

MAP

Collections Management
Assessment
Self-Study Workbook

MAP Collections Management Assessment

Self-Study Workbook

American Association of Museums

The Museum Assessment Program (MAP) is an assessment tool that can help your museum attain excellence in operations and planning through a confidential process of self-study and peer review. MAP is one component of the Department of Museum Advancement & Excellence at the American Association of Museums. The department also includes the Accreditation Program, Information Center, and Peer Review.

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Confidentiality Statement

MAP is a confidential process—the resulting information is shared only with your institution, the MAP staff, and your Surveyor(s). A museum’s current executive director or head of the governing authority can request copies of documents related to current or past assessments by contacting MAP staff.

The American Association of Museums’ Museum Assessment Program is supported through a cooperative agreement with the Institute of Museum and Library Services.

The American Association of Museums has been dedicated to promoting excellence within the museum community for over 100 years. AAM’s mission is to enhance the value of museums to their communities through leadership, advocacy and service. AAM is the only organization representing the nation’s entire museum community. Since its founding in 1906, AAM has grown to nearly 20,000 members, including more than 13,800 individual members, 3,000 corporate members, and more than 3,100 museums. For more about AAM, please visit www.aam-us.org.

The Institute of Museum and Library Services is an independent federal grant-making agency dedicated to creating and sustaining a nation of learners by helping libraries and museums serve their communities. The Institute fosters leadership, innovation, and a lifetime of learning by supporting the 15,000 museums and 122,000 libraries in America. The Institute also encourages partnerships to expand the educational benefit of libraries and museums. To learn more about the Institute, visit www.imls.gov.

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The Museum Assessment Program (MAP) was started in 1981 to promote professional standards, institutional assessment and peer review. As MAP enters its twenty-fifth year, it continues to grow and evolve to meet the needs of the museum field. Over 3,500 museums have benefited from MAP.

Many individuals and the collective wisdom of their institutions contributed to the development of this *Self-Study Workbook*. We are deeply grateful for their assistance in improving the self-study process. We thank the following people for their part in creating the *Workbook*:

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As the *Workbook* represents a group effort, neither its components nor its entirety should be assumed to reflect the opinions or professional judgment of any one person listed above.

Jeffrey Buchheit
Assistant Director
Museum Assessment Program

OVERVIEW OF THE ASSESSMENT PROCESS

The Collections Management Assessment is designed to provide an overview of your collections stewardship in the context of your entire operations. Comprised of three phases—self-study, peer review, and implementation—the assessment is a collegial collaboration. Ideas and information are shared to address your priorities and needs.

Partners in the Collaboration

The assessment process as a whole is a collaboration of three partners:

- **The Museum.** You, your staff,* and governing authority best understand your collections, resources, challenges, and opportunities. You are all active partners throughout the assessment process. You work internally on the self-study phase, with the Surveyor during the peer review phase, and finally on embedding recommendations into your organization's process of planning and implementation.
- **The Peer Reviewer.** Called a MAP Surveyor, he or she conducts a site visit and in collaboration with you writes an Assessment Report. The Surveyor provides an objective perspective and expertise relevant to your needs. The Surveyor helps you to explore your organization from a fresh point of view; examines your operations in light of current standards and best practices; and shares models and resources for recommended changes.
- **The MAP Staff.** We help match you with a Surveyor and work with the Surveyor to provide resources and knowledge of current standards and best practices relevant to your concerns. We are your partners in the assessment process: please contact us if you have questions or want further information about how to get the most out of your assessment.

The Purpose of Self-Study

Guided by this *Self-Study Workbook*, which includes a Questionnaire and Activities, you are about to begin the initial phase of the assessment. Self-study enables staff and governing authority to step back from the day-to-day work of the museum and take an in-depth view of its mission, goals, use of resources, operations, and focus on collections planning, policy, and procedure.

