

A Resource
for AAM
Peer Reviewers

FALL 2004

NEWSstandard

What's the BIG IDEA?

This feature presents the history, theory or critical points of the theme to provide a broad context for the issue.

Community Engagement: Why, and Who Gets the Ring?

Elizabeth Merritt, director, Museum Advancement & Excellence

When AAM's Museums & Community Initiative launched in 1998, it started a dialogue among museum professionals about the relationship between institutions and the people they serve. Building on that discussion, both the Museum Assessment and Accreditation Programs are incorporating standards related to community engagement into their assessments. This is challenging because it is a newly emerging area and there is not yet universal agreement about museums' obligations regarding community engagement and how to assess it. The programs are incorporating community engagement issues gradually to give museums, peer reviewers, and Accreditation Commissioners time to consider how community engagement will be evaluated.

This past year, MAP revised the Public Dimension Assessment to help museums explore the issue. In 2005, the Accreditation Program will introduce the issue in the revised *Characteristics of an Accreditable Museum and Accreditation Self-Study Questionnaire* by asking museums to identify their communities and explain how they meet their needs.

Throughout the course of the Museums & Community Initiative, the field has grappled with the definition of community. Two definitions have been applied in the ongoing discussion regarding museums and community:

1. A group of people living in the same locality and under the same government or the district or locality in which such a group lives.

2. A group of people having common interests, such as the scientific community or the international business community or a group viewed as forming a distinct segment of society, such as the gay community or the community of color.

In keeping with the core principle of assessing a museum against its self-identified mission, MAP and Accreditation expect a museum to serve the needs of its self-identified community. For many, this may be primarily geographic, but for others it may be a community of interest identified by the museum's mission. There are examples in MAP and
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THEME

This issue of *NEWSstandard* looks at community engagement in practice.

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What's the Big Idea

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Accreditation of museums that have made each of these choices. Many museums of all kinds are deeply engaged with their geographic communities and play a key role in education, tourism, and community development (see for example the case study of the Rahr West Art Museum on page 3). This may be true even if the museum has a very narrow topic area—for example, the National Civil War Medicine Museum is very involved in the revitalization of Frederick, Md., where they are located. This even though the museum's founding board was a nationally based group of scholars and amateurs focused on the museum's subject matter. Even among museums that identify their community primarily geographically, the scope of this definition may vary greatly—for some museums it may be a neighborhood, for others a college campus, town, city, county, or region.

Other museums concentrate on their community of interest—for example, the American Museum of Fly Fishing in Manchester, N.H., whose mission is to preserve “fly-fishing heritage for future generations,” sees its primary audience as fly-fishers throughout the world. The Havre De Grace Decoy Museum, which preserves and interprets the art and culture of decoy making and waterfowling in the Chesapeake Bay, serves a community of interest comprised of carvers, collectors, dealers, and historians of decoys (for a case study, see “In Sight: Engaging with Their Communities,” page 3). Both of these accredited museums draw primarily on their respective communities of interest (fly-fishing, decoy-making) for board members, committees, and volunteers.

However, this is a false dichotomy. Most museums have a community

of interest that is particularly dedicated to that museum's mission, whatever that mission may be. Most museums that primarily serve a community of interest are also locally engaged in some way. For example, The American Museum of Fly-Fishing is working to become more involved in the Manchester community by creating a program for local schools and partnering with other local museums on exhibits and events. As they expand, they wish to broaden their base of support, which historically had been provided primarily by one local company, Orvis. See also the case study of the Japanese American National Museum on page 7.

In assessing a museum's community engagement, it helps to consider some of the issues motivating the field's focus on this topic:

- Better governance and planning through the inclusion of diverse perspectives and input from people who understand the community the museum strives to serve
- Improved accountability through giving those who support for the museum a voice in how the museum uses those resources
- Stronger finances through building broad support
- Broader impact through reaching out to new audiences

These are complex issues and hard to measure, which is precisely why the role of the peer reviewer is so important. How well a museum has identified its community and how well it serves its needs and uses this as an avenue to address the issues outlined above can't be reduced to simple answers on a self-study questionnaire. As peer reviewers, you play a key role in assessing whether the complex interplay of museum and community works—whether the relationship succeeds

in building a stronger museum and a stronger community.

