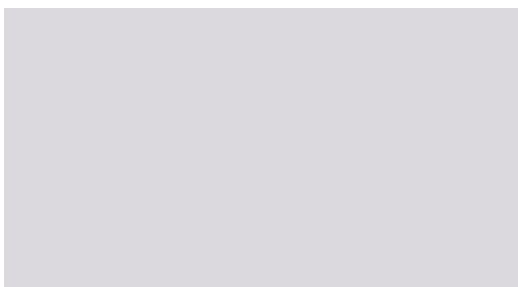
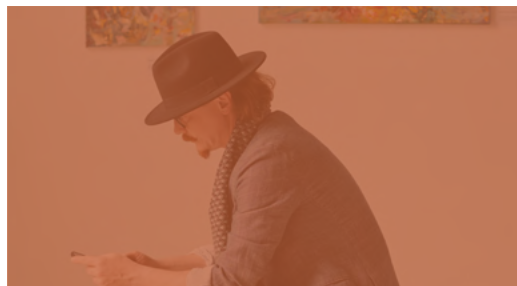
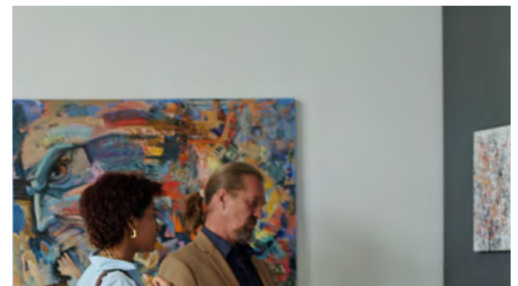
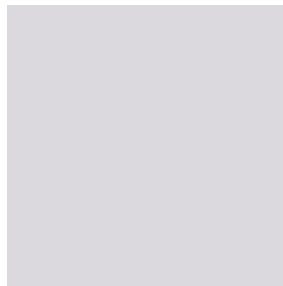
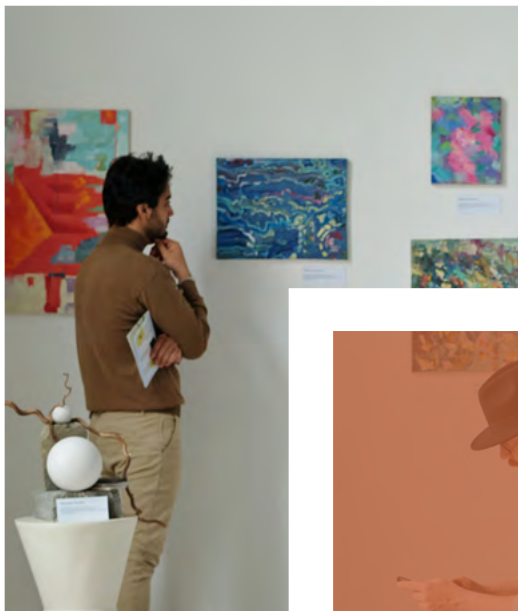


The Essential Guide to Managing Exhibitions in TMS Collections





Exhibitions are among the most visible and resource-intensive projects a museum undertakes. They involve curators, registrars, conservators, educators, and designers, each contributing vital expertise. Coordinating these efforts requires a system that captures details, fosters collaboration, and preserves a permanent record for future reference.

TMS Collections, part of the TMS Suite by Gallery Systems, is built to support museums in this work. From the early stages of planning to post-exhibition reporting, TMS Collections centralizes workflows and data, ensuring institutions save time while protecting the accuracy and richness of their exhibition records.

This guide explores how to make the most of the Exhibitions Module and provides insights into best practices for museum professionals.

Understanding the types of exhibitions that should be catalogued in TMS Collections

Exhibitions vary widely in scope, duration, and audience – and even in location. Some occur in-house, others are displayed outside of your institution, and some may not be physically installed at all! It is relevant and encouraged to enter all these kinds of exhibition records in the Exhibitions Module of **TMS Collections**.

TMS Collections supports the cataloguing of many different types of exhibitions, including:



Internal Exhibitions: Created and displayed within your institution, often drawn from the permanent collection.



External Exhibitions: When collection objects are exhibited at another institution (usually via an outgoing loan).



Travelling Exhibitions: Multi-venue exhibitions requiring precise scheduling and documentation.



Virtual Exhibitions: Groups of records presented as online exhibitions, published via **eMuseum**.

By creating TMS Collections Exhibition records for all these types of exhibitions, a true exhibition history is built automatically in the Objects Module. This allows staff to see how often an object has been exhibited, and in what context.

