

Characteristics of Excellence for Museums

1. PUBLIC TRUST & ACCOUNTABILITY

- 1.1 The museum is a good steward of its resources held in the public trust.
- 1.2 The museum identifies the communities it serves, and makes appropriate decisions in how it serves them.
- 1.3 Regardless of its self-identified communities, the museum strives to be a good neighbor in its geographic area.
- 1.4 The museum strives to be inclusive and offers opportunities for diverse participation.
- 1.5 The museum asserts its public service role and places education at the center of that role.
- 1.6 The museum demonstrates a commitment to providing the public with physical and intellectual access to the museum and its resources.
- 1.7 The museum is committed to public accountability and is transparent in its mission and its operations.
- 1.8 The museum complies with local, state, and federal laws, codes, and regulations applicable to its facilities, operations, and administration.

2. MISSION & PLANNING

- 2.1 The museum has a clear understanding of its mission and communicates why it exists and who benefits as a result of its efforts.
- 2.2 All aspects of the museum's operations are integrated and focused on meeting its mission.
- 2.3 The museum's governing authority and staff think and act strategically to acquire, develop, and allocate resources to advance the mission of the museum.
- 2.4 The museum engages in ongoing and reflective institutional planning that includes involvement of its audiences and community.
- 2.5 The museum establishes measures of success and uses them to evaluate and adjust its activities.

3. LEADERSHIP & ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

- 3.1 The governance, staff, and volunteer structures and processes effectively advance the museum's mission.
- 3.2 The governing authority, staff, and volunteers have a clear and shared understanding of their roles and responsibilities.
- 3.3 The governing authority, staff, and volunteers legally, ethically, and effectively carry out their responsibilities.
- 3.4 The composition, qualifications, and diversity of the museum's leadership, staff, and volunteers enable it to carry out the museum's mission and goals.
- 3.5 There is a clear and formal division of responsibilities between the governing authority and any group that supports the museum, whether separately incorporated or operating within the museum or its parent organization.

4. COLLECTIONS STEWARDSHIP

- 4.1 The museum owns, exhibits, or uses collections that are appropriate to its mission.
- 4.2 The museum legally, ethically, and effectively manages, documents, cares for, and uses the collections.
- 4.3 The museum's collections-related research is conducted according to appropriate scholarly standards.
- 4.4 The museum strategically plans for the use and development of its collections.
- 4.5 Guided by its mission, the museum provides public access to its collections while ensuring their preservation.

5. EDUCATION & INTERPRETATION

- 5.1 The museum clearly states its overall educational goals, philosophy, and messages, and demonstrates that its activities are in alignment with them.
- 5.2 The museum understands the characteristics and needs of its existing and potential audiences and uses this understanding to inform its interpretation.
- 5.3 The museum's interpretive content is based on appropriate research.
- 5.4 Museums conducting primary research do so according to scholarly standards.
- 5.5 The museum uses techniques, technologies, and methods appropriate to its educational goals, content, audiences, and resources.
- 5.6 The museum presents accurate and appropriate content for each of its audiences.
- 5.7 The museum demonstrates consistent high quality in its interpretive activities.
- 5.8 The museum assesses the effectiveness of its interpretive activities and uses those results to plan and improve its activities.

6. FINANCIAL STABILITY

- 6.1 The museum legally, ethically, and responsibly acquires, manages, and allocates its financial resources in a way that advances its mission.
- 6.2 The museum operates in a fiscally responsible manner that promotes its long-term sustainability.

7. FACILITIES & RISK MANAGEMENT

- 7.1 The museum allocates its space and uses its facilities to meet the needs of the collections, audience, and staff.
- 7.2 The museum has appropriate measures to ensure the safety and security of people, its collections and/or objects, and the facilities it owns or uses.
- 7.3 The museum has an effective program for the care and long-term maintenance of its facilities.
- 7.4 The museum is clean and well-maintained, and provides for the visitors' needs.
- 7.5 The museum takes appropriate measures to protect itself against potential risk and loss.

Characteristics of Excellence for Museums In Plain English

Public Trust & Accountability

- » Be good
- » No really—not only be legal, but be ethical
- » Show everyone how good and ethical you are
- » (don't wait for them to ask)
- » Do good for people
- » Know which people
- » And to be on the safe side
- » Be nice to everyone else, too
- » Especially if they live next door
- » Avoid cloning
- » Look something like the people you are doing good for
- » And maybe a bit like your neighbors
- » Let other people help decide what games to play
- » And what the rules are
- » Share your toys

Mission and Planning

- » Know what you want to do
- » And why it makes a difference to anyone
- » Then put it in writing
- » Stick to it
- » Decide what you want to do next
- » When you are deciding what to do, ask lots of people
- » for their opinion
- » Put it in writing
- » Then do it
- » If it didn't work, don't do it again
- » If it did work, do

Leadership and Organizational Structure

- » Make sure everyone is clear about who is doing what
- » The board knows it is governing
- » The director knows she is directing (and the board knows it too)
- » The staff know they are doing everything else
- » And have it in writing

Collections Stewardship

- » Know what stuff you have
- » Know what stuff you need
- » Know where it is
- » Take good care of it
- » Make sure someone gets some good out of it
- » Especially people you care about
- » And your neighbors

Education and Interpretation

- » Know who you are talking to
- » Ask them what they want to know
- » Know what you want to say
- » (and what you are talking about)
- » Use appropriate language (or images, or music)
- » Make sure people understood you
- » And ask them if they liked it
- » If not, change it

Financial Stability

- » Put your money where your mission is
- » Is it enough money?
- » Will it be there next year, too?
- » Know when you will need more \$
- » Know where you are going to get it from
- » Don't diddle the books

Facilities and Risk Management

- » Don't crowd people
- » Or things
- » Make it safe to visit your museum
- » Or work there
- » Keep it clean
- » Keep the toilet paper stocked
- » And if all else fails, know where the exit is
- » (and make sure it is clearly marked)

AMERICAN ASSOCIATION FOR STATE & LOCAL HISTORY STANDARDS & EXCELLENCE PROGRAM (StEPs) FOR HISTORY ORGANIZATIONS

StEPs helps small- and mid-sized history museums, historic sites and houses, including all-volunteer ones, assess policies and practices, manage daily operations and plan for the future.

