

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.

Peer Review and the Evolution of Standards and Best Practices

Elizabeth Merritt, Director, Museum Advancement & Excellence

Is it possible to have an ongoing conversation with 250,000 people? This is a rough estimate¹ of the number of paid employees working in the museum field in the United States. The field's established methods of deciding on appropriate standards suggest that such conversation is not only possible but necessary. Not with every one of these museum professionals, of course, but with a diverse, representative sample that reflects the experience and needs of museums of all types and sizes. Peer reviewers play a key role in this ongoing conversation and the resulting evolution of standards and identification of best practices in the field.

Areas of evolving standards—such as nonprofit transparency, accountability, community responsibilities, stewardship—are ambiguous zones with vague boundaries. Within these areas a variety of opinions exist regarding appropriate conduct. As standards are codified, this zone coalesces and acquires clear, widely recognized borders. Many participants play a role in the process of defining these boundaries, including:

- Museum professionals who exert leadership through serving on professional committees or grant review panels, writing papers, and giving seminars;
- Funders—such as granting agencies, corporations or foundations, and individual donors—who apply their own standards to their assessment of whether a museum is a worthy recipient for support;
- Journalists who affect popular perception of museums and

museum conduct through the way they interpret the standards of the field or the opinions they express regarding appropriate behavior.

AAM peer reviewers, through their work with the Museum Assessment and Accreditation Programs, have a particularly strong voice in the process. As peer reviewers, you focus on the individual museum being reviewed, but at the same time you contribute to an ongoing discussion with the field, fellow reviewers, the Accreditation Commission, and the AAM staff.

[continued on page 2]

THEME

This issue of *NEWSStandard* looks at the role of peer review in the evolution of standards and best practices.

THEME ARTICLES

- 1 **What's the BIG IDEA?**
Peer Review and the Evolution of Standards and Best Practices
- 3 **In Sight**
MAP and Accreditation: Evolving with the Field
- 4 **On the Ground**
Reality Check: The Public Dimension Assessment Revision

DEPARTMENTS

- 4 **Hot off the Web**
- 5 **Peer Reviewer Manager's Corner**
- 6 **Reference Desk**
- 8 **Opportunity Knocks!**

¹Based on the number of staff reported by participants in the 2002 Museum Financial Survey, and correcting for the estimated total number of museums in the country.

MUSEUM ADVANCEMENT & EXCELLENCE

Peer Reviewer Manager

202/218-7688
peer-review@aam-us.org

Museum Assessment Program (MAP)

202/289-9118
map@aam-us.org

Accreditation Program

202/289-9116
accreditation@aam-us.org

Information Center

202/289-1818

STAFF

ELIZABETH MERRITT

Director

KAREN BELLNIER

Peer Reviewer Manager

JEFF BUCHHEIT

Assistant Director, MAP

BETHANY TAYLOR

Coordinator, MAP

LAURA PLAISTED

Administrative Assistant, MAP

JULIE HART

Assistant Director, Accreditation

PAMELA FELTUS

Coordinator, Accreditation

KIA DORMAN

Assistant Coordinator, Accreditation

DORA WASHINGTON

Administrative Assistant, Accreditation

JANET VAUGHAN

Knowledge Manager

MEGAN GALAIDA

Information Specialist

ANA GONZALEZ

Information Specialist

SUSAN BREITKOPF

NEWStandard Editor;
Associate Editor, Publications

SUBMISSION INSTRUCTIONS:

Please send submissions for *NEWStandard* to Peer Reviewer Manager, AAM, 1575 Eye St., NW, Suite 400, Washington, DC 20005.

