

Accreditation Visiting Committee Position Description

What is Peer Review?

Peer review is a collegial process of evaluation that is practiced by many professions as a means of quality control and certification. Peer review is premised on the idea that the professionals who develop and follow standards of excellence in their own everyday work are the best ones to evaluate the work of their colleagues. Within the museum field, peer review is used to evaluate grants, critique exhibits, and as part of the Museum Assessment and Accreditation programs at the American Association of Museums (AAM).

Peer review also benefits the profession by:

- Encouraging broad, active participation in the development of standards of excellence
- Increasing knowledge among peer reviewers about evolving standards

What is the Accreditation Program?

Purpose

The AAM established the Accreditation Program in part to ensure that the essential standards by which museums are judged originate from within the profession. The achievement of AAM Accreditation signifies and recognizes excellence within the museum community, to governments and outside agencies, and among the American public. Developed and operated by museum professionals, the program reflects, reinforces, and promotes the best practices in museums and the strictest accountability to the public museums serve.

Process

A museum examines all aspects of its operations in a year-long self-assessment. A team of two peer reviewers (called Visiting Committee members in the Accreditation Program) visits the museum to verify the information in the Self-Study. They write a narrative report for the Accreditation Commission,

an independent body of experienced museum professionals appointed by the AAM Board of Directors. The commission considers both the Self-Study and the Visiting Committee's report in making its decision. While the Visiting Committee submits an advisory conclusion as to whether accreditation should be awarded, the commission is the final and only authority regarding a museum's accredited status. The museum receives a copy of the report, but it is primarily written for the commission.

What are the Responsibilities of the Visiting Committee?

The Visiting Committee serves as the impartial "eyes and ears" for the Accreditation Commission. The Visiting Committee's purpose is to:

1. Observe the institution's operations to determine whether the museum is meeting the program's eligibility criteria and characteristics of an accreditable museum
2. Verify the accuracy of the Self-Study's contents
3. Consider the museum in light of Accreditation's two core questions:
 - How well does the museum achieve its stated mission and goals?
 - How well does the museum's performance meet standards and practices as they are generally understood in the museum field?
4. Communicate the observations and findings in writing to the Commission

The Visiting Committee member's responsibilities are to:

1. Become as familiar as possible with the museum and its operation prior to the site visit. Thoroughly review and analyze the Self-Study questionnaire and supporting documents.
2. Schedule the visit to the museum. Work with the museum and other committee member to arrange a mutually convenient date, to jointly develop an agenda for the visit, and to determine an appropriate length



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for the visit, at least two days.

3. Visit the museum. Conduct the visit in a thorough, professional, and objective manner. Review any materials the museum has updated since submitting its Self-Study. Conduct an exit interview with the director. Discuss findings and the advisory conclusion with other Committee member.

4. Write a narrative report for the commission that is a comprehensive, accurate, and impartial account of the observations and findings. The report should not be consultative or include the advisory conclusion regarding accreditation. Professionalism is essential. Adhere to deadlines as established by the Accreditation Office.

What are the Qualifications?

Museum professionals must demonstrate a certain level of knowledge and experience in order to be accepted as a Visiting Committee member for Accreditation. See the Peer Reviewer Qualifications for Service: Eligibility Criteria for details about how these criteria can be demonstrated. Visiting Committee members must:

1. Demonstrate knowledge of basic, overall museum operations
2. Understand the professional nature of museum work and participate in the field-wide dialogue about museum operations, standards and best practices, and emerging issues
3. Demonstrate interpersonal qualities needed to conduct a successful site visit
4. Demonstrate familiarity with the AAM Accreditation process

What are the Performance Expectations?

Visiting Committee members must meet a certain standard of performance in order to be effective and to maintain Accreditation's credibility and accountability. See the Peer Reviewer Qualifications for Service: Performance Expectations for details

about the measures used in evaluating performance of Visiting Committee members.

1. Participation: at least one peer reviewer activity a year
2. Ethics: adheres to the highest standards of ethical behavior and maintain total confidentiality
3. Professionalism: completes the work in a well-informed and professional manner
4. Communications skills: demonstrates effective oral and written communication

What is the Time Commitment?

The time required depends on each individual's work style and the complexity and size of the museum involved. Visiting Committee members report that they spend about seven days over a three-month period preparing, conducting the site visit, and writing the narrative report.

Is there any Compensation?

In keeping with the policies of other academic and professional accrediting bodies, AAM offers no salary compensation or honorarium. AAM reimburses Visiting Committee members for all travel and visit-related expenses at the completion of the site visit.

Visiting Committee members twice yearly receive *NEWStandard*, a publication specifically for peer reviewers, and have access to the peer reviewer-only section of the AAM Web site.