For more information on the Museums & Community Initiative, see www.aam-us.org/initiatives.

Attention Accreditation Visiting Committee Members

To emphasize greater balance of responsibility between the two team members on an Accreditation visit, staff has instituted some changes.

You will start seeing and hearing some new terminology:

- The “Chair” is now called “Team Contact.”
- The “Second Member” is now referred to as the “Team Member.”

Procedural changes implemented over the past year:

- The supplementary materials from the museum are sent to the Team Member first and then forwarded to the Team Contact
- The evaluation process asks equally about the participation of both team members and evaluates the report as the product of this partnership.

If it has been a while since you’ve been on a visit, take a few minutes to review the breakdown of duties between the Team Contact and the Team Member on pages D23-24 (“Understanding Your Role”) in the Peer Review Manual, which is also available online at www.aam-us.org/programs/peer_reviewer/manual.

[In Sight] This feature illustrates the theme in practice through case studies or examples.

Engaging with Their Communities

Editor: Karen Bellnier, peer reviewer manager

To look at community engagement in practice, we gathered case studies from different museums that have taken a variety of approaches to defining community and developing approaches to foster relationships with them. While reading them, look for the commonalities that can help you determine whether the community engagement efforts of the museums you visit are effective and appropriate.

RAHR WEST ART MUSEUM, MANITOWOC, WISC.

Jan Mirenda Smith, director

Rahr West Art Museum has been the catalyst for community collaborations, seeing the broad connections between community services. Agencies such as the Manitowoc County Historical Society, Manitowoc Public Library, Wisconsin Maritime Museum, YMCA, Parks and Recreation, and the Capitol Civic Centre, as well as the County Health Department, have worked toward themed projects that heighten awareness of each agency and its contributions to the whole.

Public art works have been created in this collaborative manner: art made by the people, for the people, instructed by an artist overseeing the project. An example of this was an event called a Clay Stomp, which left two wonderful clay reliefs behind for the public to enjoy. (For a press release describing this project, see the peer review section of the AAM Web site: www.aam-us.org/peer-review under *NEWStandard*)

As budgets have been slashed, keeping the established momen-

tum has been very challenging. Institutions have lost staff and funding or simply increased their workload. We value the partnerships, so to modify expenses, we created smaller partnerships, losing some visibility in the process.

Building on our community collaborations, Manitowoc will host the Wisconsin Federation of Museums Annual Meeting in fall 2004, partnering with its colleague institutions to present sessions on topics pertinent to small museums based on the projects currently in place.

THE HAVRE DE GRACE DECOY MUSEUM, HAVRE DE GRACE, MD.

Patrick Vincenti, president
John Carrier, past president

Located on the banks of the historic Susquehanna Flats, the Havre de Grace Decoy Museum houses one of the finest collections of working and decorative Chesapeake Bay decoys ever assembled. The museum was established in 1986 as a private, nonprofit institution to preserve the historical and cultural legacy of waterfowling and decoy making on the Chesapeake Bay. The Havre de Grace Decoy Museum’s world consists of many communities: the city and county, local museums, the mid-Atlantic region, and the national decoy community.

Our most immediate community of the city and county has become a partnership for mutual benefit. The museum promotes tourism by its presence, being open every day and giving free guided tours to Harford County students and sen-

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[On the Ground] This feature incorporates the theme into the practical work of peer reviewers.

Assessing a Museum's Community Engagement

Martha Morris, associate professor of museum studies, George Washington University, Washington, D.C.

