

Information Center Fact Sheet **Standards and Best Practices for Museums**

What Are Standards?

Accountability begins with compliance with laws and regulations. Going beyond legal requirements, many museums voluntarily choose to adhere to ethical codes and accountability standards to ensure good stewardship of assets held in the public trust and to maintain public confidence.

Standards are consensus documents or written statements of generally accepted principles. Standards provide a common language to enable museums to communicate about their performance and increase accountability.

Best practices are commendable actions and philosophies that demonstrate an awareness of standards, solve problems and can be replicated. Museums may choose to emulate them if appropriate to their circumstances.

There is no single set of museum standards. In some instances museums rely on standards developed outside the profession, such as accounting standards. In other instances they use standards developed outside the profession but within the nonprofit sector, such as those concerning fundraising from the public. The American Association of Museums (AAM) established the Accreditation Program in part to ensure that essential museum standards originate from within the profession.

AAM Standards and Best Practices for U.S. Museums are voluntary national standards and best practices that museums can use as benchmarks for measuring their own performance. They also help policy makers, media, philanthropic organizations, donors and members of the public to assess museums' achievements. They apply to all museums, regardless of whether or not they are AAM member museums, or accredited.

AAM Standards and Best Practices for U.S. Museums address "big picture" issues about how museums operate—for the most part they define broad outcomes that can be achieved in many different ways. In addition to AAM, a number of organizations have issued statements of standards and best practices for technical aspects of museum operations or for segments of the museum profession.

The following compilation includes standards and ethical codes that are specific to museums as well as those that have been developed outside the profession but are applicable. AAM appreciates being informed of other statements of standards and best practices that may be useful to the museum profession. Contact: infocenter@aam-us.org.

Codes of Ethics Specific to Museums

AAM: Code of Ethics for Museums

Developed by the American Association of Museums. Available on the AAM website:
<http://www.aam-us.org/museumresources/ethics/coe.cfm>

AAM: Ethical Guidelines

AAM has issued ethical guidelines on the following topics: exhibiting borrowed objects, the unlawful appropriation of objects during the Nazi era, developing and managing business support, and developing and managing individual donor support. Available on the AAM website:
<http://www.aam-us.org/museumresources/ethics/index.cfm>

AAM – CurCom: Curators Code of Ethics 1996

Developed by the Curators' Committee (CurCom), a Standing Professional Committee of AAM. Available on CurCom's website: <http://www.curcom.org/ethics.php>

AAM - RCAAM: Code of Ethics for Registrars

Developed by the Registrars Committee (RCAAM), a Standing Professional Committee of AAM. Available on the RCAAM website: <http://www.rcaam.org/pdf/Part3-Appendix.pdf>

AAMD: Code of Ethics

Developed by the Association of Art Museum Directors. Available on the AAMD website:
<http://www.aamd.org/about/#Code>

AASLH: Statement of Professional Standards and Ethics

Developed by the American Association for State and Local History. Available on the AASLH website: <http://www.aaslh.org/ethics.htm>

AASLH: Ethics Position - Capitalization of Collections

Developed by the American Association for State and Local History. Available on the AASLH website: <http://www.aaslh.org/pos.pap.htm>

AASLH: Ethics Position – When a History Museum Closes

Developed by the American Association for State and Local History. Available on the AASLH website:
<http://www.aaslh.org/documents/EthicsPositionPaper2-WhenaHistoryMuseumCloses.pdf>

AIC: Code of Ethics and Guidelines for Practice

Developed by the American Institute for Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works. Available on the AIC website: <http://aic.stanford.edu/pubs/ethics.html>

AZA: Code of Professional Ethics

Developed by the American Zoo and Aquarium Association. Available on the AZA website:
<http://www.aza.org/AboutAZA/CodeEthics/>

ICOM: Code of Ethics for Museums

Developed by the International Council of Museums. Available on the ICOM website:
<http://icom.museum/ethics.html>

MSA:

Developed by the Museum Store Association. Available on the MSA website:

- **Code of Ethics**
<http://www.museumdistrict.com/membership/EthicsCode.cfm>
- **Ethics Policies for Archaeological and Ethnological Resources**
http://www.museumdistrict.com/membership/ethics_archeo_ethno.cfm
- **Ethics Policies for Endangered Natural Heritage**
http://www.museumdistrict.com/membership/endangered_heritage.cfm

NCPH: Ethics Guidelines

Developed by the National Council on Public History. Available on the NCPH website:

<http://www.ncph.org/AbouttheCouncil/BylawsandEthics/tabid/291/Default.aspx>

Standards & Best Practices Specific to Museums

AAM: Accreditation Commission Expectations

The AAM Accreditation Commission has issued expectation statements on mission, institutional planning, institutional code of ethics, delegation of authority, governance, and collections stewardship. Available on the AAM website:

