

Canadian Museums Association

A Study of the Economics of Museum Collections



2013

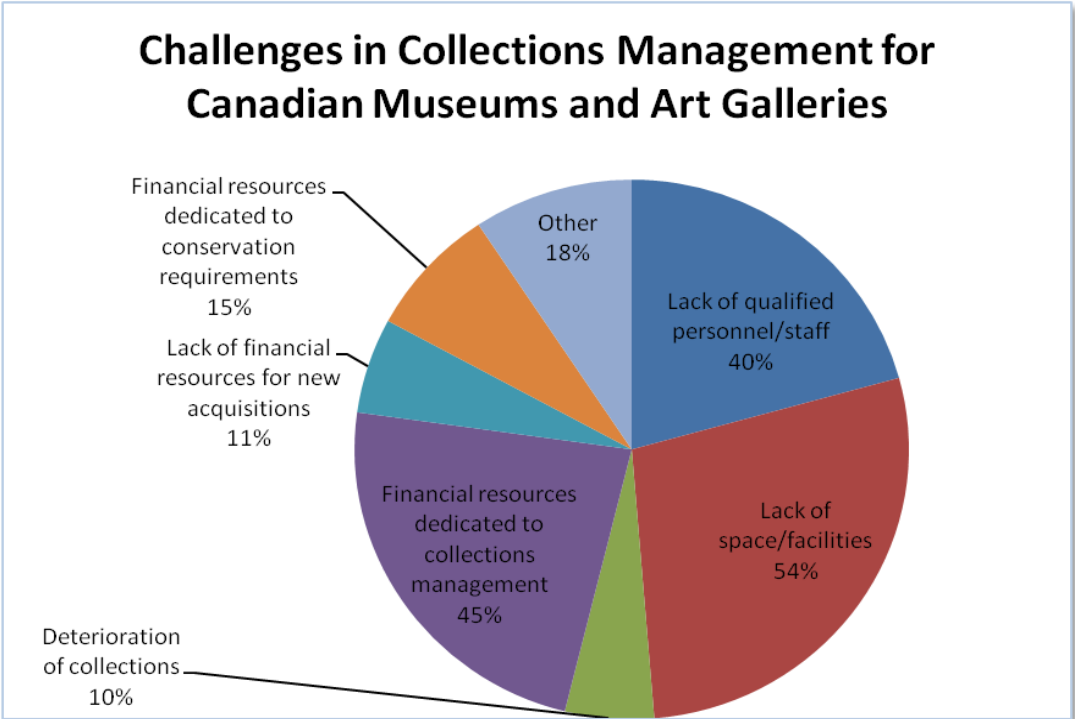
A Study of the Economics of Museum Collections 2013

OVERVIEW

In 2008 and 2009, the Canadian Art Museum Directors' Organisation (CAMDO) conducted a survey to better understand the status of Canadian public art collections. As anticipated, results showed that these collections were in crisis due to a lack of the care needed to survive.

In late 2013, the Canadian Museums Association (CMA) conducted the Economics of Museum Collections survey in hopes to build on the momentum of CAMDO's survey. Concerned with the state of collections management in Canadian museums and art galleries, the CMA collected and tabulated results from 48% of institutions invited to participate. Answers were gathered through communications with different museum officials with collections responsibilities and through a CMA member questionnaire. Most of those surveyed work for institutions located in Ontario (34%) with a history or science heritage mandate (37%).

The results were shown to reflect the issues these Canadian organisations face. The most prevalent responses were concerning the lack of storage space, financial resources and qualified personnel — all of which are important to the proper maintenance of collections.



1. Storage Space

When asked to identify the top two challenges in collections management affecting their institution, almost 53 per cent of respondents said that their **storage space** was inadequate for their needs. The storage concerns of these institutions are two-fold. Not only does a lack of storage influence the acquisition of artefacts, but three quarters of respondents also agree it weighs heavily on the collection's conservation.

Poor conservation of collections can have costly repercussions. Since it is the artefacts that breathe life into these institutions, it is crucial that they do not allow them to deteriorate. A collection in no condition to be on display raises the important issues of de-accessioning, disposal or replacement — which is a costly process. These concerns were also shown in how 64 per cent of respondents indicated that they need to err on the side of caution when making acquisitions as there may be nowhere to put these.

Despite these concerns, the majority of respondents claim they have no conservation plan for their collections, and only 45 per cent had said that they had interest in getting a full-value insurance plan for their permanent collection. Of responding institutions, 14 per cent had even said that they were required to hold all collections in off-site facilities. Respondents' reasons for storing collections off-site varied from space and funding limitations, to improper environmental conditions.

