Collections Management Assessment

2023-2024

Eleanor Sandys, LOTUS art & museum services

ASSESSMENT: PHASE I

Phase I: September 2023 – July 2024

LOTUS art & museum services assessed the following key areas of TriMet's public art collection management practices:

- Collection records, data and management system
- Collection management policies and practices
- Artwork condition and maintenance needs

TRIMET

Objective I

Assess and evaluate collections records and data, including paper files, digital files, and collections management database

Objective I - Methods

- In-person visits to view permanent records in paper form

- Close review of files and organization on TriMet's shared drive

- In depth assessment of how the PAP is using the online collection management database, Argus

Objective I – Paper Files Findings

- In line with best practices, permanent paper folders for each artwork containing key information and documents, labeled by accession number

- A few artworks without folders; some folders with outdated accession numbers

- Recommendation: Archival materials are needed for long-term preservation

Objective I – Digital Files Findings

- Important documentation kept for artworks in the collection, as well as information about maintenance or conservation treatments

- Relevant documentation in many different locations, making it difficult to find specific information or identify gaps in documentation

Objective I – Digital Files Findings

- Priority recommendation: implement a file organization system with a parent folder for each artwork, organized by accession number

- Organization system also recommended for multi-effort maintenance projects (for example, a structural inspection report on multiple artworks)

Objective I – Accession Numbers

- A significant problem identified was that the accession number formula was problematic for reports and sorting folders digitally

- Recommended: improved methodology for accession numbers

- Worked with staff to finalize new accession numbers

Objective I – Database Findings

- Argus, the online collection management database used by PAP, is a high functioning system with strong searching and reporting capabilities that has been tailored to the collection's needs

- The database is an essential repository and holds comprehensive information for each artwork

TRI✿MET

Objective I – Database Findings

- **Improvements were identified to take advantage of the robust capabilities of Argus and help improve TriMet's management of artwork data and collections management processes**

- **A report was provided listing and prioritizing the specific recommended improvements, and describing the reasoning for each recommendation**

Objective II

Review collections-related policies and practices

Objective II - Methods

- Review of all policies, guidelines, and written procedures related to managing the collection

- Meetings, verbal and written communication with PAP Administrator about procedures and practices, and clarification on status and use of guidelines

Objective II – Resources Findings

- TriMet recognizes at the Policy and budgeting level the need for funds for caring for the collection, and has invested significantly in allocating funds for graffiti abatement and maintenance projects in the past 5 years

- For a collection of this size and complexity, the PAP is understaffed, with the current 1 FTE managing work beyond the capacity of one person

Objective II – Policy, Guidelines, & Procedures Findings

- A agency-level policy establishes funding for the PAP

- Some guidelines for collection management are in place (like deaccessioning), but need updating to align with current best practices

- Recommendation: create a Collection Management Manual to address all areas of collection management; recommended outline was provided by this contractor

Objective II – PAAC Findings

- **In alignment with best practices, a Public Art Advisory Committee (PAAC), made up of community members with expertise related to public art, informs the PAP**
- **The PAAC has recently been re-formed after a hiatus**

Objective II – PAAC Findings

- **Updated guidelines will help the PAAC to make informed recommendations**

- **Recommendation: Develop training materials to educate committees on materials and maintenance to help reduce maintenance needs long term**

Objective II – Access to Collection

- **Though information about the collection is online, it's hard to find for a TriMet user or member of the public**

- **The public portal is a great tool, but design and functionality need significant improving to be useful**

- Recommendation: Plaques on site for all artworks, crediting the artist and PAP and providing information to the public

Objective III

Assess condition and maintenance needs of installed collection, including in-person condition assessments of a portion of the collection

Objective III - Methods

- In-person condition assessment with written reports and photo documentation of approximately 50% of the collection

- Review documents and data related to maintenance and conservation efforts

- Verbal and written communication with PAP Administrator

Objective III – Condition Findings

- Over half (57%) of the artworks are in Good or Excellent condition

- 43% in Fair or Poor condition, or no longer extant

- Half of the examined artworks are in need of maintenance, and 23% need conservation or replacement of a missing element

- Very few potential safety issues identified

Objective III – Condition Findings

Overall condition of inspected artworks:

- Excellent: 3

- Good: 75

- Fair: 42

- Poor: 10

- No longer extant: 6

Objective III – Condition Findings

Maintenance needs:

- Potential safety issue: 1

- Needs maintenance: 69 (50%)

- Needs conservation: 31 (23%)

- Consider for deaccession: 7

- Recommended for re-siting: 2

Objective III – Condition Findings

Common maintenance needs:

- Cleaning of grime and bio growth (algae, moss)

- Grout/mortar/sealant repair

- Concrete repair/patching

- Replacement of protective film over etched glass panes

- Routine cleaning of graffiti

Objective III – Condition Findings

Common conservation needs:

- Re-create and install missing element

- Metal treatment of rust

- Routine conservation for care of bronze (every 1-2 years: cleaning and re-application of sacrificial protective layer)

Objective III – Maintenance Practice Findings

- PAP Administrator has successfully advocated for funding to care for the collection, and overseen significant amounts of maintenance and conservation projects

- The maintenance needs of the collection – both regular and unexpected – exceed the capacity of 1 FTE position

Objective III – Maintenance Practice Findings

- A great deal of maintenance and conservation has happened over the past 5 years, and documentation of it has been saved

- However, the information needs to be entered into Argus and better organized for efficient access and to better understand the quantity of completed treatments and history of maintenance for individual artworks

Objective IV

Provide report on findings of collection management assessment and recommendations

TRIMET

Objective IV – Report

- A series of reports were provided to the TriMet PAP, each followed by feedback and discussion

- Recommendations from the reports were utilized to develop Phase II of the collection management assessment - implementation

TRIMET

Phase II Progress

Phase II, implementation of recommendations began in May 2024 and are ongoing with assistance of paid intern, admin assistant and this contractor, including:

- Potential safety concern addressed immediately
- Accession numbers updated in Argus and digital records

Phase II Progress

- Digital object records created and are being populated (ongoing)

- Archival paper folders acquired and migration of physical permanent records is in progress

- PAP FY25 Maintenance Plan in progress based on condition assessments of initial 50% of the collection

Phase II Future Work

- Implement priority database improvements

- Coordinate data entry and file organization for past maintenance and conservation treatments

- Complete condition assessments of remaining 50% of collection.

- Develop routine maintenance schedule for collection.

- Work with PAP Admin and other TriMet employees to make improvements to the public portal