



New Accreditation Self-Study Highlights and Reviewing Tips

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The 2005 version of the Accreditation Self-Study is quite different from the one you've been reading as part of your site visits since 1996. It was revised to align with, and support, the new *Characteristics of an Accreditable Museum* and *Accreditation Commission's Expectations*.

To help you make the transition to the new version, this document highlights major changes / differences and includes some reviewing tips.

In the new version you'll find some familiar **information in different places**, a number of **new questions and attachments** (including some that have been eliminated or rearranged), and some **format changes**. The most notable changes are the use of checkboxes/multiple choice options (to replace essay questions or to summarize the contents of attached documents), and more charts/tables (to visually present information in an "at-a-glance" way). This should be especially helpful to the Visiting Committee member who does not get the set of attachments first. Now you can learn a lot more about a museum from the Questionnaire.

Some things haven't changed. You are still going to get a copy of the museum's last Visiting Committee report (if the review is a reaccreditation) and the Self-Study Review Checklist (the internal review document prepared by the staff). As always, pay close attention to the Checklist. If it has been more than a couple of years since your last site visit, you'll find some enhancements to the Checklist: the code noting items for Visiting Committee review has been changed to "PD" (as in be "prepared to discuss" on site) and there are now annotations in the Checklist regarding the museum's response to the items cited by staff.

Don't forget about the Peer Reviewer Manual—you can access it on line at www.aam-us.org/getinvolved/pr/manual.cfm. In particular, see "A Guide to the Characteristics of an Accreditable Museum" in Section D. It reiterates the Characteristics and contains some diagnostic questions to help you assess if/how the museum is meeting the standards in each area.

In general...

- **There are now two kinds of attachments found in the Self-Study binders: "Required" and "If Available"**

The "Required" documents are just that—ones that must be submitted.

The "If Available" documents are not mandatory, but should be submitted if the museum has them.

- **You will see several different icons throughout the Questionnaire.**



The "Folder" icon tells you a document is/may be attached.



The "Thumbs Up" icon indicates the issue is tied to a specific expectation or eligibility criteria and that there is an expected right answer. *If all boxes aren't checked, and there is no follow up explanation in the Self-Study Review Checklist or additional documentation submitted after the Self-Study was turned in, this is a red flag. Probe further on this while on site.*

- ? The "Question Mark" icon indicates there is an entry related to the question in the *Self-Study Guide*. (The *Guide* is a companion piece the museum uses which gives detailed guidance on answering specific questions, contains a glossary, and has other instructions and resources related to completing the Self-Study.)

- * An "Asterisk" next to a word indicates that term is defined in Glossary in the *Self-Study Guide*.

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By Section...

II. Museum Profile



Question 19

“Within the past three years, has your organization experienced any of the following...” The list that follows covers major changes/events (e.g., merger with another institution, opening a new building, disaster, etc.) that will have a significant impact on operations in some way. If any items are checked the museum is asked to provide a brief explanation of the details.

As appropriate use the answers to help shape your visit agenda; this is an important question for you to follow up on while you are on site.

III. Public Trust & Accountability

General

This is a new section. It includes questions about the museum’s code of ethics, which was found in the Governance section of the previous Self-Study.



Sarbanes-Oxley – Questions A.2 and A.3

This is a new law and not all museums know that two provisions of the Sarbanes-Oxley Act apply to all entities (including nonprofits): whistle-blower protection and document destruction/retention. Many museums are just now developing, or planning to develop, these policies.

(See the Board Source/Independent Sector document “The Sarbanes-Oxley Act and Implications for Nonprofit Organizations” <http://www.boardsource.org/clientfiles/Sarbanes-Oxley.pdf>)

If the museum says it doesn’t have them but is working on developing them, please follow-up on whether the policies have been created and approved. (FYI: these policies may be integrated into the Personnel Manual, which is held for on-site review by the Visiting Committee. See more below.) It is not necessary to submit these documents.

Institutional code of ethics – Question C.2; Attachment #1

This is one of those questions where all the boxes must be checked in order to meet the Accreditation Commission’s Expectations. If all the boxes aren’t checked, refer to the Self-Study Review Checklist in the front of the binder of attachments to see how/if the museum has responded to the omission since the time the Self-Study was submitted. If the museum is still working on revising its code to meet the requirements, you should follow up on the status of these efforts.

IV. Mission, Planning, & Assessing Achievement

General

This is a new section. In the previous Self-Study, planning questions/attachments were in the Governance section and mission questions were scattered throughout the questionnaire.

Institutional plan – Question C.5; Attachment #4

This is one of those questions where all the boxes must be checked in order to meet the Accreditation Commission’s Expectations. If all the boxes aren’t checked, refer to the Self-Study Review Checklist in the front of the binder of attachments to see how/if the museum has responded to the omission since the time the Self-Study was submitted. The Commission’s Expectation document is very specific about a museum’s planning having both the “big picture” and the implementation specifics.