Proper environmental conditions are required for the effective preservation of artefacts. These conditions range from humidity control, temperature control, lighting organization and adequate security. Over half of the respondents say their institution meets these environmental standards needed to preserve collections.

Although storage space may be limited, the institutions' collections appear to be well cared for through offering proper environmental conditions and in being well organized. The majority of collections (79%) were shown to be catalogued and documented digitally.

Though the lack of storage space may be the largest challenge faced by Canadian museums and art galleries, it is in no way the only issue. There is also a lack of financial resources and qualified personnel allocated to collections management.

2. Financial Resources

The largest number of responding institutions' annual operating budget is between \$100,000 and \$499,999, the second largest number fall under \$100,000. Of these two groups of respondents, 49 per cent noted that they did not face any budget cuts within the last few years. For the 34 per cent that did undergo cuts, they stated that it had no effect on their collections management. Regardless as to whether an institution had faced budget cuts or not, the

management of collections only received a small portion of their annual budget, thereby slowing down their ability to expand and improve collections. The portion of funds that museums and art galleries do receive must be distributed among three crucial categories: acquisition, conservation and exhibitions.

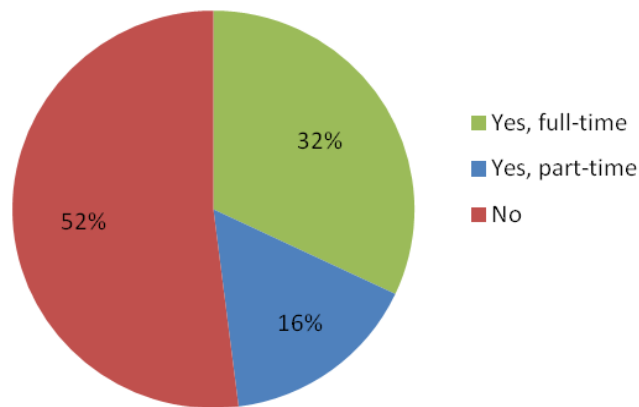
Percentage of Canadian Museums and Art Galleries Annual Budget Allocated to Acquisition, Conservation, and Exhibition (average from all responses)	
Acquisition	2%
Conservation	4%
Exhibition	16%

The majority of the finances dedicated to collections management are streamed into the installation and promotion of exhibitions – the areas of collections management visible to the public. Behind the scenes, acquisition and conservation efforts are receiving limited financial support. Though the allocated funds are in place, it remains to be seen whether efforts will be made to increase the financial support to collections management.

3. Qualified Personnel

One way to ensure the longevity of collections is to have trained personnel at the helm. A dedicated leader of collections management may help ensure that collections are properly cared for and stored. Despite this need, only 48 per cent of responding institutions said that they had someone in personnel responsible for managing collections; only 32 per cent had someone working full-time in the area.

Canadian Museums and Art Galleries With a Dedicated Collections Manager/Registrar



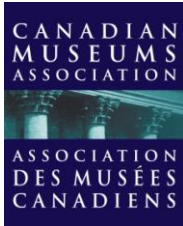
Without a staff member responsible for the management of collections, other museum personnel are required to expand their responsibilities into collections management. Since the replacement managers must take priority with their own duties, collections management tends to fall-off, causing artefact conservation to suffer. Results suggest that dedicated personnel would benefit the preservation of artefacts.

CONCLUSION

The results of the CMA's study on the Economics of Museum Collections 2013 highlight the issues buried beneath Canadian museums and galleries' expansive collections. The collections management of many institutions were shown to be suffering shortages in storage space, financial resources and qualified personnel. The most pressing of these issues was shown to be the lack of storage space and its effect on a museum or art gallery's ability to acquire and preserve artefacts. The consequences of these shortages may have a growing effect on an organization's ability to properly manage collections if action is not taken soon.

INFORMATION

The Survey on the Economics of Museum Collections was sent to more than 250 museum professionals working in the field of collections management, between November and December 2013. 120 responses were received and analysed. If you would like more information on the survey results, please contact the Canadian Museums Association.



Canadian Museums Association
280 Metcalfe Street, Suite 400
Ottawa, Ontario K2P 1R7
Phone (613) 567-0099
Fax (613) 233-5438
info@museums.ca

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EU - Canada Study Program “Thinking Canada”

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