

Characteristics of Excellence for U.S. Museums

1. PUBLIC TRUST & ACCOUNTABILITY

- 1.1 The museum is a good steward of its resources held in the public trust.
- 1.2 The museum identifies the communities it serves, and makes appropriate decisions in how it serves them.
- 1.3 Regardless of its self-identified communities, the museum strives to be a good neighbor in its geographic area.
- 1.4 The museum strives to be inclusive and offers opportunities for diverse participation.
- 1.5 The museum asserts its public service role and places education at the center of that role.
- 1.6 The museum demonstrates a commitment to providing the public with physical and intellectual access to the museum and its resources.
- 1.7 The museum is committed to public accountability and is transparent in its mission and its operations.
- 1.8 The museum complies with local, state, and federal laws, codes, and regulations applicable to its facilities, operations, and administration.

2. MISSION & PLANNING

- 2.1 The museum has a clear understanding of its mission and communicates why it exists and who benefits as a result of its efforts.
- 2.2 All aspects of the museum's operations are integrated and focused on meeting its mission.
- 2.3 The museum's governing authority and staff think and act strategically to acquire, develop, and allocate resources to advance the mission of the museum.
- 2.4 The museum engages in ongoing and reflective institutional planning that includes involvement of its audiences and community.
- 2.5 The museum establishes measures of success and uses them to evaluate and adjust its activities.

3. LEADERSHIP & ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

- 3.1 The governance, staff, and volunteer structures and processes effectively advance the museum's mission.
- 3.2 The governing authority, staff, and volunteers have a clear and shared understanding of their roles and responsibilities.
- 3.3 The governing authority, staff, and volunteers legally, ethically, and effectively carry out their responsibilities.
- 3.4 The composition, qualifications, and diversity of the museum's leadership, staff, and volunteers enable it to carry out the museum's mission and goals.
- 3.5 There is a clear and formal division of responsibilities between the governing authority and any group that supports the museum, whether separately incorporated or operating within the museum or its parent organization.

4. COLLECTIONS STEWARDSHIP

- 4.1 The museum owns, exhibits, or uses collections that are appropriate to its mission.
- 4.2 The museum legally, ethically, and effectively manages, documents, cares for, and uses the collections.
- 4.3 The museum's collections-related research is conducted according to appropriate scholarly standards.
- 4.4 The museum strategically plans for the use and development of its collections.
- 4.5 Guided by its mission, the museum provides public access to its collections while ensuring their preservation.

5. EDUCATION & INTERPRETATION

- 5.1 The museum clearly states its overall educational goals, philosophy, and messages, and demonstrates that its activities are in alignment with them.
- 5.2 The museum understands the characteristics and needs of its existing and potential audiences and uses this understanding to inform its interpretation.
- 5.3 The museum's interpretive content is based on appropriate research.
- 5.4 Museums conducting primary research do so according to scholarly standards.
- 5.5 The museum uses techniques, technologies, and methods appropriate to its educational goals, content, audiences, and resources.
- 5.6 The museum presents accurate and appropriate content for each of its audiences.
- 5.7 The museum demonstrates consistent high quality in its interpretive activities.
- 5.8 The museum assesses the effectiveness of its interpretive activities and uses those results to plan and improve its activities.

6. FINANCIAL STABILITY

- 6.1 The museum legally, ethically, and responsibly acquires, manages, and allocates its financial resources in a way that advances its mission.
- 6.2 The museum operates in a fiscally responsible manner that promotes its long-term sustainability.

7. FACILITIES & RISK MANAGEMENT

- 7.1 The museum allocates its space and uses its facilities to meet the needs of the collections, audience, and staff.
- 7.2 The museum has appropriate measures to ensure the safety and security of people, its collections and/or objects, and the facilities it owns or uses.
- 7.3 The museum has an effective program for the care and long-term maintenance of its facilities.
- 7.4 The museum is clean and well-maintained, and provides for the visitors' needs.
- 7.5 The museum takes appropriate measures to protect itself against potential risk and loss.

American Association of Museums: Characteristics of Excellence for U.S. Museums *In Plain English*

PUBLIC TRUST & ACCOUNTABILITY

Be good
No really—not only be legal, but be ethical
Show everyone how good and ethical you are
(don't wait for them to ask)
Do good for people
Know which people
And to be on the safe side
Be nice to everyone else, too
Especially if they live next door
Avoid cloning
Look something like the people you are doing good for
And maybe a bit like your neighbors
Let other people help decide what games to play
And what the rules are
Share your toys

MISSION AND PLANNING

Know what you want to do
And why it makes a difference to anyone
Then put it in writing
Stick to it
Decide what you want to do next
When you are deciding what to do, ask lots of people
for their opinion
Put it in writing
Then do it
If it didn't work, don't do it again
If it did work, do

LEADERSHIP AND ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

Make sure everyone is clear about who is doing what
The board knows it is governing
The director knows she is directing (and the board
knows it too)
The staff know they are doing everything else
And have it in writing

COLLECTIONS STEWARDSHIP

Know what stuff you have
Know what stuff you need
Know where it is
Take good care of it
Make sure someone gets some good out of it
Especially people you care about
And your neighbors

EDUCATION AND INTERPRETATION

Know who you are talking to
Ask them what they want to know
Know what you want to say
(and what you are talking about)
Use appropriate language (or images, or music)
Make sure people understood you
And ask them if they liked it
If not, change it

FINANCIAL STABILITY

Put your money where your mission is
Is it enough money?
Will it be there next year, too?
Know when you will need more \$
Know where you are going to get it from
Don't diddle the books

FACILITIES AND RISK MANAGEMENT

Don't crowd people
Or things
Make it safe to visit your museum
Or work there
Keep it clean
Keep the toilet paper stocked
And if all else fails, know where the exit is
(and make sure it is clearly marked)