<http://www.aam-us.org/museumresources/accred/standards.cfm>

AAM: Characteristics of an Accreditable Museum

Developed by the AAM Accreditation Commission. Available on the AAM website:

<http://www.aam-us.org/museumresources/accred/standards.cfm>

AAM: Standards and Best Practices for U.S. Museums

A group of documents, approved by the AAM Board of Directors, that constitutes the AAM Standards and Best Practices for U.S. Museums. Available on the AAM website:

<http://www.aam-us.org/aboutmuseums/standards/stbp.cfm>

AAM – CARE: Professional Standards for the Practice of Audience Research and Evaluation in Museums

Developed by the Committee on Audience Research and Evaluation (CARE), a Standing Professional Committee of AAM. Available on the AAM (Members Only) website:

<http://www.care-aam.org/Resources/Professional+Standards+/default.aspx>

AAM - EdCom: Excellence in Practice: Museum Education Principles and Standards

Developed by the Committee on Education (EdCom), a Standing Professional Committee of AAM. Available on EdCom's website:

<http://www.edcom.org/Files/Admin/EdComBookletFinalApril805.pdf>

AAM - NAME: Standards for Museum Exhibitions and Indicators of Excellence

Developed by the Standing Professional Committees Council of the American Association of Museums. Available on the National Association for Museum Exhibition's website:

<http://name.pmhclients.com/aboutus/Standards>

AAM - RCAAM: Code of Practice for Couriers of Museum Objects

Developed by the Registrars Committee (RCAAM), a Standing Professional Committee of AAM. Available on the RCAAM website, page 7 of the PDF:

<http://www.rcaam.org/pdf/Part3-Appendix.pdf>

AAMD: Professional Practices in Art Museums

Developed by the Association of Art Museum Directors. Available for purchase through the AAMD website: <http://www.aamd.org/order/>

AASLH: Statement of Values and Basic Standards for Corporate Archives and Museums

Developed by the American Association for State and Local History. Available on the AASLH website: <http://www.aaslh.org/statements.html>

ACM Standards Document

Developed by the Association of Children's Museums. Available for purchase from the ACM website: <http://www.childrensmuseums.org/programs/publications.htm>

AHA:

Developed by the American Historical Association. Available on the AHA website

- **Standards for Museum Exhibits Dealing with Historical Objects**
<http://www.historians.org/press/Museums.cfm>
- **Statement on Standards of Professional Conduct**
<http://www.historians.org/PUBS/free/professionalstandards.cfm>

AIC: Basic Guidelines for the Care of Special Collections

Developed by the American Institute for Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works. Available on the AIC website:
<http://aic.stanford.edu/library/online/brochures/objects.html>

APGA: Voluntary Code of Conduct for Botanic Gardens and Arboreta, also Code regarding Invasive Plant Species

Developed by the St. Louis Invasive Plants Species Workshop and endorsed by the American Public Gardens Association (formerly AABGA). Available on the Center for Plant Conservation website, hosted by the Missouri Botanical Garden:
<http://www.centerforplantconservation.org/invasives/codesN.html>

ARM: Recommended Practices for Railway Museums

Developed by the Association of Railway Museums. Available on the ARM website:
http://www.railwaymuseums.org/recommended_practices.asp

ASTC: Accessible Practices

Developed by the Association of Science-Technology Centers. Available on the ASTC website:
<http://www.astc.org/resource/access/index.htm>

ICOM/CIDOC: International Guidelines for Museum Object Information

Developed by the International Committee for Documentation (CIDOC) of the International Council of Museums (ICOM). Available on the CIDOC website:
<http://cidoc.ics.forth.gr/docs/guide.htm>

MOMCC: Statement of Professional Conduct

Developed by the Midwest Open Air Museums Coordinating Council. Available as Word file (.doc) on the MOMCC website: <http://www.momcc.org/index.htm>

NINCH: Guide to Good Practice in the Digital Representation & Management of Cultural Heritage Materials

Developed by the National Initiative for a Networked Cultural Heritage and the Humanities Advanced Technology and Information Institute (University of Glasgow). Available on the NINCH website: <http://www.nyu.edu/its/humanities/ninchguide/>

NPS: Guidelines for the Treatment of Historic Furnished Interiors in Accordance with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties

Developed by the National Park Service's Northeast Region. Available on the Federal Preservation Institute website: <http://stage.historicpreservation.gov/Training/powerpoints.aspx>