What's the Big Idea

[continued from page 1]

One way to focus on areas of emerging standards is to look at the difference between the performance results of a museum—such as good governance and appropriate collections stewardship, which anyone would agree are appropriate expectations—and the existence or non-existence of prerequisites for achieving those results. For example, there are well-established standards in the field that require museums to have founding documents (e.g., articles of incorporation), governing documents (e.g., bylaws), and a written delegation of authority from the governing authority to the director. The consensus of the field, arrived at over time, is that these documents are so clearly necessary for good governance that they are in and of themselves indispensable standards. Currently, there is no standard that requires a collections plan as a prerequisite for a museum exercising good collections stewardship. However, a growing consensus in the field suggests this may become so—that it is reasonable to expect a museum to have a collections plan as a necessary step to shaping its collections, just as bylaws are necessary to good governance or a strategic plan to good management.

As peer reviewers, you focus on the individual museum being reviewed, but at the same time you contribute to an ongoing discussion with the field,...

How do we make the leap from a standard based on performance to standards regarding specific steps a museum must take as a prerequisite to good performance? In part through the peer review process of observing hundreds of museums each year and noting what practices consistently produce desirable or

undesirable results. Is it possible for a board and a director to have a good working relationship without a written delegation of authority? Yes. But the absence of such a document is so often a problem that it seems imprudent not to expect it as a standard. Regarding collections plans, the Accreditation Commissioners note that they table their decision on almost 30 percent of museums in accreditation review due to collections stewardship issues. Many of these tabling decisions represent deep, systemic problems of museums having more material than they can appropriately care for; collections that do not support their mission; broad, unfocused collections that do not support interpretive or research plans; or acute unmet needs for additional material. The Commissioner's understanding of these problems comes in large part from reading the reports prepared by the Accreditation Visiting Committees. These observations have initiated an ongoing dialogue with the field regarding the role of collections planning. This may eventually result in the Commission making a collections plan a required document for accreditation, which in turn may lead to it being regarded as a standard document by the field.

For all the reasons discussed above, it is useful for peer reviewers to tackle problems of poor performance and try to analyze root causes, even when there is no clear standard in the field for how these issues should be resolved. In accreditation reviews, peer reviewers note the problem and comment on whether attempts by the museum to solve the problem are working. MAP peer reviewers, in addition, suggest a number of possible solutions and relate how documents or processes that they have seen in other museums helped resolve similar issues. Regardless of the type of visit, your

written comments on recurring issues form a pool of ideas that are the basis for evolving standards.

Peer reviewers also play a vital role in identifying examples of best practices. Some standards are abstract and general and can be hard for museums to translate to their own situation. For example, a museum should be transparent in its operations and accountable to the public—what, exactly, does that look like? How does a museum fulfill this standard? Examples of best practices, whether sample documents or descriptions of programs or processes, demonstrate in a concrete, often replicable way how a museum can meet specific standards. When you comment in your written reports on documents or practices that are particularly commendable, AAM staff seek permission to distribute these documents through the Information Center, to use excerpts of them in articles, books, handouts, and seminars, to compile lists of “who does this well?”, and to note potential case studies.

So much these days revolves around “meta” issues—meta-data (data about data); meta-analysis (doing research on research)—and this is true of peer review, too. As you assess the performance of individual museums, you create the basis for “meta-assessment”—assessment of assessments to identify emerging standards and best practices in the field.

Museum Standard: A generally accepted level of attainment for measuring or judging performance.

Best Practice: A commendable action or philosophy that successfully solves problems, can be replicated, and demonstrates an awareness of standards.

MAP and Accreditation: Evolving with the Field

Julie Hart, Assistant Director, Accreditation

Keeping the Accreditation and Museum Assessment Programs dynamic and reflective of the changing museum field environment is a challenging yet critical responsibility for AAM. As Beth Merritt described in “What’s the Big Idea?”, peer reviewers play a very important role in these efforts by identifying and disseminating standards and best practices.

Substantial changes are underway in the Museum Assessment and Accreditation Programs. As a peer reviewer, stay knowledgeable about program changes—you are on the front lines communicating and applying any new requirements. As a peer reviewer, you are also a key distributor—directly and indirectly—of the changes. The changes described below will change how you assess museums. Let’s take a look at these changes, your role in developing them, and how they affect you in your role as a peer reviewer.

