



# Reinventing AAM Accreditation

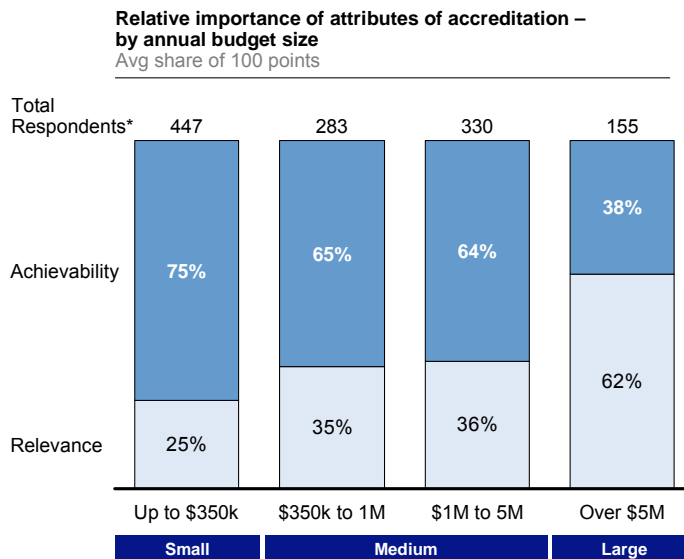
The American Association of Museums (AAM) is in the process of evaluating how best to reinvent its accreditation program to better support the museum community, be more relevant and accessible, and expand participation and benefits. Through generous funding by The Kresge Foundation and The Institute of Museum and Library Services, AAM hired McKinsey & Company to do the diagnostic phase of this process. During March-April 2009, AAM surveyed 12,000 institutions nationally and received over 1,200 responses; and conducted in-depth interviews with 14 museum service providers and representatives of specific constituent groups. The responses informed an understanding of how organizations perceive accreditation today, surfaced needs and priorities, and provided reactions to alternative accreditation models. This summary briefly outlines overall findings and specific areas of opportunity for AAM.

## Overall insights

An effective accreditation program is rooted in two critical aspects: 1) achievability – the degree to which the process is efficient and the levels of performance are appropriate for museums in different stages of development; and 2) relevance – benefits that result from achieving accreditation status. Today, AAM is perceived to have variable performance on both of these dimensions for each museum segment (size, type, governance). This likely accounts for the program’s low penetration across the board (between 2% and 13% depending on segment).

The most meaningful differentiator in responses was annual budget size – suggesting that while there are important differences by discipline and governance that should be taken into consideration, accreditation needs are primarily determined by a museum’s size and where the organization is in the life cycle of its development. Hence, small- and medium-sized institutions (which represent the largest population in the museum field, but smallest share of the total accreditation “market,” as measured by organization budget) perceive achievability as the primary barrier to the accreditation process, while large institutions perceive relevance as the primary barrier to accreditation.

