic significance of these materials. Yet, no matter how extensive a library's collections, exhibitions regularly prompt libraries to borrow materials from other organizations to complete exhibition storylines, or to participate as a lender for exhibitions at other libraries or museums. Through loans, institutions promote their collections while supporting scholarship and appreciation of cultural heritage holdings with a wider audience.

Protecting collection holdings is always important, but it is of paramount significance when displaying materials, especially those on loan, because of the potential public relations implications losses would have during the run of an exhibition. Moreover, in the context of a formal exhibition loan, safeguarding materials is legally compulsory, and failing to protect materials has lawful ramifications in addition to

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any media repercussions. Additionally, libraries insure materials on loans differently from their main holdings, and loan materials may present legal indemnity issues. Librarians managing exhibition loans must understand these concerns and know how to address them.

Varied cultural heritage management sources and legal texts such as *Art Loans* (Palmer & Bently, 1997) and *MRM5: Museum Registration Methods* (Buck, Gilmore, & American Alliance of Museums, 2010) provide instruction and document professional best practices on how to manage effectively the specialized needs of materials borrowed for display. Furthermore, the growing body of fine art-focused disaster management literature, such as *Disaster Response and Planning for Libraries* (Kahn, 2012) and *Handbook of Research on Disaster Management and Contingency Planning in Modern Libraries* (Decker & Townes, 2016), documents how librarians address proactive contingency planning needs, prioritize response, and prescribe detailed response procedures specific to loaned materials.

While not a panacea, thorough loan registration policies and comprehensive contingency planning help libraries and other cultural heritage institutions care for materials, including those borrowed for exhibition loans. This article outlines proactive ways libraries incorporate loan registration policies and contingency planning principles into the management of exhibition loans to safeguard rare and valuable library materials.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Perils and Risks Facing Loaned Materials

The range of potential perils for materials on display is typically greater than those for materials held behind the scenes in secured storage spaces. In addition to building-specific threats, such as fires and broken pipes; regional risks such as hurricanes and earthquakes; materials on display have higher public visibility making the materials more vulnerable to theft, vandalism, and judicial seizure. Additionally, because materials loaned for display can often be very highly valued, unique, and historically significant, institutional disaster plans must specifically speak to the issues exhibition loans present in order to protect institutions from risk and potential loss in the event of an unforeseen incident.

Sudden losses that may occur during the highly visible window of an exhibition have the potential to catch the attention of the media, and could irrevocably strain or damage the relationship between borrower and lender. Beyond the loan, high-profile losses could quickly damage a borrower's reputation as a careful custodian of cultural heritage materials. This blemish could thwart approval of future loans, and, perhaps negatively color perceptions potential donors may hold about the library. It is of the utmost importance to address, proactively, the concerns loan materials present during the loan review process to minimize risk and limit exposure over the entire course of an exhibition.

During a loan, a borrowing institution legally pledges that it will assume full responsibility for the safekeeping of loaned materials and provide the same level—if not higher level—of professional care it does to materials in its formal custody, and that it will consistently exercise best practices in registration, handling, and display (Malaro & DeAngelis, 2012). As provisional caretakers, borrowers have a duty to keep lenders fully informed of the status and physical condition of borrowed materials.

Libraries that participate in loans protect their valuable collection materials by having guidelines set in place to evaluate a proposed borrower's ability to provide appropriate care for materials lent for an

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