The Self-Study Questionnaire and Activities are designed to help you see the institution systemically, not merely as a way to prepare the peer reviewer. Most organizations find that they derive at least half the benefit of their assessment from the self-study process. Your responses to the Self-Study Questionnaire build a profile of your institution and help you evaluate current strengths and weaknesses in its collections management and general operations. The completed Questionnaire and Activity summaries are important institutional records and valuable planning documents. They serve as a baseline against which to measure your progress. The purpose of the Self-Study is also to inform your Surveyor prior to the visit. Please do not write to impress--write with candor to help guide and inform your Surveyor and you will get more out of the experience.

Time Frame for Self-Study

In the Welcome Packet you received with this *Workbook is a MAP Assessment Timeline*. Consult the *Timeline* to find the due date for your completed self-study. This time frame accommodates the needs of different institutions. Some museums will need all the time allocated in the *Timeline*; others will finish sooner. If you find that the *Timeline* does not fit your needs, contact the MAP staff to discuss revising it for your organization.

* Throughout this document, *staff* refers to paid and unpaid, full- & part-time positions, unless otherwise noted.

Maximizing the Benefits of Self-Study:

Form an Assessment Team

Broad-based participation can foster an atmosphere of dialogue, planning, and cooperative decision-making that continues after the self-study phase is completed. To most effectively accomplish this, we recommend that you form an Assessment Team. The Assessment Team is responsible for:

- Overseeing completion of the Assessment;
- Establishing and monitoring a timeline for completion of the *Self-Study Workbook*;
- Scheduling the MAP Surveyor site visit;
- Evaluating the Surveyor's performance;
- Ensuring that the museum begins the process of planning and implementation after completing the Collections Management MAP.

Who from your organization should be on this team? We suggest selecting individuals who have:

- **Knowledge** about how things really work or don't work at your organization, about what resources are available, about how to get things done;
- **Authority** to make decisions about policies or procedures;
- **Responsibility** for implementing decisions arising from the assessment and subsequent planning.

The Assessment Team might include representatives of your governing authority, of your community, and a cross-section of staff. This assessment looks at how collections are integrated into your organization so you should include non-collections staff in your team. Staff with responsibilities for housekeeping, building management, security, marketing, public relations, development, etc., are all key players in maximizing the potential of your collections. Consider who should be the team leader: it may be the director, or it may be another staff member with the skills to lead a team. The team leader should have the authority to communicate that the assessment is a priority to his/her co-workers.

If you have not already formed your Assessment Team, take time to do so now.

How to Involve the Entire Institution in the Assessment

Long-lasting results from the assessment are achieved when commitment is sought from the entire institution. You will want to prepare your institution for the assessment and apprise them of progress periodically.

We suggest:

- As you begin the Assessment **orient governing authority and staff on the assessment process**: introduce members of the Assessment Team, explain how each phase of the assessment is conducted, how the results will be implemented, and what benefits you expect from the assessment;
- As the Assessment Team works through the MAP process, **involve additional members of the governing authority and staff** at appropriate points. Invite their answers to the Self-Study questions and participation in the Self-Study Activities. Provide information about the site visit: the Surveyor's name and experience, the visit date, and the schedule for meeting with staff and governing authority;
- Upon receipt of the Assessment Report, **share and discuss the report findings** with governing authority and staff. You may want to distribute copies of the report itself or circulate a summary of the major points. Explain how your museum plans to use the results.

USING THE PRINTED AND ELECTRONIC WORKBOOK

You will notice several features about the *Workbook* design. Part I contains all procedural information, including steps in the assessment process and additional documentation. Part II contains the Self-Study Questionnaire, Activities, and Conclusion. Part III contains a glossary of terms and a list of resources.

Use the electronic copy provided to complete the Self-Study Questionnaire and Conclusion using a word processor. The CD contains PC-compatible versions for your convenience. If you need a Macintosh-compatible version, please contact the MAP office. In order to make these copies readable by as many programs as possible, the formatting is very simple. Feel free to change font type and size, page breaks, etc. to make the document more attractive and legible.

You can answer multiple choice questions by using your word processor to overwrite the appropriate box with an "x" or, after completing the narrative answers, you can print out the Questionnaire and fill in the check boxes by hand.

