

Imperial Valley Desert Museum  
Curatorial Procedures

Imperial Valley Desert Museum  
Ocotillo, California  
Imperial County

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## **PART 1 - INTRODUCTION**

The purpose of this manual is to summarize the Imperial Valley Desert Museum's (IVDM or Museum) practices, procedures, and guidelines in fulfilling its role a curatorial facility focused on archaeological, historical and ethnographic materials from, and relevant to, the Imperial Valley, California and region. As such, it supplements the Museum's *Collections Management Policy* (CMP)(IVDM 2011).

### **IVDM Curation Mission and Goals**

It is the Museum's intent to provide curatorial services fully compliant with Federal and state standards, including the Archaeological Resources Protection Act of 1979 (ARPA) (16 USC 470aa-mm), "Curation of Federally-owned and Administered Archaeological Collections", 36 CFR Part 79, and the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act of 1990 (NAGPRA) (25 USC 3001-13). The Museum seeks to be a primary curatorial facility for archaeological collections generated by cultural resources management projects conducted in compliance with the National Historic Preservation Act, the National Environmental Policy Act, and the California Environmental Quality Act and other relevant legislation. These are referred to herein as "CRM collections." In this context, "collections" include, but are not necessarily limited to: artifacts, faunal and floral material recovered from archaeological sites or their environs, related field and laboratory records, and photographs.

### **Current Collections**

The Museum is charged with the care and preservation of a large collection of cultural material from archaeological sites throughout the Imperial Valley and region. The current collection is largely prehistoric, but historic period materials are also present.

The Museum has several thousand prehistoric artifacts in its collections. These include a large collection of metate grinding slabs and a broad collection of desert area pottery, including a large collection of complete ollas.

The Museum's ethnographic collection includes: dibble sticks; baskets; beads; shell ornaments; spirit sticks; projectile points; children's toys; knives and scrapers; discoidals; spokeshaves; and crescentics. The Museum has also collected musical tapes of aboriginal songs and oral history.

### **Collections Acceptance Policies**

At its sole discretion, the Museum accepts collections that it deems compatible with the Museum's mission, goals, policies, and guidelines. Please refer to the Museum's CMP for additional information.

### ***Fee Collections*** (accepted for fee)

The Museum encourages Federal, state and local agencies, CRM firms, and research organizations to utilize the Museum's curatorial facilities as the preferred, central location for CRM collections from Imperial County, California and adjacent areas. The Museum will normally accept collections that:

- Are prepared in accordance with the Guidelines provided in this manual, and
- Are accompanied by a duly executed Curation Contract, Accession Agreement, and/or Transfer Agreement (see Appendix A), and
- Are fully paid in advance in accordance with the Museum's current Schedule of Fees (see Appendix B).

### ***Collections Eligible for Consideration as Donations***

To be a candidate for acceptance as a donation, a collection must:

- Be relevant to the Museum's goals, and
- Be of sufficient integrity and free of pests, health hazards, etc.
- Be accompanied by acceptable provenience information
- Be given to the Museum with all rights of ownership
- Not have been removed illegally from federally-owned land

In addition the Museum encourages potential donors to consider the long-term costs of curation and to make a monetary donation to the Museum's Endowment Fund.

### ***Collections Not Accepted***

The Museum will not accept collections without written provenience information.

As the Museum is located adjacent to large areas of land under the jurisdiction of the United States Bureau of Land Management (BLM) it is anticipated that there is the potential for collections to be presented to the Museum that were illegally removed from federal land. It is recognized that these collections may hold historically important artifacts, objects or material. In cases where the provenience can be ascertained, these collections will be held by the Museum and BLM El Centro will be contacted for consultation.

### ***NAGPRA Compliance***

The Museum is committed to the standards established by the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) and actively works for the repatriation of human remains, funerary objects, and sacred objects to the rightful descendant groups. If NAGPRA eligible artifacts, objects, or materials are found to have been mistakenly brought into the Museum's collections, the Museum will immediately contact the federal land owner.

## **PART 2 - ACCESSIONING PROCEDURES**

### **Cataloguing of Existing Collections**

The Museum has embarked on a multi-year process to recatalog the existing collections as these collections are brought into the new Museum facility for permanent storage. A standard catalog format in Microsoft Excel™ (please see Sample Catalog sheet and Sample Codes in Appendix C) has been created for use in this process. Using this catalog format as a starting point, it is the Museum's intent to create a comprehensive Master Catalog of its entire collection, including existing collections and those acquired in the future.

