AAMG

Professional Practices for Academic Museums and Galleries

Leading Academic Museums and Galleries in the 21st Century

Second Edition

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ASSOCIATION of ACADEMIC MUSEUMS and GALLERIES

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Appendices: A chapter-by-chapter appendix with links to original source documents is ONLY available on the AAMG Website: https://www.aamg-us.org/wp/best-practices/

Introduction

The Association of Academic Museums & Galleries (AAMG) published its first Professional Practices document in 2017 to provide members and our field at large insights and guidance into the particular dynamics that make our institutions—embedded within colleges and universities—structurally different from most independent, public museums and galleries. The original edition leaned heavily on best practices promoted by the American Alliance of Museums (AAM) through its accreditation and core documents verification programs. It also referenced the importance of discipline-specific associations, including the Association of Art Museum Directors (AAMD), American Association for State and Local History (AASLH), and Association of Science and Technology Centers (ASTC), among many others. AAMG continues to encourage its members to pursue accreditation and participate in other AAM institutional programs, as well as to align their policies, protocols, and ethical standards with those of their discipline-specific associations.

Since 2017, much has changed, and so too has this document. We consolidated some of the general content available elsewhere and expanded narratives specific to academic institutions: the responsibility of simultaneously serving both "town and gown"; relationships with administrators, central service providers, advisory boards, and community leaders; and financial reliance on a centralized budget combined with the necessity of raising funds and in-kind resources. We also added content on issues that have gained prominence in recent years: environmental sustainability; broadening participation among a range of communities; ethical collecting; and appropriate uses of proceeds from the sale of deaccessioned objects. Recognizing the needs of our individual members, this revised document endorses the importance of professional development for staff and articulates the obligation that student interns receive both mentorship and compensation.

AAMG understands the diverse variety of its institutional membership: collecting and non-collecting; staffs as small as one or two professionals to large-scale specialized organizations; art, science, history, natural history, and a variety of other disciplines; research universities, undergraduate colleges, community colleges, and even some high schools. We also know that state laws vary, as do institutional values; so too do distinctions between private and public institutions. We try, in the pages that follow, to use definitional distinctions such as "museums and galleries" and "college and university" in their most inclusive sense, but sometimes in the interest of narrative flow, use one to stand for both. We trust our informed readers to distinguish what aptly applies to their own institutions.

In lieu of footnotes or endnotes, we accompany this revised version of Professional Practices with an online appendix available on the AAMG website. This allows us to include links to supporting documents, articles, white papers, and resources offered by other museum- and discipline-specific associations. We hope that the appendix will serve both as acknowledgment of essential sources and as an aid to users seeking to probe deeper into issues treated in the text.

While all museums are educational in purpose, academic museums and galleries are unique in their mission to teach and train succeeding generations of students, in service to their parent institutions. As learning laboratories, they advance research and student achievement. They build cross-cultural understanding; create cross-departmental and interdisciplinary teaching opportunities; strengthen analytical thinking and creativity; offer real-world work experiences; model hospitality and access; and further civic responsibility in their efforts to improve the lives of people in their communities. As object-based centers of research and teaching, they sustain on-campus learning. They often serve as the front doors of their universities, connecting town and gown, the academy and the public.

AAMG encourages museum and gallery directors, their academic supervisors, university administrators, trustees, and advisory board members to support and affirm these professional practices in their museums.

Kristina Durocher
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Mission & Strategic Planning

Mission

Whether for a collecting museum or exhibition-based gallery, the mission statement is an essential core document, guiding the daily activities of staff and the allocation of resources. The mission should explicitly support the educational purpose of its parent institution and, if it also serves a public function, affirm a commitment to off-campus constituents and the community in which it resides.

The mission statement should clearly articulate why the museum exists and how the mission is used to guide decisions about policies, priorities, actions, and responsibilities. The mission statement should be succinct and easily remembered by staff, volunteers, and university administrators. It should be approved by the university's governing authority and endorsed by the museum's advisory board. The mission should be reviewed every five to ten years for applicability and relevance.