WHAT’S NEW IN THE MUSEUM ASSESSMENT PROGRAM?

When the MAP Public Dimension Assessment turned 10 years old in 2002, the staff began a year-long process of revising it to incorporate key findings from AAM’s Museums & Community (M&C) initiative.

The new Public Dimension Assessment will be released to the field this spring. MAP Surveyors contributed their knowledge of standards and best practices from their own job and their site visits to this process. As MAP’s eyes and ears, it was essential to include Surveyors as key members of the revision committee. To read more from the Surveyor’s perspective of the revision

process and new assessment, see this issue’s “On the Ground” article by Guy C. Vanderpool.

The revision maintains the prior strengths of the assessment—helping museums identify new audiences, improve programming, and more successfully market themselves—but now also asks museums to think critically about how deeply they involve the community in their operations. Throughout the *Public Dimension Self-Study Workbook*, they are consistently asked to think about how the community is involved in the museum’s decision making.

Highlights of content changes to the Public Dimension Assessment:

- A new focus on the way in which the museum serves, communicates, and collaborates with its community and audiences,
- Museums guided in defining and clarifying their understanding of who makes up their audience and community, and
- Participants conduct a mini Museums & Community Dialogue and/or focus group.

If you are a peer reviewer who does Public Dimension Assessment visits, make sure you’re up to speed on the M&C project and outcomes (see sidebar).

WHAT’S NEW IN ACCREDITATION?

In 1996, the current Self-Study Questionnaire was implemented by the Accreditation Program and something brand new called the Characteristics of an Accreditable Museum went into effect. The issues,

[continued on page 7]

Reality Check: The Public Dimension Assessment Revision

Guy C. Vanderpool, Executive Director, Texarkana Museums System, Texas

The Public Dimension Assessment program is an excellent opportunity for museums to learn new perspectives on their organizations. I have been in the museum field for 12 years and have made four Public Dimension visits and had my own museum assessed. The assessments I have participated in have helped me tremendously as a museum profes-

sional and are some of the most rewarding experiences I have had.

The Public Dimension Assessment program celebrated 10 years of service in 2002, but some of the program's components needed to be revised to reflect changes in the field and the Museums & Community initiative coming from the AAM

leadership. As a result, AAM convened the Public Dimension Workbook Revision Committee in 2002, of which I was a member.

The revision of the Public Dimension Assessment Workbook reflects AAM's concern that its publications and programs reflect the goals of the Museums and Community Initiative that were outlined in *Mastering Civic Engagement: A Challenge to Museums, 2002*, and the association's concern for developing realistic approaches for participating museums and peer reviewers.

HOT OFF THE WEB

The peer review section of the AAM Web site is becoming a key resource for peer reviewers. AAM will continue to increase the breadth and depth of the site to meet the needs of peer reviewers. "Hot Off the Web" will be a regular feature in *NEWStandard* devoted to announcing additions to the site, highlighting hot discussions from the past few months, and introducing new topics for discussion.

AAM's Web site continually adds new information on key concerns and emerging issues in the museum field. All of the references below can be found on AAM's Web site, www.aam-us.org. The addresses listed below should follow the main Web address when typed into your browser. For example (/peer-review) would be entered as www.aam-us.org/peer-review to take you to the peer review section.

