

## **Meeting the Challenge: Standardization and Accreditation**

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### **Abstract**

The role of museums in today's constricting global environment, and their larger and more expansive responsibility as places of people and nature is defined by the related objects, ideas, and achievements. Museums must be trusted places of knowledge with the values and beliefs that include a progressive approach toward the environment, the sciences, technology, and the arts, as well as the inherent system of ideas that define an inclusive vision of the world, personal and group perceptions, and ways of life.

As society moves into the second decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, museums must become more relevant to the public by providing exhibitions and programs that deal with the important issues of the time. One of the extraordinary aspects of museums is their collective responsibility for preserving heritage as a process of creation and presentation that ensures the continuity between life, space, time, and emotion. Because heritage assists people to define and project harmonious relationships with other humans and with nature, the process of preservation of heritage is not an idyllic notion. It is a reality of museological responsibility. The concept, as well as the act, of preserving heritage, is more than economic or political expediency, it is an ethical obligation.

This paper looks at the social and cultural role of museums from the perspective of standardized practices as exemplified by accreditation. Two examples of accreditation methodologies are provided with primary attention given to the process developed by the American Association of Museums (AAM).

The paper defines the accreditation process, but states that no standardization process is ideal for all museums. It also calls to attention that accreditation is not simply an institutional validating program, but one that serves the broader interests of the museum profession through education, information exchange, and self-improvement.

**Keywords:** Museums, accreditation, AAM, MAP, self-study, certification, registration, heritage, culture, museum standards, best practices

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## Introduction

Contemporary society is in constant change, therefore, the values of one era may not be those of another. Culture is a living social organism that has the ability to revise itself to meet the needs of people. It may reduce the emphasis it places upon one element, or shifts its focus to a new element that was not previously considered essential. This process of change may assign values to certain meanings, events, and objects that cannot be understood without the requisite transfer of information. It is in this role that museums excel.

The differences between the cultural elements of one people or activity and those of another are so intermingled that there is reason to believe there may be but one essential human nature. The recognition of this seemingly complex issue is important to the way museums fulfill their obligations in the service of humanity. It is a point of trust that cannot be ignored.

Because of this increasing responsibility, issues relating to proper stewardship of artifacts and specimens held by museum are of concern worldwide. Therefore, establishing standards for museum activities, including care and use of collections, is an acknowledged challenge. Standards and best practices are considered by many museums as a means for assessing the level of professionalism employed in dealing with collections, public service, institutional ethics, and the highest standards of museum operations.

A concern often arises when standardization is viewed as establishing restrictive measures by which the museum and museum staff are required to act and operate. Standardization is by definition the means to remove variations and irregularities and make all types or examples of a particular act or activity the same or bring them into conformity with one another. In other words, standardization on an individual level can be described as expecting the target group to perform a certain activity in the same or similar way. There is a great difference between standardized practices and standardized outcomes, and it is the outcome – result – that is of importance to the museum profession.

The American Association of Museums (AAM) formulates standards and best practices that guide museum operations.<sup>1</sup> It defines “standards” and “best practices” as follows.

- Standards are generally accepted levels that all museums are expected to achieve.
- Best practices are commendable actions and philosophies that demonstrate an awareness of standards, solve problems and can be replicated. Museums may choose to emulate them if appropriate to their circumstances.<sup>2</sup>

These standards and best practices are levels against which museums measure their

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<sup>1</sup> Accreditation Standards. Washington, DC: American Association of Museums. <http://www.aam-us.org/museumresources/accred/standards.cfm> (Accessed 2009/10/ 20).

<sup>2</sup> Accreditation Standards. Washington, DC: American Association of Museums. <http://www.aam-us.org/museumresources/accred/standards.cfm> (Accessed 2009/10/ 20).

own performance. They also help policy makers, media, philanthropic organizations, donors, and members of the public to assess museums' achievements.

Proper planning and an organized approach can avoid restrictive standardization of specific activities while providing substantive guidance of practical value. For example: the ICOM Code of Ethics for Museums is a standardizing document, and as such, it provides a foundation for the various activities of a museum. It is intended to promote an acceptable standard of practice for museums and persons working in museums. The Code states that, "Museums should promote the sharing of knowledge, documentation, and collections with museums and cultural organizations in the countries and communities of origin."<sup>3</sup> It does not tell the museum how to accomplish these tasks; rather it states that such practices are to be achieved.

## Commentary

Standardization of museum activities is about achieving commonly endorsed objectives, and in some countries that process is identified with accreditation. Consideration of this issue calls for sharing an experience relating to the museum in which I have worked for the past 24 years. When I arrived at the Museum there had been a succession of directors during the previous 14 years. The longest tenure for a director at that time was about four years and the shortest was only six months. There was an ongoing conflict between the museum and the community. This strife caused the museum, as a public service organization, to be at a virtual standstill.