### 1 Small museums value achievability while large museums value relevance...



\* Unweighted  
SOURCE: AAM accreditation survey, stakeholder interviews



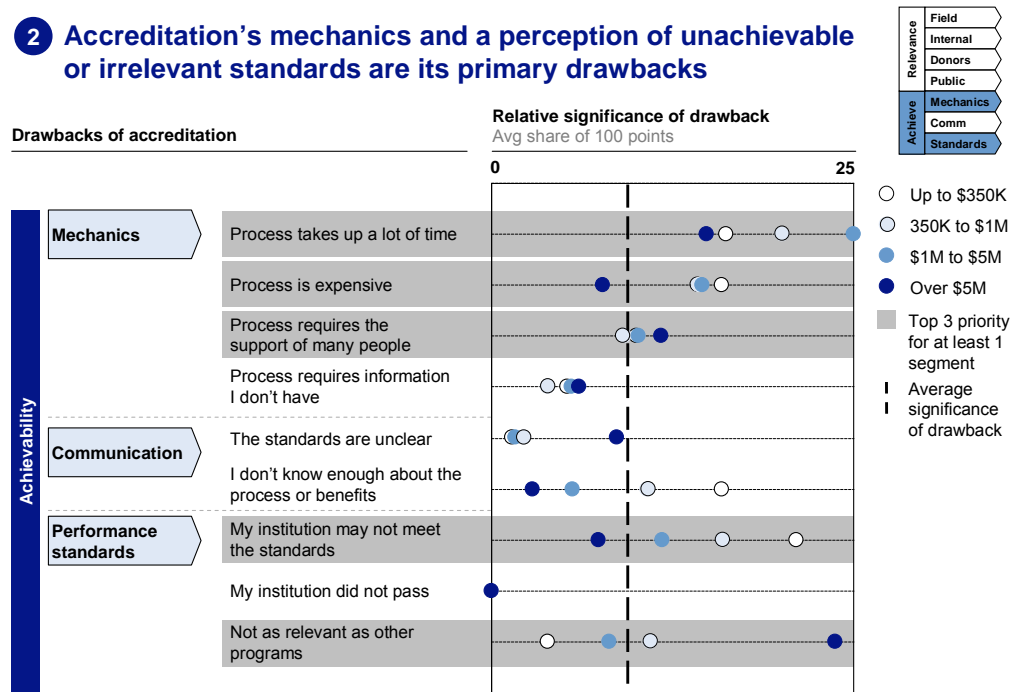
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## Achievability:

Survey respondents highlighted two elements as barriers to accreditation: *mechanics* and *performance standards*.

- Accreditation’s mechanics and a perception of unachievable or irrelevant standards are its primary drawbacks.
- Medium-size institutions perceive the mechanics of accreditation as the primary drawback, while small institutions perceive the standards themselves to be unachievable (and perhaps not tailored to their stage of development).

## 2 Accreditation’s mechanics and a perception of unachievable or irrelevant standards are its primary drawbacks



SOURCE: AAM accreditation survey | McKinsey & Company | 14

## Relevance:

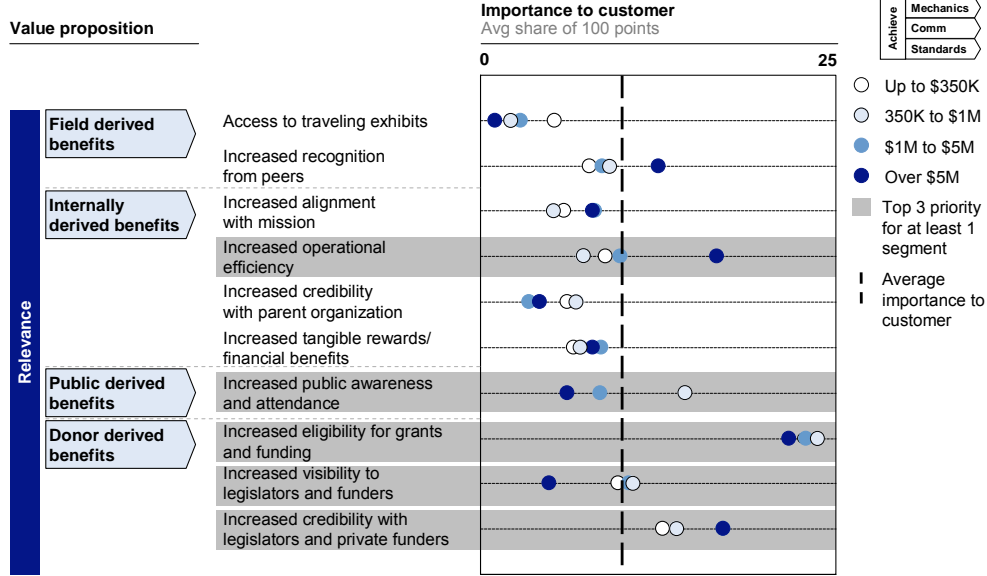
Institutions value four areas of benefit, although accreditation over-delivers on the benefits museums rate the lowest priority.