In **TMS Collections**, it is not difficult to distinguish one type of Exhibition from another in the Exhibitions Module. You can enter this data quickly and see it immediately when viewing records. There are a series of checkboxes featured prominently in the Exhibition record. Internal exhibitions can be designated with the “In-House Exhibition” checkbox, whereas external exhibitions would leave that checkbox unchecked. The “Traveling Exhibition” checkbox is used to show an exhibition has multiple venues. Finally, online exhibitions can be flagged with the “Virtual Exhibition” checkbox. Because these are separate checkboxes, you can include as many as you need for the exhibition you are working on.

Best Practice: Enter Exhibition records for all types of exhibitions, including in-house, external, traveling, or virtual exhibitions. Utilize the checkboxes in the Exhibitions Module to designate the type of exhibition quickly and efficiently.

Starting with Object Packages

Every exhibition begins with an idea: a curatorial vision, a request from a partner, or a theme inspired by recent acquisitions. Developing a checklist of objects is often the first step in the creation of an exhibition.

TMS Collections uses object packages to create saved groupings of selected records:

- Curators assemble groups of objects supporting a concept.
- Curators can rearrange the order of the objects and can add or remove objects from the package as needed.
- Packages can be shared with registrars, conservators, and other relevant staff for feasibility checks.
- Loan requests can be evaluated by creating a package of requested works.

This collaborative tool allows staff to transition smoothly from idea to planning, moving from an initial checklist to a more refined (or even finalized) one. Object packages set the stage for creating robust exhibition records.

Best Practice: Encourage curators to begin every project with an object package in TMS Collections. Doing so ensures consistent tracking and makes it easy to link objects to an exhibition later without re-entering data.



***Tip:** In the case of an external exhibition, the first thing that would happen is an outside institution makes a loan request. It is still likely that this workflow would begin with an object package. Staff should put the object(s) being requested for loan into a package and share it with all team members that are part of the loan approval process, such as registrars, curators, and conservators. All parties can now determine if all objects in the request are appropriate for loan. The package remains an asset that can be used to link the objects to a record in the Loans Module!*



Creating an Exhibition Record

After creating the object package, the time will come to create the exhibition record. You may be developing the project beyond a simple checklist – perhaps you have created an exhibition title, or the display dates or venues are beginning to be discussed. It is now time to create a record in the Exhibitions Module of **TMS Collections**. This record serves as the backbone of planning and collaboration.

An **exhibition record** captures critical details:

Titles and mnemonics for easy searching.

Planning stage and approximate dates.

Linked staff (constituents) with defined roles.

Venues and associated details.

Linked objects drawn from packages or lists.

This central record ensures that everyone—curators, registrars, and technicians—is working from the same authoritative information and recognizing up-to-the-moment updates and changes.

By creating and maintaining an exhibition record, museums ensure continuity, reduce risk, and support accurate reporting to boards, funders, and partners. The exhibition record will also function as an archive of information about the exhibition, even as it moves through the different planning stages.

Best Practice: Consider the fields that your institution needs. Customize your data entry views in the Composer to fit your workflows. For example, remove fields not relevant to your team or add new widgets that capture institution-specific needs. At minimum, a well-catalogued exhibition should have data in the following fields:

- Exhibition Title
- Mnemonic (the short name of the exhibition)
- Department/Planning Stage
- Begin and End Dates
- At least one Exhibition-Related Constituent (staff name)
- At least one Venue
- At least one linked Object record

Managing Planning Stages and User Access

Exhibitions evolve through distinct phases, each with its own requirements. From planning to installation and eventually de-installation, different staff need varying levels of access.

The **Planning Stage** (otherwise known as the **Department**) field in **TMS Collections** serves two major functions: it allows users to divide up their vast number of Exhibitions records into sub-groups, thus making it easier to query all the future exhibitions, or those that are on view now, versus those that are completed. Additionally, System Administrators can grant or restrict viewing or editing permission based on these Planning Stages.

The Planning Stage field helps manage both organization and access. Examples of some recommended planning stages are:



Pending: Early collaboration is encouraged, so many users may need access to edit these exhibition records.



Active: Editing rights are restricted to protect approved label text or final designs.



Completed/Archived: Records are preserved with limited editing, ensuring accuracy for the historical record.



Canceled: Exhibition records that did not come to fruition for some reason (optional, but could be useful for staff to track and possibly revisit someday).

Planning stages keep exhibitions on track and ensure records remain reliable. They also protect data integrity when staff turnover or overlapping responsibilities occur. The Planning Stage will be updated several times during the lifetime of a typical exhibition record.

Best Practice: Always keep the Planning Stage field up to date. Use user security by planning stage to empower collaboration early on but lock down records when exhibitions are live or completed. This prevents accidental edits to finalized data such as label copy.