The decision to pursue accreditation helped to focus the museum staff and the community board on a common objective, and the steps required to prepare the self-study as an institutional analysis brought the internal conflicts to the surface. Once it was clear what the problems were they could be addressed in a constructive manner and resolved. Not every issue was decided in a way that made everyone happy, but decisions were made to benefit the museum and to meet the requirements for accreditation.

The process took time, but accreditation was eventually achieved and the museum has been successfully reviewed three times. It is safe to say that the members of both the community and institutional boards, as well as the museum staff, would be displeased if the museum were to lose its accredited status. Everyone is proud of the accomplishment.

Accreditation for our museum involved challenges not unlike those experienced by many institutions. The concern was, and is, that accreditation brings with it the idea of standardization of procedures, and there is no perfect way to standardize museum practices. It is not a simple process to change years of practice and the accompanying attitudes. The

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<sup>3</sup> ICOM Code of Ethics for Museums. Paris: International Council of Museums, 2006, Section 6.1.

process requires reason and patience. It also requires an intermediary element that involves either the written or spoken word. It is this part of the process that often causes confusion and in extreme instances, the loss or misrepresentation of vital information about important issues. Accreditation is a complex issue to discuss. The more complex the issue being considered is, the more important the clear exchange of information becomes, and words are the good and bad of the communication process.

Museums have the responsibility for strengthening the values and identities of those communities whose heritage they preserve. It is therefore necessary for museums to acknowledge that role and fully endorse standardized collection maintenance and use practices. This effort requires museum personnel to give added attention to the museum's responsibility to address concerns about community values, and thereby, respond to the need of visitors. Museums should, when meeting best practice objectives, model institutional strategies to enhance social initiatives that go beyond traditional practices of collection care and object use. This concept can accommodate standardized practices while maintaining the unique character of the museum. The ideals promoted by standard practices and unique activities are not contradictory—they are mutually supportive.

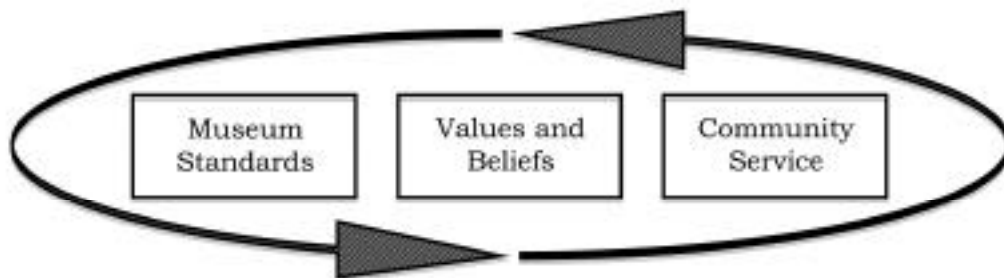


Figure 1. Museum standardization reinforces institutional values and beliefs and redefines the ideals of community service.

Standardized museum practices allow for a clear exchange of information between the profession and the public when describing professional activities. Such communication may describe collection care, conservation techniques, record maintenance, and the elements of public trust. The standardization of ways for improving quality is not a restrictive process; however, arbitrary standardization to establish and perpetuate a regimented system of rules and practices is often repressive and backward thinking. Such a limiting attitude can stifle imagination, creativity, and growth.

Two models may be considered as examples of standardizing practices that result in a national accrediting process. One example is in the United States and the other is in the United Kingdom. The US model is voluntary. It is administered by a national non-governmental agency, the American Association of Museums (AAM). There is no direct financial or political benefit for accredited museums. The UK model is also voluntary, but it

is an element of the central government. It is administered by an agency of the Department of Culture Media and Sport. Elements of this Department are responsible for delivering Registration to the regions. In addition, accredited museums in the UK are eligible for financial assistance allotted by the government.

More attention will be given to the US model because it is the one with which I am most familiar; however, both models are interesting examples of regulatory practices. Each model is a standardizing mechanism devised within the existing museum environment.

In the United States there are approximately 17,500 museums at recent count, and about 12,500 are listed in the American Association of Museums (AAM) directory. This listing is voluntary and does not infer or confer endorsement. Of the 12,500 museums in the directory, fewer than 800 are accredited. This is to say that approximately 6% of the listed museums are accredited. This is, by all measures, a small number.

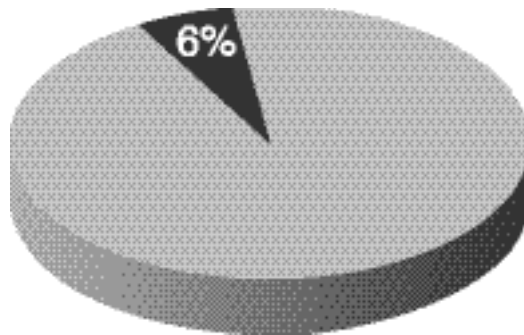


Figure 2. 12,500 museums are listed in the AAM directory and approximately 800 are accredited.