Many museums find that their narrative answers exceed the space provided in the printed *Workbook*. We do not intend for these spaces to limit the length of your answer. Using a word processor to complete the electronic copy, you can make your answers as long as necessary.

Terminology

Museums often use different terminology to describe procedures, programs, conditions, and collections. To help you decide how to respond to specific sections or questions, there is a **Glossary** and key terms are defined at the beginning of some sections of the questionnaire.

Resources

Museums may find the recommended resources listing useful during both the self-study and the implementation phases.

Completing the Self-Study Questionnaire

The completed self-study materials are **confidential**, and outside of your organization seen only by your Surveyor and the MAP staff. To make the Questionnaire as effective as possible:

- Answer the questions with total candor and in the manner most useful and relevant to your museum;
- Encourage participants to think reflectively—to think about their thinking—to think about what it is they do, why and how they do it, and how well it works.
- Change the wording as needed to make it more pertinent to your museum's discipline (if necessary, answer Not Applicable, but please indicate why).

Sections of the Self-Study Questionnaire may be distributed among departments or staff for completion. In this way, each area of the museum has an opportunity to review its own operations.

Completing the Self-Study Activities

The Activities produce a different kind of learning than the Questionnaire. They provide the opportunity for you to assess your institution's knowledge about its operations in action. Completion of the self-study phase of the

assessment requires conducting *at least three* activities. The Activities vary in complexity and focus: choose the ones that best fit your resources and match the goals you set for the assessment. If you can complete more than three, we encourage you to conduct all that would be useful.

The Activities and Questionnaire can be completed in any order; however, some of the Activities refer to your Questionnaire answers, requiring them to be ready *before* conducting the Activity. Therefore, we recommend making your Activity selections first, then reviewing the Questionnaire to identify questions that relate to your selections. In addition, you may find that because of the findings and discussion other questions can be more productively answered *after* conducting an Activity.

Completing the Self-Study Conclusion

The Self-Study Questionnaire and Activities allow a closer look at each aspect of your organization and its collections. The final part of the self-study phase is to answer the Conclusion questions. This provides the opportunity to refocus on the institution as a whole. It helps prioritize your needs and will prepare you for the implementation phase.

Suggestions for the Assessment Team

- Agree on the assignment of responsibilities, including the distribution of Questionnaire sections and Activities.
- Decide which questions you will answer as a group. Throughout the Workbook Questionnaire we have marked with an “*” questions we suggest are appropriate for group discussion.
- Set a timetable with interim deadlines to gauge progress and to apprise staff and governing authority.
- Collect the completed sections of the Self-Study Questionnaire and Activity summaries and compile them into one document.
- Review the compiled self-study document with director and head of the governing authority for completeness and consistency (revise as necessary).
- Answer the Self-Study Conclusion questions with director and head of governing authority.
- Secure signatures and submit materials to the MAP Office.
- Collect additional documentation and send to Surveyor.

Standards, Best Practices, and the Uniqueness of Every Institution

The questions and activities in the *Workbook* reflect standards and practices as they are generally understood in the museum field. MAP used a wide range of sources to develop the *Workbook*, including the Accreditation Program, published references, research, and practices of other MAP participants.

While some questions address legal issues such as safety and accessibility that are of concern to all museums, the relevancy of each question and each checklist component is dependent on the individual museum’s operations. Each institution is unique. Not every museum will operate in the same way. Consequently, interpret this document in light of your own needs, resources, and stage of growth.

Though all questions and checklist components may not apply to your institution, they can serve as a guide to the variety of practices found in museums, practices you might consider implementing as you review your policies and procedures. Viewed in this way, they are tools to be used in your planning process.

Submitting the Completed Self-Study Materials

The completed self-study materials consist of:

- Signed Institutional Information page
- Questionnaire answers
- Activity summaries
- Self-Study Conclusion

Keep a copy of the completed self-study materials for your files and send **two copies** to:

**Museum Assessment Program
American Association of Museums
1575 Eye Street, N.W., Suite 400
Washington, D.C. 20005**

If you have any questions or concerns regarding the use of this document, how to answer certain questions, or how to form an Assessment Team, contact the MAP staff at (202) 289-9118, or via email at map@aam-us.org.