***Tip:** Saved Dashboard Queries can be developed to help staff see the exhibitions they are currently working on. A Query for the "Pending" Planning Stage will display all upcoming exhibitions on the Dashboard. Add other criteria, such as the linked constituent "is current user" to see only the upcoming exhibitions you are linked to! Dashboard queries are always up to date, so if an exhibition moves to the "Active" Planning Stage, it will disappear from the Dashboard, thus displaying just what you need to see and refreshing automatically.*

Tracking Venues and Object Movements

For many exhibitions, particularly travelling ones, venue management is complex. Institutions must track where each object is, when, and under what conditions.

In **TMS Collections**, venues are captured as **constituent records**. Linking them to exhibitions allowing you to:

- Assign approval status (approved or denied).
- Record exact or estimated dates.
- Flag international venues for reporting.
- Track inclusions and exclusions of objects per venue.

The **venues dashboard** is a data view that automatically updates based on venue entry. It effortlessly provides an at-a-glance overview of all venues, contact details, and object counts, making logistics management easier.

Accurate venue tracking is essential for security, insurance, and public accountability. TMS Collections ensures every object movement is documented with precision.

Best Practice: Link all relevant venues to an exhibition record, including your own. Maintain accurate included/excluded object lists per venue. Use the venue dashboard to provide a top-level view of the exhibition for staff. It reduces the need for manual reporting and ensures transparency. A well-catalogued venue should have data in the following fields:

- Venue Constituent (the Borrower or Lender)
- Venue Mnemonic (the short name of this Borrower or Lender)
- Venue Begin/End Dates
- Objects (ensuring the included and excluded objects are kept up to date)



Linking Objects and Building Exhibition Histories

Every exhibition an object participates in becomes part of its story. Capturing this history ensures the institution has a full record for scholarship and future planning.

By linking objects to exhibitions:



An exhibition checklist is created.



Individual object labels can be written.



An installation plan can be developed.



The Objects Module automatically builds an **exhibition history**.



Staff can see past and present exhibitions from the object record.



Exhibition history supports curatorial research, provenance tracking, and loan negotiations.

Maintaining exhibition histories strengthens institutional memory and enhances both scholarly and public engagement with your collection.

Best Practice: Encourage staff to review exhibition histories before proposing loans or new projects. This helps avoid overexposure of certain objects and provides insights into past curatorial decisions.



Enriching Records with Supporting Data

Beyond logistics, exhibitions produce interpretation, documentation, and media that deserve to be preserved.

TMS Collections allows staff to enrich records with:

- **Text entries** for labels, didactic panels, and installation instructions.
- **Media files** such as installation photography, graphics files, and floor plans.
- **Custom constituent roles** that reflect your institution's unique staffing (e.g., guest curator, community advisor).
- **Public information** pushed directly into **eMuseum** for online access.

Capturing interpretive and supporting material ensures exhibitions live on as a resource for future scholarship, not just as temporary events.

Best Practice: If any data is created specifically for the purpose of the exhibition (such as label copy, press releases, marketing materials, educational materials, and more), it should be added to the exhibition record. Text entries on the overall exhibition record as well as on the linked objects can be used for this. Flex Fields can be used to create additional custom fields to track even more details. Some materials can be linked as media.



Tip: In addition to linking installation images to exhibition records, also link graphics files, floor plans, checklists, installation diagrams, and any other documents or files that were created for the purpose of this exhibition. These become invaluable for future reference, whether to inspire new shows or evaluate past display strategies. This also allows TMS Collections to be the centralized hub of data about this specific exhibition. The exhibition record becomes akin to a finding aid and will help staff locate relevant files.



Best Practices for Exhibition Management

Exhibitions require coordination across teams and disciplines. A consistent approach ensures efficiency and accuracy.

To maximize the benefits of **TMS Collections'** Exhibitions Module:



Begin with object packages.



Standardize key fields across departments.



Utilize and update planning stages to balance collaboration and control.



Record venues thoroughly for each show.



Link objects to build complete exhibition histories.



Enrich records with text and media.

By adopting these practices, museums create not only successful exhibitions but also enduring institutional resources that support scholarship, reporting, and public engagement.

Best Practice: Schedule periodic reviews of past exhibitions in TMS Collections. This ensures records remain complete and can be mined for insights into audience engagement, curatorial trends, and collection use.

Speak to an Exhibition Expert

Exhibitions are dynamic, public-facing projects that showcase a collection's power and relevance.

TMS Collections ensures these complex undertakings are well-documented, efficiently managed, and preserved for future generations.

Learn more about how TMS Collections can streamline exhibition management by speaking to a member of the Gallery Systems team.

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