The AAM has identified two core questions to be used as guides for every accreditation review. Those same questions can provide a strong foundation for an accreditation or certification review regardless of where it occurs. Their value lies in their direct application to the museum profession.

The questions are:

- How well does the museum achieve its stated mission and goals?
- How well does the museum's performance meet standards and best practices as they are generally understood in the museum field, as appropriate to its circumstances?<sup>4</sup>

Accreditation is recognized as an achievement that brings recognition to a museum for

<sup>4</sup> Accreditation Standards. Washington, DC: American Association of Museums. <http://www.aam-us.org/museumresources/accred/standards.cfm> (Accessed 2009/10/14).

its commitment to excellence, accountability, high professional standards, and continued institutional improvement.<sup>5</sup> However, as stated, there is no financial or political reward associated with the accreditation process in the United States.

Standardizing practices in the United Kingdom had a different genesis. It may have been, at least in part, an effort to adjust to European Union ideals for a standard working environment. The 1957 Treaty of Rome creates the European Economic Community (EEC), or “Common Market,” and in 1987 the Single European Act was signed. The Act provided the basis for a six-year program to resolve the problems with the free-flow of trade across EU borders. The primary issues of concern were differences in national regulations including those regulating labor, and that effort began the process of standardizing outcomes. This course of action started with the for-profit arena and eventually moved to the not-for-profit sector.

The Registration Scheme developed in the United Kingdom set nationally agreed standards for museums in 1988.<sup>6</sup> (The Scheme was renamed Accreditation in 2004 to better reflect its purpose and the achievements of those museum that met the standards it set.<sup>7</sup>) These quality standards were formulated on “caring for and documenting collections, governance and management, and information and services for users.” They were also to identify opportunities for further improvement and development of museums. There are currently over 1800 museums participating in the Scheme, thus demonstrating their commitment to effectively manage collections for the enjoyment of all communities.

The accreditation scheme in the UK was prompted, also in part, by the availability of grant money made available by the Heritage Lottery Fund. This publically generated funding source is administered by a department of the central government to offer Heritage Grants for projects that relate to the national, regional, or local heritage of the UK. A standard as a national measurement of museum quality was required to distribute these funds; consequently, the Accreditation Scheme was originated. Accredited museums are better positioned to apply for funding and that was an incentive. Nevertheless, it must be stated that accreditation in the UK is voluntary. There is no obligatory endorsement of the accreditation scheme. The process is self-nominating.

The Museums, Libraries, Archives Councils (MLA) administer the UK accreditation scheme in collaboration with the regional agencies for museums, libraries, and archives. According to MLA, “People expect more of museums today. Accreditation has been

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<sup>5</sup> Accreditation index. Washington, DC: American Association of Museums. <http://www.aam-us.org/museumresources/accred/index.cfm> (Accessed 2009/10/14).

<sup>6</sup> The Museum Accreditation Scheme. Museum Libraries Archives Council. <http://www.freud.org.uk/file-uploads> (Accessed 2009/11/15).

<sup>7</sup> The Museum Accreditation Scheme. Museum Libraries Archives Council. <http://www.freud.org.uk/file-uploads> (Accessed 2009/11/15).

developed by MLA and the museum community to keep pace with these expectations.”<sup>8</sup> The Scheme has four levels. This gradation allows museums to identify deficiencies and make the necessary improvements to achieve accreditation. The levels are:

- Accredited Museums
- Provisionally Accredited Museums
- Registered Museums
- Provisionally Registered Museums

The levels are defined as follows:<sup>9</sup>

- Accredited Museums are those meeting the requirements of the Museums Accreditation Scheme.
- Provisionally Accredited museums are those who have applied for Accreditation, and do not entirely meet one or more requirement, but who have demonstrated a commitment to meet the relevant requirement(s) in a set time period. Provisional Accreditation is available for 12 months. Museums are also awarded Provisional status if they meet the standard, but are temporarily closed for refurbishment or redevelopment.
- Registered Museums are those meeting the requirements of the Registration (Phase 2) standard, launched in 1996, and superseded in 2004 by Accreditation.
- Provisionally Registered museums are those who have applied for Registration, and who do not entirely meet one or more requirement, but who have demonstrated a commitment to meet the relevant requirement(s) in a set time period. Museums are also awarded Provisional status if they meet the standard, but are temporarily closed for refurbishment or redevelopment.