Learn more about the entire StEPs program at <http://tools.aaslh.org/steps/>

StEPs Standards for Interpretation*

Interpretation section addresses: Programs, Exhibitions, and Publications

INT Standard 1

The institution asserts its public service role and places education at the center of that role.

INT Standard 2

The institution clearly states its overall educational goals, philosophy, and messages, and demonstrates that its activities are in alignment with them.

INT Standard 3

The institution understands the characteristics and needs of its existing and potential audiences and uses this understanding to inform its interpretation.

INT Standard 4

The institution's interpretive content is based on appropriate research.

INT Standard 5

Institutions conducting primary research do so according to scholarly standards.

INT Standard 6

The institution uses techniques, technologies, and methods appropriate to its educational goals, content, audiences, and resources.

INT Standard 7

The institution presents accurate and appropriate content for each of its audiences.

INT Standard 8

The institution demonstrates consistent high quality in its **interpretive activities**.

INT Standard 9

The institution assesses the effectiveness of its interpretive activities and uses those results to plan and improve its activities.

*Unless otherwise noted, standards are common to both AASLH and AAM. One difference, however, is that within the standards AASLH uses the term "institution" when referring to museums, historic houses, historic sites, and other history organizations whereas AAM uses the term "museum."

Unacceptable Practices

While many appropriate policies and practices are described in *StEPs* standards and performance indicators, there are unacceptable practices that may occur within history organizations that require special attention. The following list addresses practices that are unethical and in some cases illegal.

- Biased comments or behavior related to race, ethnic background, gender, age, ability, economic status, or other personal criteria at any time.
- Disregard for visitors' interests, abilities, knowledge, and preferences by failing to ask about their interests and experiences.
- Using outdated, inappropriate, or inaccurate materials as sources, evidence, or examples.
- Giving false or fabricated information to visitors.

Interpretation refers to all of the activities that institutions, historical societies, historic sites, state and national parks, and other agencies use to help visitors make broader emotional and intellectual connections with the artifacts, images, processes, structures, and other features that they encounter at that site.

INT Standard 1:

The institution asserts its public service role and places education at the center of that role.

*A. Do the governing authority, staff, and volunteers believe that providing meaningful and relevant information and programs for a variety of public **audiences** is the institution's primary reason for existing?*

Basic

The institution understands that its responsibilities include providing interpretation and related educational activities for public audiences.

The institution looks for ways to serve many public needs as it goes about its work.

Good

The institution creates exhibitions and programs that provide meaningful, satisfying, and engaging experiences for its audiences.

Members, staff, and volunteers consider all of their public activities to be part of the institution's interpretation.

Better

The institution addresses community and other public needs through its exhibitions, programs, and facilities.

It is involved in the current issues and activities of its community so that its programs and offerings are relevant.

INT Standard 2:

The institution clearly states its overall educational goals, philosophy, and messages, and demonstrates that its activities are in alignment with them.

A. Does the institution coordinate its activities and interpretation in a variety of areas (e.g., programs, publications, exhibitions)?

Basic

The institution identifies key interpretive topics and offers related activities in support of its mission.

Good

Interpretive design and presentation are consistent with each other and the mission.

The institution has a written statement of its broad interpretive goals that also describes how activities and themes are developed and implemented.

The governing authority, staff, and volunteers have access to and understand this statement.

Better

All aspects of museum operations reflect interpretive goals (e.g., education, interpretation, curatorial, marketing, sales, administration, site, and operations).

All staff and volunteers recognize they are involved in conveying interpretive goals and philosophy to the public.

The institution reviews and refines its interpretive goals every three to five years.

Governing authority members, staff, and volunteers are involved in the review process; the community may be involved.

INT Standard 3:

The institution understands the characteristics and needs of its existing and potential audiences and uses this understanding to inform its interpretation.

A. Does the institution identify the main characteristics and interests of the institution's current audiences and use this information to design exhibitions and programs and select effective presentation techniques?

Basic

The institution understands who comes to, and benefits from, its offerings.

It is aware of who is not visiting or using its offerings.

Good

The institution has identified its specific interpretive message in relation to other institutions in its geographical or topical area.

It systematically collects information about its audiences and uses this to choose topics and presentation methods.

It seeks community and public suggestions as it plans and develops its programs and exhibitions.

Better

The institution includes its audiences and communities in the creation of its exhibitions and programs by using, for example, an advisory committee or focus group.

The institution seeks new audiences and includes them in developing relevant programs.

The interpretation reflects topics, themes, and issues emerging from public interests and community needs that are supportable through the collection.

The variety of exhibitions and programs gives visitors wide choices in the artifacts, processes, and topics they want to explore.

INT Standard 4:

The institution's interpretive content is based on appropriate research.

A. Do the staff, volunteers, and governing authority members keep up with current scholarship that relates to its interpretation?

Basic

The institution uses current scholarship and appropriate historical methods when it develops exhibitions and programs.

To avoid bias and inaccuracies, the institution uses more than one scholarly source for information in exhibitions and programs.

Good

The institution conducts its own research using primary and secondary sources to develop its exhibitions and programs.

Interpretive materials help visitors understand local topics by placing the institution's exhibitions and programs within broader historical themes and contexts.

Better

The institution seeks assistance from scholars and knowledgeable specialists to develop its exhibitions and programs.

The institution makes changes and corrections to interpretation information as new information becomes available.

The institution uses solid research to support its presentation of complex issues: popular myths and inaccuracies, differences in opinion, and difficult topics that provoke emotions and opinions.

INT Standard 5:

Institutions conducting primary research do so according to scholarly standards.

A. Does the institution recognize the standards of, and follow the procedures for, scholarly research?

Basic

The institution understands the difference between primary and secondary sources.

All staff, contractors, and volunteers recognize some primary materials contain bias and must be compared to related resources.

Good

The institution documents its findings and makes sources and evidence available.

Better

The institution integrates primary sources in its interpretation and gives visitors the opportunity to examine them.

The institution makes use of a variety of primary sources, including artifacts, archives collections, landscapes, and buildings (not just documents and photographs).