Institutional Plan

The mission informs the museum or gallery's institutional or strategic plan. The plan articulates guiding principles through its vision and values, implemented through goals that support the ways in which the museum or gallery responds to challenges and embraces the opportunities presented in its environment. The plan should offer a 3- to 5-year road map that aims to further both the university's comprehensive institutional plan and the museum's mission-based priorities. While inspirational and aspirational in nature, the plan should identify achievable goals, both short-term and long-range. By developing the plan in support of the university's strategic objectives, the museum positions itself to leverage resources because of its academic value and service to its constituents, both on and off campus. The plan should be reviewed regularly, revised as appropriate, and factor in staff performance assessments.

The plan should address all relevant aspects of a museum's operations—from its physical plant, professional development, and evaluation practices, to its collections, exhibitions, and educational goals. Museum staff, as well as representatives of constituents and stakeholders, should participate in the plan's development. For academic museums and galleries, faculty, student and staff input can be especially valuable. Benchmarking can be useful in determining meaningful, measurable goals. The parent institution and museum's advisory board should help to refine the plan and align it with the resources necessary for its success—whether through allocations, fundraising, in-kind contributions, earned revenues, or other means to sustain ongoing operations and pursue special projects. Each goal should relate to the mission, with an understanding of the resources needed to achieve it, the point person responsible, and measures of success.

An institutional plan should articulate a commitment to access and inclusiveness for audiences, volunteers, and staff. This commitment strengthens the effectiveness, impact, and relevance of the museum or gallery by creating an environment in which all people feel welcome and valued. Academic institutions normally have offices or departments that can assist in planning and provide training for staff and volunteers. Such initiatives require resources, as well as tracking, data-based assessment, revision over time, and accountability. Inclusiveness is a component of integrity and excellence.

Governance, Organizational Structure, & Leadership

Governance and Organizational Structure

As academic museums and galleries serve faculty, students, and staff throughout the college or university, their resources should benefit all within the academy. In support of its unique and broad-reaching services, the museum should function as a discrete unit of its parent institution. Its director should report centrally to the highest academic officer, often the vice president of academic affairs or the provost—although governance structures may vary at two-year colleges, due to their public-facing missions (see Community College white paper in appendices). Given the museum's capacity for both discipline-based and interdisciplinary learning—as well as its commitment to personal student growth, faculty research, inclusion, access, and community relations—consideration should be given to aligning the director's position with that of a dean. For smaller museums or galleries, the director may report to a dean, but absent special circumstances, the director should not report to a department chair, as it could be perceived by others within the academy as an exclusive component of that department or school. As a result, conflicts of interest are likely to arise with regard to the museum's broader mission and use of its resources.

AAMG strongly recommends that academic museums and galleries adopt and update basic documents that establish and preserve their presence and purpose on campus. Those may include the following:

- mission statement;
- institutional plan;
- articles of incorporation, charter, enabling legislation, or other founding document (this may, at times, be found in the minutes of the university's board of trustees);
- documentation regarding the importance of the museum to the parent institution that affirms its commitment to supporting the museum (e.g., resolution of support passed by parent organization's trustees, memorandum of understanding or management agreement between the parent institution and the museum);
- document affirming the university's protection and care of its collections (may be a presidential memorandum or found in the parent institution's bylaws and/or board of trustees' minutes);
- document delegating operating authority to the museum director (may be a presidential memorandum or found in the parent institution's bylaws and/or board of trustees' minutes, and in the formally approved job description of the director); and

- charter and bylaws for any support or advisory group for which the museum is its primary beneficiary.

An academic museum or gallery only functions effectively when the governing authority and director respect one another and work well together. It is the responsibility of the museum's governing authority (often a vice president, provost, or dean) to help determine and advance the museum's mission and approve its budget. Working closely with the director, the governing authority approves the museum's institutional plan and leverages resources to fulfill its mission. The governing authority leads the search for a new director and conducts annual performance assessments of the director, assuring that the museum operates ethically and responsibly in all areas, upholding the public trust through responsible operations. The governing authority should become knowledgeable about museum practice and support the professional practices of the field, including but not limited to regulations regarding acquiring and deaccessioning objects in the museum's collections. It is the responsibility of the director to provide necessary information about museum practice and ensure that the governing authority is aware of ethical, governance, and operational concerns. In addition, the governing authority should advocate on behalf of the museum and make its centralized professional expertise available for the museum's benefit—including legal, financial, facility, security, and fundraising support.