Museum Ethics

(/resources/ethics_guidelines)

As AAM's Ethics Committee develops guidelines to assist museums in maintaining their accountability and integrity, they are posted here. They include:

- Code of Ethics for Museums
- AAM Guidelines on Exhibiting Borrowed Objects
- AAM Guidelines Concerning the Unlawful Appropriation of Objects During the Nazi Era

- AAM Guidelines for Museums on Developing and Managing Business Support
- AAM Guidelines for Museums on Developing and Managing Individual Donor Support

Collections Exchange Center

(/newcec/resources.cfm)

The AAM Collections Exchange Center (CEC) facilitates the exchange of collections material between AAM institutional member museums. This assists museums in managing their collections while ensuring that material held in the public trust remains available to the public for its education and enjoyment. AAM institutional member museums can post and view items in the AAM CEC. The service is free of charge to these institutions. The resources section, available to all users, presents several valuable references about collections stewardship that all peer reviewers may find useful, especially Collections Management Surveyors.

Information Center

(/programs/infocenter)

The online resources of the Information Center, available to all AAM members, continue to grow. Examples include a new Fact Sheet on capitalizing collections and a checklist for gift agreements. In addition, AAM institutional member museums have access to the Information Center's reference services and sample documents. The Information Center can be an excellent resource for learning more about issues in the museum field, and Surveyors may want to recommend the museum they visit take advantage of this membership benefit. When exploring the Information Center online, you may find links to other resources that would be beneficial to recommend to other museums. All AAM-produced content (such as Fact Sheets) and the sample documents are protected under copyright law and cannot be distributed further.

Other documents include

Considerations for AAM Accredited Museums Facing Retrenchment or Downsizing

(/programs/accreditation/retrenchment.cfm)

AAM Position Statement: University Natural History Museums and Collections

(/pdf/univcollstatement.pdf)

Jeffrey Buchheit, assistant director, Museum Assessment Program, assembled the committee of past and current Public Dimension Assessment museum participants, peer reviewers, and experts on accessibility and diversity to revise the *Self-Study Workbook*. Mr. Buchheit's excellent coordination of the difficult revision project made certain that each committee member voiced an opinion on various topics. This inclusive approach ensured that the different realities of peer reviewers, participating museums, and AAM initiatives and guidelines could be addressed in the new document.

All committee members agreed that the program's goals of helping museums identify new audiences, improve programming, and better market themselves were essential. The most important addition to these core components of the assessment workbook focused on encouraging museum participants to think critically about community involvement in their museum operations.

While an overused cliché, "reality check" seemed most influential on my thoughts during the project. Bob Dylan once sang that "reality has always had too many heads." The museum profession is full of different realities: from the reality of curatorial standards to the reality of a collection in peril, from the reality of board expectations to the reality of what can be delivered by museum staff, and from the reality of the standards of the profession to the reality of what museums can accomplish.

A perception held by some trustees and staff is that if museums are places where people are encouraged to think, then museum professionals should be people with big ideas and solutions. "Tell us what to do and how to fix our situation" is heard by

[continued on page 6]

PEER REVIEWER MANAGER'S CORNER

Recruiting • Supporting • Developing Peer Reviewers

It is an exciting time for peer review with AAM!

- The evaluation process is fully underway,
- A new *Peer Review Manual* is available in print and online,
- Peer reviewer activities at the Annual Meeting continue to improve, and
- *Evaluating Governance: A Workshop for AAM Peer Reviewers* begins a second life.

EVALUATION

After your next visit, you will receive feedback on how it met the expectations of the participating museum, the program, and (for Accreditation only) the Accreditation Commission. As many visits are very successful and a good experience for everyone involved, this feedback will often result in appreciation for the work you have done. When there are challenges or a difference of understanding about expectations, the feedback will allow us to discuss the situation and how to work towards a more effective and positive visit the next time.

PEER REVIEW MANUAL

The *MAP Surveyor Handbooks* and the *Visiting Committee Handbook: A Closer Look* have been replaced with the enclosed *Peer Review Manual*. The content of each handbook is updated in the *Peer Review Manual*. New peer review policies and information about peer review in general is also provided. This tool will benefit your peer review work. Please let me know if you have any comments or suggestions for future revisions. A huge thank you to the team of peer reviewers who provided guidance and feedback throughout its development process.