INT Standard 6:

The institution uses techniques, technologies, and methods appropriate to its educational goals, content, audiences, and resources.

A. Does the institution use a variety of presentation techniques (e.g., exhibit labels, signage, printed materials, demonstrations, electronic media, performances, and educational programs) to meet the needs, interests, and abilities of its audiences and to achieve the educational goals?

Basic

The institution uses more than one interpretive technique to present and explore a topic.

Good

The institution offers different levels of information for audiences of different ages and abilities.

Exhibits and programs offer choices so that visitors and audiences can learn from the presentation methods they prefer.

Better

Presentation techniques take advantage of the institution's resources (e.g., volunteers, staff, budget, facilities, equipment, space, etc.).

The institution offers a variety of exhibitions and programs to engage audiences and foster meaningful debate and the free exchange of ideas.

It regularly tests and refines innovative presentation techniques for its exhibitions and programs based on its interpretive plan.

INT Standard 7:

The institution presents accurate and appropriate content for each of its audiences.

*A. Does the institution vary program **content** techniques according to visitor age, interest, learning styles, physical needs, and abilities?*

Basic

The institution offers a variety of programs and exhibitions that appeal to different ages and interests.

The institution meets appropriate universal accessibility standards according to the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990.

Good

The institution develops different programs and exhibitions that suit different learning styles.

Better

The institution establishes learning, emotional, and behavioral objectives for exhibitions and programs.

The institution involves its audience, community, staff, and volunteers in the development, evaluation, and reshaping of its major programs and exhibitions.

Interpretation links exhibition and program topics to the community's current issues and concerns.

INT Standard 8:

The institution demonstrates consistent high quality in its interpretive activities.

*A. Does the institution provide regular training in **content** and interpretation, including written materials, for appropriate staff and volunteers?*

Basic

If the institution offers guided tours, tour leaders receive accurate written information as background for interpretation.

Good

The institution provides regularly updated, written training materials.

Public programming staff and volunteers receive training that addresses presentation techniques and content, and educational theory and practice.

Better

The institution offers ongoing training for public programming staff and volunteers, and possibly mentoring opportunities.

Front-line staff and volunteers coach peers on content and presentation strategies.

The institution tests innovative program, interpretation, and exhibition methods and strategies to engage new audiences.

INT Standard 9:

The institution assesses the effectiveness of its interpretive activities and uses those results to plan and improve its activities.

*A. Does the institution **evaluate** the success and failure of its exhibitions, publications, and programs and use the results of those evaluations to improve and update new offerings?*

Basic

The institution informally collects and reviews feedback from audiences and discusses this feedback with staff and volunteers.

Good

The institution formally collects and reviews feedback from audiences.

It uses this information to plan and improve its exhibitions and programs.

Staff and volunteers seek information and training on evaluation and audience research.

Better

The institution consistently uses a variety of evaluation methods (e.g., surveys, questionnaires, focus groups, post-visit phone calls, etc.) to develop, refine, and implement its exhibitions and programs.

It reviews most of its activities (e.g., exhibitions, public programs, publications, demonstrations, landscapes, etc.) to be sure they work well together.

It uses evaluation and audience research resources which may include training workshops, consultants, books, or Internet resources.

The institution invites audience input and debate for shaping its plan for programs, services, and exhibitions.

Possible Projects to Help Your Organization Move Closer to Achieving One or More Interpretation Standards*

Develop, or Review and Possibly Revise:

- Docent manual
- Docent training
- Exhibit label uniformity
- Exhibition policy
- Exhibition plan
- Gallery guide
- Traveling trunk
- Arrange for field trips to other museums to observe their education programs
- Develop a partnership with another museum where your volunteer(s) or staff responsible for educational program development can work with that museum's staff and/or volunteers to share ideas and information
- Begin to develop an interpretive plan
- Examine state standards for history and other subjects and align your education programs with the standards; ask a teacher to help you with the project
- Create an education program for a particular grade using state standards and curriculum guidelines
- Create gallery guides in a second language if you have non-English-speaking visitors; consider also the need for exhibit labels in a second language
- Develop a walking tour (or bicycle, rollerblading, or automobile tour)
- Develop a cemetery tour or other specialized local history tour

*Note that these possible projects are in no particular order; also, this list presents some suggestions and should not be considered a complete list of possible projects.

Print Resources

Beck, Larry and Ted Cable. *Interpretation in the 21st Century: Fifteen Guiding Principles for Interpreting Nature and Culture*. Champaign, IL: Sagamore Publishing, 1998. INT 1-9

Borowsky, Larry. "Telling a Story in 100 Words: Effective Label Copy." Technical Leaflet 240. Nashville: AASLH, 2007. INT 6 A

Borun, Minda and Randi Korn, ed. Roxana Adams, Technical Information Series Editor. *Introduction to Museum Evaluation*. Washington, DC: AAM, 1999. AUD 1 A & B; INT 3 A; INT 9 A

Charlton, Thomas L., Louis E. Myers and Rebecca Shapless, eds. *Handbook of Oral History*. Lanham, Maryland: AltaMira Press, 2008. INT 4-6

Cunningham, Mary Kay. *The Interpreter's Training Manual for Museums*. Washington, DC: The American Association of Museums. 2004. INT 8 A

Diamond, Judy. *Practical Evaluation Guide: Tools for Museums and Other Informal Educational Settings*. Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press, 1999. AUD 1 A & B; INT 3 A; INT 9 A