### **Examination of Candidate Collection**

Prior to accepting any collection, IVDM personnel will conduct a condition assessment to evaluate the general condition of the candidate collection, including: content of the collection; condition of boxes, bags, bag labels, object labels and box labels; organization of collection by material class separation and site number; evidence of mold, insects, pests and dirt; presence of appropriate computer data, catalog, associated records; possible presence of NAGPRA items; and total number of boxes of artifacts and associated records, unboxed artifacts and estimated total number of artifacts. Conformance of the collection to the Museum's standards will be a major criterion in determining whether the collection will be accepted for accessioning.

### **Assignment of Accession Numbers**

A unique accession number will be given to each new collection accepted into the Museum. That accession number pertains to all records, photographs, and artifacts created or collected in association with that collection. The accessioning system will be the Museum's primary tool for tracking and managing its collections. Additionally, a catalog numbering system (see below) will be utilized for more detailed information useful in collections management and comparative research.

Upon accepting a collection for curation the Museum will assign accession numbers as follows:

- The general form of the accession number will be: IVDM – current year (four digits) – three digit accession number (sequential number, starting with 001 each year, for the entire collection), for example IVDM-2011-001 would be the accession number for the first collection accessioned in 2011.
- Each accession number will begin with the letters IVDM, to indicate the owner or custodian of the collection.
- The year will indicate the year that the collection was accepted into the Museum.
- Always be sure that the accession number shows all three digits, including preceding zeros to facilitate digital data storage and retrieval.
- If the collection includes more than one archaeological site or other location, a three digit subaccession number will also be assigned for each site or location.

The accessioning system will record where within the Museum's facilities the collection is permanently stored (box number, etc.) and will also note if any of the materials require a special storage environment. The accessioning database will be stored digitally, with daily off-site backup. In addition on completion of accessioning, a hard copy of the accession record will be placed in each archival box holding the collection.

The full accession number should be affixed on the outside of each box accepted for curation, upon each primary bag within each box, and with a redundant tag placed inside each bag within each box.

### **Assignment of Catalog Numbers**

All collections shall be professionally cataloged in accordance with the Museum's standards (see below). Once collections are verified and accessioned the collections catalog will be fully entered into the Museum's Master Catalog. Minimally, the professionally prepared catalog shall include all of the data categories shown on the Sample Catalog Sheet or their equivalent, including but not limited to the following:

- Catalog number
- Site trinomial or Isolate P-number
- Intra-site provenience (horizontal)
- Intra-site provenience (vertical – level or stratum)
- Feature or Locus association (if any)- be specific as to which it is
- Artifact class
- Artifact subtype
- Material type
- Description
- Number of objects included (as part of each cataloged item)
- Weight of object(s) included
- Photo reference (if present)
- Comments

Upon accepting a donated collection that has not been cataloged in accordance with Museum standards, Museum staff will assign Catalog Numbers in accordance with the system described above.

For all collections, the catalog will be stored both digitally (with offsite backup) and in hard copy. One hard copy of the catalog will be placed in the first archival box of each collection.

## **PART 3 – GUIDELINES FOR SUBMISSION OF FEE COLLECTIONS**

The Museum advocates that all CRM investigations be conducted in accordance with a high degree of professional care. The guidelines are intended to aid CRM investigators in preparing collections for curation in a manner compatible with the Museum's standards.

### **Required Collection Documentation**

New collections delivered to the Museum must contain a site report, site/isolate records, collection catalog and documentation, and conveyance documents. Once collections are transferred to the Museum and all documents are verified, the Museum will accession the collections through standardized documentation. It is the responsibility of the CRM firm to provide the required signatures on the appropriate documents. If you are not sure of which document to use, or who should sign, please call the Museum for consultation.