Advisory Boards/Committees

Academic museums and galleries often benefit from having their own advisory boards or councils whose composition reflects their communities and constituencies. They are usually composed of university alumni, friends of the museum, and community members—including collectors, donors, and connectors—who have the capacity to advance the mission, contribute to financial sustainability, help develop collections, and inform the institutional plan. They may also include faculty, staff, and students whose departments, schools, or student associations benefit directly from their involvement in the museum. Advisory boards should have written operating papers, approved by the governing authority, that affirm their members' responsibilities to legally, ethically, and effectively volunteer on behalf of the museum. There should also be a clear and formal division of responsibilities between the governing authority and any advisory board that supports the museum, whether separately incorporated or at the behest of the museum or its parent organization.

In some instances, an academic museum board may have limited fiduciary responsibilities, the most common being financial oversight of a separate 501(c)(3) fundraising entity, such as a membership program or foundation that raises money to support museum activities. In such instances, it is imperative that those specific fiduciary duties are clearly articulated in the entity's founding documents and bylaws to separate those responsibilities from the general oversight of the museum. Regardless of fiduciary status, conflict of interest prohibitions apply, meaning board members may not exert pressure on collection acquisitions, exhibitions, or program content for personal benefit—be it monetary, reputational, or otherwise.

Because most academic museum boards do not have institutional decision-making authority, their bylaws and practices should not echo those of independent fiduciary boards. Rather, their purpose and structure should focus more on their support and advisory roles, recognizing that the director ultimately reports to the administration. Effective advisory boards often function similarly to those supporting academic schools (law, business, medicine, etc.). In addition to offering outside perspectives to deans and administrators, their members often provide ambassadorial service as advocates for their schools and may play prominent roles in fundraising campaigns.

As with any board, expectations for members should be clear, including financial expectations (if any), participation in a specific number of meetings per year (in-person and/or virtual), requirements to attend special events (including purchasing tickets), and any other expectations for a member in good standing. The composition of the board or committee should also be determined, including a range for board size, means of appointing and renewing members, terms of service, and term limits. In appointing members, consideration should be given to community demographics and the parent institution's commitment to diversity and inclusion.

Staffing

The director of the museum or gallery should be a museum professional with leadership expertise who is charged with the authority to manage the museum's daily operations. Depending on the size of the museum and its staff, as well as the diversity of its collections, the director may be trained in a curatorial field or in areas such as education, collections, fundraising, marketing, or administration. The director advocates for the mission of the museum, provides vision, and upholds policies and procedures, as well as overseeing the development of collections, exhibitions, and educational programs. Fundraising acumen, diplomacy, and strategic thinking are all essential skills for the academic museum director.

Universities vary in their classification of professional museum staff. Some curators, directors, and educators have faculty status along a tenure track, while others have staff/administrative appointments. AAMG recommends that in recognition of the core teaching (formal or informal) and research responsibilities of these positions, parent institutions classify them as tenure-eligible faculty lines in the same way that many university librarians enjoy faculty appointments without formal teaching obligations. When a parent institution employs a "faculty" museum professional, it should clearly define the evaluation criteria for tenure and promotion, including peer-reviewed exhibitions, catalogs, and other museum-focused publications that demonstrate scholarly productivity and valuable research, writing, and creative work that is often disseminated outside of traditional academic publications.

The governing authority, staff, and volunteers should all have a clear and shared understanding of their roles and responsibilities. Staff at all levels should understand the chain of command. Both the museum and governing authority should support professional development for the museum staff, which, in addition to training available on campus, may be conducted as webinars or in-person workshops and conferences organized by museum associations, discipline-specific organizations, or other related entities.

Interns, Fellows, and Student Employees

As education constitutes a central component of a museum's purpose, engaging students in the work of the museum advances the museum's mission. This opportunity comes with responsibilities and requires commitment.