- Accreditation today does not provide the level of funding eligibility and visibility, and public awareness that museums desire.
- Access to funding is most important value for all museums regardless of institution type, size, or governance.
- While donor benefits are most important across all segments, small institutions value public awareness second, and large institutions value professional development second.
- College and university museums value increased credibility with and recognition by parent organization.
- Accredited museums view accreditation as a professional development tool, whereas non-accredited museums view accreditation as a funding tool.



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## 3 Different museum segments prioritize differently among internally, donor, and field derived benefits



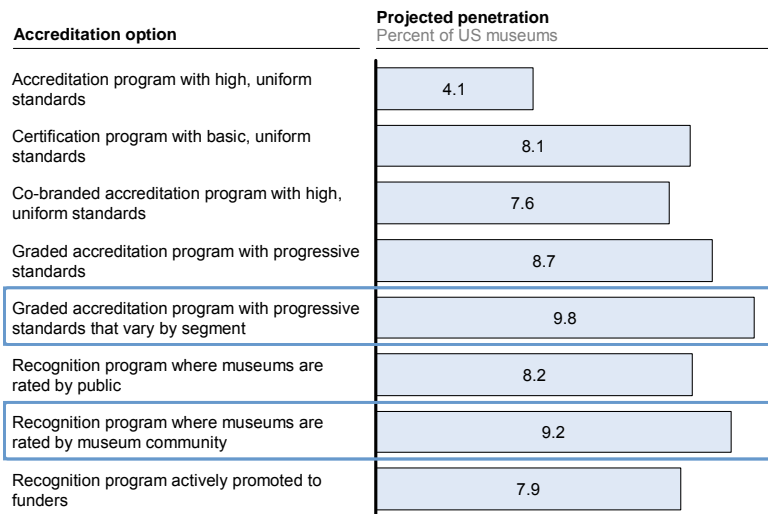
SOURCE: AAM accreditation survey

McKinsey & Company | 23

## Models for the Future

The survey and interviews tested several different accreditation concepts to determine level of interest in alternative accreditation/certification/recognition program models.

### Museums are most interested in a customized accreditation program and more recognition



SOURCE: AAM Accreditation Survey 2009

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## Next Steps

—These survey findings will help AAM make strategic decisions about the future direction of the accreditation program.

—This is the first step in reinventing the AAM accreditation process. Future phases of this work will involve finishing the remaining stages of the planning process, drilling down further into the pros and cons of various models, formulating an action plan around decisions made, developing and piloting changes, and finally, rolling out the new program and any spin-off services. This process of implementation will take place over five years and will involve a broad swath of stakeholders in the museum field.

—AAM would like to thank all of the institutions that have participated in the process so far. The broad-based input from across the field is critical as we look to reinvent the accreditation process to better support the field.

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## Survey respondent breakdown

The survey respondent population is representative of the U.S. museum population in terms of discipline, governance, and budget (based on AAM and IMLS data), but not representative of AAM affiliation (i.e., membership status). (*n=1215 for all figures below*)

### Discipline/Type

35%	History Museum
18%	Art Museum/Center
16%	Historic House/Site
8%	General/Multi-disciplinary
8%	Specialized Museum (e.g. railroad, music, aviation)
6%	Natural History/Anthropology Museum
4%	Children's/Youth
4%	Living Collections
3%	Science/Technology Museum/Center

### Budget

37%	\$350K and under
10%	\$350,000 - \$499,999
13%	\$500,000 - \$999,999
20%	\$1M - \$2.9M
7%	\$3M - \$4.9M
9%	\$5M - \$14.9M
4%	\$15M and over

### Governance

60%	Private Non-Profit
13%	College/University
10%	Federal, State
7%	Municipal
5%	Other (e.g. joint governance, trust, school district)
4%	County/regional
1%	Private For-Profit

### Relationship with AAM

41%	AAM member museum but not accredited
31%	AAM member museum and accredited
28%	Not an AAM member museum and not accredited

(The number of accredited museums that are non AAM members was too statistically insignificant to include in results.)

For more about AAM's Accreditation Program, visit [www.aam-us.org/accred](http://www.aam-us.org/accred)