

# Policy for Allegations Regarding Unprofessional Actions by an AAM Peer Reviewer

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## Introduction

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The American Association of Museums (AAM) takes allegations regarding unprofessional actions on the part of peer reviewers very seriously and exercises caution in these situations. AAM program staff considers the information presented in an allegation and whether the allegation is part of a larger pattern of unprofessional actions as opposed to an isolated incident of misjudgment. This document outlines the procedures to be followed so that peer reviewer's rights and reputation is protected, the institution making the allegation is heard, and the allegation considered carefully, confidentially, and thoughtfully so informed decisions can be made.

AAM considers allegations only against *current and active peer reviewers*. The allegation must also concern his/her actions while conducting a site visit *and relate to the reviewer's credibility and/or ability to conduct future visits*.

Allegations of unprofessional actions may be made by an institution, represented by the museum's director or the head of the museum's governing authority. The institution must fully substantiate its concerns and agree to have the allegation disclosed to the peer reviewer in question.

AAM is not qualified to determine the legality of a peer reviewer's actions. Institutions with allegations regarding illegal conduct are referred to the local district attorney's office or other appropriate governmental authority.

## Confidentiality

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During the review of an allegation, AAM does not disclose the existence or contents of the allegation to any individual or organization except the appropriate program staff, the peer reviewer in question, and the institution making the allegation. All correspondence between AAM program staff and

the peer reviewer in question or the institution will be copied to all parties. At the conclusion of the process, all materials related to the allegation will be placed in a sealed file.

The file will be kept in a secure place in the AAM Human Relations office. No reference to the file or its contents will be made in any other location. The file remains sealed unless an additional allegation is made against the same peer reviewer. In that situation, the file will be reviewed for relevant materials to the subsequent allegation by the Director, Museum Advancement & Excellence.

## Allegation Procedure

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Filing an allegation of unprofessional practice is a serious action. All allegations must be fully substantiated. AAM considers allegations using formal procedures and full disclosure to ensure fairness and transparency for all involved parties.

Allegations against a peer reviewer for unprofessional actions can be made only by an institution, not an individual; therefore, any allegation must be presented through the museum's director or the head of the museum's governing authority.

1. When a complaint is made about a peer reviewer's performance, the MAP or Accreditation staff person receiving the communication makes a record of it and presents it to the Peer Reviewer Manager.
2. The Peer Reviewer Manager contacts the museum to discuss the complaint and review the allegation process as well as other options.
3. If the museum then wishes to present a formal allegation, it must submit a letter describing the concern and include any supporting documents.
4. Upon receipt of the allegation, the Peer Reviewer Manager has 20 business days to:
  - a. send a copy of the allegation and these procedures to the peer reviewer(s) in question by



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certified mail, requesting a response.

b. present it to the Director, Museum Advancement & Excellence and ask him/her to review any pre-existing information in the Human Resources files.

5. The Director, Museum Advancement & Excellence asks the Human Resources staff person to check the secured files to see if there already exists a file for the individual in question

a. If a file exists, the Director, Museum Advancement & Excellence retrieves the file from, the Human Resources staff person and reviews the previous incident to determine if it has any relevance to the current issue.

b. Any relevant information will be considered in combination with the current concern in determining the appropriate course of action.

c. A record of the current issue will be added to the folder, which is then re-sealed and returned to the Human Resources person.

d. If no file exists for the person in question, a file will be established containing a copy of the current allegation.

6. The peer reviewer(s) will have 30 business days from receipt (determined by certified mail receipt) to respond to the allegation in writing via letter, email, fax, including any relevant supporting material.

7. The Peer Reviewer Manager will review the allegation, the peer reviewer's response if provided, and any additional information with an Allegation Review Committee comprised of the Peer Reviewer Manager, the Director, Museum Advancement & Excellence, and the appropriate program Assistant Director(s) to evaluate the substance of the allegation and determine a response.

8. The result of this deliberation will be disclosed in a letter copied to the museum and the peer reviewer(s).

can only place the complete record of the allegation process in a file for the peer reviewer in the Human Resources office. AAM is not an investigative body and cannot pursue an allegation beyond the process already outlined.

## Agreement in Parties, First Offense

If the peer reviewer and the museum agree as to the circumstances and concerns, the Allegation Review Committee will determine if the program's integrity and credibility will be damaged if the peer reviewer remains involved. If they decide yes, AAM will terminate the peer reviewer's participation in the AAM's peer review program. If they decide no, then a record will be created in the Human Resources Office for the complete record of the allegation, and the peer reviewer will be put on probation (see Policy for Addressing Concerns Regarding Peer Reviewer Performance for complete details on the probation action).

## Second Offense

If a review of the Human Resource files reveals a previous allegation of sufficiently similar substance to the current issue, AAM will terminate the peer reviewer's participation in AAM's peer review program.

For information on other peer reviewer performance concerns, see Policy for Addressing Concerns Regarding Peer Reviewer Performance.

## Possible Responses

### Disagreement in Parties, First Offense

If the peer reviewer and the museum disagree as to the circumstances and concerns, and the peer reviewer has no prior allegations submitted against him/her, AAM