NEXT STEPS

Select a Surveyor

MAP staff will select and send a list of potential Surveyors appropriate for your assessment based on their expertise and interests as well as your institution's size, type, and goals stated in your application. You will eliminate any potential Surveyors from consideration that may have a conflict of interest and rate the remaining individuals according to your preference. Immediately return the list to the MAP office. Staff will contact the Surveyors in order of your preference to determine their availability. *Please note that it is not appropriate to contact the individuals listed on the form to discuss their availability or willingness to conduct your site visit.* Once your Surveyor confirms his/her availability and your museum submits its completed *Self-Study Workbook*, including activity summaries, MAP staff will provide you and the Surveyor with contact information. It is your responsibility to contact the Surveyor within a few weeks, determine a site visit date, and notify the MAP office.

Preparing for the Site Visit

The site visit is a unique professional opportunity for both the museum and the Surveyor. It marks the culmination of much preparation and may be accompanied by high expectations and anxiety.

Once you notify the MAP office of the site visit date, collaborate with the Surveyor to develop the site visit agenda and determine travel arrangements. You and the Surveyor will receive the "Site Visit Expectations" document and sample site visit agenda to assist you with this process. The museum and Surveyor should agree to all travel arrangements in advance to ensure that the plans are reasonable, appropriate, and acceptable to both parties. Note that the site visit is a professional business trip that typically includes transportation (airfare and/or car rental), hotel accommodations and meals.

Other key preparations for the site visit include:

- Assembling the additional documents and sending them to your Surveyor along with any additional materials the/she requests;
- Reviewing the site visit purpose, goals, and agenda with your staff, governing authority and additional stakeholders. Clear expectations and an understanding of the Surveyor's role—to evaluate, not inspect—can quell apprehension surrounding the site visit.

Conducting the Site Visit

Do not work day and night preparing for the Surveyor's site visit in order to impress him/her. Keep in mind that the Surveyor is there to help you. Do your best to stick to the agenda that you have developed together.

Receiving the Assessment Report

Your Surveyor has six weeks to complete the Assessment Report and send it to the MAP office. Occasionally, Surveyors work with museum staff during these six weeks to develop content and confirm facts for the report. This decision is left up to the individual Surveyor. Once the report has been turned into the MAP office, MAP staff have one month to review the report for tone and comprehensiveness. Once the review is complete, the final Assessment Report is forwarded to you. Expect your copy of the Assessment Report within 10 weeks of your site visit.

Implementation

After completion of the self-study and Surveyor's site visit phases, you will have a self-study document—answers to the questionnaire, activity summaries, and conclusion—and the Assessment Report written by your Surveyor. This is the time to review these materials with the purpose of addressing key issues in your planning. We suggest that you again use a team to undertake this process. It might be the same as your Assessment Team, or you might change the team composition to include people with different skills and knowledge needed to accomplish this phase. If you form a new team, have the Assessment Team fully brief members on the assessment process to date, its results, and their recommendations for further action. We also suggest you integrate assessment results into your planning for the next one to three years.

Leveraging Your Assessment

Many museums have used their Assessment Reports and the recommendations contained therein to approach funding agencies and donors with requests for support to implement the recommendations. In other cases museums have used their new knowledge gained from the assessment and implementation process to bolster their requests to funding agencies and donors. Funding agencies and donors are oftentimes impressed with the amount of work that the museum has done throughout the process, making your proposal all the more competitive.

Evaluation and Implementation Goals Form

Once you have received your Assessment Report and have had some time to share it with your stakeholders, MAP will send you an Evaluation and Implementation Goals Form. We will ask you about your experience with the assessment process and what recommendations and changes you expect to implement during the following year. For applicants participating through the annual deadline, the MAP office will send you a resource packet from the AAM Bookstore once we receive your completed form.