



Frequently Asked Questions
about
The American Association of Museums and the
Association of Zoos and Aquariums'
Collaboration Regarding Their Accreditation Programs

Why are the two programs collaborating?

Cooperation between the two associations with respect to their respective accreditation programs will:

- Encourage participation in both programs.
- Strengthen the entire museum field, and boost collective advocacy efforts, by encouraging more institutions to participate in a rigorous standards based program. More accredited museums equals more institutions meeting standards.
- Provide a benefit to AZA members who wish to seek AAM accreditation.
- Encourage smaller zoos, aquariums, science centers and natural history museums that hold AAM accreditation to apply for AZA accreditation.
- To afford AAM a better awareness of zoological issues and standards specific to living collections.
- Bring awareness of the resources of AAM and AZA to new audiences.
- Create a closer connection between living collections-based institutions and those with non-living collections.

If my zoo is AZA accredited, how will the AAM accreditation process be different?

- AAM will offer AZA accredited institutions a simplified AAM accreditation Self-Study process, reducing the time and paperwork involved.

Self Study

- AAM will allow AZA-accredited zoos/aquariums that participate in AAM's Museum Accreditation Program to substitute for *some* of their AAM accreditation Self-Study with their AZA accreditation report and related materials. Information and documents required will be at the sole discretion of AAM.

FAQs About: the American Association of Museums
and Association of Zoos and Aquariums' Collaboration Regarding Accreditation

- In order to receive these Self-Study benefits, institutions applying for or renewing their AAM accreditation must:
 - Provide AAM with copies of their AZA application package, Site Visit Report, written response to that report, and final decision letter.
 - Provide AZA with written permission to share with the AAM Accreditation Program any information about the institution's last AZA review and current AZA accreditation status, as deemed relevant.

Site Visit

- AZA and AAM site visits will *not* be combined and the AZA site visit cannot fully substitute for the AAM site visit. However, since the institution has given permission to AZA to share confidential information related to the review, the team Chairs of the AZA and AAM site visit teams could consult each other pre or post visit if needed/desired.

What kind of information will be shared between AAM and AZA? Will it stay confidential?

- Upon receipt of written permission from an AZA-accredited institution, AZA will, at AAM's request, provide AAM with information about the institution's last AZA review, current AZA accreditation status, and any concerns that may impact the AAM review (e.g., areas the Visiting Committee and Accreditation Commission should know about) for all AAM accreditation program participants taking advantage of the streamlined Self-Study process.
- This same information, about AAM accredited museums, will be provided to AZA upon request.
- All information shared between AAM and AZA about institutional reviews will only be available and accessible to current accreditation program staff members, Accreditation Commission members, and assigned peer reviewers when appropriate, and will be held in strict confidence in accordance with each program's confidentiality policies.

Is this a reciprocal initiative?

- No, this is not a reciprocal initiative; AZA is not altering its program or standards for AAM-accredited institutions that seek AZA accreditation.
- Receiving accreditation from either association is not contingent on receiving accreditation from the other. This is not co-accreditation or joint accreditation. It is a method of streamlining the AAM accreditation review process for institutions that have achieved accreditation from AZA.
- Membership, fees, and eligibility criteria associated with each program are set and overseen by each association and are not inter-related.
- On its website, AAM will place the AZA accredited logo or other indicator next to listings of those AAM-accredited museums that also hold accreditation from AZA, and *vice versa*.

What's the history of these two programs? What's their relationship to each other?

The American Association of Museums (AAM) accredited its first 16 institutions in 1971; the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA) accredited its first institution just a few years later, in 1974. For both organizations the emergence of an accreditation program happened as a result of potential federal legislation, increased public awareness, and a desire within the profession for greater accountability. The AZA program was developed using the AAM program as a model and both programs continue to have a highly similar process built around three main areas: Self-Study, Peer Review/Site Visit, and an Accreditation Commission. At the time, both programs offered voluntary accreditation.

Today AZA accreditation is a requirement of AZA membership; AAM accreditation remains voluntary and is not tied to AAM membership. Zoos and aquariums represent less than one percent of AAM accredited institutions. AAM is in the process of re-inventing its accreditation program to be more inclusive and have a greater value proposition, especially for institutions with living collections.

Similarities and differences between the two programs:

AZA

- Goal: an assurance to the public that the institution meets or exceeds the standards established by the zoological and aquarium industry through self evaluation, on-site inspection, and peer review.
- Mandatory
- Directly related to association membership
- Eligibility: Zoos and Aquariums; can be for-profit
- Institution accredited for 5 years

AAM

- Goal: an assurance to the public that the institution meets or exceeds the standards established by the museum field through self evaluation, on-site inspection, and peer review.
- Voluntary
- Unrelated to AAM membership
- Eligibility: all museum types; only non-profit, educational institutions
- Institution accredited for 10 years

The AAM and AZA accreditation program staff have had a long and collegial relationship with one another via informal connections. AAM also sought AZA's input in developing an AAM Accreditation Self-Study supplement for zoos and aquariums in the 1980s (which is no longer in use). In 2010, staff from the two programs initiated a closer examination of how the programs are similar and different, and how each can be improved.

When was this agreement between AAM and AZA signed?

When will it take effect?

The agreement was signed in September 2011 by the board chairs of the two organizations. It becomes effective January 1, 2012.

Who should I talk to if I have questions or if my institution is interested in applying for AAM or AZA accreditation?

AZA: www.aza.org ; jdinenna@aza.org

Founded in 1924, the Association of Zoos and Aquariums is an organization dedicated to the advancement of zoos and aquariums in the areas of conservation, education, science, and recreation. Look for the AZA logo whenever you visit a zoo or aquarium as your assurance that you are a facility dedicated to providing excellent care for the animals, a great experience for you, and a better future for all living things. AZA is a leader in global wildlife conservation, and your link to helping animals in their native habitats.

AAM: www.aam-us.org; accreditation@aam-us.org.

The American Association of Museums has been bringing museums together since 1906, helping to develop standards and best practices, gathering and sharing knowledge, and providing advocacy on issues of concern to the entire museum community. With more than 15,000 individual, 3,000 institutional and 300 corporate members, AAM is dedicated to ensuring that museums remain a vital part of the American landscape, connecting people with the greatest achievements of the human experience, past, present and future. For more information: visit www.aam-us.org ; email