The UK Accreditation Scheme is flexible in that it allows museums to progress from provisional status to full accreditation. It also allows a systematic progression that is beneficial to the UK museum community. Furthermore, it recognizes the importance of collections and effective collection management as the foundation for the level of practice for which museum strive. “Without adequate collections care and documentation, the potential of museums to extend access to new audiences, encourage learning and inspire people’s creative world, eventually, will be lost.”<sup>10</sup>

There was no special incentive to stimulate accreditation in the US; however, the Accreditation Program has served the museum field as the primary vehicle for quality assurance, self-regulation, and public accountability for almost forty years. It is important to acknowledge that the accreditation program in the United States was developed and is sustained by museum professionals, and that the program reflects, reinforces, and promotes best practices, institutional ethics, and the highest standards of museum operations.

<sup>8</sup> The Museum Accreditation Scheme. Museum Libraries Archives Council. <http://www.freud.org.uk/file-uploads> (Accessed 2009/11/15).

<sup>9</sup> Registration: The true story. [www.ibc.regione.emiliaromagna.it/wcm/ibc/pagine/.../gee.pdf](http://www.ibc.regione.emiliaromagna.it/wcm/ibc/pagine/.../gee.pdf) (Accessed 2009/10/19).

<sup>10</sup> The Museum Accreditation Scheme. Museums Libraries Archives Council. [www.freud.org.uk/file-uploads](http://www.freud.org.uk/file-uploads) (Accessed 2009/11/15).

As the national association representing museums, AAM serves as a forum in which museum professionals come together to formulate standards and best practices that guide museum operations.<sup>11</sup> The standards and practices currently approved by AAM were developed with extensive input from the field through the AAM Accreditation Program and the Ethics Committee.

AAM Standards and Best Practices for US museums address the inclusive aspects of how museums operate, and for the most part, they define broad outcomes that can be achieved in different ways. This approach is supplemented by a growing resource of museum literature regarding technical standards, including specific information about many practical tasks.

Accreditation is a recognized mark of accomplishment that brings national recognition to US museums, regardless of their size or location. Since the first museums were accredited in 1971, the AAM Accreditation Program has recognized museums' commitment to excellence, accountability, high professional standards, and continued institutional improvement.<sup>12</sup>

The Accreditation Program reflects the diversity of the US museum field, accommodating museums of different:

- disciplines (from art centers to zoos)
- budget sizes (from less than \$100,000 to \$150 million and above)
- governance types (private not-for-profit or public)
- collecting status (including museums that do not own or use collections)<sup>13</sup>

Governing Authority (American Museums <sup>14</sup> )	% of accredited museums by type
County/Regional	2%
Federal	4%
Municipal	7%
State	7%
College/University	15%
Private Non-Profit	63%
Other	2%

Figure 3. Accredited US museums by Governing Authority.

<sup>11</sup> Accreditation Standards. Washington, DC: American Association of Museums. <http://www.aam-us.org/museumresources/accred/standards.cfm> (Accessed 2009/10/20).

<sup>12</sup> Accreditation Index. Washington, DC: American Association of Museums. <http://www.aam-us.org/museumresources/accred/index.cfm> (Accessed 2009/10/15).

<sup>13</sup> Accreditation Program Annual Statistics At-A-Glance. Washington, DC: American Association of Museums.

<sup>14</sup> Accreditation Program Annual Statistics At-A-Glance. Washington, DC: American Association of Museums.



The value of the accreditation program is significant for the standards endorsed and the values identified, specifically ethical and professional practices. The Accreditation program is intended to fulfill specific functions in museums, as well as to serve to promote a sense of professionalism throughout the museum community.

Consistent with this point of view, AAM has identified three (3) objectives to be served by accreditation:

- strengthen individual museums and the entire museum profession by promoting ethical and professional practices;
- recognize excellence in individual museums and the museum community;
- serve as the field's primary vehicle for quality assurance and self-regulation.<sup>15</sup>

The AAM Accreditation program accomplishes these three objectives in the following ways. (It should be noted that only one of the three methods of accomplishing the accreditation objectives involves a standardized process.)

- assessing how well each museum achieves its stated mission and goals and meets the standards and best practices generally accepted in the museum field;
- employing a standardized process of self-study and peer review that incorporates multiple perspectives to ensure balance and fairness;
- drawing on the collective wisdom of the field; gathering it from various sources and perspectives, including participating museums, peer reviewers, and the Accreditation Commission.<sup>16</sup>

Receiving accreditation grants certain professional values to recipient museums. The American Association of Museums defines those values as:

- certifying that a museum meets the program's eligibility criteria and the Characteristics of an Accreditable Museum as set forth by the Accreditation Commission;
- certifying that a museum has undergone a rigorous process of self-assessment, as well as review by its peers;
- signifying that a museum fulfills its obligations to the public as set forth in its mission;
- recognizing a museum's commitment to excellence, accountability, high professional standards, and continued institutional improvement.<sup>17</sup>

Accreditation has value for the accredited museum, and has great value for the museum field. Personnel of both accredited and non-accredited museums acknowledge the importance of professionally established standards. They confirm that accreditation inspires museums to achieve a higher standard. It strengthens the field as a whole by:

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<sup>15</sup> Accreditation Standards. Washington, DC: American Association of Museums. <http://www.aam-us.org/aboutmuseums/standards/stbp.cfm> (Accessed 2009/10/12).

