

Characteristics of Excellence for U.S. 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 U.S. 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)