As always, give close review to plans and planning. For example: how is the plan “going”—is implementation generally on target, are the museum’s resources/capacity and the plan in alignment? Make sure implementation elements (action steps, timeline, assignment of responsibilities and assessment of resources) are present in the plan or other supporting documents, particularly if the plan was newly adopted before the visit. If a yearly work plan is in the Self-Study as documentation of implementation of the “big” picture” but has now expired, get the most up-to-date yearly work plan during the visit.

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Tools for measuring achievement – Question C.8; Attachment #5 (if available)

Here the museum indicates how it assesses whether it's met/meeting its goals. If any exist, samples of things like surveys and financial performance indicators may be in the Self-Study as attachments.

V. Leadership & Organizational Structure

General

This section contains the information on museum administration that used to be found in the Finance and Administration Section of the previous version of the Self-Study. In particular all the staff information (org chart, resumes, list, etc.) is now found here.



Documentation of operational relationships with other organizations integrally connected to the museum's governance or operations -- Questions C.2, C.3, and E.2; Attachments # 10.a/ b

If the museum has joint governance it is required to provide copies of the agreements that delineate the relationship between the governing authorities. If there are any external, separately incorporated organizations or government entities that have or share key assets key to the museum's operations, then copies of agreements between the parties (e.g., memorandum of understanding, contract, etc.) must be provided.

To streamline your review of this information, Question C.3 provides you with a summary of the roles and responsibilities of each governing authority/outside organization.



Table of contents of the governance manual – Attachment #12

This is a new required attachment. You may want to visually inspect the actual manual while on site.

Position descriptions & current resumes for principal professional & administrative staff–Attachment #17

The position description and resumes are now combined behind the same tab, with the employee's resume behind the corresponding position description.



Personnel policies manual – Question F.9 and F.10

The entire manual is no longer an attachment, but instead museums must have it available for visual inspection by the Visiting Committee while you are on site. Question F.9 lists the topics covered in the museum's personnel manual. Question F.10 indicates how the manual is made available—this will tell you what format you will see it in when on the visit.



Volunteers Manual Table of Contents – Attachment #20 (if available)

This is a new (optional) attachment. You may want to visually inspect the actual manual while on site.

VI. Collections Stewardship



Legal issues (compliance with laws and regulations) – Question C.6 - 8

The Self-Study now itemizes over a dozen laws and regulations that may apply to a museum if it holds certain biological or cultural materials; and asks the museum to indicate if it is out of compliance with any of them.

Note: NAGPRA policies and compliance is addressed in this question (and in one about the contents of the museum's collections management policy) but a NAGPRA policy is no longer singled out as a separate required attachment.



Collections plan – Attachment #22

New “if available” attachment.



Conservation plan – Attachment #29

New “if available” attachment.

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VII. Education and Interpretation

General

You will notice a substantial change in this section compared with the last Self-Study. What was once a very essay laden chapter is now almost totally comprised of checkbox-answer questions.



Interpretive plan or education master plan – Attachment #30

Furnishing plan – Attachment #32

New “if available” attachments.

VIII. Financial Stability

General

There is more information in this section than in the previous version of the Self-Study, especially when it comes to breaking down income sources and allocation of expenditures into standard categories.



Audited financial statements for the last two fiscal years, including management letters (or unaudited year-end financial report) – Attachment #38

The Self-Study now includes 2 years of financial information (instead of just the most recent year) and the letters to management from the auditors. If management letters have recommendations to improve internal controls, review how/if the recommendations have been implemented.



Investment policy – Attachment #39

Individual donor support policy – Attachment #42

Business support policy – Attachment #43

All new “if available” attachments.

IX. Facilities & Risk Management

General

This information used to be found in the Finance and Administration Section of the old Self-Study. This section contains more information about the museum’s facilities, largely via charts/tables and checkbox lists. This format presents lots of detailed data, including climate control readings and benchmarks, in a visually easy to digest manner. This additional data should streamline the visit by having more detailed information before you arrive on site. A number of these new charts were adapted from the RC-AAM Standard Facility Report, which is also now a new “if available” attachment (see below).



Completed RC-AAM Standard Facility Report – Attachment #45

New “if available” attachment.

Emergency/disaster preparedness plan (covering staff, visitors, and collections) – Question B.4; Attachment #46

You now get a list of the topics covered in the museum’s emergency plan in the Questionnaire itself. The actual plan is still a required attachment.

Images – Attachment 47a-d

Images are still required attachments, but are now more frequently being submitted on CD. Museums are given this as an alternative to submitting color digital image printouts or actual photographs. You’ll get the images in whatever format the museum provided them in.

X. Wrap-up



This is a new section...and it only has one question. This section/question is an open-ended opportunity for the museum to tell us why the museum is important, to whom it is important, and how it makes a difference. You may want to read this section first!