<sup>16</sup> Accreditation Standards. Washington, DC: American Association of Museums. <http://www.aam-us.org/aboutmuseums/standards/stbp.cfm> (Accessed 2009/10/12)

<sup>17</sup> Museum Assessment Program. Washington, DC: American Association of Museums. <http://www.aam-us.org/museumresources/map/index.cfm> (Accessed 2009/10/20).

- contributing to the development and dissemination of standards for the museum community
- promoting professional practices that enable museum leadership to make informed, ethical decisions; allocate and use resources wisely; and be accountable to the public
- encouraging excellence in the museum community
- serving as the field's primary vehicle for quality assurance and self-regulation
- emphasizing the public service role and strengthening the public image of all museums

Although there is no direct financial or political consideration for accredited institutions, museums benefit from both the status and the process of accreditation. Different benefits emerge from each step of the review cycle, and continue to unfold over time. Each museum experiences a different mix of benefits based on its needs at a particular time. Over the last 30 years, participants have reported the following reasons as the most common and important.

- National recognition of the accredited museum's commitment to excellence and the highest professional standards of museum operation and public service
- A positive public image and validation of the museum's work and accomplishments
- Increased credibility with funding agencies and donors
- Stakeholders see the museum's obligation to the public trust is fulfilled
- A clearer sense of purpose and understanding of the accredited museum's strengths, goals, priorities, and mission
- An opportunity for staff and board to be thoughtful about their practices
- A valuable tool in lobbying local and state governments
- Improved relationships with other museums resulting in more loans and traveling exhibitions
- Maintenance of accreditation as a leveraging tool to attract support for capital improvements
- Fosters sustained organizational development and improvement
- A governing authority better educated about museum standards
- Increased level of professionalism<sup>18</sup>

The list of benefits might continue to include a range of reasons based on local needs and expectations. The benefits of accreditation will vary for each museum.

Accreditation is an educational process for museums, museum personnel, and museum boards. While it serves to identify and promote standards and best practices, it has an equally important role in identifying crucial issues associated with proper stewardship, public trust, and professional responsibility. As noted, professionals in both accredited and non-accredited museums recognize the importance of the issues inherent in an accreditation program.

The preparation for accreditation often has a fundamental influenced on the activities of museum personnel. The following example occurred in a museum with which I am

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<sup>18</sup> Accreditation Standards. Washington, DC: American Association of Museums. <http://www.aam-us.org/aboutmuseums/standards/stbp.cfm> (Accessed 2009/10/12).

familiar. A curator, a geologist, was in the habit of assigning his own accession numbers to the specimens. He refused to comply with the museum's standardized practices of accessioning and cataloging. He also took collection pieces home with him at night reportedly to do research; however, it was learned that he exchanged specimens with collectors and persons dealing in minerals. When the director told the curator that he was to accession the collection according to established procedures and was to stop removing specimens from the museum, the curator refused to comply with those instructions.

The director explained the accreditation process and the need to follow the rules of the museum. The director informed the curator that he must make a choice between following institutional standards and leaving the museum. The curator said he would do as he pleased and that the director had no authority to make him change his methods. The director agreed he could not make the curator change his methods, but he could deny him access to the museum and to the collections. The curator threw his keys on the desk and walked out of the museum. He did not return.

Such cases are extreme but not unknown. Museum personnel, volunteers, and board members may become so enraptured by the museum and its collections that they become possessive. Such obsession can be either positive or negative. The person may become a stellar employee or a constant problem. Standardized practices allow one person to provide greater service to the museum, and minimize the damage caused by the other person.

## Standards and Best Practices

The standards and best practices promoted by AAM come from within the museum profession. They are constantly under review. They are revised or updated as recommended by persons working in museums. AAM works closely with other museum professional associations as they expand upon and refine national standards and to clarify how they apply to museums in specific disciplines.

## Museum Assessment Program

A supportive element of the AAM accreditation process is the Museum Assessment Program (MAP). It helps maintain and improve museum operations through a confidential, consultative process. The Program provides guidance to assist museums in meeting priorities and goals, and understanding how a particular institution compares with established standards and best practices. As an example, if a museum is facing challenging financial times, participating in MAP can help:

- prioritize goals so the museum can allocate resources wisely
- document needs so the museum can make a stronger case to funders

- provide recommendations on ways to become an even stronger institution<sup>19</sup>

MAP is a constructive assessment designed to assist the museum to improve and to move toward accreditation. It also involves a self-study (self assessment) and a site visit by a peer reviewer that results in recommendations about ways to improve critical aspects of the museum. However, unlike the accreditation, the MAP review focuses on one part of the museum operations, and there is no “pass” or “fail.” It is important to note that there is no strict link between utilizing a MAP review and applying for accreditation. It is also possible for already accredited museums to use a MAP review to improve incumbent practices.

