



**FRAMINGHAM HISTORY CENTER  
COLLECTIONS POLICY**

Adopted February 8, 2022

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## **I. Statement of Purpose**

The Framingham History Center (FHC) Collections Policy supports the mission statement of the FHC, and governs all activities relating to the development and use of the FHC's collections. The policy becomes effective upon its approval by the FHC Board of Directors on February 8, 2022, and replaces all previous collections policies.

## **II. Ethics statement**

The FHC subscribes to the ethics codes and standards of two professional organizations to which it belongs: the American Association of Museums, and the American Association of State and Local History. The FHC expects its Board, its committee members, and its staff, both paid and volunteer, to abide by those standards.

Specifically, with respect to personal collecting, all Board and committee members, and staff, both paid and volunteer, should be aware of the collections policy and should at all times avoid any conflict of interest in their own personal collecting activities. A Board member must make a full, written disclosure of interests, relationships and holdings that could potentially result in a conflict of interest. This written disclosure will be kept on file and updated as appropriate. The Board member shall disclose any interests in a transaction of the History Center or decision where the Board member or affiliated party (including business, family or other affiliations), will receive a benefit or gain.

## **III. Responsibility for the Collections, and Delegation of Authority**

The collections are owned by the FHC and held in trust by the Board of Directors. With certain exceptions noted below, the Board delegates authority to the Director to ensure that the collections are managed in accordance with professional museum standards as outlined below. The general authority to collect materials for the Framingham History Center is vested in the Director and delegated to the Curator who recommends objects for acquisition consideration. The Collections Committee reviews recommendations from the Curator on potential accession donations and purchases and votes on whether or not to add these objects to the permanent collection.

## **IV. Scope of Collections**

The Framingham History Center collects artifacts, tangible (physical objects) and intangible (oral histories, inherently digital objects, etc.), that are quintessentially Framingham. Our collections hold up a mirror to the community while answering the question "What makes this place special?". The FHC does not collect, artifacts based solely on aesthetics, artifacts that have no specific tie to Framingham, artifacts with no provenance or story. Such objects may serve as exhibit props or as part of the hand on/education collection, but should not be formally accessioned. See "Scope of collections" addenda for more specifics about this policy.

## **V. Collections Committee**

### **A. Appointment**

The Board of Directors of the FHC may appoint a Collections Committee to review potential acquisitions periodically; to review proposed deaccessions as needed; and to advise on other issues directly related to the collections, and collections management. See "Collections Committee Guidelines" addenda for more specifics about the committee's duties.

### **B. Meetings and Quorum**

A quorum of the Collections Committee is the majority of the Collections Committee. The Collections Committee meets no fewer than 4 times per year and no more than once per month, for a review of objects or issues when a quorum can be present. A date for the next committee meeting will be set before the end of each meeting.

### **C. Curator and Collections Manager**

The Curator and the Collections Manager are ex-officio, non-voting members of the Collections Committee.

## **VI. Acquisitions**

### **A. Criteria**

- i. FHC adopted a variation on the Active Collections Manifesto in 2016. All collections decisions should be informed by this document. See "Active Collections Manifesto" addenda for more specifics about this policy.
- ii. Materials must help to tell or illustrate the story of Framingham in some meaningful way.
- iii. Duplication within the collection is to be avoided except in exceptional circumstances.
- iv. Objects that cannot be properly cared for according to current professional standards will not be accessioned into the collection.
- v. Additional criteria may be specified by recommendation of the Director, Curator, and Collections Manager and approved by vote of the Collections Committee.

### **B. Procedures**

- i. Acquisitions in general
  - a. The FHC may acquire materials by gift, bequest, or purchase. A Receipt of Donation, including information as to how the object is to be dealt with if it is not accessioned into the collection, is required for objects to be considered for accession. Objects that are left at FHC without such paperwork will be considered abandoned property An

Abandoned Property Receipt must be completed before any further action is taken regarding these objects.