AAMG recognizes the fundamental importance of paid student jobs because unpaid internships restrict access to the museum field for those who cannot afford to subsidize their own labor. This is neither equitable nor beneficial for the museum profession. Museums should pay students for their work—especially for jobs essential for their operation. Nevertheless, there may be special occasions when a student approaches the museum for a voluntary internship experience, be it for course credit or personal development. Museums should treat these as special learning opportunities and may accommodate such requests as staff time allows.

Student workers should be considered both paid employees and beneficiaries of the museum's commitment to education. Beyond monetary compensation, student workers should expect mentorship, career advice, and progressive job responsibilities to advance their future careers, whether they work in museums, galleries, or elsewhere. They are also entitled to references upon request, as performance merits.

When students engage with the museum as unpaid interns for course credit or work experience, they should expect museum professionals to mentor them, with sufficient supervision, feedback, and advice to constitute a genuine learning experience. Workplace productivity, while important, cannot be the sole focus. Interns are entitled in advance to a clear understanding of the learning outcomes they may expect from their museum experience. Internships should never provide a cost-saving strategy to secure unpaid labor.

Many universities and colleges offer museum courses, some leading to an undergraduate or master's certificate or degree in administration, curation, and other areas. When possible, such academic offerings should be directed or co-directed by the museum staff who have first-hand knowledge of what skills and knowledge are required for those hoping to pursue museum careers. AAMG recommends new models in museum teaching and training that recognize the museum as the academic center for such programs with commensurate monetary remuneration.

Code of Ethics

The effectiveness of any non-profit institution—including a college or university, as well as its academic museum or gallery—is directly related to the public's perception of integrity, accountability, and transparency. As a unit of a parent institution, the academic museum and gallery must abide by its university's code of ethics and regulations.

As a servant of the public good, the university museum should demonstrate that it is a responsible steward of its resources and a welcoming neighbor of its community and region. The museum should be inclusive and offer opportunities for diverse interests and participation, reducing as much as possible any barriers of access to its programs and facilities.

In addition to complying with the university's code of ethics, the academic museum or gallery must codify and formally approve its own ethical responsibilities specific to its function as a collecting and/or exhibiting institution. This may include conflict of interest policies relating to collections and collecting, commercial activities, or otherwise leveraging professional status at the museum for personal gain. Differing kinds of collections—art, natural history, historical artifacts, living collections, and the like—bring their own ethical standards, often codified and advanced by specialized museum associations, adherence to which should be clearly documented in the museum's policies. AAMG strongly recommends that the code of ethics articulates the museum's commitment to access and inclusion.

While the AAM, AAMG, and other general museum associations' Codes of Ethics may prove useful in developing one's own code, the museum should not simply adopt another's. It must affirm the public trust according to its own discipline-specific use of collections, programmatic development, and expectations for the appropriate conduct of its professional staff, as well as advisory board members and volunteers. The code of ethics should contain language about how it will be implemented and how conflicts or challenges to its mandates should be addressed. Before implementation, it must be approved by the university's governing authorities, who are also expected to abide by its principles.

The code of ethics may be a completely separate document or it may be included in other museum policy documents, such as those that pertain to personnel, exhibitions, collections, etc. Staff and volunteers are normally required to sign the document annually to refresh their understanding of expectations and potential violations.

Financial Stability & Fundraising

The academic museum or gallery must legally, ethically, and responsibly acquire, manage, and allocate its financial resources in ways that advance its mission and promote its long-term sustainability. For academic museums, this can be especially challenging, because a substantial portion of the enterprise may not be funded through the museum's own budget. Essential facilities and services are often provided and overseen centrally, off-budget and beyond the immediate control of the director. Nevertheless, responsibility remains for managing the costs of exhibitions, programs, collection care, and other activities with funding that may be provided by the parent institution and/or alternatively, acquired through fundraising.