MAP is a very practical and beneficial way of helping to improve museums. It is a confidential consultative process that is open to all museums in the United States. MAP is designed for museums of all types, including historic houses, botanic gardens and arboretums, science centers, children’s museums, university museums, zoos, nature centers and art galleries.<sup>20</sup> There is no size or budget limitation other than the museum must have at least one full-time qualified employee. The program is designed to help museums understand how they compare to standards and best practices in the field. MAP can help museums understand how other institutions deal with similar challenges. It provides suggestions for improvement, and can help set institutional priorities, allocate financial resources wisely, and build a stronger case for support.<sup>21</sup>

The MAP assessment is a three-stage process that consists of the following:

**Self Study:** The self-study is intended to help the museum see itself systemically. Most museums find that they derive at least half the benefit of the assessment from the self-study process. The self-study is designed to:

- stimulate a review of the museum’s policies, procedures and records
- enhance institutional dialogue and openness
- provide information for the peer review phase
- serve as a baseline against which to measure the museum’s progress<sup>22</sup>

**Peer Review:** The peer reviewers conduct a site visit and write an assessment report that summarizes the visit and makes recommendations for change. Peer review is a method that provides:

- the opportunity to discuss your operations from a new perspective

<sup>19</sup> Museum Assessment Program (MAP). Washington, DC: American Association of Museums. <http://www.aam-us.org/museumresources/map/index.cfm> (Accessed 2009/11/17).

<sup>20</sup> Museum Assessment Program (MAP). Washington, DC: American Association of Museums. <http://www.aam-us.org/museumresources/map/index.cfm> (Accessed 2009/11/17).

<sup>21</sup> Museum Assessment Program (MAP). Washington, DC: American Association of Museums. <http://www.aam-us.org/museumresources/map/index.cfm> (Accessed 2009/11/17).

<sup>22</sup> Steps in the MAP Process. Washington, DC: American Association of Museums. <http://www.aam-us.org/museumresources/map/index.cfm> (Accessed 2009/11/17).

- validation and input from an informed colleague

Implementation: The implementation incorporates the information from the self-study process, the site visit and assessment report into the institution's planning process. Using this information, the museum formulates goals and strategies for the improvement of your museum.<sup>23</sup>

### Four options to the MAP

As noted, four (4) different reviews are part of MAP, and the Institutional Assessment (IMAP) is the most comprehensive of the four. It considers the museum's entire operation, including mission and planning, governance, administration, finance, collections stewardship, interpretation and presentation, marketing, public relations, membership, and community support.<sup>24</sup> This assessment assists in institutional planning, and is the first step in understanding the accreditation process. Most museums find this visit to be invaluable in having the board understand the fiduciary responsibilities associated with a not-for-profit organization. The IMAP assessment results in:

- increased board understanding of museum practices
- better cooperation between board and staff
- clearer sense of mission and purpose
- increased knowledge of professional practices
- enhanced team spirit among trustees, staff, and volunteers<sup>25</sup>

Activities in the Institutional Assessment focus on:

- mission
- composition and skills of the board of trustees
- financial analysis
- accessibility
- customer service
- the museum's place in its competitive environment<sup>26</sup>

The second MAP review is the Collections Management Assessment (CMAP) that focuses on collections management issues in the context of the museum's total operations, including mission, governance, finance, interpretation, and marketing. The emphasis of this

<sup>23</sup> Steps in the MAP Process. Washington, DC: American Association of Museums. <http://www.aam-us.org/museumresources/map/index.cfm> (Accessed 2009/11/17).

<sup>24</sup> Steps in the MAP Process. Washington, DC: American Association of Museums. <http://www.aam-us.org/museumresources/map/index.cfm> (Accessed 2009/11/17).

<sup>25</sup> Steps in the MAP Process. Washington, DC: American Association of Museums. <http://www.aam-us.org/museumresources/map/index.cfm> (Accessed 2009/11/17).

<sup>26</sup> Steps in the MAP Process. Washington, DC: American Association of Museums. <http://www.aam-us.org/museumresources/map/index.cfm> (Accessed 2009/11/17).

review is on collections stewardship, including scope of collections, acquisitions and deaccessioning, legal and safety issues, documentation, backlog, inventory and risk management.<sup>27</sup>

The Collections Management Assessment is designed to assist in the development of collections management policies and procedures, and results in:

- increased understanding of collections management practices on the part of staff and board
- improved care of collections
- increased knowledge of resources for collections management and conservation<sup>28</sup>

Activities in the Collections Management Assessment focus on:

- non-collections staff's perceptions of collections care and use
- the board's legal and ethical responsibilities for collections
- disaster preparedness
- acquisitions
- deaccessioning
- record keeping<sup>29</sup>

The Collections Management Assessment is a very valuable tool for reviewing and updating collection related activities. The technology related to collection care and maintenance is constantly changing. Traditional practices are not always the best, and the CMAP can bring greater insight to professional collection care.