- Doe, Paula C., Curtis A. Peacock, R. Eli Paul. "Exhibit Mounts on a Budget." Technical Leaflet 187. Nashville: AASLH, 1993. INT 6 A
- Donnelly, Jessica Foy, ed. *Interpreting Historic House Museums*. Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press, 2002. INT 4 A
- Falk, John H. and Lynn D. Dierking and Susan Foutz, ed. *In Principle, In Practice: Museums as Learning Institutions*. Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press, 2007.
- Falk, John H. and Lynn D. Dierking. *Learning from Museums: Visitor Experiences and the Making of Meaning*. Walnut Creek, CA; Lanham, MD; New York, Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2000.
- Glines, Timothy and David Grabitske. "Telling the Story: Better Interpretation and Small Historical Organizations." Technical Leaflet 222. Nashville: AASLH, 2003. INT 4-7
- Grinder, Alison L. and E. Sue McCoy. *The Good Guide: A Sourcebook for Interpreters, Docents and Tour Guides*. Scottsdale, AZ: Ironwood Press, 1989. INT 8 A
- Gross, Michael and Ron Zimmerman, and Jim Buchholz. *Signs, Trails, and Wayside Exhibits: Connecting People and Places*, third edition. Stevens Point, WI: UW-SP Foundation Press, 2006. INT 6-7
- Johnson, Anna, Kimberly A. Huber, Nancy Cutler, Melissa Bingmann, Tim Grove. *The Museum Educators Manual: Educators Share Successful Strategies*. Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press, 2008. INT 6 A; INT 8 A
- Kammen, Carol. *On Doing Local History*. Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press, 2003. INT 4-5
- Kammen, Carol and Norma Prendergast. *Encyclopedia of Local History*. Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press, 2000. INT 4-5
- Kerrigan, Deanna J. "Developing Effective Educational Programs." Technical Leaflet 202. Nashville: AASLH, 1998. INT 6 A
- Kyvig, David E. and Myron A. Marty. *Nearby History: Exploring the Past Around You*. Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press, 2000. INT 5 A
- Leftridge, Alan. *Interpretive Writing*. Fort Collins, CO: National Association for Interpretation, 2006. INT 6-7
- Levy, Barbara Abramoff, Sandra Mackenzie Lloyd and Susan Porter Schreiber. *Great Tours!: Thematic Tours and Guide Training for Historic Sites*. Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press and the National Trust for Historic Preservation, 2002. INT 4; INT 8
- Lucas, Cindy. "Reaching Teachers: Marketing Museum Education in the Twenty-First Century." Technical Leaflet 235. Nashville: AASLH, 2006. INT 3 A
- Parman, Alice and Jeffrey Jane Flowers. *Exhibit Makeovers: A Do-It-Yourself Workbook for Small Museums*. Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press, 2008. INT 6 A
- Rand, Anne Grimes, Robert Kiihne, and Sarah Watkins. "Families First! Rethinking Exhibits to Engage All Ages." Technical Leaflet 245. Nashville: AASLH, 2009.
- Regnier, Kathleen, Michael Gross and Ron Zimmerman. *The Interpreter's Guidebook: Techniques for Programs and Presentations*. Stevens Point, WI: UW-SP Foundation Press, 1992. INT 8

StEPs

- Roth, Stacy F. *Past into Present: Effective Techniques for First-Person Historical Interpretation*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1998. INT 8
- Sachatello-Sawyer, Bonnie, Robert A. Fellenz, Hanly Burton, Laura Gittings-Carlson, Janet Lewis-Mahony, and Walter Woolbaugh. *Adult Museum Programs: Designing Excellent Learning Experiences*. Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press, 2002. INT 6-7
- Serrell, Beverly. *Exhibit Labels: An Interpretive Approach*. Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press, 1996. INT 6-7
- Sommer, Barbara W., and Mary Kay Quilan. *The Oral History Manual*. Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press, 2002. INT 4-6
- Stein, Jill, Marianna Adams, and Jessica Luke. "Thinking Evaluatively: A Practical Guide to Integrating the Visitor Voice." Technical Leaflet 238. Nashville: AASLH, 2007. AUD 1 A & B; INT 3 A; INT 9 A
- Thomson, Ron. *A Different Path for Historic Walking Tours*. Nashville: AASLH, 1996. INT 6 A
- Tilden, Freeman. Originally published 1957; revised editions 1977 and 1997. *Interpreting Our Heritage, fourth edition*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008. INT 1-9

Electronic Resources

- AltaMira Press. www.altamirapress.com
- American Association for State and Local History. www.aaslh.org
- American Association of Museums. www.aam-us.org
- Larsen, David L. "Meaningful Interpretation: How to Connect Hearts and Minds to Places, Objects, and Other Resources." 2003.
www.nps.gov/history/history/online_books/eastern/meaningful_interpretation/index6.htm
- Museum-Ed. www.museum-ed.org
- National Association of Interpretation. www.interpnet.com
- National Association for Interpretation Definitions Project.
www.definitionsproject.com/definitions/index.cfm [offers definitions of common terminology used by interpreters, environmental educators, historians, and others in non-formal settings such as parks, aquariums, zoos, nature centers, historic sites, and museums]
- National Park Service. Teaching with Historic Places. www.nps.gov/history/nr/twhp [free classroom-ready lesson plans on a large variety of topics]
- National Storytelling Network. *Storytelling Magazine*. www.storynet.org
- National Trust for Historic Preservation. www.preservationnation.org
- Online discussion groups. There are a large variety of online discussion groups that serve as valuable resources for history organizations of all sizes. Participation in some is a benefit of membership in national, state, or regional associations and their affiliate committees and affinity groups. Others, such as Museum-L and Museum-Ed, are open lists and can be found by doing an online search.
- Reach Advisors' Blog. http://reachadvisors.typepad.com/museum_audience_insight

USS Constitution Museum. Family Learning Forum. www.familylearningforum.org

Note: The StEPs website is frequently updated with links to new resources.
Be sure to visit the website often at <http://home.learningtimes.net/aaslh>

Glossary

This glossary was compiled using definitions from a number of reliable sources including the American Association of Museums, American Institute for Conservation of Historic & Artistic Works, the National Association for Interpretation's Definitions Project, Museum SOS from the American Museum of Natural History, National Park Service, Society for the Preservation of Natural History Collections, Society of American Archivists, and the Washington Conservation Guild.

Accessibility: A general term used to describe the degree to which a facility, program, or product is usable and understandable by people with widely varying abilities. The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 gives civil rights protections to individuals with disabilities similar to those provided to individuals on the basis of race, color, sex, national origin, age, and religion. It guarantees equal opportunity for individuals with disabilities in public accommodations, employment, transportation, State and local government services, and telecommunications.

Accession: (1) An object, group of objects, or archival collection physically and legally transferred to an institution's permanent collection as a unit at a single time; an acquisition. (2) To take legal and physical custody of an addition to an institution's collection, including establishing documentation for it. (3) To document the transfer of records or materials in a register, database, or other log of the repository's holdings.