Types of Conveyance Documents:

*Accession Agreement:* An Accession Agreement is used when the archaeological collections will become the property of the Museum and will be accessioned into the permanent collections. The Accession Agreement documents the transfer of title, project details and collection details and affirms that the collection was prepared in accordance with these guidelines. The CRM firm does not have the authority to transfer title to the collection to the Museum. Only the collection owner may transfer the title to the collection to the Museum. The accession fees may be paid directly to the Museum by the collection owner, or the fees may be paid by the CRM firm on behalf of the owner. Signatory: Collection Owner

*Curation Contract:* A Curation Contract is used in cases where the collection owner retains title to collections and contracts with the Museum to provide curatorial services and long-term storage. All Curation Contracts must be negotiated between the Museum and the collection owner and must be signed by the collection owner; the CRM firm will usually not be involved. For collections coming in under a curation agreement, the curation fees must be paid directly to the Museum by the collection owner, in some cases the fees may be paid by the CRM firm on behalf of the owner. Signatory: Government Agency

*Deed of Gift:* The Museum may accept individual objects and collections from various sources using a Deed of Gift. The Deed of Gift is usually reserved for objects or collections donated to the Museum from private collections. In most cases, these are objects that were not excavated as part of a formal mitigation process. Signatory: Collection Owner

*Transfer Agreement:* A Transfer agreement is used when the archaeological collection will be curated at the Museum under an existing curation agreement. The CRM firm should call the Museum to make sure that a curation agreement exists before attempting to transfer the collection. The Transfer Agreement documents the person, company, or agency that will retain title to the collection, project details and collection details and affirms that the collection was prepared in accordance with these guidelines. The CRM firm is not generally responsible for

curation fees in this case, as they would have been negotiated previously with the collection owner. A Transfer Agreement would most commonly be used for collections excavated from Federal lands during a Federal project. Signatory: Cultural Resource Management Firm Representative

### **Cleaning, Stabilizing**

When preparing a collection for curation at the Museum, please utilize a high standard of professional care. The Museum will rely to some degree on the professional judgment of the Principal Investigator who led the investigation that resulted in the candidate collection. However, the Museum recommends that the following guidelines be taken into consideration.

#### ***Cleaning***

Under modern archaeological standards, it is prudent to treat artifacts conservatively to avoid loss of evidence of original use. It is recommended that the cleaning of artifacts be limited to dry brushing or washing in distilled water when deemed necessary. Artifacts washed in water should be dried in the shade or at room temperature, never heated to dry. If other methods of cleaning are used, the exact material, i.e., formula of cleaning solution, brand name, concentration, etc., and procedures used should be documented in the report or catalog.

#### ***Conservation***

Only the minimal treatment should be performed for objects undergoing conservation. Treatment should not modify the unique nature of the object. In addition, the restoration or conservation process must be reversible, restored areas must be detectable (but not necessarily obvious), evidence of former use, e.g., wear, repair, etc., must not be altered and all restoration must be carefully documented and cataloged with the object. If an artifact must be treated in such a way that it will be permanently altered, a representative sample in untreated condition should be preserved.

### **Cataloging**

Every item or group of like items, in a collection must be given a unique catalog number. Minimally, the catalog should contain the fields shown in the Sample Catalog Sheet or their equivalent, including detailed provenience and descriptive information.

Cataloging of artifacts must conform to the Museum standard format. See Appendix B for more detail.

Accession #	Cat #	Site Tri	# of artifacts	Class	Material	Descrp	Cond	Weight	Unit #	Level	Unit type	Project Name	Comment
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## Labeling

All artifacts, artifact bags, and boxes must be clearly labeled.

All artifacts of appropriate size and type are to receive a surface label. A base coat of Acryloid/Paraloid B-72 is to be used on all artifacts. The color and shading of an artifact should determine the base coat that is used. For dark artifacts, use the B-72 Opaque Lacquer. Using a brush, spread a thin amount of B-72 in an appropriate place on the artifact. After the lacquer is dry, use an Extra fine-tip Sharpie marker or Rapidograph pen with India ink to write the Accession and Catalog number on the object.

Friable objects, such as baskets, hides, vegetal artifacts should be tagged with a standard label using acid-free paper labels and cotton string.

### Standard Labels

Labels should conform to the Museum's standardized label format. They can be produced from the Microsoft Excel Museum Master Catalog format by using the mail merge tool in Microsoft Office. The label size is 1.6 inches for the height and 2 inches for the width. The labels are done in Times New Roman with font size 10.