- b. The Curator takes the initiative in locating potential acquisition materials that will increase the educational value of the collections and/or upgrade existing materials. If an object is accessioned because it is a better version of an existing collection item, those collection objects should be deaccessioned at the same time that the incoming item is accessioned.
- c. The Curator will review all incoming potential accession items and will bring the materials they recommend for accession to the Collections Committee. A majority vote of the Collections Committee will constitute approval to accept materials. A report on items not presented for accession will be provided to the Collections Committee.
- d. If the Collections Committee fails to generate a majority vote to accept or not to accept materials, the item(s) may be tabled until a future meeting. If the issue is tabled more than once, the issue will then be passed on to the Board of Directors who will vote on whether or not to accept the materials into the collection.
- e. Transfer of ownership to the FHC shall be confirmed by a Deed of Gift or other statement in writing signed by the legal owner, such as the Receipt of Donation, whenever possible. Abandoned Property Receipts will be retained for objects without such documentation. All ownership paperwork will be stored in the object record for each accession.
- f. The Curator shall submit a record of all acquisitions to the Board of Directors at least once a year, and inform the Board of Directors of any highly significant acquisitions in a timely manner.

#### C. Gifts and bequests

In general, gifts and bequests to the collection must be free of all encumbrances regarding their future disposition or use. Any exception to this condition must be recommended by the Director and the Curator, approved by the Collections Committee, and referred to the Board of Directors for final approval.

#### D. Purchases

- i. Purchases for the FHC collection will be made from the Collections Fund, a fund, which is restricted to use for

- acquisition or direct costs of care or conservation of collection materials.
- ii. Purchases of \$1000 or more (funds permitting) will be reviewed by the Board of Directors prior to completing purchases whenever possible.
  - iii. When timing is a factor in completing the purchase, the Director, in consultation with the Curator and the Collections Committee Chair, will act as the Board's representative.
  - iv. Purchases made by the Director or Curator will be reviewed by the Collections Committee before being accessioned into the collection.

## **VII. Deaccessions, and Disposition of Objects "Found in Collection"**

### **A. Deaccessioning - General considerations and conditions**

- i. Deaccessioning is the process of permanently removing from the collections accessioned museum holdings. The deaccession process shall be cautious, deliberate, and scrupulous.
- ii. The disposal of objects from the collections for any reason has ethical, legal and financial consequences which must be considered. Materials accepted into the collections will be retained permanently unless they are recommended for deaccession, based on one or more of the criteria specified below.
- iii. In conformance with the U.S. Tax Reform Act of 1984 and I.R.S. regulations, no accessioned materials shall be deaccessioned for any reason until two years after the date of accession unless the item(s) was accessioned in error, either through clerical oversight or discovery that the accession is a duplicate of an existing item.
- iv. A review must be conducted to ensure that the FHC has clear title to the material, and that the deaccessioning will not violate the terms of a gift or bequest.

### **B. Criteria for Deaccession**

- i. The material is outside the scope of the mission and collections policy of the FHC, or has no value to the FHC for research, exhibition, educational or study purposes. Special consideration shall be given to retaining materials that document the early collecting patterns of the Framingham History Center.
- ii. The material is a duplicate or redundant copy of existing material in the collection, or a better example of the material has been acquired by the FHC.
- iii. The material can no longer be properly cared for according to current professional standards. This may be due to substantial deterioration, compromising its integrity or authenticity, and the

- expense of repair, conservation or restoration exceeds the value of the material to the collection.
- iv. The material threatens the physical safety of the staff, visitors, facility or other collection materials, and this condition cannot be remedied.

#### C. Deaccession Procedure

- i. The Curator may recommend deaccessioning materials if, in his/her best judgment, the conditions and one or more of the criteria for deaccessioning has been met. The recommendation will include the source and/or provenance of the materials, if known, and the reason(s) for deaccessioning.
- ii. The Collections Committee will consider the Curator's recommendation. If the Committee approves deaccession of the material, the recommendation will be submitted to the Board of Directors for final approval before disposing of the material.

#### D. Method of Disposal for Deaccessioned Materials

Items that have been donated to the Framingham History Center and formally accepted into its collection have been given to the organization with an understanding that they would be kept in the public trust. It shall always be the preference of the FHC that these items should, if possible, remain within the public trust. The Director or Curator may seek the opinion of legal counsel and/or other outside experts in an appropriate professional field, concerning the proposed act of disposal.

If possible, items shall be offered back to the donor, provided s/he is still living, or to another institution (historical, governmental, educational, etc.) to which it may be applicable.