Operational Sustainability

The academic governing authority monitors, advises, and supports the museum operationally and financially. Direct financial subsidy often covers staff salaries and benefits, security, and a variety of other needs. Indirect support comes in the form of central services from human resources, legal advice, marketing and publications, accounting, invoice processing and payment, custodial services, facility maintenance, and a host of other support for which a stand-alone museum would expect to pay on its own. Facilities themselves are provided by the institution, often equipped with climate and security control systems, serviced with utilities, and stocked with general supplies. Because so much support comes "off the books" of academic museums or galleries, their operating budgets appear to be much lower than those of comparable stand-alone museums. This is deceptive. The programmatic capability can often match the capacity of independent peers with double or triple the budget.

The entirety of its direct financial support plus indirect services and facilities establishes the parent institution, in most instances, as the largest annual donor of the museum or gallery. Consequently, it is vital that staff cultivate supportive relationships with their colleagues across campus, regardless of their ranks or duties. Operating a small entity in a large bureaucracy is not always easy or seemingly efficient, but understanding central protocols, providing required paperwork on-time, and contributing to a supportive culture across campus can contribute directly to success. Inviting colleagues from the administration and supporting service departments to museum or gallery events can do wonders for spreading goodwill.

Fundraising

The generosity of institutional support rarely accounts for the entirety of expenses necessary to operate an academic museum or gallery, especially for those activities and needs that lie beyond the normal function of classroom learning. Exhibitions, collection care and conservation, public programs, and even certain staff positions or professional development may lie beyond the financial capability or willingness of the parent institution. They often rely on fundraising.

Academic museums function best when they have their own development officers who liaise with the university's central development office but also have experience fundraising for museums and can expand beyond the alumni base to reach local residents and collectors. While membership programs require staff time and resources, they can be particularly effective in enfranchising community support. Grant applications can also differ from those for pure academic research, often affording access to foundations or governmental programs that may not otherwise contribute to university priorities—such as certain family foundations or local, state, and federal grant-making entities. Museum and gallery leaders should be aware that, at times, they may be restricted from approaching certain foundations or donors, or applying for specific grants, because other academic departments or schools may have more compelling cases or higher-value needs.

Smaller museums or galleries located within larger colleges may have to rely on central development officers to identify potential museum contributors from the alumni base and to support the director's cultivation of potential donors from outside the alumni network. A central development office can be quite helpful in soliciting contributions, approaching foundations, or refining grant proposals. Its staff are most effective when they are well-informed about the museum, its collections, and constituencies, so as to better represent both the museum and university to knowledgeable and sophisticated donors.

When seeking financial support, museums and galleries must align their needs with the demands of the donor, but resist accepting contributions with undue "strings attached" that may encumber future leaders with onerous requirements or restrictions. They must also establish policies regarding the appropriateness of accepting assistance from sources that may have reputations or histories in opposition to their values, beliefs, or mission. Academic museums or galleries can often rely on the parent institution for guidance.

Academic museums must abide by the fundraising policies set forth by their governing authority. These may include the types of support the university is willing to accept, requirements to establish endowments and other naming opportunities, gift processing procedures, managing membership and affiliate organizations, and regulations regarding donor confidentiality. In managing funding from governmental or private sources, universities may follow different practices for indirect cost recovery or impose foundation fees (cuts) for the central services they contribute when writing and administering grants.

The museum should affirm that it has the human and financial resources necessary to fulfill its obligations in any donor relationship. Policies must also address donor opportunities in which a member of the museum's governing authority, advisory council, or staff may have a conflicting interest. In such cases, the individual should recuse him/herself from any discussion or action related to the personal or business conflict. Parameters regarding the use of the museum's name and logo—and, if appropriate, those of the university—should be clarified in advance, as should the benefits accruing to the donor.

University development offices often recognize the appraised value of donated collection objects toward their internal fundraising goals—a practice that can incentivize the solicitation of valuable gifts but also facilitate the potential dumping of unwanted collections onto overburdened staff and facilities. The museum must work closely with staff and faculty to align acquisitions with collecting and teaching needs. Academic museums should also resist the temptation to publicize monetary values lest they unwittingly identify their collections as an attractive source of future operating funds (see next section).