### Label information:

Site Trinomial

Cat #: Catalog Number & Sub-Catalog Number (if applicable)

Acc #: Accession Number and sub accession number if applicable

Project: Project Name

Level\_cm: (Columns in museum master catalog referring to the depth the artifact was found)

Unit: (Column in master catalog, assigned number to the trench or unit an artifact was found)

Number/Material/Description

Weight\_g: Weight in grams

Sample:

CA-IMP-7750 Cat # 56 Acc.# IVDM 2009-001 Project: 11 D L - line Level_cm: 40-50 Unit: 2B 1/SHELL/BEAD Weight_g: 0.2
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Note: All label information comes directly from the categories on the Museum Master Catalog,

no adjustments need to be made to the Excel sheet or the Word document with the labels for the mail merge.

The labels should be printed in duplicate, with one copy on acid free archival paper, and one copy on sticky-back paper. The archival paper label should be placed into the artifact bag or box, and the sticky-back label should be placed on the outside of the bag or box.

### Box Tag

The box tag is inserted into an affixed, clear, plastic front pocket which should be placed on all boxes. The box tags are 6 inches in width and 3.5 inches in height. The tags should be printed in Times New Roman.

### Tag Information:

IV Desert Museum Collection (Font size, 24)

Box Number (Font size, 24)

Site Trinomial(s) (Font size, 18)

Accession Number(s) (Font size, 20)

Sub-accession number(s) (Font size, 18) (optional)

Artifact Description (Font size, 18) (optional)

Box \_ of \_ (Font size, 18) (refers to how many boxes are for the particular project)

Project Name (Font size, 14)

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>IV Desert Museum</b> <b>Box 00</b> <b>CA-IMP-0000, 0000, and 0000</b> <b>ACCESSION # Year-000-00</b>  <b>Material</b>  <b>Project Name</b></p>
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## **Packaging**

All collections accessioned to the Museum must be transferred in appropriate standardized packaging materials conforming to the following Museum standards.

### Artifact Bags

All artifacts should be separately stored in archivally stable clear plastic bags of an appropriate size for the artifact. A minimum of 4-mil. thickness is required for each plastic bag.

### Artifact Storage Boxes

Standard size 15" x 12" x 10": acid-free

Color: Blue/gray

Detachable lid

Deep lid, acid-free, metal-edge artifact boxes; Color: cream; various sizes (these may be used for internal boxes).

Collections should be curated according to the project and site number. Normally each site should be contained in a separate annotated box however in the case of small collections from multiple sites, more than one may be included. If applicable, boxes should be organized by material class within each site. If different artifact classes are placed in the same box they should be clearly marked in separate 4-mil plastic archival bags. All diagnostic material should be boxed separately in cream-colored artifact boxes and clearly labeled. Fragile items should be separated and protected through the use of additional archival quality packaging materials such as acid-free unbuffered tissue paper or polyethylene foam.

Standard size boxes should not weigh more than 25 pounds.

### Oversize Artifacts

Objects that weighs over 25 pounds, or are larger than a standard box, should be transferred without packaging but in a suitable means that protects the object.

Oversized objects should be labeled directly on the surface of the artifact using archival labeling material. Surface labels should contain the accession and catalog number. Acryloid/Paraloid B-72 Acrylic Resin should be used as a base coat and top coat when labeling the artifact. A second standard label is to be a tied to the artifact using a cotton string. The label should be placed in a plastic protective sheet or laminated.

### Photographs

Photographs should be marked and numbered on the reverse lower left-hand corner of each print or contact sheet with an archival-quality marking pen or pencil. Prints and contact sheets should be placed individually into archival-quality photographic protectors or page protectors

Digital images should be produced at 600 DPI or higher and printed using a laser printer on archival-quality paper. Additional digital images should be saved on appropriate storage device. The CD label should include clear information and the correct file extension (e.g., jpg, html, etc.)

### Paper Records

All project documents should be transferred in an archival-quality document box, similar to the Metal Edge brand variety. Separate acid-free paper folders should be used to contain loose documents or photograph sleeves. All paper records should be printed on white, smooth finish, acid-free 8-1/2 x 11-inch, 20-pound bond. Records may be typed, laser printed or photocopied. Inkjet printing is not archivally stable and is not permitted. Newspaper articles, pamphlets and other records on non-acid-free paper should be photocopied onto acid-free paper. All bindings should be plastic comb with acid-free card stock on the front and back.

### **Box Inventories**

Each box delivered to the Museum should include a Box Inventory placed in the top of the box printed on acid-free paper.

## Appendix A: Conveyance Documents

## Appendix B: Schedule of Fees

## Appendix C: Sample Master Catalog Sheet and Codes