If item is to be sold, this shall be the order of preference for sales:

- Sale to another museum/historic institution
- Sale at public auction (or via consignment) through unaffiliated auctioneer/seller

Items the FHC has unsuccessfully tried to dispose of through all of the above channels are assumed to be of minimal value and limited interest. These items may be offered directly for sale by the FHC at publicly advertised events or through FHC-facilitated public auction such as eBay.

In accordance with museum best practices and the Collections Policy of the FHC, items from the FHC collections will not be sold to FHC staff, donors, members, Board members, or Collections Committee members unless at public auction or publicly advertised sale. No preferential access to deaccessioned collection items shall be granted to FHC staff, donors, members, Board members, or Collections Committee members.

E. Disposition of Materials “found in collection”

The assumption should be made that items found in collection were donated to the FHC in the good faith that the organization would keep them in the public trust. The failure to properly document the items is entirely the burden of the Framingham History Center. These items should therefore be treated as part of the FHC’s collection and should be disposed of in the same manner as deaccessioned items.

**VIII. Loans**

Conditions, procedures, and monitoring of loans (both outgoing and incoming) are the Curator’s responsibility, except as outlined below.

A. Loans from the FHC (outgoing):

- i. Objects and other collections materials may be granted as loans to recognized museums, historical societies or educational organizations for exhibition, study and/or public education, subject to conditions imposed by the FHC to ensure the protection, safe transport, return and appropriate insurance for the materials. These terms must be detailed in a formal loan agreement.
- ii. Under certain circumstances materials which are duplicates and of minimal value may be granted as a short-term loan to an individual for an expressly approved educational purpose. These items must be signed out by the borrower with written approval from the Curator.
- iii. A loan of collections materials from FHC to another organization shall be subject to approval by the Collections Committee, upon the recommendation of the Curator. The Board of Directors shall be informed of all outgoing loans to other organizations.

B. Loans to the FHC (incoming):

- i. Materials from other institutions and/or individuals may be borrowed for a specific exhibition or for research. The FHC does not accept materials on “permanent” loan.
- ii. For both outgoing and incoming loans, a loan agreement in writing must be signed by both the lender and the borrower, or their authorized representatives.

**IX. Documentation**

The FHC shall maintain accurate records on all objects in its care. FHC will maintain both paper and digital accession records. All paper records shall be safeguarded from hazards such as fire, water, smoke damage, or loss.

**X. Care and conservation**

The FHC will care for the permanent collections using approved museum techniques for storage and exhibition, and giving attention to environmental



conditions. As funding permits, collection materials may be conserved, to assure their preservation and/or suitability for exhibition. Such work shall respect the integrity of the materials and shall be documented.

#### **XI. Access**

The FHC will strive to provide maximum access to its collections to the public for research and exhibition consistent with staff availability and the security, safety and conservation of the objects.

Certain materials, restricted as a condition of their accession to the collection, shall not be released for public access while restrictions are in place. Requests for access to FHC collections records will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis. Some records containing confidential information, such as addresses of donors, shall not be released.

#### **XII. Appraisals**

In accordance with ethical standards of the American Association of Museums, the determination of value of all gifts is the responsibility of the donor. FHC staff shall not determine the value of gifts, but may assist donors in the identification of qualified appraisers.

#### **XIII. Conditions for Temporary Custody**

Materials left in the custody of the FHC, for research, identification or for consideration for accession to the collection, must bear clear identification as to ownership, and as to the owner's intent in placing materials in custody. Items without this information will be considered abandoned property.

The FHC assumes no responsibility for the damage, loss, destruction or theft of deposited materials.

Materials left in custody will be returned only to the owner, unless otherwise requested in writing by the owner.

#### **XIV. Insurance**

##### A. Permanent Collection

The permanent collection of the FHC shall be covered by insurance to the extent that funding permits. The status of insurance coverage of the permanent collection shall be subject to an annual review.

##### B. Loans to the FHC

Loans to the FHC may be insured at the request of the lender under the fine arts policy of the FHC, as specified in the loan agreement. Loans from the FHC may be insured by the borrower, under the terms specified in the loan agreement.

#### **XV. Reproduction & Copyright**

Whenever feasible, the FHC shall obtain copyright for objects in the three-dimensional collection, and materials in the archival collection.

The FHC holds copyright on work done for hire, produced by staff members or commissioned from others.

