



A Guide to the Characteristics of an Accreditable Museum

A. PUBLIC TRUST AND ACCOUNTABILITY

The museum is a good steward of its resources held in the public trust.

The museum identifies the communities it serves, and makes appropriate decisions in how it serves them.

Regardless of its self-identified communities, the museum strives to be a good neighbor in its geographic area.

The museum strives to be inclusive and offers opportunities for diverse participation.

The museum asserts its public service role and places education at the center of that role.

The museum demonstrates a commitment to providing the public with physical and intellectual access to the museum and its resources.

The museum is committed to public accountability and is transparent in its mission and its operations.

The museum complies with local, state, and federal laws, codes, and regulations applicable to its facilities, operations, and administration.

- Describe any gaps between the museum's self-identified communities and the museum's audiences, staff, board, and committees.
- In what ways does the museum act as a good neighbor to its geographic community?
- What opportunities for diverse participation are offered?
- How does the museum provide the public with information about its operations and fulfill its obligations for transparency and accountability?
- What efforts has the museum made to meet the physical and intellectual needs of all audiences within its facilities?
- Which staff are responsible for the museum's compliance with local, state, and federal laws, codes, and regulations?
- What has the museum done to ensure appropriate inspections/certifications regarding compliance with relevant laws, codes and regulations?

B. MISSION & PLANNING

The museum has a clear understanding of its mission and communicates why it exists and who benefits as a result of its efforts.

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.

Mission

- Do staff and governing authority members demonstrate a clear, shared understanding of the museum's mission? Describe any related concerns.
- Are there any discrepancies between the mission and the plans, practices and resources of the museum? Describe any related concerns.

Institutional Planning

- How does the museum define success and determine if it has achieved it?
- Does the governing authority demonstrate a clear understanding of the major forces affecting the museum's ability to succeed, and how effective are they in responding to these challenges?
- How does the museum gather information from its audience and visitors and use it to evaluate its performance?
- How often and effectively does the staff and governing authority engage in planning and who is involved in the process?

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C. LEADERSHIP & ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

The governance, staff, and volunteer structures and processes effectively advance the museum's mission.

The governing authority, staff, and volunteers have a clear and shared understanding of their roles and responsibilities.

The governing authority, staff, and volunteers legally, ethically, and effectively carry out their responsibilities.

The composition, qualifications, and diversity of the museum's leadership, staff, and volunteers enable it to carry out the museum's mission and goals.

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.

Structure and Composition

- Does the museum's documentation establish the organization's structure, function, and delegation of authority? Describe any related concerns.
- How does the governing authority's structure (size, term of office, etc...) impact its ability to operate effectively?
- How well do the governing authority's mechanisms for selecting, recruiting and training new members provide the qualifications and diversity it needs?
- Are the following adequate to meet the museum's needs :
 - number of staff
 - number of volunteers
 - their roles & responsibilities
 - their compensation
 - their training
- If the museum is part of a larger organization (e.g., university, government, historical society), what is nature of the working relationship between the museum and the parent organization?
- If two or more organizations govern the museum (e.g., city and private nonprofit), what is the nature of the working relationship between the governing organizations?

Responsibilities

- How good is governing authority members' understanding of their roles and public trust responsibilities, especially in relation to collections management?
- How effectively do the director and head of governing authority work together?
- How well do members of the governing authority demonstrate an understanding of and respect for the difference between their roles and those of the staff members?
- Are bylaws and other policy documents reviewed often enough to keep them in alignment with the museum's practices? Describe any related concerns.

Support Organization(s) (if applicable)

- How is the museum supported, financially and otherwise, by any separately incorporated affiliate organizations (e.g., members, Friends, Society)?
- How clearly defined and communicated are the purposes of the support organizations the relationship between the museum and its support organization(s).

D. COLLECTIONS STEWARDSHIP

The museum owns, exhibits, or uses collections that are appropriate to its mission.

The museum legally, ethically, and effectively manages, documents, cares for, and uses the collections.

The museum's collections-related research is conducted according to appropriate scholarly standards.

