

STRENGTHENING MUSEUM SECURITY: GOVERNANCE, TECHNOLOGY, AND PEOPLE WORKING TOGETHER

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As security threats continue to rise across the globe, safeguarding artwork and cultural assets demands more focused attention than ever.

Drawing on decades of law enforcement and security consulting experience from Aon Global Risk Consulting's **Christopher Giovino**, Managing Director and Senior Vice President Aon Property Risk Consulting, this article provides practical tips institutions can take to help strengthen security, protect collections and visitors, and reduce vulnerabilities to theft and violence.

WHAT IS THE MOST COMMON SECURITY WEAKNESS PUTTING ARTWORK AT RISK IN INSTITUTIONS?

One of the most important, and often overlooked, aspects of security is **governance**. Many institutions use contracted security services, yet those contracts are not always managed as actively or strategically as they could be. Oversight frequently falls to facilities, operations, or HR rather than to a dedicated security professional, which can result in unclear expectations and uneven performance.

A more effective approach is to appoint an **internal security lead**. Even if guards are contracted, having a designated in-house security professional (full-time or fractional) can:

- Set clear policies and standards
- Manage and evaluate the security vendor
- Coordinate closely with facilities, IT, and leadership.

This role becomes the focal point for security decision making and helps ensure that the institution's risk tolerance and mission are reflected in day to day operations.

HOW CAN MUSEUM SECURITY DEFENSES KEEP PACE WITH TODAY'S RISKS?

While security technology may not evolve as quickly as consumer tech, new security tools are increasingly accessible to museums. Understandably, institutions may be cautious about systems that seem complex or intrusive and continue to rely on legacy solutions that have worked for years. However, as risks change, it's important to revisit whether those long standing systems still align with current risks, and where targeted upgrades could meaningfully improve protection.

A strong starting point is **modernizing core surveillance and analytics**. Today's smart CCTV systems can recognize patterns in real time. Rather than depending entirely on a person watching multiple screens, analytics can flag unusual behavior such as unusual loitering, bulky clothing, or the return of known disruptive individuals, turning cameras from passive recorders into early-warning tools.

Physical hardening is another critical complement to technology. Bollards and other perimeter barriers, whether simple posts, planters, or integrated design elements, can help prevent vehicle ramming and deter smash and grab attacks through glass lobby areas.

On the building exterior, applying ballistic or security film to ground-floor doors and windows makes it significantly harder to break through. While these films do not make glass bulletproof, they help hold it together under impact, slowing forced entry and buying time for response.

These measures can be scaled to fit different budgets and are also most effective when planned as part of an institution wide security strategy, rather than added piecemeal after an incident.

HOW CAN STAFF AND EXTERNAL PARTNERS BECOME A CULTURAL INSTITUTION'S STRONGEST SECURITY ASSET?

Security is ultimately delivered by people, not hardware. Staff with security responsibilities should receive thorough background checks. Gallery attendants and contract guards, often the first and last line of defense for collections and visitors, need adequate training and an understanding of specific risks.

Partnering with curators and docents for brief updates on current exhibitions, and why certain works are especially important or vulnerable, helps make gallery attendants more “art-smart,” and more alert to subtle changes, or early warning signs.

Equally important are **safety and response skills**. Every guard and gallery attendant should be trained in situational awareness, de-escalation, and workplace violence prevention.

Scenario based active shooter training tailored to a cultural institution environment can help improve decision making under stress and coordination with law enforcement officers. Clear guidance on how to interact with visitors and police, especially in tense moments, supports both safety and the institution's reputation.

Strong relationships with local law enforcement may be one of the most impactful and cost-effective security measures an institution can adopt. Inviting officers for on-site walk throughs gives them familiarity with your layout, key artworks, and typical operations before a crisis occurs. Maintaining the relationship through periodic check-ins (ideally quarterly or at least twice a year) help ensure your institution is viewed not as just another address, but as a known and valued partner in the local public safety network.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

Meaningful improvements to art security are within reach for institutions of every size. You do not need to start from scratch or have an unlimited budget; you need an honest look at where you are today and a few deliberate steps forward.

Appointing someone to “own” security, updating key physical and technological measures, investing in staff, and engaging law enforcement as partners can all tangibility reduce risk and build institutional confidence.

By approaching security as an ongoing practice rather than a onetime project, institutions can better protect their collections, and create an environment where staff, visitors, and communities feel safe and supported.

WHY HAVING A FINE ART BROKER IS IMPORTANT

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