How should reviewers prepare to counsel or assess a museum's effort to engage its community? Having served as a Surveyor for MAP assessments, particularly the Public Dimension and Institutional reviews, and as a member of Accreditation Visiting Committees, I know it is critical to have markers to understanding the museum's success in engaging its community.

As mentioned in the first article, many museums define their community as the physical area around them, but a museum's community isn't always a geographic one.

The Baseball Hall of Fame in Cooperstown, N.Y., clearly has a worldwide community of interest (sports fans, collectors, and histori-

ans to name a few) while it also has its local community. The museum uses its website, a traveling exhibition program, publications, and school programs to serve each of these communities. Another example would be a regional museum such as the Missouri Historical Society, which has done much to work effectively with its geographic community. Recently, the museum has determined to advance their national story, through a traveling exhibition on the explorations of Lewis and Clark. In this case, resources were secured from a variety of sources and the local community was involved in the planning.

A reviewer needs to understand how the museum has made strategic choices about investing time

and resources in support of several often competing community interests. The following are ways that I have found helpful.

DO YOUR HOMEWORK!

I recommend that reviewers become familiar with the issues by reading *Mastering Civic Engagement*, a set of essays that AAM has published on the topic. As a reviewer preparing for the site visit, invest time in careful study of the museum's documentation. I look for references to community in the self-study reports and accompanying materials.

- Is there an effort to define what and who the museum's community is in the museum's strategic plan and mission statement?
- Do they emphasize a commitment to serving and working with that community?
- Does the museum show a consistent interest in community issues in supplemental materials such as brochures, newsletters, or annual reports?

HOT OFF THE WEB

Hot Off the Web announces additions to the AAM website of specific interest to peer reviewers.

The AAM website has undergone a significant redesign to make it easier to find what you are looking for and to better communicate what AAM is all about. The redesign is scheduled to launch in October. You can find the peer review section under "Get Involved" then "Participate," and it is still accessible through www.aam-us.org/peer-review. Changes in the peer review section include the following, as well as a way to contact the peer review manager directly.

- **Apply/Update:** Application information and the Peer Review Profile for you to update the information we use to match you with museums.

• Benefits of Peer Review

Participation: Peer Review Frequently Asked Questions and testimonials.

- **Resources for Peer Review:** Includes all of the resources currently offered as well as several of peer reviewer-specific forms available for download.

- **Nominate for EPRSA:** Information on the Excellence in Peer Review Service Award, past recipients, and a nomination form.

The Peer Review Manual is now online under "Resources." Each subsection is presented in .pdf format.

Due to launch in the winter is *Evaluating Governance: Online*, a training resource for peer reviewers. The form of the presentation is under development.

In addition, online registration for the annual meeting will most likely be available in November, along with the "Search Sessions" and "Plan Your Annual Meeting" options.

If you have any feedback as you use the new site, please e-mail peer-review@aam-us.org.

As a peer reviewer, one can engage in further research to get a sense of the community at large: Who lives in the area, what are the economic challenges, what appears in the headlines of the local newspapers?

THE SITE VISIT

On your way to the site visit, look for evidence that the museum has a presence through signage, print, or radio ads. See if cab drivers, hotel staff, and other locals know the museum. As you experience the programs, exhibitions, and other amenities on site, do you notice visitors being treated as guests and a welcoming atmosphere at the entrance to the museum?

When touring the facility, look for evidence that exhibitions, events, and programs reflect issues important to the defined community and reflect the voice of community members. As you talk with board, staff, and volunteers, see whether they describe a process that encourages community members to participate in the upfront planning of exhibitions and programs. Inquire if collecting is focused on subjects and materials and policies reflective of the interests of the defined community.