As with any cultural, scientific, or educational institution, funding needs can be both near and long term, general or specific. Any effective fundraising strategy will generate a mix between general operating support and project-specific underwriting for exhibitions, educational programs, or special events. Philanthropy may support annual needs or long-term sustainability, such as by establishing endowments or committing to planned gifts through an estate. In the current challenging climate affecting university funding and practices, museums are encouraged to build their operating endowments to better withstand funding cuts. They should also consider ways to protect their collections from being sold for broader university needs through legislation (university and state) or transfer to a "friends" group with its own non-profit status. Agreements for collection gifts can also include language that prohibits monetization for operational uses.

Collections Stewardship

Academic museums are responsible for the care, research, interpretation, and exhibition of important objects representing human cultures and the natural world from the earliest times to the present.

Collections are held in trust and made accessible for the academic community and the public's benefit. As collections stewards, museums must be in compliance with applicable legal, social, and ethical obligations.

In most cases, academic museums steward their collections on behalf of their university, university foundation, or state, which serves as the legal ownership entity. Occasionally, academic museums hold their own non-profit status or have a foundation separate from the university that retains ownership of the collection. In those situations, the museum has greater control over the management of its collections, including opportunities for acquisitions and responsibilities associated with deaccessioning.

Academic collections should never be treated as fungible assets and so should not be monetized. Generally accepted accounting standards recognize that museum collections are not financial instruments, but instead constitute resources that are fundamental to the museum's and university's mission and public service. Therefore, the value of collections need not be reported on an institution's balance sheet. In alliance with major museum associations, AAMG also affirms that collections must be "unencumbered," meaning that they cannot be used as collateral for a loan. Donors can prevent the future monetization of their collection gifts for operational expenses by including language in their gift agreement that mandates, in the event that their donated objects be deaccessioned and sold, that any proceeds must be reinvested back into the collection through purchase or direct care.

Proposed acquisitions should be carefully considered to ensure pertinence to the collection and the museum's ability to care for them. Whenever possible, donations and bequests should be unrestricted from onerous obligations, such as requirements for permanent display. It is always the responsibility of donors to acquire their own appraisals that may be required for tax purposes. When accepting donations and bequests, and when purchasing objects and specimens, the museum should confirm provenance to establish legal ownership and assure compliance with applicable laws and regulations. Restrictions by property rights (copyright, patents, trademarks, or trade secrets), or risks of inherent hazards (such as toxic materials), should be carefully considered and documented before accepting gifts or approving purchases.

Loyalty to the museum is paramount. All museum staff and volunteers should fully disclose any and all conflicts of interest in collecting practices, dealings, and relationships with donors, to avoid the perception of special favors.

Likewise, no staff member or museum volunteer should compete with the museum for the acquisition of an object or specimen for their personal collection. If anyone is a practicing artist, designer, or fabricator, that person should not use the museum or gallery to advance their own work.

The museum collections policy is an essential document that delineates all collections management practices, including accessioning and deaccessioning. It articulates documentation and inventory procedures, as well as access, storage, conservation and preservation, risk management, disaster preparedness, copyright and rights of reproduction, research and interpretation, and use of acquisition funds or endowments. The needs of collections will vary, and museum collections staff should be knowledgeable about the standards required for the types of objects they steward. In all cases, the museum must provide proper storage and environmental climate controls, maintain accurate and timely documentation, and ensure proper intellectual control (image rights, etc.).

The parent institution is responsible for ensuring that all works owned by the university are covered by an insurance policy and that those premiums are provided by the parent institution. Because the museum is responsible for collections that are frequently used for teaching, it must make every effort to make those collections accessible to faculty, students, and other scholars without jeopardizing the safety of those works.

Collections may include different levels of importance and care, with study collections often available for class use. Other areas of the collection may be identified as loan collections, which may be installed in university buildings and the president's house, or teaching collections available to faculty for use in classroom settings, or research collections with access limited to those performing scientific analysis. If so, the parameters of the program, including inventory, identification of appropriate items and locations, and potential fees, should be noted in the collections policy. AAMG also recommends that museums create collection development plans, identifying desired areas of growth through gift, bequest, and/or purchase, to further the museum's mission and institutional plan.