The Public Dimension Assessment (PDA) is the third assessment element of MAP. The PDA assesses the museum's public perception, experience, and involvement with the museum. This assessment assists a museum in effectively communicating with the public and helps the museum identify and strengthen collaborations with other organizations around the country. It includes a review of all the ways in which the museum interacts with its audience, including marketing, public relations, audience development, and exhibitions.<sup>30</sup>

Participants report that the Public Dimension Assessment results in:

- a clearer understanding of the museum's image in the community
- insight into developing or improving marketing
- increased ability to broaden the museum's audience
- improved service to the museum's current audience

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<sup>27</sup> Steps in the MAP Process. Washington, DC: American Association of Museums. <http://www.aam-us.org/museumresources/map/index.cfm> (Accessed 2009/11/17).

<sup>28</sup> Steps in the MAP Process. Washington, DC: American Association of Museums. <http://www.aam-us.org/museumresources/map/index.cfm> (Accessed 2009/11/17).

<sup>29</sup> Steps in the MAP Process. Washington, DC: American Association of Museums. <http://www.aam-us.org/museumresources/map/index.cfm> (Accessed 2009/11/17).

<sup>30</sup> Steps in the MAP Process. Washington, DC: American Association of Museums. <http://www.aam-us.org/museumresources/map/index.cfm> (Accessed 2009/11/17).

- increased community support for and participation in public activities
- better communication and cooperation between staff and board
- improvements in public programming<sup>31</sup>

Activities in the Public Dimension Assessment focus on:

- the public's perception of the museum
- how the public experiences the museum
- methods to get the community, staff and governing authority involved

The Public Dimension Assessment is very valuable for determining the museum's visitor base and, perhaps more importantly, determining why certain segments of potential visitors do not come to the museum. This assessment helps to define the: who, what, when, and why of the museum's audience. It also gives careful consideration to museum education activities.

The fourth element of the MAP quartet is the Governance Assessment (GMAP). This review is to help the museum's governing authority examine its structure, roles, and responsibilities. The assessment enhances the ability of the governing authority to advance the museum's mission and engage in effective planning.

The Governance Assessment is designed to provide an overview of the museum's governance practices. Comprised of three phases—self-study, peer review, and implementation—the assessment is a collegial collaboration. Members of the governing authority, the director, other groups and individuals who influence governance, and museum staff share ideas and information in order to identify governance priorities and address those needs.<sup>32</sup>

Governance Assessment results in:

- clearer understanding of the responsibilities of the governing authority
- improvements in board recruitment, retention, and engagement
- increased ability to obtain and manage resources
- clarity regarding the roles of auxiliary groups
- better communications among members of the governing authority, staff, and auxiliary groups<sup>33</sup>

Activities in the Governance Assessment focus on:

- mission

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<sup>31</sup> Steps in the MAP Process. Washington, DC: American Association of Museums. <http://www.aam-us.org/museumresources/map/index.cfm> (Accessed 2009/11/17).

<sup>32</sup> Steps in the MAP Process. Washington, DC: American Association of Museums. <http://www.aam-us.org/museumresources/map/index.cfm> (Accessed 2009/11/17).

<sup>33</sup> Steps in the MAP Process. Washington, DC: American Association of Museums. <http://www.aam-us.org/museumresources/map/index.cfm> (Accessed 2009/11/17).

- delegation of authority
- governance summit
- running better meetings
- measuring performance of the organization
- maintaining strategic focus
- recruitment and orientation
- collections responsibility<sup>34</sup>

Because Governance Assessment requires a significant time commitment on the part of members of the museum's governing authority, the governing authority is required to pass a resolution in support of the museum's application. This resolution should indicate that the members of the governing authority support the goals of the assessment and will devote the time needed to complete the program.

The museum's governing authority should start the process of discussing participation in GMAP, and the museum's goals for the assessment, several months prior to submitting the application for review. The governing authority should carefully review material about the GMAP process. Better understanding of the process will help frame the discussion regarding whether to participate in Governance Assessment, and help identify appropriate goals for the assessment.

The requesting museum must select the assessment type it wishes to undergo and make the proper application. The application includes a checklist that includes basic information about the applying museum. This information is used to determine the eligibility of the museum to participate in the selected MAP assessment.