Examples of efforts to reach out to commonly chosen communities such as families, school children, seniors, the physically challenged, and immigrant populations include:

- Collections, exhibitions, and programs accessible through outreach to community centers, schools, and traveling exhibitions
- Programs developed in such a way as to be affordable to a wide range of users
- Multilingual publications
- Use of its website to reach out to varying groups
- Extended hours

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PEER REVIEWER MANAGER'S CORNER

Recruiting • Supporting • Developing Peer Reviewers

Another year, another annual meeting has passed. This year's meeting in New Orleans was a success overall and a particular success for the peer-review-related activities:

- Peer Reviewer Orientation: This overview of peer review and its role within MAP and Accreditation was followed by Q&A with an experienced peer reviewer, Pam Meister. Special thanks to Pam for her participation.
- Peer Reviewer Reception: Presented for the sixth year, in collaboration with IMLS, attendees received acknowledgements from AAM Board Chair Jeffrey Rudolph (a peer reviewer himself) and IMLS Director Robert Martin.
- Peer Review Mid-Career Mentoring Roundtable: Participants had one-on-one discussions with an experienced peer reviewer, Linda Eppich, and me about the eligibility requirements for and expectations of peer reviewers. Special thanks to Linda for her assistance.
- Making Lemonade: This workshop provided resources and practice with managing unexpected situations during site visits and how to address such issues in the following report. Excerpts from this workshop will be made available through the peer review section of the AAM website within a year.

I hope to see you all at the next meeting in Indianapolis.

As mentioned in last issue's "Hot Off the Web" section, the Information Center is developing a rich set of resources available through the AAM website to all AAM members. Currently, one can get information on museum operations, standards and best practices, and emerging issues in the areas of:

- Governance & Support Organizations
- Financial Stability
- Facilities & Risk Management
- Human Resources

If you are not currently a member of AAM or at an institutional member museum, you may want to consider joining to have access to this growing resource.

Last but certainly not least, I hope peer review is a fulfilling experience leading to professional growth for each of you. If you feel any of your colleagues would benefit from this experience and would be an asset to the MAP and Accreditation programs, please use the enclosed brochure to encourage them to participate in peer review (or make many copies and to give to all your fiends or post on your museum's bulletin board).



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REFERENCE DESK

This feature provides annotated references of articles, websites, books, and more that relate to the newsletter theme. You are encouraged to submit annotated references that you have found helpful.

The following resources may help museums and peer reviewers consider different aspects of community engagement.

The National Park Service created a website to support its Civic Engagement initiative. It has resources for partners, educators, and employees, including case studies, a list of events, a bibliography, and a Community Tool Box. The Community Tool Box offers extensive tips, guidelines, and checklists on a wide variety of topics, such as building consensus, facilitation, planning a conference, developing a brochure, and holding a focus group. (www.nps.gov/civic/index.html)

In “The Future of Local History: Overcoming the Challenges of Mobility,” Anamari Golf discusses the changing meaning of local, home, resident, and native in an era of extensive leisure travel, frequent family relocation, and the itinerant museum professional. Who is the “community” for a local history museum and how does the museum make local history meaningful for these audiences? (*History News*, spring 2004, vol. 59, #2)

The Association of Science-Technology Centers (ASTC) supports the ongoing effort to open museum doors to all people and specifically to people with disabilities. Its resource, *Accessible Practices*, outlines a process to help match the institution's capabilities with the needs of the audience. It summarizes accessibility laws, has checklists for conducting a survey of the facility and services, and describes the process of writing a plan for removing barriers. (www.astc.org/resource/access/index.htm)

The Society for Human Resource Management offers lengthy material on diversity in the workplace. Sections include making the business case for diversity, affirmative action vs. diversity, components of a successful initiative, training, measuring results, recruitment, and retention. (www.shrm.org/diversity/businesscase.asp)

The Support Center for Nonprofit Management has an article that discusses collaboration. It identifies a number of key factors which influence the success and sustainability of collaboration and offers seven guidelines for fostering collective efforts. (www.supportcenteronline.org/fostering-sustainable-collaborative-relationships.php)

Many museums have community partners that share some level of responsibility for the museum's success. It may be that one entity owns the collection and the other owns the building. It may be a Friends group that provides financial and volunteer support. Management agreements can help formalize and clarify the roles and responsibilities of each party. The Information Center has examples of a variety of management agreements; institutional member museums may access these sample documents by contacting the Information Center at infocenter@aam-us.org.