PEER REVIEW & AAM'S ANNUAL MEETING IN NEW ORLEANS

This year's annual meeting has several offerings for peer reviewers. Refer to the enclosed card for a description of each.

- Peer Reviewer Orientation (4 p.m.-5 p.m., Friday, May 7)
- Peer Reviewer Reception (5 p.m.-6:30 p.m., Friday, May 7)
- Mid-career Mentoring Roundtable on peer review (12:15 p.m.-1:15 p.m., Sunday, May 9)
- AAM Peer Reviewer Workshop: Making Lemonade (9 a.m.-2 p.m., Monday, May 10)

Please stop by the AAM Resource Center to introduce yourself at any time. If you would like to schedule a time to talk about a concern, contact Laura Plaisted at lplaisted@aam-us.org.

EVALUATING GOVERNANCE ONLINE

Evaluating Governance, supported by an IMLS grant and developed in conjunction with BoardSource, begins a second life as *Evaluating Governance: Online*. Currently under development, it will provide the information and activities from the workshop; insight into the elements of good governance; and how to review governance in context of peer review for AAM. A great opportunity for peer reviewers unable to attend the workshop and a reference source and a chance to refresh before a visit for those who did. Look for *Evaluating Governance: Online* this fall at www.aam-us.org/peer-review.



Karen Bellnier
Peer Reviewer Manager
Phone: 202/218-7688
Fax: 202/289-6578
peer-review@aam-us.org
www.aam-us.org

REFERENCE DESK

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

There is no single set of museum standards. In some instances museums rely on standards developed outside the profession, such as accounting. In other instances they use standards developed outside the profession but within the nonprofit sector, such as those concerning fund raising from the public. AAM established the Accreditation Program in part to ensure that the essential standards by which museums are judged originate from within the profession. In addition to AAM, a number of organizations have issued statements of standards and best practices for particular aspects of museum operations or for segments of the museum profession.

The Information Center has compiled a list of standards and ethical codes that are specific to museums as well as those that have been developed outside the profession but are applicable. Standards are continually evolving; as new statements are issued they will be added to this list.

The complete list is available under Resources for Peer Review in the Peer Review section of the AAM Web site (www.aam-us.org/peer-review). The following are examples of standards from inside and outside the museum field.

AAM – CARE: PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS FOR THE PRACTICE OF AUDIENCE RESEARCH AND EVALUATION IN MUSEUMS

Developed by the Committee on Audience Research and Evaluation (CARE), an AAM Standing Professional Committee. Available on the AAM (members only) Web site (http://www.aam-us.org/members/infocenter/interp_educ/research.cfm).

AAM – EDCOM: STANDARDS AND BEST PRACTICE IN MUSEUM EDUCATION

Developed by the Committee on Education (EdCom), an AAM Standing Professional Committee. Available on EdCom's Web site (<http://www.edcom.org/about/standards.shtml>).

STANDARDS AND PRACTICES FOR HISTORIC SITE ADMINISTRATION

Developed by the Tri-State Coalition for Historic Places. Available for purchase from the Heritage Investment Program, 100 South Broad St., Philadelphia, PA 19110 or 215-569-2896.

AFP: THE ACCOUNTABLE NONPROFIT ORGANIZATION

Developed by the Association of Fundraising Professionals. Available on the AFP Web site (<http://www.afpnet.org/ethics>).

BBB/WGA: STANDARDS OF CHARITABLE ACCOUNTABILITY

Developed by the BBB Wise Giving Alliance. Available on the Alliance Web site (<http://www.give.org/standards/index.asp>).

On the Ground

[continued from page 5]

many peer reviewers, but the important focus of the revised workbook and of the entire process is listening. Peer reviewers do not have all of the solutions. In fact, most of our time is spent simply listening. By a participating museum listening to its community and by peer reviewers listening to the concerns of the museum, concrete solutions can be found and the different realities of standards, peer reviewers, communities and participating museums can move more in line. It leads to a community-led correction where the peer reviewers become the conduits for lining up the conditions for future success. It is not that the peer reviewers have a magic correction; instead, their strength is professional objectivity.

