

# Standards on Fundraising of the International Council of Museums

## INTRODUCTION

The following standards elaborate on the principles of the *ICOM Code of Ethics for Museums* concerning the development of financial resources for a museum through fundraising. In this document, financial support refers to money raised by a museum from external sources including individuals, philanthropic organizations, foundations, businesses, and governmental bodies. In all circumstances, museums must comply with all applicable laws related to raising funds for its activities and should reference the *ICOM Code of Ethics for Museums* as a cornerstone of all fundraising policies.

## ETHICAL PRINCIPLES (from the *ICOM Code of Ethics for Museums*)

*Museums are responsible for the tangible and intangible natural and cultural heritage. Governing bodies and those concerned with the strategic direction and oversight of museums have a primary responsibility to protect and promote this heritage as well as the human, physical and financial resources made available for that purpose.*

### **Funding**

*The [museum's] governing body should ensure that there are sufficient funds to carry out and develop the activities of the museum. All funds must be accounted for in a professional manner.<sup>1</sup>*

### **Income-generating Policy**

*The governing body should have a written policy regarding sources of income that it may generate through its activities or accept from outside sources. Regardless of funding source, museums should maintain control of the content and integrity of their programmes, exhibitions and activities. Income-generating activities should not compromise the standards of the institution or its public.<sup>2</sup>*

*Museum collections reflect the cultural and natural heritage of the communities from which they have been derived. As such, they have a character beyond that of ordinary property, which may include strong affinities with national, regional, local, ethnic,*

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<sup>1</sup> ICOM Code of Ethics for Museum, 1.9

<sup>2</sup> ICOM Code of Ethics for Museums, 1.10

*religious or political identity. It is important therefore that museum policy is responsive to this situation when seeking funds for activities involving contemporary communities.*<sup>3</sup>

## **FUNDRAISING POLICY**

Each museum should have a fundraising policy that governs the solicitation, acceptance and stewardship of monetary donations by the museum and provides information for prospective donors about how a museum is accountable to its supporters. This policy should address the legal and ethical principles and professional responsibilities involved in accepting such donations. It should address the museum's goals for developing and managing financial support and define the sources of income that the museum may generate through its activities or accept from external sources. Will the museum, for example, accept donations that support the acquisition of art works? Staff positions? Renovation? Operating costs?

The fundraising policy should be developed with and approved by the museum's governing body and should be published, in print and in digital format online. The governing body should regularly review, evaluate, and update the policy. Discussions about the policy should be transparent, and all staff members should be aware of the principles and procedures that it includes. The policy should outline the procedures that the museum will use in evaluating, accepting, and documenting donations and identify the individuals (both members of the governing body and staff) who should be involved in making decisions about the acceptance of financial support.

## **CONSIDERATIONS WHEN DEVELOPING AND MANAGING FINANCIAL SUPPORT**

Museums should develop and manage financial support, whether from individuals or from other entities, such as businesses, in a way that is consistent with their mission and values. They should be transparent to their potential donors, providing accurate information about their mission, finances, and programs. They should make sure that a donation will not result in a conflict of interest or an appearance of such conflict for the museum as well as for any of the museum's staff, volunteers, or governing body members.

Museums should create a process through which they may decide whether or not to accept financial support that is offered to them. They should consider whether to exclude any specific business or kind of business because of the business' products and services, taking into account the characteristics, values, and attitudes related to these products and services. This decision should be made in view of not only the museum's mission but also its respective communities. For example, a museum might

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<sup>3</sup> ICOM Code of Ethics for Museums, 6.6

consider whether or not to accept funds from tobacco companies, gun manufacturers, fossil fuel extractors or any other potentially controversial kind of business.

Financial support often comes with expectations on the donor's part regarding involvement in the activities of the museum. To maintain public trust, museums should retain control of the content and integrity of all its programs, exhibitions, and activities, without undue interference from donors.

The financial support a museum receives should be documented in written agreements with the donor that spell out the conditions of the financial support and the expectations of all parties involved. The agreement should specify that the museum will retain ultimate control of its exhibitions and programs related to the financial support. Museums should steward the funds that they receive responsibly and provide timely reports about the use of funds to their donors as well as to the public unless confidentiality is requested by the donor and permitted by law.

### **CONSIDERATIONS AFTER ACCEPTING FUNDS**

If, after a museum accepts financial support from an individual or from other entities, such as businesses, a situation occurs where the reputation of the donor or an action on the part of the donor is called into question, a museum should consider whether the circumstances will have a negative impact upon the museum and its credibility. If a museum determines that its reputation is endangered by this situation, the museum may decide to make a public statement explaining its position or, in extreme situations, a museum may return the financial support. Clear and open communication about the situation with staff, volunteers, leadership, governing bodies, and the museum's communities, is essential, whatever the resolution.

Fundraising is increasingly a part of many museums' activities. At the same time, the environment for raising financial support is becoming more challenging and competitive. These standards are intended as guidance for museums so that they may maintain professional standards and the confidence of the public they serve.

Guidelines developed by ETHCOM and approved by the Executive Board in December 2020. If you have questions and study cases related to the topic of this document please write to: [ethics@icom.museum](mailto:ethics@icom.museum)