On the Ground

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- Hosting special events for community groups
- Groups welcome to conduct meetings or hold performances or events
- A permanent presence in more than one part of its city or region

MANAGEMENT

One way to determine the degree to which community engagement is embedded in the culture of the museum is to examine what data is collected to support its decision making. Does it survey current audiences as well as those who don't normally visit? Does it work with the local government and/or economic development and tourism offices to better understand trends in the population and in visitors to the area? Are there performance measures to determine success of community engagement efforts, such as the percent of programs created with community input or of staff representative of the community?

Another is to examine from where the institutional support comes. Who are the funders of the museum's programs? Are there efforts to work with other nonprofit organizations such as arts groups, churches, museums, libraries, collectors, academics, or students to share program ideas and jointly seek funding? Are advisory groups created and communicated with and are their ideas considered and incorporated as appropriate?

A third is to look at how community engagement is incorporated into the policies, procedures, and actions of the staff, board, and volunteers of the museum. Examine whether every staff member, board member, and volunteer understand their role in making the mission work and their participation is codified through job descriptions,

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In Sight

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ior citizen groups. Both city and county support us with grants, use of facilities and transportation. The city provides police protection and temporary fencing for our events. The city leases us the property, which we share with another museum.

We partner with local museums on advertising and scheduling events. We meet on a regular basis with four other local museums to solve problems and discuss subjects of mutual interest and to avoid conflicting schedules. The Decoy Museum has been awarded annual grants by the Maryland State Arts Council. A member of our staff has served on their board.

Look for the commonalities that can help you determine whether the community engagement efforts of the museums you visit are effective and appropriate.

Regionally, we are a recognized stop on the Chesapeake Bay Gateway tour guide and the Greenways Program. We have been awarded grants from both organizations. Our various functions are attended by people from several different states. We have had a lecture series of varying interests such as “How to Detect Counterfeit Decoys” and “Afro American Decoy Makers.”

Nationally, we have been accredited by AAM. The Decoy Museum has also partnered with conservation organization Ducks Unlimited in the past. We interact in the decoy community by providing competition judges, exhibitors, and advisors to other museums and the decoy shows

they may sponsor. We also sponsor several events each year. The museum is partnering with other museums and private individuals by sharing artifacts for temporary loans or revolving displays.

We hope to increase the number of people our museum touches in the future.

JAPANESE AMERICAN NATIONAL MUSEUM, LOS ANGELES

Akemi Kikumura-Yano, senior vice president

Because of its name, the mission of the Japanese American National Museum would appear to be primarily an ethnic-specific one. Clearly, documenting, preserving, and presenting the Japanese American experience through the first-person perspective of Japanese Americans remains a key objective. However, the importance of promoting an understanding and appreciation of America’s ethnic and cultural diversity that moves beyond the interests and orientation of one ethnic group has been a critical part of its mission.

Curator Dr. Sojin Kim’s work on the Boyle Heights project illustrates the museum’s commitment to involving multiple perspectives in the research and exhibition development processes. The project was a collaborative initiative that explored the history of the Boyle Heights community (located in east Los Angeles) through the perspective and experiences of the many people who lived there. Dr. Kim states, “Through collaborative research, programs, exhibition development, and ongoing dialogues, participants were challenged to approach the concept of community in a pluralistic and dynamic context and to consider how individual lives, actions, and

memories intersect as part of a larger web of relationships, changes, events, and consequences.”¹

The related events of civil unrest that engulfed Los Angeles following the verdict in the Rodney King trial and the public opening of the museum constituted a graphic reminder of the need to expand collaborations with the ethnic communities that formed neighborhoods with Japanese American communities. The museum’s efforts to reach out to Arab American and Muslim communities who could be unfairly targeted on the basis of their ancestry in the days following Sept. 11, 2001, further illustrates the way the institution continues to interface and interconnect with the diversity and larger social fabric of the United States.