By a participating museum listening to its community and by peer reviewers listening to the concerns of the museum, concrete solutions can be found and the different realities of standards, peer reviewers, communities and participating museums can move more in line.

The goal of the revision project was to match the experiences of peer reviewers with the Museums and Community initiative so that Public Dimension Assessment is a tangible benefit to participating museums. As committee members, we worked to make the revised workbook a concrete experience that could be useful for even the smallest museum facing the critical issues of community support and involvement. As a peer reviewer, I have found that the realities of small to mid-sized museums often outweigh the lofty goals of professional initiatives.

[continued on page 8]

In Sight

[continued from page 3]

practices, and challenges in the museum field have evolved greatly since then.

Over the past two years, the Accreditation Commission and program staff developed a revised set of Characteristics of an Accreditable Museum and began to revise the Self-Study around them. Copies of the draft revised Characteristics are enclosed in this issue of *NEWStandard*, along with the table of contents and list of required documents from the *draft* Self-Study. For the next few months, we are seeking comment on them from the field (see below for how you can provide feedback). We estimate the final versions of both will go into effect simultaneously in early 2005.

At the same time, the current Accreditation Commission Expectations are going to be revised and new ones developed to align with and support the changes being made to the Characteristics and Self-Study.

Highlights of content changes to the Characteristics and the Self-Study:

- A new emphasis on the philosophy and processes a museum uses to guide its decision-making and to connect the dots between its functional areas.
- A new section called Public Trust and Accountability that addresses pan-organizational issues for ensuring sustainability. This section covers community, accessibility, accountability, and transparency.
- Reflect the ideas underpinning AAM's Museums & Community initiative, including a greater expectation that a museum engage in ongoing, reflective institutional planning for its future that includes participation of its audiences and com-

munity; and a stronger focus on how outside stakeholders are involved in the process of helping develop, assess, and revise the museum's interpretation.

- Greater emphasis on how a museum defines and measures its own success and what it does with the results. Questions here range from those about evaluation of specific programs to how your museum can make a difference in people's lives and how you know.
- More details on partnerships and operational relationships with other non-museum organizations, including evidence of Memoranda of Understanding/ Operating Agreements.

The format of the Self-Study has also undergone a makeover for the benefit of both the museum filling it out and the peer reviewer reading it:

- More comprehensive yet easier to complete and review by turning many questions into checkbox lists and tables for quick and easy answering.
- Using a number of questions from the Standard Facility Report—easy to transfer data if this document is already filled out.
- Fewer broad essay questions (e.g., how does a specific activity support your mission?) that produce generic answers; questions are more focused in their scope.
- Less repetitive!

HOW YOU CAN BE INVOLVED IN INFORMING THE FINAL PRODUCT

Peer reviewers are invited to give us feedback on the enclosed documents. We want to hear your overall impressions about the new directions being taken by the Accreditation Program and whether the new standards will be both usable and beneficial in your assess-

ment and analysis of a museum's operations. (Please no word-smithing or editing at this time.)

Peer reviewers are invited to give us feedback on the enclosed documents. We want to hear your overall impressions about the new directions being taken by the Accreditation Program and whether the new standards will be both usable and beneficial

We are also looking for Visiting Committee volunteers to carefully review and comment on the full draft of the revised Self-Study Questionnaire (likely to take place during the months of May and June). Please direct all feedback and requests to be a Self-Study Questionnaire reviewer to Julie Hart at jhart@aam-us.org.

Museums & Community References

Seminar

Advanced Building Community Connections, Annual Meeting

About the Initiative

<http://www.aam-us.org/initiatives/m&c/index.cfm>

Publications

Mastering Civic Engagement:

A Challenge to Museums

A 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.

