

FUNCTIONAL REQUIREMENTS FOR EXHIBIT MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS

B. ALTERING MUSEUM PRACTICES

Computer information storage is more expensive, but more accurate and more manipulative than manual record storage. Museums may not be able to afford to computerize all exhibit documentation. If this is the case, staff must choose the most important tasks to computerize. To save space in the database, variable length fields should be used.

Functionally, exhibit management systems include tasks that fall under several categories: planning and projection (scheduling problems), central document management, reporting and tracking (objects and exhibit fabrication), space allocation (galleries and storage), printing and publication and visitor management and ticketing. Exhibit computer systems should use these categories to design screens. Gallery design and budget capabilities should be incorporated as well.

A travelling exhibit system should include four key reports: Object Specifications, Object Insurance Value, Budget, and Loan Agreement. Repetitive tasks, like the Loan Agreement, are especially adapted to computerization. One time, lengthy documents with static facts, like the Justification for Indemnity or the Facility Report, should be done by word processing.

Planning should be the most important phase of a project. Museums must put more money and time into professional planning for computerization. Coordination must involve staff and they must work under Board approval. Since all department computers and software should be compatible, systems analysis is much more important than donation of equipment. Museums should encourage donors to give initial dollars for planning rather than for equipment. Planning includes data definition and written standards.

C. INFORMATION EXCHANGE

Realistically, even now, museums should be able to send a core of information before and with a travelling exhibit on floppy disks. This would prevent registrars, designers, and packers from retyping tedious dimensions, weight and description for each object. However, without data standards shared between museums, this exchange is not even close to implementation. Such exchange is technically possible and desirable. Future museum to museum links via modems to databases for research and collection sharing in exhibit planning will only come with considerable