SECAC: Guidelines for College & University Museums and Galleries

Developed by the Southeastern College Art Conference. Available on the SECAC website: http://www.unc.edu/~rfrew/SECAC/galleries_museums.html

The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties

Includes Standards for Preservation, Rehabilitation, Restoration, and Reconstruction. Available for purchase (GPO stock number 024-005-1-01091-2) from the National Park Service (866-512-1800) or for free online: <http://www.nps.gov/hps/tps/standguide/>

SPNHC: Guidelines for the Care of Natural History Collections

Developed by the Society for the Preservation of Natural History Collections. Available on the SPNHC website: <http://cool-palimpsest.stanford.edu/byorg/spnhc/spnhc1.html>

Standards and Practices for Historic Site Administration

Developed by the Tri-State Coalition for Historic Places. Available for purchase from the Heritage Investment Program, 100 S. Broad St., Philadelphia, PA 19110 or 215-569-2896

Codes of Ethics of Interest to Museums

AAA: Code of Ethics

Developed by the American Anthropological Association. Available on the AAA website: <http://www.aaanet.org/committees/ethics/ethics.htm>

AFP: Code of Ethical Principles & Standards of Professional Practice

Developed by the Association of Fundraising Professionals. Available on the AFP website: <http://www.afpnet.org/ethics>

AIA: (American Institute of Architects) Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct

Available on the AIA website: <http://www.aia.org/SiteObjects/files/codeofethics.pdf>

AIA: (Archaeological Institute of America) Code of Ethics

Available on the AIA website: http://www.archaeological.org/pdfs/AIA_Code_of_EthicsA5S.pdf

AIIP: Code of Ethical Business Practice

Developed by the Association of Independent Information Professionals. Available on the AIIP website: <http://www.aiip.org/Default.aspx?pagelD=88881>

ALA: Code of Ethics

Developed by the American Library Association. Available on the ALA website: <http://www.ala.org/ala/aboutala/offices/oif/statementspols/codeofethics/codeethics.cfm>

Code of Ethical Online Philanthropic Practices

Developed by the e-Philanthropy Foundation. Available on the Foundation website: <http://www.fundraising123.org/article/ephilanthropy-code-ethics>

Giving Institute: Professional Code of Ethics

Developed by the Giving Institute (formerly the American Association of Fundraising Counsel). Available on the Giving Institute website:
http://www.aafrc.org/code/index.cfm?pg=Code_of_ethics.html

MANO: Standards for Excellence: An Ethics & Accountability Code for the Nonprofit Sector

Developed by the Maryland Association of Nonprofit Organizations. Available on the Maryland Association website: http://www.marylandnonprofits.org/html/standards/04_02.asp

SAA: A Code of Ethics for Archivists with Commentary

Developed by the Society of American Archivists' Committee on Ethics & Professional Conduct. Available on the SAA website: http://www.archivists.org/governance/handbook/app_ethics.asp

Standards & Best Practices of Interest to Museums**AERA: Ethical Standards**

Developed by the American Educational Research Association. Available on the AERA website: <http://www.aera.net/aboutaera/?id=222>

AFP: The Accountable Nonprofit Organization

Developed by the Association of Fundraising Professionals. Available on the AFP website www.afpnet.org: Ethics > Guidelines, Codes, Standards

AIP: Criteria for Rating Charities

Developed by the American Institute of Philanthropy. Available on the AIP website: <http://www.charitywatch.org/criteria.html>

BBB/WGA: Standards of Charitable Accountability

Developed by the BBB Wise Giving Alliance. Available on the Alliance website: www.us.bbb.org Home > For Charities & Donors > Charity Reports & Standards > Charity Accountability > Standards

FASB/GASB: Standards of Financial Accounting & Reporting

Standards used by the private and nonprofit sectors are developed by the Financial Accounting Standards Board. Standards used by state and local government are developed by the Governmental Accounting Standards Board. Both offer a series of publications; titles and ordering information are available on the FASB website (<http://www.fasb.org>) and the GASB website (<http://www.gasb.org>).

Financial Health Ratings for Charities

Developed by Charity Navigator. Available on CN website: <http://www.charitynavigator.org/index.cfm/bay/content.view/catid/2/cpid/33.htm>

Obedience to the Unenforceable: Ethics & the Nation's Voluntary & Philanthropic Community

Developed by the Independent Sector. Available on the IS website (the link to the PDF is on the right): http://www.independentsector.org/issues/ethics/code_checklist.html

OHA: Principles and Standards of the Oral History Association

Developed by the Oral History Association. Available on the OHA website: http://www.dickinson.edu/organizations/oha/pub_eg.html#Principles%20and%20Standards