Accreditation: In the museum field, accreditation refers to the program coordinated by the American Association of Museums that recognizes museums that have successfully met its Accreditation program criteria and have thus been awarded accredited status.

Acquisition: (1) An artifact or archival item acquired by an institution. (2) The method by which an institution acquires an artifact or archival item such as donation, bequest, purchase, transfer from another institution, exchange with another institution, or archaeological find.

Advisory Committee: A group of people with specific skills, knowledge, and interests that meet with the staff of an institution to make recommendations about programs and offerings.

Appraisal: Evaluating an artifact or archival item's financial value.

Archival: (1) Of or pertaining to archives.
(2) Records: Having enduring value; permanent.
(3) Records media: Durable; lacking inherent vice; long-lived. (4) Storage conditions: Not causing degradation. (5) Procedures: Following accepted standards that ensure maximum longevity.

Archives: (1) Materials created or received by a person, family, or organization, public or private, in the conduct of their affairs and preserved because of the enduring value of the information they contain or as evidence of the functions and responsibilities of their creator, especially those materials maintained using the principles of provenance, original order, and collective control; permanent records. (2) The

StEPs

division within an organization responsible for maintaining the organization's records of enduring value. (3) An organization that collects the records of individuals, families, or other organizations; a collecting archives. (4) The professional discipline of administering such collections and organizations. (5) The building (or portion thereof) housing archival collections. (6) A published collection of scholarly papers, especially as a periodical.

Archivist: (1) An individual responsible for appraising, acquiring, arranging, describing, preserving, and providing access to records of enduring value, according to the principles of provenance, original order, and collective control to protect the materials' authenticity and context. (2) An individual with responsibility for management and oversight of an archival repository or of records of enduring value.

Artifact: An object of cultural, artistic, or scientific value.

Audience: The people for whom the institution designs and delivers messages, programs, and services. Synonymous with visitors, learners, customers, users, recreationists, stakeholders, guests, buyers, consumers, clients, patrons.

Authentication: Evaluating an artifact's or archival item's character and genuineness, such as its age, creator, or use.

Best Practice: A commendable action and philosophy that demonstrates an awareness of standards, successfully solves a problem, can be replicated, and that an institution may choose to emulate if appropriate to its circumstances.

Blog: An Internet site that offers commentary or news on a particular subject or a site that functions as an online diary. A typical blog combines text, images, and links to other blogs, web pages, and other media related to its topic. The ability for readers to leave comments in an interactive format is an important part of many blogs.

Bylaws: The rules for governance of an institution including the mission of the institution, the size of the governing authority, governing authority officers and subcommittees, terms of service, governing authority member and officer duties, requirements for financial contributions, and conflict of interest statements. Bylaws also include meeting requirements and procedures, delegation of authority to staff, and clarity about roles of governing authority members in finance and other activities.

Catalog: (1) The act of developing detailed records about an object's physical characteristics and cultural, artistic, or scientific significance. (2) The process of arranging collections records into categories. (3) The reference tool created by arranging collections records into categories. (May also be called Catalogue)

Character-defining Feature (See Contributing Feature)

Charter: A type of enabling document that describes the institution's mission, location, and assets, and lists the founding incorporators/governing authority members. It also includes a statement about dissolution of the institution and the distribution of assets.

Code of Ethics: Professional standards of conduct for staff, governing authority members, and volunteers carrying out the mission of the institution. Standards are of a higher nature than legal requirements. Codes are usually defined by professional associations and adopted by individual institutions.

Collecting Plan: A plan outlining goals and guidelines for adding to and refining an institution's collection.

Collection(s): A group, or groups, of artifacts or archival items that are held and cared for by an institution.

Collections Emergency and Disaster Response and Recovery Plan: A document specifically addressing artifact and archival collections in terms of identifying vulnerabilities, mitigation and preparedness, appropriate response by staff and volunteers, and recovery procedures.

Collections Housekeeping: The careful cleaning of spaces where artifact and archival collections are stored or exhibited using methods, materials, and supplies proscribed by preventive conservation. The goal of collections housekeeping is preservation while the goal of regular housekeeping is usually aesthetics.

Collections Housekeeping Plan: A written document outlining appropriate collections housekeeping procedures including locations, tasks, methods, supplies, equipment, frequencies, and the title of the person(s) responsible for performing the tasks.

Collections Housekeeping Schedule: A guide that reminds appropriately trained staff and volunteers when to do tasks, tracks and charts progress, and prevents tasks from being forgotten.

Collections Policy: A document outlining an institution's standards and guidelines for managing the collections in its care.

Collections Scope: An outline of what an institution collects including a description of its existing collections and its collecting goals.

Compliance Issues: That the institution pays attention to its responsibility to obey any laws and regulations, that it has identified laws and regulations appropriate to its operations, and that it enforces compliance with those laws and regulations among its staff and volunteers.

Condition Report: A written evaluation of an object's condition.

Conflict of Interest: Conflict between a person's private interests and those of an institution and its collections.

Conflict of Interest Policy: Policy prohibiting governing authority members, staff, or volunteers from engaging in activities that would benefit themselves over their allegiance to the institution and its mission.

Conservation: (1) Maintenance and preservation of works of art, artifacts, or archival items; their protection from future damage, deterioration, or neglect; and the repair or renovation of works that have deteriorated or been damaged. (2) The profession devoted to the preservation of cultural property for the future. Conservation activities include examination, documentation, treatment, and preventive care, supported by research and education. (See also Conservator and Preventive Conservation)

Conservation Plan: A prioritized course of action for maintaining or improving the condition of collection(s).

Conservation Planning: Assessing the physical condition of collection(s) and developing goals for maintaining or improving that condition.

Conservation Survey: An assessment of a collection's current physical, storage, and exhibition conditions, resulting in a prioritized written report.

Conservator: A person whose primary occupation is the practice of conservation and who, through specialized education, knowledge, training, and experience, formulates and implements all the activities of conservation in accordance with an ethical code such as the American Institute for Conservation of Historic & Artistic Works' Code of Ethics and Guidelines for Practice.

