

**What You Need to Know About:  
The Museum's Site Visit Narrative Report**

***The role of the Visiting Committee is to:***

- Observe the institution's daily operations and practices to determine whether it is operating according to accreditable standards, as outlined in the program's criteria and characteristics
- Verify the museum's presentation of itself in its Self-Study Questionnaire and supporting documentation
- Contextualize the written documentation and operations to provide the Accreditation Commission with a more in-depth, first-hand understanding and perspective of the museum
- Record its observations in a comprehensive narrative report
- Communicate its findings and opinions to the Accreditation Commission

***Contents and Purpose of the Report***

Following its site visit to the museum, the Visiting Committee documented its findings and observations for the Accreditation Commission in the narrative report which is enclosed here. The narrative report is a substantive analysis of the museum's performance in relation to its mission and goals and to the Characteristics of an Accreditable Museum, as witnessed, reviewed, and reported on by the Visiting Committee. It generally follows the framework of the Characteristics of an Accreditable Museum and addresses the two "core questions" of accreditation.

The report will cite areas of strength as well as areas of weakness or concern; however, it is not the role of the Visiting Committee to recommend specific remedial action in the report. This step is for the museum to address as appropriate. The Visiting Committee may draw attention to best practices in areas where the museum could strengthen its operation.

**The Visiting Committee's narrative report is written primarily for, and addressed to, the Accreditation Commission.** While the report provides the Commission with a first-hand account of the museum's operations, it is not the sole basis for the Commission's decision, nor does it carry more weight than the Self-Study in the decision-making process. When they meet, the Commissioners thoroughly review each museum's Self-Study Questionnaire and support material, read the Visiting Committee report, and consider these together in the context of their individual experience and expertise, broad knowledge about museums, and experience with many institutions in the accreditation process. Among the points the Accreditation Commission (over)

discusses is whether the Visiting Committee's confidential advisory conclusion is consistent with the main points presented in the narrative report and whether the factual information provided by the museum (in the Self-Study) is supported or contradicted by the Visiting Committee's findings.

***How to use, read, and interpret the narrative report:***

The comments of the Visiting Committee are based on the experience and expertise of the two individual team members and are their own. The Commission does not necessarily always endorse or agree with concerns cited by the Visiting Committee and does not always concur with the Visiting Committee's advisory conclusion, which is transmitted confidentially to the Commission. The Commission may advise the museum that it concurs with the Visiting Committee's concerns by commending all or parts of the narrative report to the museum. **If the museum is tabled, the museum should focus on the issues specifically cited by the Commission in its decision letter, not necessarily every statement made by the Visiting Committee.**

While the Commission is the primary audience for the report, it is written by the Visiting Committee with the knowledge that it will be used by the museum as an important guiding, planning, and archival document. Museums have used the narrative report for a variety of purposes. It is a tool that can provide the incentive to propose, implement, and leverage changes or other needed support. It can also be used as the basis for an on-going process of planning and internal self-assessment, building on the efforts begun during the Self-Study phase of the review process. Some museums make portions of their reports public as part of press releases or grants as a way to underscore their successes and strengths as identified by an outside organization.

If there are serious *factual* errors in the report, the museum may submit written clarification to the Accreditation Office, which will be added to the museum's permanent file. The Commission and staff do not amend or re-write reports once a decision has been made.

The report is the property of the museum at the conclusion of the review process. The Accreditation Office retains an archive copy in the institution's files and in the Commission's agenda records. Under no circumstance will the Accreditation Office provide a copy of the report or disclose any of its contents to anyone outside the museum. If the museum needs a copy in the future, requests must be made in writing, on museum letterhead, and be authorized by the director. It is at the museum's discretion how or if it wants to make the report available internally and externally. The museum is strongly encouraged to keep a copy on file with its Self-Study materials in the corporate archives for future reference, particularly when preparing for the museum's next accreditation review.