Legal and Ethical Collecting

A collection reflects the integrity of both the museum and the academic institution in which it resides. It is vital that objects in the collection are acquired in compliance with US and international law and that their possession conforms to ethical standards of fairness, justice, and respect for other cultures. Legal and ethical collecting requires the museum to maintain records of how each object came into the collection as well as documentation on the object's history, ideally from its time of making or discovery to its entry into the collection—otherwise known as "provenance." Of course, not every object comes with an unbroken history of ownership, but it is incumbent on the museum to do its best to establish that its discovery, export from country of origin, and chain of ownership justify its place in the university museum as legal and ethical.

Applicable laws vary depending on the various kinds of academic collections. Art, historical artifacts, zoological specimens, geological objects, fossils, plants, and living creatures are subject to differing statutes and codes. It is the responsibility of each institution to understand and comply with relevant laws and regulations. In some instances, mere possession may be illegal (ivory or endangered species). In others, how the works came into possession may trigger prohibitions (Nazi-era loot or illegally exported antiquities). It is also possible that current law allows possession, but the very nature of the object and its culture of origin may make possession or display ethically questionable or morally wrong (human remains or indigenous artifacts stolen by colonial forces or possibly even academic expeditions). In instances where collection objects appear dubiously ethical to retain, it is up to each collecting entity to conduct appropriate research, consult informed authorities or rightful descendants, explore potential pathways of return, and work collaboratively with potential claimants and/or kin-relatives to seek a just and appropriate outcome—be it restitution, consensual stewardship, or continuation of the status quo.

Even when possession by the museum is affirmed, representatives of the originating cultures may request or require restrictions about how works may be displayed, published, or made accessible for research. It is possible that a shared stewardship concept of joint responsibility may be appropriate for certain objects or groupings. We are also learning that ethical stewardship extends beyond possession to appropriate means of storage, presentation, and interpretation, often requiring a deeper understanding of the heritage and cultural context of the objects in our care. As concepts of ownership, stewardship, and care evolve, college and university museums will need to adapt, embracing new ideals and utilizing change to enhance their own institutional cultures of learning.

Discipline-specific academic or museum associations can help collecting institutions navigate the applicable laws and ethical guidelines. AAMG urges its members to work with their appropriate discipline-specific association to align their policies and procedures accordingly.

Two further recommendations: publishing collections online serves the academic institution both in its mission to share natural and cultural heritage with the global community and to alert any potential claimants of their possession of the objects. Unless a cultural community objects to such publication (for instance, as with some Native American cultures under NAGPRA provisions), publication can shine a cleansing light on a collection.

Second, academic administrations must understand that complying with legal and ethical collecting standards requires expertise and regular updates on changing guidelines and laws—the kind of competencies acquired by attending professional conferences, workshops, or specialized training. Investing in professional development for the curatorial and collections management staff can, in the long run, prove to be a wise investment.

De-Accessioning and Acceptable Uses of Proceeds, including "Direct Care"

AAMG recognizes the ethical guidelines on deaccessioning promulgated by major museum associations, including AAM and the International Council of Museums (ICOM). Collecting institutions' guidelines for deaccessioning should also comply with the standards of their appropriate discipline-specific associations.

AAMG supports active deaccessioning to improve collections. The permanent removal of objects that are duplicative, degraded beyond repair, forged, fake, inappropriately sourced, collected, conveyed, or acquired, or no longer in alignment with the museum's stated mission can be an important tool for strengthening the academic museum and its capacity to serve its many audiences.

AAMG also acknowledges that the due diligence necessary for the legal, ethical, and strategic implementation of deaccessioning requires a significant investment of time and money. Accordingly, museums may reimburse themselves from the proceeds earned through the sale of collection objects for the direct costs required to deaccession such objects. Applying restrictions to "net" instead of "gross" proceeds provides necessary resources for museum research on provenance and deed of gift restrictions, determining viable means of sale, access to consultants, or other activities that may be required for responsible deaccessioning.