¹Excerpt from *Common Ground: The Japanese American National Museum and the Culture of Collaborations*, Akemi Kikumura-Yano, Lane R. Hirabayashi, and James A. Hirabayashi, editors (Boulder: University Press of Colorado, forthcoming December 2004).

MAP Grant Amounts Increased

Beginning with the Dec. 1, 2003, grant deadline, IMLS Museum Assessment Program (MAP) grant amounts have increased. The new amounts are:

- Surveyor honoraria (\$300)
- Travel expenses for two Surveyor assessments (\$750 for each reviewer)
- Implementation funds (\$300) for recommendations made by Surveyors.

On the Ground

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annual performance reviews, or values and ethics statements. When speaking to staff, determine if the CEO or director speaks about these issues with conviction and the staff welcomes input from the community or community member ideas. Indicators of commitment to community engagement could include an office of outreach or marketing or a similar position tasked with connecting the community and the museum or a membership program sensitive to demographics of the defined community as well other interested audiences.

STAFFING

Building community engagement takes skills such as collaboration, communication, and coordination. These skills can be gained through recruiting people with community skill, experience, and understanding

as staff and volunteers; actively training staff and volunteers in the techniques of public service; and providing staff access to best practices of other museums and cultural organizations. Is the museum considered a leader in its advocacy of community issues?

Other evidence of a successful community program is through the makeup of the board, staff, and volunteers. Personnel should reflect all levels of the community, including gender, age, areas of expertise, ethnic, racial, location, and economic status. Individual staff should be actively engaged in the life of the defined community through volunteer work or collegial interchange with other museums.

MEET THE COMMUNITY

As a peer reviewer, you should have

an opportunity to actually spend time with community representatives. If they make time for you, it shows they are enthusiastic and supportive of the museum. Examples of community representatives might be school board members, city or state government officials, university provosts, business leaders, members of the local NAACP or other minority organizations, area collectors/aficionados, as well as the museum's visitors.

Mention this article when placing your AAM Bookstore order and get the member price for *Mastering Civic Engagement* and the *Museums & Community Toolkit*.

OPPORTUNITY KNOCKS!

Keep an eye on this space in every issue for deadlines, important dates, and exciting opportunities of interest and benefit to peer reviewers and museum professionals.

PROFESSIONAL EDUCATION

Best Practices in Collections Stewardship: Collections Planning

Dec. 10-11 - Washington, D.C.
Based on national, collaborative research done by the National Museum of American History and the American Association of Museums.

CEOs & Governance

Jan. 14-15 - Phoenix
This seminar takes an intensive look at developing and nurturing a high-functioning board, designing a process that provides fair evaluation of your performance, and tools needed for keeping the focus on strategy and results.

Secrets of Accreditation

January 28-29 - Los Angeles
Learn first-hand from Accreditation program staff and a member of the Accreditation Commission how to

maximize the benefit your museum derives from your accreditation experience, minimize delays, and avoid setbacks. Participants will review how other museums use accreditation as a tool for self-improvement and a lever for political or funding logjams.

Legal Problems of Museum Administration

March 30-April 1 - San Francisco
Sponsored by ALI-ABA and the Smithsonian Institution with the cooperation of the American Association of Museums.

PROGRAM DATES

IMLS Application Deadlines for MAP Grants

Dec. 1

Accreditation Program Application Deadline

Dec. 15

ANNUAL MEETING

It's not too early to plan your budget for the 2005 annual meeting in Indianapolis from May 1-5. Take advantage of one of the following advance registration rates.

Alumni Registration

(received in the AAM office by Oct. 31)
Available only to those who attended the New Orleans meeting
Members: \$275
Non-members: \$415

Early Bird Registration

(postmarked by March 4)
Members: \$305
Non-Members: \$445

Visit www.aam-us.org for more details on each of these activities.