Content: The facts and concepts you share with the public through interpretation. The way you provide the information is interpretive technique; what you provide is content.

Contributing Feature: A prominent or distinctive aspect, quality, or characteristic of a historic property that makes it significant in history, such as the roof, windows, siding, etc., including design, setting, or materials.

Copyright: Legal reproduction and exhibition rights to an object; these rights are separate from the right to physically possess the object.

Cultural Patrimony: An object having ongoing historical, traditional, or cultural importance central to the Native American group or culture itself, rather than property owned by an individual Native American, and which, therefore, cannot be alienated, appropriated, or conveyed by any individual regardless of whether the individual is a member of the Indian tribe or Native Hawaiian organization. Such object shall have been considered inalienable by such Native American group at the time the object was separated from such group.

Deaccession: (1) An artifact or archival item that has been permanently removed from an institution's collection. (2) The formal process of permanently removing an accessioned item from an institution's collection.

Direct Care: Care providing direct benefit to artifact and/or archival collections, such as conservation treatment or preventive conservation.

Directors and Officers Liability Insurance: Insurance coverage for governing authority members for claims alleging mismanagement.

Disaster: An event or situation that results in significant loss, damage, or destruction, and that makes it impossible for an institution to carry on operations for an extended period of time.

Disposal: The method in which an institution removes a deaccessioned item from its collection, care, and responsibility; methods include transfer to another institution, sale, or physical destruction.

Diversity: (1) Understanding and valuing the characteristics and beliefs of those who demonstrate a wide range of characteristics. (2) Audiences whose members exhibit a variety of characteristics. In both definitions those characteristics include different ethnic and racial backgrounds, age, physical and cognitive abilities, family status, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, religious and spiritual values, and geographic location.

Documentation: (1) Permanent records and images (e.g., paper, photographic, electronic) about collections items such as: provenance, accession, and deaccession information; condition and conservation reports; before-and-after treatment photographs; deeds of gift; sales receipts; correspondence; and exhibition, loan, and publication history. (2) A detailed record, in the form of a report or other written document, including photographs, maps, and drawings.

Education Collection: A group of objects or archival items for educational programs that can be used and handled. Also called hands-on, living history, or teaching collections.

Emergency: An event or situation that develops suddenly and unexpectedly and threatens people, property, or operations. An emergency may develop into a disaster if the proper immediate action is not taken.

Emergency and Disaster Mitigation: Planning and activities directed toward eliminating or reducing the probability of occurrence of an emergency or disaster or reducing the effects of unavoidable emergencies or disasters.

Emergency and Disaster Preparedness: A readiness to cope with an emergency or disaster so as to minimize loss of life and damage to property and collections, and to organize and facilitate timely and effective rescue, relief, and recovery.

Emergency Operations Plan: A document that guides staff and volunteers in preparing for and responding to sudden and unexpected occurrences such as a medical emergency, bomb threat, elevator or other significant equipment failure, severe weather, etc.

Enabling Documents: Documents that establish the founding of an institution including charter, bylaws, articles of incorporation, and statements of tax exemption from the Internal Revenue Service, and the state where the institution was incorporated.

Energy Efficiency: Using only as much energy as absolutely necessary. This is most often achieved by sizing heating, ventilation and air-conditioning, and electrical systems to function according to real demand, not highest-possible demand; by using sensors and systems that turn off lights and electrical connections when they are not in use; and by using systems that minimize energy use by reducing demand through eliminating unnecessary features (e.g., opting to do without an electric stapler or pencil sharpener) and coordinating systems to share energy or offset energy uses (e.g., opening windows and using awnings to cool a building instead of turning on the air conditioner).

Environment: The atmospheric conditions surrounding an object: temperature, relative humidity, and natural and ultraviolet light levels.

Environmental Sustainability: The World Commission on Environment and Development, in 1987, began using the concept of “meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own.” This translates into daily practice as using methods and materials, in all activities, which do not harm the environment: preferably using resources that are rapidly renewable and methods that do not create damage. Rapidly renewable resources include wood that re-grows quickly, and outside air and sunlight that are readily available instead of non-renewable resources like oil, coal, and fresh water which are available in finite quantities. Methods that cause damage include chemicals and toxins, such as bleach in paper production, formaldehyde to create plywood, clear-cutting in forests, etc. For small museums, sustainable practices most often include being thoughtful about the products its

StEPs

buys, sells, uses for special events, and in exhibits; water conservation through rain barrels, watering with drip-hoses, and planting native plants; considering energy and water efficient fixtures and systems when building new construction or renovating; and adopting the habits of reduce, reuse, and recycle to dramatically reduce its contribution to the waste stream.

Ethics: Moral principles and standards of conduct.

Evaluation: (Front-End, Formative, Remedial, Summative) The careful appraisal and study of a process or program to determine its feasibility or its effectiveness at meeting its goals and objectives. Evaluation is typically divided into four temporal stages: Front-End, Formative, Remedial, and Summative Evaluation. Front-end evaluation provides background information for future program planning. It is typically designed to determine an audience's general knowledge, questions, expectations, experiences, learning styles, and concerns regarding a topic or theme. Formative evaluation provides information about how a program or process can be improved and occurs while a project is under development. It is a process of systematically checking assumptions and products in order to make changes that improve design or implementation. Remedial evaluation assesses how the parts of an interpretive media or program work together as a whole; like formative evaluation, the goal of remedial evaluation is to improve educational effectiveness and ensure achievement of goals and objectives. Summative evaluation, conducted after completion, provides information about the impact of that project. It can be as simple as a head count of program attendance or as complex as a study of what individuals learned; what is assessed should be tied to project goals and objectives.

Fabric: In relationship to historic fabric, the material structure or substance of a historic property, such as the character-defining features.

Feature (See Contributing Feature)

Feedback: A generic term for information from visitors in response to institutional performance. For example, this can be visitors' comments in the guest book, answers on formal surveys, verbal compliments or suggestions made by visitors to staff or volunteers, and comments in private communications.

Focus Group: A group of people selected to test and evaluate an idea, program, or product. Focus groups are typically small groups chosen to reflect diverse backgrounds and opinions.

Front-line Staff: Staff or volunteers with regular and direct visitor contact.

