



Historical Records Theft: Strategies for Prevention and Response

Online Search Procedure

Overview

It is important to have a systematic and well documented approach to locating stolen records offered for sale on online auction sites such as eBay. If resources permit, a team-based approach is recommended for any online search process to minimize the likelihood of an insider thief taking responsibility for searches. At minimum, more than one person should be responsible for every step of the process.

An established search methodology will greatly increase the likelihood of recovering stolen records offered for sale on online auction sites. Regular online searches may also alert you to items missing from your collection and the occurrence of a previously unknown theft. Your methodology should include procedures for locating records, assessing your search results and recovering the records.

Search

Searches should be conducted by more than one person in your organization.

- Determine if you will use an automated search utility or conduct manual searches.
- Identify categories of materials to search.
- Conduct consistent but not regularly scheduled searches.

Assessment

Once auctions of potentially stolen records are identified you must evaluate if the records are stolen from your repository.

- Conduct assessment within a set period after auction is identified by searchers.
- Compare auctions identified during your search to any records in your missing records log.
- Compare auctions of potentially stolen records to accession records, finding-aids, inventories and deeds of gift.

Response

If records offered on an auction site are likely to be stolen from your repository you will need to initiate recovery procedures.

- Compile documentation establishing ownership of potentially stolen records.
- Contact legal council and local law enforcement.
- Contact auction site, if appropriate.
- Contact seller, if appropriate.
- Publicize theft including any related materials that may also be missing from

your collection.

- Update staff and members of your governing body about theft and recovery procedures.

Documentation

Searches, assessments and responses should be documented and tracked using either paper forms or a database. Your search documentation should collect the following information for each auction of potentially stolen records.

- Searcher
- Date of search
- Auction site searched
- Auction title
- Auction ID
- Closing date of auction
- Auction item URL
- Seller
- Purchaser (if available)
- Category
- Assessment of auction
- Recommended action
- Notification of theft