

The Accreditation Commission's Expectations Regarding Institutional Planning

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What are the Accreditation Commission's expectations regarding institutional planning?

Characteristics of an Accreditable Museum Related to Planning:

- All aspects of the museum's operations are integrated and focused on meeting its mission.
- The museum's governing authority and staff think and act strategically to acquire, develop, and allocate resources to advance the mission of the museum.
- The museum engages in ongoing and reflective institutional planning that includes involvement of its audiences and community.
- The museum establishes measures of success and uses them to evaluate and adjust its activities.

An **accreditable museum** engages in *current, comprehensive, timely, and formal* planning for its future.

Planning is:

- *current* when it is up-to-date, and reflective of an on-going process
- *comprehensive* when it covers all relevant aspects of museum operations (e.g., not just a facility master plan)
- *timely* when it is geared to significant events in the museum's lifecycle (e.g., changes in size, scope, purpose, governance, etc.)
- *formal* when the process and outcome are documented in writing and approved by vote of the governing authority

The Commission expects the museum to provide evidence of planning in the form of:

- documentation of the planning process (e.g., committee lists, meeting minutes, planning schedules)
- a **current, comprehensive, timely, and formal institutional plan** that includes both strategic and operational elements

An **accreditable museum** uses planning to:

- set goals and establish strategies by which it will achieve them
- ensure that the museum acquires, develops, and allocates its resources (human, financial, physical) in a way that advances its mission and sustains its financial viability
- gather appropriate information to guide its actions, including input from stakeholders and data from **benchmarking**
- establish measures by which the museum will assess its achievements

Why does the Commission consider strategic planning important?

Strategic planning:

- produces a mutually agreed upon vision of where the museum is going and what it wants to achieve
- ensures this vision meets the needs of its audiences and community
- ensures that the museum identifies how it will obtain the resources to fulfill this vision
- allows the museum to make sound decisions in response to changes in its operating environment

What are the Commission's expectations for the process?

The Commission expects the process to be:

- inclusive of all stakeholders: staff, governing authority, audiences, and community
- on-going
- reflective
- documented

The Commission expects a museum undergoing an initial or subsequent accreditation review to provide a written, approved plan that is currently guiding its operations. If the plan's timeframe has just ended, or is about to expire, the Commission expects the museum to be engaged in revising the current plan or creating a new plan, and to document this process, including the method, participants, schedule, draft outcomes, etc. In such cases, a preliminary or draft version of the new plan, in conjunction with evidence of a well-managed planning process, is acceptable to submit in the interim.



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What are the Commission's expectations for the plan?

Each museum's institutional plan should include a **multi-year strategic plan** and an **operational plan**, a combination of the two, or the functional equivalent. See the Glossary at the end for definitions and characteristics of each type of plan.

Each museum's planning documents will look different. However, the Commission expects the plan(s) to:

- be captured in written documents and approved by the governing authority
- be based on the mission
- be tied to other relevant planning documents (e.g., financial plans, development plans, interpretive plans, collections plans)
- set priorities—help the museum make choices and allocate available resources
- identify how the institution will secure the human and financial resources needed to implement the plan—bring resources and goals into alignment
- be living documents—continually used and updated by the staff and governing authority
- establish measurable goals and methods by which the museum will evaluate success
- include action steps, establish timelines, and assign responsibility for implementation

A compilation of implementation plans, studies, etc. does not meet the Accreditation Commission's expectations for a strategic plan—an integrated, comprehensive document is required.

Planning by museums within non-museum parent organizations

Museums operated by a parent organization for which museum management is not the primary purpose (e.g., a university, or government agency) must provide evidence of a *museum/site-specific planning process and plan*, both of which should be linked to the parent organization's planning. The parent organization's planning process and documents should also reflect support for the museum's mission and ensure that museum/site-specific goals can be achieved.

Glossary

Benchmark: A point of reference used in measuring and/or judging quality or value.

Benchmarking: The process of comparing your museum's operations to some point of reference for the purpose of setting goals, evaluating performance, and making decisions about whether and how to change. There are several points of reference: internal—between departments or against the museum's history, external—comparison to selected peers, and external—comparison to the museum field.

Institutional plan: Comprehensive plan that both drives the “big picture” of where the institution is going, and provides sufficient detail to guide implementation. It sets priorities and makes important decisions that are oriented towards the future. Some museums split this into two parts:

- A “big picture” multi-year plan that sets strategies, goals, and priorities. Sometimes this is referred to as a strategic or long-range plan.
- A plan that provides the details needed to implement the decisions in the strategic or long-range plan. Usually focuses on a short period of time, typically geared to the museum's budget year. Sometimes called an operational or implementation plan.

There is great variability in how museums refer to these planning documents, or divide particular functions between them. The Commission does not mandate a particular format or nomenclature.

¹ First issued by the Accreditation Commission in March 1999. This revised version supercedes the 1999 version.