Governing Authority: The executive body charged with fiduciary responsibility for the institution and for approving institutional policy; also the executive body to which the director reports if the institution has paid staff. Examples of governing authority names include board of directors, board of regents, board of trustees, advisory board, council, and commission.

Hands-on Collection (See Education Collection)

Historic Preservation: The process or program by which historic environments such as districts, sites, buildings, structures, objects, and landscapes are protected under laws and statutes. The act or process of applying measures necessary to sustain the existing form, integrity, and materials on a historic property.

Historic Property: Any prehistoric (pre-contact) or historic district, site, building, structure, or object

included in, or eligible for inclusion in, the National Register of Historic Places. It includes artifacts, records, and remains that are related to and located within such properties, and it includes properties of traditional religious and cultural importance to an American Indian tribe or Native Hawaiian organization and that meets the National Register of Historic Places criteria.

Historic Structure Plan/Report: A formal plan or report that documents original and subsequent use, construction, alterations, and owners, identifying current conditions, and making prioritized recommendations for future work. Reports that include extensive historical documentation can be very valuable for developing interpretive plans and strategic plans.

Housekeeping: The day-to-day cleaning of an institution's public, administrative, and other spaces not used for the storage and exhibition of collections.

Housekeeping Plan: A written document outlining appropriate housekeeping procedures.

Institutional Documents: An overarching term that includes the institution's enabling documents (bylaws, charters, and/or articles of incorporation), other legal documents such as a 501(c)3 letter of determination, and planning and operational policies.

Integrated Pest Management (IPM): A comprehensive approach to assessing the presence and impact of pests in a collection, removing existing pests, and deterring future pests.

Integrated Pest Management Plan: A plan outlining an institution's short-term and long-term goals for integrated pest management.

Integrity: The ability of a property to convey its significance through its location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association. Also, the authenticity of a property's historic identity, evidenced by the survival of physical characteristics that existed during the property's historic or prehistoric (pre-contact) period.

Intellectual Access: Access to collections documentation provided to the public.

Interpretation: (1) A **communication process** that forges emotional and intellectual connections between the interests of the audience and the meanings inherent in the resource. (2) The use of cultural, artistic, and scientific resources such as collections to illuminate the past.

Interpretive Activities or Offerings: Include exhibits, public programs, school programs, and written lesson and curricular materials; publications in print or electronic form; tours; and any communication with the public that communicates content and mission.

Interpretive Plan: A plan that guides the allocation of resources for interpretation (e.g., human, material and financial) and states the interpretive themes, techniques, and goals appropriate for the institution's interpretive work.

Interpretive Planning: The decision-making process that blends management needs and resource considerations with visitor desire and ability to pay to determine the most effective way to communicate the message to targeted markets.

Interpretive Technique: A technique that helps audiences make emotional and intellectual connections.

Inventory: An itemized listing of collection items, including current location, for which the institution has either accessioned or accepted on loan. During the inventory process, each item must be physically located.

Key Control: The restriction of keys, security codes, and other means of access only to staff or volunteers whose job responsibilities require their presence in a specific area such as collections storage.

Landscape: A geographic area, which may include cultural, natural, or historic resources, typically associated with a historic event, location, activity, or person or exhibiting other visual values. A landscape can be designed by a professional or evolve by means of the people using the area.

Learning Styles: The different ways that humans learn; the dominant three are visual, auditory, and kinesthetic.

Living History Collection (See Education Collection)

Loan Agreement: A legal document signed by both lender and borrower that specifies the objects to be loaned, the conditions of the loan, and the responsibilities of the lender and borrower.

Long-range Plan (See Strategic Plan)

Media Outlets: Publication or broadcast institutions (e.g., newspapers, magazines, radio and television stations).

Mission: An institution's purpose including who it is, what it does, and for whom.

Mission Statement: The mission defines the purpose of the institution including who it serves, how it provides those services, and what unique assets it uses to provide the service. The mission statement guides all activities of the institution. A mission is for long term, but may be altered by the governing authority. The mission is usually defined in the enabling documents.

NAGPRA: The Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act passed in 1990 requires public and private institutions that have received federal funds to inventory Native American objects in their care, notify the appropriate cultural or tribal representatives, and return the objects if requested.

National Historic Landmark (NHL): A historic property evaluated and found to have significance at the national level and designated as such by the Secretary of the Interior.

National Park Service (NPS): A bureau of the U.S. Department of Interior that manages national parks, monuments, and historic sites; administers preservation programs; maintains the National Register of Historic Places; sets standards for preservation related activities; and provides technical preservation information and guidance.

National Register of Historic Places: Also known as the National Register, the official federal list of districts, sites, buildings, structures, and objects of significance in American history, architecture, archaeology, engineering, and culture.

Neighborhood: The individuals, families, and entities in an institution's geographical area.

Neighborhood Profile: A comprehensive view of the individuals, families, and entities in the institution's geographical area. It should include analysis and demographic figures by age, family size,

economic levels, and interest or activity categories.

Object: An artifact or other item of cultural, artistic, or scientific value.

Objective: A statement of a specific, measurable, and observable result desired from an educational or interpretive activity or experience; a stated expectation about audience, behavior, condition, and degree that will result from a learning experience.

Permanent Collection: An institution's core collection of objects that supports and reflects its mission and which it preserves for posterity.

Personnel Policy: The institutional policy, adopted by the governing authority, which guides the management of personnel, including hiring, firing, compensation, benefits, and expectations.

Physical Access: Supervised access to collections provided to the public.

Planning Documents: Any documents created as plans for the institution. The plans may be strategic, long-range, or for collections, interpretation, investment, business, fundraising, emergencies and disaster preparedness, conservation, maintenance, environmental sustainability, etc.

Plant Materials: Any natural material, decoration, or plant that can pose a threat to collections objects. This can include (fresh or dried): flowers, plants, pine cones, branches or wood, leaves, birds' nests and/or eggshells, herbs, grass, liquids (such as water), tobacco, and foodstuffs.

Preservation: (1) The act of protecting artifacts and archival items by minimizing deterioration.

