



## Frequently Asked Questions: about the Accreditation Site Visit

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If your particular question is not addressed in this FAQ sheet or one of the resources listed below, do not hesitate to contact the Accreditation Program staff at [accreditation@aam-us.org](mailto:accreditation@aam-us.org) or 202-289-9116.

The answers provided here are adapted from the following reference materials and aim to give you the basics. Please access these resources for other details. Where applicable, the specific document names and sections are indicated in the text.

- “The Site Visit” chapter in *A Higher Standard: The Museum Accreditation Handbook* (pages 34-43 )
- *Steps in the Accreditation Process*  
([www.aam-us.org/museumresources/accred/process.cfm](http://www.aam-us.org/museumresources/accred/process.cfm))
- “Conducting an Accreditation Visit” chapter of the *Peer Review Manual* (pp D23-39). The *Peer Review Manual* is the reference manual for all peer reviewers; it is important for you to review to know what the reviewers are expected and instructed to do. The entire manual is on-line at [www.aam-us.org/getinvolved/pr/pr\\_main.cfm](http://www.aam-us.org/getinvolved/pr/pr_main.cfm).
- *Site Visit Expectations* (covers the museums and the peer reviewers’ basic responsibilities)  
([www.aam-us.org/getinvolved/pr/upload/E10\\_Site\\_Visit\\_Expectations.pdf](http://www.aam-us.org/getinvolved/pr/upload/E10_Site_Visit_Expectations.pdf))
- *Frequently Asked Questions about the Visiting Committee Selection Process and Completing the Potential Peer Reviewer Selection Form*  
([www.aam-us.org/museumresources/accred/SiteVisit.cfm](http://www.aam-us.org/museumresources/accred/SiteVisit.cfm))
- *What You Need to Know About: Getting Ready for the Site Visit and Next Steps*  
([www.aam-us.org/museumresources/accred/SiteVisit.cfm](http://www.aam-us.org/museumresources/accred/SiteVisit.cfm))

If you do not have these already, or cannot access them on-line, call or e-mail the Accreditation Program staff for copies: 202-289-9116, [accreditation@aam-us.org](mailto:accreditation@aam-us.org).

## **The Visiting Committee Team**

### ***Who will be on the team?***

Your Visiting Committee will be two museum directors or senior museum staff with direct experience with the accreditation process (there may be three team members for very large museums or systems). They will be vetted members of the AAM Peer Review roster. For more details see: Peer Reviewer Qualifications for Service at [www.aam-us.org/getinvolved/pr/upload/PRQS.pdf](http://www.aam-us.org/getinvolved/pr/upload/PRQS.pdf)

### ***Can I pick the team members?***

The museum is given the opportunity—through the Potential Peer Reviewer Selection Form—to review a pool of possible team members, which have been carefully selected by the Accreditation Program staff, and eliminate any that pose a conflict of interest. These candidates have been chosen because they are considered appropriate and a good match for the museum’s visit in terms of their professional background, museum disciplines, areas of expertise, and demonstrated experience. The museum cannot handpick the two team members: the Accreditation Program staff ask one candidate from those you approved to serve as the Team Contact. The Team Contact is asked to select his/her Team Member from the approved list.

For more details about the team selection process see: *Frequently Asked Questions about the Visiting Committee Selection Process and Completing the Potential Peer Reviewer Selection Form*

## **Scheduling, Logistics, Expenses**

### ***When will the visit occur? Can I request a specific visit date?***

*You are given the opportunity to list scheduling preferences when you complete the Potential Peer Review Selection Form. The Accreditation Program staff and the Visiting Committee team will try to accommodate these needs. However, we cannot guarantee that the visit will take place within these parameters or by a certain deadline.*

While every effort is made by Program staff to expedite the peer review phase of the accreditation process, we ask for your patience and want you to have realistic expectations. You should know that the process of securing a Visiting Committee team and setting a date can sometimes take up to 6 to 12 months—due to peer reviewer availability and responsiveness, and a generally high program workload—and the visit date is usually scheduled several months after that point. A basic review timeline is available at [www.aam-us.org/museumresources/accred/process.cfm](http://www.aam-us.org/museumresources/accred/process.cfm).

After a Visiting Committee team has been secured, dates for the actual site visit are negotiated between the members of Visiting Committee and museum. *The visit date is usually scheduled several months in advance in order to allow the team enough time to review the museum’s self-study materials* (however, the visit should be scheduled for no more than twelve months from the time that the Visiting Committee is constituted). The museum is copied on key communications between the Program staff and Visiting Committee.

### ***How long is the visit?***

The appropriate length of the site visit depends on the size and complexity of the museum and its governing structure. Typically, visits last two full days. Large museums, those with multiple sites, or those with multiple supporting groups or advisory boards may require a longer site visit.