The FHC may charge fees and/or require written permission for certain uses of materials to which the FHC holds copyright.

Copyright on materials in the library is often held by others, and the FHC cannot authorize use of such materials.

#### **XVI. NAGPRA**

It is the policy of the FHC to comply with Public Law 101-601, the "Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act."

#### **XVII. Public disclosure**

A copy of this policy shall be made available, upon request, to any donor or prospective donor, and/or any other responsible party.

#### **XVIII. Provisions for changes in policy**

This policy may be revised as required, at the request of the Director, the Curator, the Collections Committee or the Board of Directors. All revisions shall be reviewed by the Collections Committee, and their revisions will be taken into consideration. The revised policy will then be submitted to the Board of Directors for final approval.

**XIX. Addenda**

A. Mission statement, FHC



**Framingham History Center Mission Statement**

The mission of the Framingham History Center is to preserve and share Framingham's history in order to encourage connection to community.

- B. Ethics Code, AAM (adopted 1991, and as amended – [www.aam-us.org/aamcoe.cfm](http://www.aam-us.org/aamcoe.cfm); see “Collections.”)
- C. Ethics Code, AASLH (adopted 1992 – [www.aaslh.org/ethics.htm](http://www.aaslh.org/ethics.htm))

## D. Scope of Collections, FHC

### Framingham History Center Scope of Collections

We collect artifacts, tangible and intangible, that are quintessentially Framingham. Our collections hold up a mirror to the community while answering the question “What makes this place special?”

Our collections tell the stories of:

- Our Special Places: villages, neighborhoods, and communal spaces (Downtown Common, Centre Common, places of worship, Shopper’s World)
- Industry and Business: The evolution from cottage industries to global corporations and their impact on the community (straw bonnets, mills and manufacturing, biotech...)
- The Creative Spirit: moments of invention, innovation, and art (Margaret Knight, Meta Warrick Fuller, Floyd Walser, Dennison products...)
- The Land: Its variety, its beauty, and its natural resources
- The Changing Built Environment: the coexistence of rural, urban, and suburban development
- A Regional and Cultural Crossroads: The intersection of railroads, highways, and diverse communities
- The Volunteer Spirit: serving community and country (The Heart Study, Civil War enlistment, Peter Parker in China, the Military Girls’ Club...)
- The Lived Experience of Framingham: attending its schools, building its houses, working in its factories (farm diaries, personal letters, photos...)
- Families: Old families, new families, and families of choice; the ways they direct and drive the community
- Institutions, Traditions, and Celebrations: Those that are lost and those that continue (Town Meeting, Centennial celebrations, the FHC, the First Parish...)
- Immigrant Communities: how they developed, interacted and became part of the fabric of Framingham
- Class: class mobility, where classes mingle, where they diverge (Millwood Hunt, The North/South divide, Gentleman Farmers, Mill workers...)
- Community Inflection Points: Moments of change and resistance to change
- Presence: Framingham’s participation in significant national and international events. (Harmony Grove, Crispus Attucks, Heart Study, President Clinton in Framingham...)

The FHC does not collect:

- Artifacts based solely on aesthetics
- Artifacts that have no specific tie to Framingham
- Artifacts with no provenance or story

Such objects may serve as exhibit props or as part of the hand on/education collection, but should not be formally accessioned.

E. Collection Committee Guidelines, FHC

**Guidelines**  
**Framingham History Center Collections Committee**

1. Constitution and Purpose

1.1. Mission

- a. The Collections Committee shall uphold the Mission Statement of the Framingham History Center as it pertains to collections development, management, preservation, and access

**FHC Mission Statement:** The mission of the Framingham History Center is to preserve and share Framingham's history in order to encourage connection to community

- b. The Committee promotes academic and public engagement with, access to, and use of the collections
- c. The Committee promotes and supports partnerships with other collecting organizations to further the mission of the FHC

1.2. Duties

- a. The Committee shall review and vote on potential acquisitions
- b. The Committee shall review and vote on proposed deaccessions as needed
- c. The Committee shall review and vote on requests for outgoing loans as needed
- d. The Committee shall adhere to a yearly budget, prepared by the Curator, and approved by the Executive Director
- e. The Committee shall advise on issues directly related to the collections and collections management