AAM Peer Reviewer Workshop: Making Lemonade

May 10, Annual Meeting, New Orleans

Have fun developing skills for managing challenging interpersonal situations, effectively communicating concerns in a report, and navigating unexpected dilemmas through role playing, collaborative writing, and discussion. Experienced peer reviewers will facilitate discussions, share their perspectives, and provide insights into how they approached past challenges. The cost of workshop (\$15) covers materials and refreshments; attendees will provide their own lunch.

PROFESSIONAL EDUCATION SEMINARS

Learning in Museums

June 25-26 - Boston

In collaboration with the AAM Committee on Education

Hosted by the Boston Museum of Fine Arts and the MIT Museum

Advanced Building Community Connections Workshop

New Orleans – May 10 (Annual Meeting)

For current museum staff and board members who already have established relationships with their communities or who have attended a previous AAM Building Community Connections seminar.

AAM ANNUAL MEETING AND MUSEUM EXPO™ 2004

New Orleans, May 6-10

The most comprehensive conference and exposition for museum professionals

ADVANCE REGISTRATION (received by April 9)

Member \$365

Non-member \$505

Member Student \$210

ON SITE REGISTRATION (After April 9)

Member \$405

Non-member \$545

Member Student \$230

On the Ground

[continued from page 6]

The hand-wringing stress of professionals in small to mid-sized museums is universal. The only thing that has changed in the last two years is that now the need is even more pressing. While the standards of the Museums and Community Initiative and the new Public Dimension Assessment Workbook are very important, often peer reviewers are greeted at the museum door by an overworked director and small staff who simply want to know what they can do to obtain more community support and awareness. The revised workbook helps them work through this issue by asking them to listen to their community and identify new ways to become more relevant. If those new avenues are not evident to the staff, then the peer reviewers' suggestions become even more important. Therefore, the observations, advice, and support of the peer reviewers on site remain at the center of the Public Dimension Assessment experience.

The revised workbook asks museums to address the issue of community. Museums will have to define their community, conduct a museum and community dialogue, and examine how their community is involved in museum decision making. Mr. Buchheit states that "as museums participate in the new assessment, they will identify their strengths and weaknesses in terms of their level of community engagement. Some of the issues they will identify on their own as they do the self-study portion of the assessment. Other issues will arise during the Surveyor site visit." The Surveyors then will compare their observations with the self-assessment and provide a report outlining areas that need improvement.

Often peer reviewers find that once on site the realities of the museum have changed since the application was completed. Staff turnover, com-

munity developments, and new directions by board leadership can all occur very quickly. Flexibility, then, is very important for peer reviewers. One of the strengths of the revised workbook is that it is more flexible and allows for more spontaneous approaches if necessary.

The good news for peer reviewers about the new workbook is that they now have a new tool to help them assist museums in the program. By knowing more about a museum's community, peer reviewers will be able to spend less time trying to get the big picture. Site visits are often so rushed that peer reviewers can go away without knowing some important perceptions of the museum. The new workbook eliminates some of our guess work by asking the participating museum to do more background work that will be ready for the peer reviewers to include in their overall assessment. Peer reviewers will then have better information for their evaluation and recommendations. Most importantly, though, it will continue the invaluable service of the Public Dimension Assessment Program and make the project an important addition to the Museums and Community Initiative.

What you need to know about Facilities and Risk Management.

AAM has mailed out a survey to the field to gather information on facilities management and risk management. Designed with the help of 20 museum professionals, it asks about what the field most wants to know about these subject areas. The resulting data will help museums make financially critical decisions regarding insurance, facilities rental, catering, parking, space usage, and other key issues. Check the AAM Web site after April 2 for a list of museums receiving the survey and a PDF version of the survey. If you want to answer the survey but were not on the mailing list, download a copy and fill it in. The survey results will be disseminated on the AAM Web site at national and regional meeting sessions, and in AAM publications.