The museum strategically plans for the use and development of its collections.

Guided by its mission, the museum provides public access to its collections while ensuring their preservation



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Collections Management

- How effectively is the museum's mission supported by its collections?
- How well does the museum support the collections with financial, collections, and human resources?
- How does the museum exercise responsible stewardship of the collections?
- How well do the museum's collections records document ownership of the collections and reflect continuous, up-to-date, control over the location of objects in the collections?

Preservation and Accessibility

- Have the greatest risks to the collections been identified and how well are they mitigated?
- Are the policies, procedures, and schedules for inventory and condition reporting sufficient to provide accountability for the collections? Describe any related concerns.
- Does the condition and/or care of the collections meet current standards within the appropriate discipline? Describe any related concerns.
- How effectively are the collections in storage and on exhibition protected from relevant environmental, humans, and pest threats?
- How well does the size and quality of collections' storage, on and off-site, meet the needs of the collection?
- Do policies and procedures appropriately guide decision-making regarding public access and preservation? Describe any related concerns.

E. EDUCATION AND INTERPRETATION

The museum clearly states its overall educational goals, interpretive philosophy, and messages, and demonstrates that its activities are in alignment with them.

The museum understands the characteristics and needs of its existing and potential audiences and uses this understanding to inform its interpretation.

The museum's interpretive content is based on appropriate research.

Museums conducting primary research do so according to scholarly standards.

The museum uses techniques, technologies, and methods appropriate to its educational goals, content, audiences, and resources.

The museum presents accurate and appropriate content for each of its audiences.

The museum demonstrates consistent high quality in its interpretive activities.

The museum assesses the effectiveness of its interpretive activities and uses those results to plan and improve its activities.

Interpretive Planning

- How clearly are the educational goals and interpretive philosophy articulated and how appropriate are they to the mission, audiences, and resources?
- How effective are the procedures for selecting, planning and developing exhibits and programs?
- How well does the museum support the exhibits and programs with financial, collections, and human resources?

Audiences

- How effectively is information gathered about audience interests and needs and included in the museum's interpretative planning efforts?
- How does the museum assess whether exhibits, programs, and publications meet the needs of the museum's audience?

Interpretive Activities

- How effectively do the exhibits and programs use the collections or other objects to illustrate themes or concepts?
- What is the quality of the visitor experience provided by the museum?
- How appropriate are the labels, interpretive techniques, and support materials to the nature and content of the activity and its intended audiences?

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F. FINANCIAL STABILITY

The museum legally, ethically, and responsibly acquires, manages, and allocates its financial resources in a way that advances its mission.

The museum operates in a fiscally responsible manner that promotes its long-term sustainability.

Financial Management

- How good a job is done with providing timely, accurate, and complete information on the museum's finances to the museum staff and governing authority?
- How stable are the museum's income sources? Are they appropriately diversified?
- If there are sources of earned income unrelated to the mission, how well does the museum balance the time and resources devoted to this income with those devoted to mission fulfillment?

Sustainability

- How good is the museum's understanding of its current and future financial needs and how realistic are the museum's plans for meeting them?
- How closely is the budgeting process linked to institutional goals and planning?

G. FACILITIES & RISK MANAGEMENT

The museum allocates its space and uses its facilities to meet the needs of the collection, audience, and staff.

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.

The museum has an effective program for the care and long-term maintenance of its facilities.

The museum is clean and well-maintained, and provides for visitors' needs.

The museum takes appropriate measures to protect itself against potential risk and loss.

Facilities Management

- How well do the museum's facilities to support its operations (e.g., collections, exhibitions, public programs, visitor services, parking)?
- How good are the museum's policies and procedures for maintaining the facilities in good, safe working condition?
- What does the first impression of the museum indicate about its maintenance, cleanliness, and the care of the facility?
- If applicable, is the care and maintenance of any historic structures consistent with appropriate standards? Describe any related concerns.

Risk Management

- Have the greatest risks to the staff and operations been identified and how well are they mitigated?