### ***Who makes the Visiting Committee's travel arrangements?***

Visiting Committee members generally arrange (and pay up front for) their own transportation and lodging; however, the peer reviewers may need your suggestions and help regarding lodging or travel specifics. It is perfectly acceptable for you to arrange direct billing and/or discount rates at a hotel you have an account with—this lessens the reviewers' out-of-pocket expenses and you will not be invoiced for the charges later (see below). For more on this, see *Site Visit Expectations*: [www.aam-us.org/getinvolved/pr/upload/E10\\_Site\\_Visit\\_Expectations.pdf](http://www.aam-us.org/getinvolved/pr/upload/E10_Site_Visit_Expectations.pdf)

### ***What are the costs related to the visit? Who pays?***

Visiting Committee expenses usually range between \$1,500 to \$2,700 in total for two team members. However, the actual amount depends on the distance the reviewers have to travel, method of travel, length of visit, etc. All the costs associated with the visit are ultimately the responsibility of the museum.

In most cases, the reviewers cover their own expenses out of pocket and are reimbursed by AAM after the visit; the museum, in turn, is invoiced for these expenses. Covered expenses include: coach class air or rail fare, rental car, mileage for private vehicles, parking, taxis, hotel accommodations, meals during the visit and enroute during travel, costs of mailing Self-Study materials to the other team member and back to AAM, and other like administrative and miscellaneous travel costs.

### ***How and when will the museum be billed for the site visit expenses?***

Each member of the Visiting Committee team submits an expense report with AAM after the visit. AAM reimburses the individual directly and then invoices the museum. This procedure allows the AAM to expedite reimbursement and arbitrate any unusual expenses. The Program staff generate museum invoices quarterly: at the end of January, April, July, and October. Therefore, it may be several months between the time of the visit and when you receive your invoice. We generally invoice the museum for the expenses of both peer reviewers at one time. However, based on when the reviewers submit their reimbursement request, the museum may receive two separate invoices—one for each reviewer's expenses. (It is not appropriate to withhold payment until after the museum receives its decision letter from the Accreditation Commission, or based on the decision.)

### ***Can the visit be postponed?***

Once the Self-Study is submitted, the Accreditation Program staff begins the process of identifying and securing a Visiting Committee. As outlined above, this process has many steps and can take anywhere from two months to a year to complete. The normal timing of the Visiting Committee phase can often accommodate the institution's timing needs. A site visit cannot be postponed for a long period of time or indefinitely. If you have questions about an unusual or unique situation, contact the staff to discuss the situation.

### ***What happens if the director leaves before the visit occurs?***

Depending on the status of the museum's accreditation review process at that point (e.g., whether the Visiting Committee team and/or visit date has been secured or not) the departure of the director may or may not impact the review process. A site visit can occur in the absence of a permanent director—the review is about the museum, not the director—and the museum is expected to have acting or new leadership in place that will take responsibility for overseeing and participating in the site visit. If the museum experiences a leadership transition, call the Accreditation Program staff as soon as possible to discuss if/how it will impact the review.

### ***What if something happens and a peer reviewer or the museum director can no longer make the agreed upon visit date ?***

Unforeseen circumstances, such as serious illness, family emergencies, and natural disasters, sometimes necessitate the cancellation or rescheduling of a visit, or a team member to be replaced. In such cases, please call the Accreditation Program staff ASAP at 202-289-9116 for help and guidance on the best course of action. If you cannot reach the Accreditation staff, please contact the team members directly. Depending on the situation and the date of the visit, the Program staff will work with all parties to either substitute a new team member and keep the same visit date, substitute a new team member and reschedule the date, or reschedule the visit date with the same team.

## **Visit Preparation**

### ***What should the museum do to prepare for the visit?***

Read *What You Need to Know About: Getting Ready for the Site Visit and Next Steps*.

### ***What are responsibilities of the museum? Of the Peer Reviewers?***

Read *Site Visit Expectations*.

## **On Site**

### ***What will happen during the visit?***

The Visiting Committee is on site to verify for the Accreditation Commission that the museum operates as reported in its Self-Study, meets the program requirements (eligibility criteria, Characteristics of an Accreditable Museum), fulfills its mission, and operates according to standards and best practices.

The Visiting Committee will:

- observe
- ask probing questions
- seek clarification of facts
- gather new information

Staff and governing authority members should be well-versed in the details of the Self-Study, the museum's mission and strategic plans, and be prepared to answer questions and make information available to the team.

The Visiting Committee will:

- Have an initial interview with the director

- Tour the entire facility (including galleries and other public spaces; program departments, offices, work areas; collections area, including storage and records; workshops, meeting rooms, and laboratories; grounds; off-site collections storage areas; branch/satellite sites)
- Meet with key staff members individually or in a group(s)
- Meet with governing authority members
- Take time each day to talk with each other and discuss findings privately
- Conduct follow-up interviews as necessary
- Hold an exit interview with the director (any concerns the Visiting Committee have should come up here if they haven't already)

The Visiting Committee will not:

- Provide specific recommendations on how to improve operations or rectify problems
- Tell you what its advisory recommendation to the Accreditation Commission regarding accreditation is going to be.