(2) Identification, evaluation, recording, documenting, curating, acquisition, protection, management, rehabilitation, restoration, stabilization, maintenance, research, interpretation, conservation, and education and training regarding the foregoing activities or any combination of the foregoing activities.

Preventive Conservation: Actions that prevent or slow deterioration and damage to cultural property through the adoption and enforcement of policies and procedures for appropriate environmental conditions, handling, storage, exhibition, packing, transport, integrated pest management, emergency preparedness, and reformatting/duplication.

Primary Research: Research employing primary sources: materials and stories from the period being interpreted (e.g., diaries, letters, photographs, sheet music, newspaper articles, artifacts, oral histories, etc.).

Primary Sources: Original records created at the time historical events occurred, or well after events in the form of memoirs and oral histories by people directly involved in the event or who observed the event. Primary sources may include letters, manuscripts, diaries, journals, newspapers, speeches, interviews, memoirs, documents produced by government agencies, photographs, audio or video recordings, moving pictures, research data, and objects or artifacts such as works of art, buildings, and tools.

Provenance: The background and ownership history of an artifact or archival items. Also known as "provenience."

Public Relations/Marketing Plan: A written description of how an institution intends to publicize,

StEPs

promote, sell, or advertise the institution or project to a specific group. It often includes a description of hours, tactics, money required, and a work timeline.

Public Trust: The legal and ethical responsibility to care for and exhibit collections for the benefit of the public.

Qualified Professional: An individual with a minimum education and experience required to perform identification, evaluation, registration, and treatment activities. Additional areas or levels of expertise may be needed, depending on the complexity of the task and the nature of the historic properties involved.

Records Management: The systematic and administrative control of records throughout their life cycle to ensure efficiency and economy in their creation, use, handling, control, maintenance, and disposition.

Research: An active, diligent, and systematic process of inquiry aimed at discovering, interpreting, and revising facts.

Resources: The time, people, space, services, collections, and funds an institution applies to fulfilling its mission and realizing the goals articulated in its vision statement.

Restoration: Process of recovering the form of a building as it appeared at a particular period of time by means of removal of additional work or by replacement of missing later work.

Right of First Refusal: A right that gives an institution the option to obtain object(s) before they are offered to any other party.

Rights and Reproductions: Laws and procedures regarding copyright, trademarks, and other rights related to the exhibition, publication, and reproduction of objects.

Risk Management: A program of risk analysis and control of an institution's visitors, staff and volunteers, collections, facility, and property. Risk management addresses insurance coverage, security and fire protection systems, safety policies and procedures, emergency and disaster mitigation for collections and operations, and architectural planning.

Roles and Responsibilities: The individual job titles, duties, authorities, and reporting relationships of the governing authority, staff, and volunteers.

Scholar: An individual with professional training and skills to critically analyze and synthesize data.

Secondary Sources: Documents that provide commentary upon, or analysis of, events, ideas, or primary sources. They provide historical context or perspective developed after events by people not directly involved in the events. Secondary sources include documentaries, textbooks, articles, etc.

Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties: The official principles to guide work on historic buildings. There are separate standards for acquisition, protection, stabilization, preservation, rehabilitation, restorations, and reconstruction.

Significance: The importance of a historic property as defined by the National Register of Historic Places in one or more areas of history relating to events, people, architecture, archaeology, craftsmanship, engineering, or culture.

StEPs

Site: The location of a significant event, a prehistoric or historic occupation or activity, or a building or structure, whether standing, ruined, or vanished, where the location itself possesses historic, cultural, or archaeological value regardless of the value of any existing structure.

Standard: A generally accepted level of attainment that all institutions are expected to achieve.

Stewardship: An ethic of caring for, protecting, and responsibly managing resources.

Strategic Plan: A written document outlining an institution's goals for a specific time period (e.g., three years) and the actions it will take to meet those goals.

Support Groups: Stakeholder groups affiliated with the institution for specified purposes, such as a friends group that raises money for institution projects, an advocacy group, or a group that provides volunteers. Depending on the institution's governing structure, support groups may or may not be separately incorporated nonprofits. They do not, however, have governing authority or fiduciary responsibility for the institution.

Teaching Collection (See Education Collection)

Training: The systematic process of developing knowledge, skills, abilities, and attitudes for current or future jobs through formal or informal learning experiences.

Treatment: Applying measures generally focusing upon ongoing maintenance and repair of historical properties.

Universal Accessibility Standards: Universal design is about inclusion. It goes beyond accessibility. It defines an approach that uses multi-sensory experiences as an educational tool for communicating an exhibit's main point.

Vision Statement: As the long-term view of the institution, the vision statement outlines key results and positive impacts anticipated in the future. It often includes ambitious goals, describing ways to serve the public and to optimally care for and manage the institution's assets. The time frame often ranges from three to ten years in the future.

Visitor Research and Evaluation Methods: Visitor research is the systematic gathering of information (descriptive, psychological, contextual) about audiences or visitors. (For Evaluation Methods, see Evaluation)

Visitor Services: Services and amenities that offer assistance and comfort to visitors.

Volunteer: Someone who performs services for an institution for civic, charitable, or humanitarian reasons, without promise, expectation, or receipt of compensation.

About the American Association for State and Local History

AASLH was born in 1904 as a part of the American Historical Association. Over one hundred years later, AASLH is the only national association dedicated to the people and organizations that practice state and local history in order to make the past more meaningful to all Americans. These history organizations are American leaders in preserving, researching, and interpreting traces of the past to connect the people, thoughts, and events of yesterday with the creative memories and abiding concerns of people, communities, and our nation today. History organizations are foremost educational institutions, and they excel in creating the enlightened, engaged citizenry that the founders envisioned. From its headquarters in Nashville, Tennessee, AASLH provides a variety of programs and services, as well as leadership in the national arena.



1717 Church Street • Nashville, TN 37201-2991 • 615.320.3203 • www.aaslh.org

Copyright © 2009 American Association for State and Local History. All rights reserved.

AASLH encourages the use of this workbook by history organizations, service organizations, consultants, academic programs, and others. While permission to use the workbook contents for professional and educational purposes is not necessary, credit to AASLH is always required whether the user's work is in print, electronic, or spoken format.

AAM standards used with permission of the American Association of Museums.