1.3. The Committee serves at the discretion of the FHC Board of Directors

2. Membership

2.1. Members of the Collections Committee shall be approved by the Board of Directors of the Framingham History Center

2.2. The Committee shall consist of a minimum of 5 and a maximum of 9 voting members, including a Committee Chair and a Clerk

2.3. The Curator and Executive Director shall be ex-officio, non-voting members of the committee

2.4. 2 of the voting seats on the Committee shall be occupied by an FHC Board Member

2.5. The remaining voting seats on the Committee shall be occupied by FHC members

2.6. New members shall be nominated by a current Committee member and voted on by that body in advance of joining of the Committee

2.7. The Chair of the committee shall be selected from among the general FHC membership

2.8. Any other FHC staff may be provisional, non-voting members of the committee

2.9. Members are expected to attend meetings regularly and absences should be clearly communicated with the Curator and Committee Chair. Failure to regularly attend meetings may result in removal from the committee.

### 3. Meetings

- 3.1. The Committee shall meet monthly or whenever there is a need for review of objects or issues
- 3.2. A Quorum shall be present at all Committee meetings.
  - a. Quorum shall be a majority of the voting members of the collections committee

### 4. Procedures

- 4.1. The Committee shall adhere to the FHC Collections Policy
- 4.2. Voting on Accessions/Deaccessions
  - a. A quorum is required for the committee to vote on accessions and deaccessions
  - b. Each lot shall be considered for accession individually
  - c. Each potential deaccession shall be considered individually
  - d. A motion shall be made by a member of the committee to approve each potential accession/deaccession and shall be voted upon by the present members of the committee
  - e. If the majority of present committee members votes yea, the motion shall pass. If the majority votes nay, the motion shall not pass
  - f. Should a committee member possess a conflict of interest regarding a motion to Access/Deaccess, s/he shall abstain from voting
  - g. The Board of Directors shall review and vote on all Collections Committee Deaccession votes
- 4.3. Selecting a Chair
  - a. The Committee Chair shall be a member of the Committee who is not an FHC staff or board member
  - b. Should the Chair be vacant, members of the Committee shall appoint a Chair from within the Committee pending approval by the Board of Directors
- 4.4. Minutes and Recording Decisions
  - a. Minutes shall be taken summarizing relevant discussion points by the Clerk
    - a.1. Minutes shall be submitted to the committee for review prior to the next meeting
    - a.2. Meeting attendance shall be recorded by the clerk and included in the minutes
  - b. All decisions shall be recorded by the Clerk, submitted to the Curator and Executive Director, and recorded in the archives of the institution

## F. Active Collections Manifesto, FHC

### **A MANIFESTO FOR ACTIVE HISTORY MUSEUM COLLECTIONS**

Millions of artifacts in museum collections across the country are not actively supporting the institutions that steward them. Museums of all types are experiencing this problem, but it is particularly entrenched in history museums. Most history museums possess thousands of poorly maintained, inadequately cataloged, and underutilized artifacts. Instead of being active assets, these lazy artifacts drain vital resources. Multiple studies have assessed the problem of collections preservation, and each has proposed providing museums more money to process and preserve artifacts. But there's little point in preserving collections if they don't actively support the mission. We believe collections must either advance the mission or they must go. Collections are expensive. The time and money required to catalog and store objects ties up valuable resources that could be used elsewhere. Fortunately, museum professionals are recognizing that significant portions of their collections aren't pulling their weight, and attitudes are changing. But in the absence of a coherent philosophy or way forward, changing opinions have not yet led to changes in practice. Therefore the problem continues to get worse with each passing year. In addition, professional standards, funding models, and museum training programs still primarily support the idea that all collections are equally important, and that owning collections is as important as effectively using them. **We believe a new model for thinking about collections is needed.**

Collections are important to history museums. Artifacts are a deeply powerful way to connect with what it means to be human and to understand the past, present and future. In his compelling book *A History of the World in 100 Objects* Neil MacGregor, Director of the British Museum, argues that "telling history through things is what museums are for." Museums are uniquely positioned to use things to tell meaningful stories—but to do so they need to collect the right artifacts and make good use of them. **We believe that artifacts can be powerful tools—touchstones filled with meaning and connection—but only when used effectively.**