For more details on all of this, see pages D29-32 in the *Peer Review Manual*.

## **After the Visit and the Narrative Report**

### ***What if I think of something after the visit that I forgot to say or give to the team?***

You should call the Team Contact or send him/her the materials.

### ***Will I hear from the team again after the visit?***

The Team Contact may call you with follow-up questions as s/he is writing the report.

### ***What happens after the visit?***

- The Visiting Committee members work together to write a narrative report about the visit and their observations and analyses, for the Accreditation Commission. For more detail about the report, see pages D33-36 in the *Peer Review Manual* and "The Site Visit" chapter of *A Higher Standard: The Museum Accreditation Handbook*. The report is due to the Accreditation Program staff 4 to 6 weeks after the visit. (See below for more about the report.)
- Within a month of the visit the Accreditation Program staff sends the director a site visit and peer reviewer performance evaluation form. This is the museum's opportunity to praise or express concerns about the Visiting Committee's performance. (Also see "How do I communicate problems / concerns about the visit or team members?" below).
- After the report is submitted, staff review it and will follow up with the museum if clarification or additional information is needed based on something the Visiting Committee said, or omitted (e.g., sometimes the report mentions something that is slated to happen or is in process; the staff may contact you to find out the status of it).
- The staff assigns the museum to the next available Commission meeting and includes a copy of the report in the agenda book (see "When will my museum be reviewed by the Commission" below).

- The staff sends the director a letter confirming the museum has been assigned a time for review by the Accreditation Commission. The letter is usually mailed about one month before the slated Commission meeting and contains additional information about the Accreditation Commission review process and outcomes.
- At the assigned meeting, the Accreditation Commission reviews the museum's Self-Study and Visiting Committee report and makes its decision regarding accredited status. For more about this, read the document called *What You Need to Know About: Being Reviewed by the Accreditation Commission*—sent with the agenda placement confirmation letter and available at [www.aam-us.org/museumresources/accred/AccredCommDecision.cfm](http://www.aam-us.org/museumresources/accred/AccredCommDecision.cfm); —and “The Accreditation Decision” chapter in *A Higher Standard: The Museum Accreditation Handbook* (pages 44-47).

***When will the Accreditation Commission review my museum's report?***

Which meeting agenda the museum's report appears on is based on when the visit occurs and when the report is received. The Commission meets three times a year: usually in late March/early April, late July, and early December. In order for the Commissioners to fully prepare for the meeting, the agenda closes about 9 weeks before the actual meeting date. Due to the advance nature of the Accreditation Commission meeting preparation schedule, there may be anywhere from a 3 to 7 month period between the time of the visit and when the Commission reviews the museum's report.

As noted above, the director will receive a letter confirming the exact dates of the Commission meeting during which the museum is being reviewed. With this letter you will also receive a copy of *Frequently Asked Questions About: Being Reviewed by the Accreditation Commission*.

***When will I get a copy of the Visiting Committee's report? Can the museum review it before the Commission sees it?***

You will get a copy of the Visiting Committee's narrative report, along with the museum's official decision letter, 3-4 weeks after the Accreditation Commission meeting at which the museum was reviewed. With it you will also get a copy of *What You Need to Know About: The Visiting Committee Narrative Report* to help you best read, use, and interpret the report.

The museum does not get to review the report before the Commission sees it. This preserves it as a communication tool between the Visiting Committee and the Commission. The museum has the chance to respond to the report, if necessary, after the Commission sees it. If there are serious *factual* errors in the report, the museum may submit written clarification, which will be appended to the report in the museum's permanent file. If the Commission tables the museum due to serious concerns which are supported by the report, the museum will get the opportunity to directly explain and act on these issues as part of the one year tabling process.

**Other**

***How do I communicate problems / concerns about the visit or team members?***

Within a month after the visit, you will receive an evaluation form. The evaluation form allows you to rate the reviewers' performance using a set scale, write in any comments to be shared with the reviewers, and write any confidential comments that you want to share only with the Accreditation Program staff and Peer Reviewer Manager.

Also, at any time you may contact the Peer Reviewer Manager directly to express concerns about a reviewer's performance related to your visit: 202-218-7688 or [peer-review@aam-us.org](mailto:peer-review@aam-us.org) .

Staff will follow up with the museum director and the peer reviewer in all cases where concerns or complaints are expressed.

If you have any other questions, do not hesitate to contact the Accreditation Program staff at

E-mail: [accreditation@aam-us.org](mailto:accreditation@aam-us.org)

Phone: 202-289-9116

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