

**Accreditation Commission Statement on Best Practices:
Loaning Collections to Non-Museum Entities**

Approved April 5, 2006¹

Accreditation standards are set forth by the AAM Accreditation Commission in the *Characteristics of an Accreditable Museum*, and elaborated in a series of *Expectation* statements. Standards are generally accepted levels of attainment that all museums in accreditation are expected to meet, and to which all museums should aspire. In addition to these standards statements, the Commission occasionally issues statements that codify best practices (commendable actions and philosophies that successfully solve problems, can be replicated, and demonstrate an awareness of standards).

These statements are intended to:

- Provide guidance to the field as a whole on appropriate ways to approach a given issue, based on the Commission's observations of the hundreds of high-performing museums in the Accreditation Program
- Help museums in the Accreditation Program understand the Commission's thinking on issues that may arise in a museum's review

These statements generally address complex issues that museums may approach appropriately in a variety of ways, depending on their mission, values, discipline, and other individual circumstances. They are not standards, and do not set forth criteria that all accredited museums, or museums in general, are expected to meet. The Commission does feel that museums will benefit from considering how the issues discussed in this statement affect their operations and, as appropriate, using this information to make decisions regarding their own institutional practices, policies, and procedures.

Museums hold collections in trust for the public. As stewards, museums fulfill their fiduciary and ethical responsibilities by preserving, caring for, and providing access to collection objects for the benefit of the public. The Accreditation Commission recognizes that some museums loan objects from their collection to non-museum entities and encourages museums that do so to consider best practices for collections care and accessibility, and public accountability.

In some instances, loaning objects from the collection to non-museum entities may jeopardize the level of care provided for the items. This may constitute a breach of a museum's public trust responsibility and be perceived as an inappropriate or unethical use of objects held and maintained for the benefit of the public. Further, loaning objects from the collection to non-museum entities may result in inappropriate or inadequate practices in collections documentation and limit public access to the items.

If a museum participating in the Accreditation Program engages in the practice of loaning objects from the collection to organizations other than museums, such a practice should:

- be considered for its appropriateness to the museum's mission
- be thoughtfully managed with the utmost care and in compliance with the most prudent practices in collections stewardship, ensuring that loaned objects receive the level of care, documentation and control *at least* equal to that given to the objects that remain on the museum premises
- be governed by clearly defined and approved institutional policies and procedures, including a collections management policy and code of ethics

Resources

- *Characteristics of an Accreditable Museum and Accreditation Commission Expectations*, (American Association of Museums, 2005). Available free at www.aam-us.org/museumresources/accred/standards.cfm
- *Code of Ethics for Museums*, (American Association of Museums, 2000). Available free at www.aam-us.org/museumresources/ethics/coe.cfm.
- *Standard Facility Report*, (American Association of Museums/Registrar's Committee of AAM, 1998). Available for purchase at www.aam-us.org/bookstore/index.cfm.

¹ Formerly titled "Policy on the Loaning of Collections to Private Entities or Corporations" issued by the AAM Accreditation Commission October 10, 1996; revised November 10, 2000 as "Position Statement on Loaning Collections to Non-Museum Entities."