If museums existed simply to preserve things, the best way to save them would be to put the entire collection in an enormous freezer and never take anything out. But museums don't just preserve things; they also use them to inspire, enlighten, and connect. Every day museums balance the twin needs of preservation and access. Every time a piece is used by a researcher or is exhibited, the decision has been made to shorten its lifespan. We weigh these decisions against the rarity of the piece, its condition, and how important it is to the institution. How is it that we distinguish degrees of significance when we deal with individual objects and yet we are paralyzed into inaction when we look at an entire collection? Major conservation surveys and statewide risk assessments assume that all collections are equally valuable and are worthy of the same standard of care. **We believe some objects support the mission better than others—not based on monetary value or rarity, but based on the stories they tell and the ideas they illuminate. The ones that provide the most public value should get the largest share of our time and resources.**



We cannot continue to function in this manner. We live an era of hyper consumption and production. Material goods are produced at a rate that was unimaginable when American museums first started collecting. We've got to change how and what we collect or we'll drown in consumer goods. Many history museums have chosen (whether consciously or not) to ignore the problem of collecting contemporary artifacts because of the high volume, but simply avoiding the problem is not a solution. If museums are to be more than hoarders, we need to deal with this issue. Museums are fond of telling donors about the size of the collection, equating size with quality. We leave them with the idea that by simply getting more stuff, that makes us more relevant. **We believe we need to stop touting the size of museum collections and start talking about impact.**

### **A PATH TOWARD CHANGE**

What if museums had smaller, more focused collections, where each object truly pulled its weight? Help the field move forward! Join us in finding out.

1. **Make Collections Everyone's Issue.** Discuss collections at the board level. Take your board into collections storage. Calculate what it costs to collect, preserve and maintain your collections. Know the financial and personnel costs. Assess if your collections are active or lazy in supporting your mission.
2. **Initiate Smarter Sharing.** How many times has your institution acquired an object, not because it's unique or has an amazing story, but because it's a generic example that you might need someday for an exhibition? Wouldn't it be great if museums addressed this tendency (which fills countless storage rooms with lazy objects) by functioning like interlibrary loan? What if the museums in your region agreed to collect different artifacts, so that only one institution needed to have a few spinning wheels, for example, and everyone else was released from collecting them? If such a system existed, museums could focus on artifacts that tell important stories or their communities and borrow pieces easily from other institutions if they needed to. Start that conversation with museums in your area.
3. **Create a Tiered System for your Collections.** Go ahead and rank your collections! What pieces best support the mission? What are the ones that are just ok? What really has NOTHING to do with what you're trying to accomplish? Establish a triage system for your artifacts and spend your time, effort and money on the compelling ones.
4. **Change the Conversation.** Stop advertising the number of artifacts you have and start talking about their impact. Stop touting your role in preserving artifacts and instead talk about how you use them. Stop promising donors that you'll treasure their items forever. Start talking about a "useful life" for artifacts. Push funders and museum associations to stop tying funding and accolades to the number of artifacts preserved or cataloged. Instead ask to be assessed on how your collections are being used.

5. **Get Rid of What You Don't Need.** We need to make it easier for museums to deaccession their collections while preserving the public's trust. This is a complex and controversial issue, but it must be addressed or we will continue to misplace our priorities and hamstring efforts to provide public value. Current policies are too cumbersome and slow. Museums with collections that do not support their mission cannot be expected to jump through so many hoops that deaccessioning becomes a nonstarter. We need streamlined, basic guidelines for mass deaccessions.
6. **Stop the Bleeding.** Do not accept artifacts you do not need. Start today. Get boards to understand that taking things you don't need drains resources from other areas. Make sure your collections committee and collecting plan are as careful with new acquisitions as they are with deaccessions. Reject more than you take. "We might need it someday" is not a valid acquisition justification; it just leads you to death by a thousand cuts.
7. **Make the Good Stuff Sing.** Chances are you have artifacts that could tell incredible stories. Let them. Don't shoehorn them into an existing narrative and rob them of their power or bury them among hundreds of others. Pick a story and tell it. Be bold. All artifacts can be interpreted in many ways. Acknowledge this and choose one, the most compelling one. Don't water it down.
8. **Share Ideas.** Be part of a new breed of museum advocates who demand more from museum collections. Share these ideas and add your own. Put them into practice and tell others what works and what doesn't.