

# Characteristics of Excellence for Museums

## 1. PUBLIC TRUST & ACCOUNTABILITY

- 1.1 The museum is a good steward of its resources held in the public trust.
- 1.2 The museum identifies the communities it serves, and makes appropriate decisions in how it serves them.
- 1.3 Regardless of its self-identified communities, the museum strives to be a good neighbor in its geographic area.
- 1.4 The museum strives to be inclusive and offers opportunities for diverse participation.
- 1.5 The museum asserts its public service role and places education at the center of that role.
- 1.6 The museum demonstrates a commitment to providing the public with physical and intellectual access to the museum and its resources.
- 1.7 The museum is committed to public accountability and is transparent in its mission and its operations.
- 1.8 The museum complies with local, state, and federal laws, codes, and regulations applicable to its facilities, operations, and administration.

## 2. MISSION & PLANNING

- 2.1 The museum has a clear understanding of its mission and communicates why it exists and who benefits as a result of its efforts.
- 2.2 All aspects of the museum's operations are integrated and focused on meeting its mission.
- 2.3 The museum's governing authority and staff think and act strategically to acquire, develop, and allocate resources to advance the mission of the museum.
- 2.4 The museum engages in ongoing and reflective institutional planning that includes involvement of its audiences and community.
- 2.5 The museum establishes measures of success and uses them to evaluate and adjust its activities.

## 3. LEADERSHIP & ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

- 3.1 The governance, staff, and volunteer structures and processes effectively advance the museum's mission.
- 3.2 The governing authority, staff, and volunteers have a clear and shared understanding of their roles and responsibilities.
- 3.3 The governing authority, staff, and volunteers legally, ethically, and effectively carry out their responsibilities.
- 3.4 The composition, qualifications, and diversity of the museum's leadership, staff, and volunteers enable it to carry out the museum's mission and goals.
- 3.5 There is a clear and formal division of responsibilities between the governing authority and any group that supports the museum, whether separately incorporated or operating within the museum or its parent organization.

## 4. COLLECTIONS STEWARDSHIP

- 4.1 The museum owns, exhibits, or uses collections that are appropriate to its mission.
- 4.2 The museum legally, ethically, and effectively manages, documents, cares for, and uses the collections.
- 4.3 The museum's collections-related research is conducted according to appropriate scholarly standards.
- 4.4 The museum strategically plans for the use and development of its collections.
- 4.5 Guided by its mission, the museum provides public access to its collections while ensuring their preservation.

## 5. EDUCATION & INTERPRETATION

- 5.1 The museum clearly states its overall educational goals, philosophy, and messages, and demonstrates that its activities are in alignment with them.
- 5.2 The museum understands the characteristics and needs of its existing and potential audiences and uses this understanding to inform its interpretation.
- 5.3 The museum's interpretive content is based on appropriate research.
- 5.4 Museums conducting primary research do so according to scholarly standards.
- 5.5 The museum uses techniques, technologies, and methods appropriate to its educational goals, content, audiences, and resources.
- 5.6 The museum presents accurate and appropriate content for each of its audiences.
- 5.7 The museum demonstrates consistent high quality in its interpretive activities.
- 5.8 The museum assesses the effectiveness of its interpretive activities and uses those results to plan and improve its activities.

## 6. FINANCIAL STABILITY

- 6.1 The museum legally, ethically, and responsibly acquires, manages, and allocates its financial resources in a way that advances its mission.
- 6.2 The museum operates in a fiscally responsible manner that promotes its long-term sustainability.

## 7. FACILITIES & RISK MANAGEMENT

- 7.1 The museum allocates its space and uses its facilities to meet the needs of the collections, audience, and staff.
- 7.2 The museum has appropriate measures to ensure the safety and security of people, its collections and/or objects, and the facilities it owns or uses.
- 7.3 The museum has an effective program for the care and long-term maintenance of its facilities.
- 7.4 The museum is clean and well-maintained, and provides for the visitors' needs.
- 7.5 The museum takes appropriate measures to protect itself against potential risk and loss.

# Characteristics of Excellence for Museums In Plain English

## Public Trust & Accountability

- » Be good
- » No really—not only be legal, but be ethical
- » Show everyone how good and ethical you are
- » (don't wait for them to ask)
- » Do good for people
- » Know which people
- » And to be on the safe side
- » Be nice to everyone else, too
- » Especially if they live next door
- » Avoid cloning
- » Look something like the people you are doing good for
- » And maybe a bit like your neighbors
- » Let other people help decide what games to play
- » And what the rules are
- » Share your toys

## Mission and Planning

- » Know what you want to do
- » And why it makes a difference to anyone
- » Then put it in writing
- » Stick to it
- » Decide what you want to do next
- » When you are deciding what to do, ask lots of people
- » for their opinion
- » Put it in writing
- » Then do it
- » If it didn't work, don't do it again
- » If it did work, do

## Leadership and Organizational Structure

- » Make sure everyone is clear about who is doing what
- » The board knows it is governing
- » The director knows she is directing (and the board knows it too)
- » The staff know they are doing everything else
- » And have it in writing

## Collections Stewardship

- » Know what stuff you have
- » Know what stuff you need
- » Know where it is
- » Take good care of it
- » Make sure someone gets some good out of it
- » Especially people you care about
- » And your neighbors

## Education and Interpretation

- » Know who you are talking to
- » Ask them what they want to know
- » Know what you want to say
- » (and what you are talking about)
- » Use appropriate language (or images, or music)
- » Make sure people understood you
- » And ask them if they liked it
- » If not, change it

## Financial Stability

- » Put your money where your mission is
- » Is it enough money?
- » Will it be there next year, too?
- » Know when you will need more \$
- » Know where you are going to get it from
- » Don't diddle the books

## Facilities and Risk Management

- » Don't crowd people
- » Or things
- » Make it safe to visit your museum
- » Or work there
- » Keep it clean
- » Keep the toilet paper stocked
- » And if all else fails, know where the exit is
- » (and make sure it is clearly marked)