## Conclusion

Accreditation is often viewed as an infringement upon the freedom of museum personnel and boards. It may be viewed as a process of standardization that will limit the ability of individuals to pursue their intellectual and museological field of work and research. Certainly that view has some merit. However, there are a number of other issues to be considered and the good of the museum must supersede the preferences of a few individuals.

I am reminded here of an individual with whom I worked for many years. I had a great respect for this person and held him in the highest regard. In most things he was intelligent and highly capable. Nevertheless, I would not ride in his automobile when he was driving because he had total disdain for the standards of vehicular traffic. For him stop signs were an unnecessary annoyance. His idea was that the other person should stop to allow him

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<sup>34</sup> Steps in the MAP Process. Washington, DC: American Association of Museums. <http://www.aam-us.org/museumresources/map/index.cfm> (Accessed 2009/11/17).



passage. He had the same disregard for one-way streets, traffic lights, and speed limits. He parked wherever he pleased and was totally indignant when he received a traffic ticket. The rules were made for others and he had no time for such trivialities. However, the day someone did not stop at the stop sign and crashed into his car, he was quick to inform the investigating police that the other person did not follow the rules of the road.

The accreditation process is one that strengthens the “rules” of the museum profession by which members can assume equal status. It establishes defensible standards that can be explained to the public, funding agencies, and politicians as serving the best interests of the museum. Ethics, fiduciary responsibility, collections care, public service, and the affirmation of intellectual, social, and environmental responsibility are parts of the overall mission of all museums. The times have changed. Museums can no longer fulfill their role in society by being repositories of cultural and natural materials. They must be engaged with humanity.

If I were to begin an accreditation process today, I would design a method that is progressive and web based. Steps like those identified with the MAP assessment program could be used to move the museum forward at a gradual pace. Each step would be designed to satisfy one module of the accreditation process. A museum would have a time, perhaps four years, to successfully complete all the steps, and at the end of that time it would receive a ten-year certificate of accreditation. At the end of the ten years, the museum would be required to complete an abbreviated self-study and review for re-accreditation.

An on-line record can be maintained that includes all the museum’s pertinent information. This will minimize the need to complete multiple forms requesting the same basic data. As a museum progresses through the different modules, the on-line information is updated. This process will allow easy access to data by the museum, the peer reviewers, and the accrediting agency.

The role of accreditation and standardization is to improve the professionalism of museums—all museums—not to create a structure of good and bad institutions. All museums should aspire to be the very best they can be regardless of process or conditions imposed. However, it is certain that if museums do not regulate themselves by establishing standards of best practices, including ethics, other persons will impose those rules and regulations upon them. Accreditation is a process—a tool—for self-regulation that should be established, promoted, and enforced by museum professionals, and not politicians.

NOTE: The author wishes to recognize the American Association of Museums and the Museum Assessment Program (MAP). Much of the information in this paper comes from the AAM website <http://www.aam.us.org/museumresources/map/index.cfm>.

# 迎接挑戰—— 博物館的標準化與認證制度

蓋瑞·艾得森<sup>1</sup>

## 摘要<sup>2</sup>

在當今全球化的環境中，距離越來越短、差異越來越小，博物館應該負起更大的責任，扮演好自己的角色，成為展現與當地的人與自然有關的物件、思想和成就的地方。博物館必須成為大眾信賴、提供價值觀和信仰的知識殿堂；為了達成這個目標，必須採取循序漸進的作法，在環境、科學、科技、藝術以及固有思想系統各方面，都呈現出廣袤的世界觀，其中包括個人和群體的觀點，以及各種生活方式。

隨著社會邁向21世紀第二個10年之際，博物館必須提供符合當代重要議題的展覽和活動，更貼近社會大眾。其中一個重要的面向，就是博物館應該將保護公共遺產的責任，視為創造和展現的過程，並藉此確保大眾在生活、空間、時間和情感上的延續性。博物館人必須清楚地認識到，公共遺產可以維繫人與他人和自然間更緊密而和諧的關係，因此遺產的保存工作絕不是濫情的口號，而是博物館人實實在在的責任。不論在概念還是行動上，遺產的保存工作對博物館而言都應該是超越經濟算計和政治權謀的道德責任。

本文著眼於博物館在社會和文化中扮演的雙重角色，從標準化的實務工作出發，探討認證的實際過程。文中提到兩種認證模式，主要用來說明美國博物館協會(AAM)在整個過程中所關注的重點。

本文雖然提出了認證的過程，但也說明了沒有一體適用的標準化程序。作者也希望藉此提醒大家注意，認證不僅能讓一個機構的公信力得到正式的認可，更重要的是在認證期間，每一個博物館在經過教育、資訊交換和自我改進等過程之後，其專業水準在無形中也將大幅提昇。

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**關鍵詞：**博物館、認證、美國博物館協會、博物館評鑑程序、自評、證明、登錄、遺產、文化、博物館標準、最佳實務運作

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