AAMG condemns the monetization of collections. Proceeds from the sale of deaccessioned works should never be utilized to fund the operations of the museum or its parent institution, including exhibition and programming costs, capital improvements or related expenses, the servicing or repayment of debt, or the establishment of endowments dedicated to any of these purposes. This prohibition also extends to staff salaries and endowments for the general support of staff or faculty.

Proceeds from the sale of deaccessioned collection objects must be reinvested in the collection. This investment may take a variety of forms:

- Proceeds may be used to acquire other works that strengthen or diversify collections to advance their relevance, integrity, and social responsibility.
- Acceptable uses of deaccessioning proceeds for acquisition may extend beyond purchase price to include all costs of acquisition, whether by purchase or gift, including packing, shipping, and processing as required for intake into the collection.
- In the case of damaged or disfigured objects already owned by the museum, proceeds may fund the direct costs of conservation necessary to make collection objects suitable for display or study, in accordance with AAM's concept of "direct care."
- Because integrity is a central value for museums and universities alike, deaccession proceeds may also be used to fund the direct costs associated with the deaccession and subsequent repatriation or restitution of collection objects to their rightful owners.

Deaccessioning need not end in a sale. Sometimes the public good can best be served by simply transferring ownership to another museum or academic institution. In the case of some contested objects or prior accessions with cultural contexts not previously understood by the museum, the best and highest use may be to return items to the Community of Origin for the benefit of mutual relationships.

Other University Collections

Independent of their museums' collection protocols, universities often acquire works of fine and decorative arts, outdoor sculpture, commemorative items, specimens of the natural world, and other objects that require professional care and oversight. Many such objects come through gifts and bequests, accepted by the university administration or individual schools or departments. Should objects appropriate to the museum be offered to other areas of the parent institution, the museum should have first right of refusal, given its capacity for care and engagement. In some instances, state and local "Percent for Art" programs require a percentage of the budget for new buildings and renovations be allocated to commissioning or purchasing artwork for that location. Public art collections on campus may or may not come under the jurisdiction of the museum.

Responsibility for custody and care may vary. Sometimes, the museum can be charged with their management, while at other times, a university registrar or archivist manages such collections. On occasion, the university's facilities management department may have responsibility for items not in the museum's collection and may contact museum personnel on an ad hoc basis when questions or issues arise. In many instances, museum professionals may be the only university personnel with the training and experience to care for and manage these collections (provided they have sufficient funding and staff). Prudence suggests that responsibility for such campus collections be established in advance by MOU, institutional operations manual, or similar documentation and, regardless of which entity assumes oversight, the university should provide the necessary support to care for its collection assets.

Object Loans

It is standard practice for a museum to request loans to support exhibitions, research, and curricula. The museum's collections policies should detail procedures regarding incoming and outgoing loans to ensure their care and safety and that their use is consistent with the museum's mission.

In loaning objects from its collection, the museum should require a standard AAM general facilities report from the borrowing institution, which specifies appropriate security, environmental controls, and professional handling. Packing and shipping costs and logistical requirements may be imposed on the borrower to protect valuable or rare collection objects in transit. Note that in the interest of environmental sustainability, some traditional requirements (such as demanding a courier to accompany an object in transit) are gradually being pared back or eliminated. When borrowing objects, the college or university museum or gallery should expect to meet the same procedural rigor and level of care that it expects when lending objects of its own.

Education, Exhibitions, & Interpretations

As with any museum, the mix of educational programming and exhibition content for academic museums and galleries depends upon the unique relationship of each institution's mission, collections, and primary audiences, both on campus and off. They also depend upon resources available, such as staff, time, facilities, discretionary budget, and more. There is no "best practice" to determine the specifics of an exhibition schedule or program calendar, but some considerations may provide assistance.

Academic Engagement

College or university students are much like members of general museums, except that they pay their dues through tuition. Faculty and staff constitute another primary user group as may, for some campus museums or galleries, alumni and major donors to the college or university. University students may participate in museum learning as part of their courses and through extra-curricular activities. To augment student engagement, the museum may appoint "academic curators or coordinators" or "museum educators" to liaise with leaders of student groups and to encourage faculty members to incorporate museum resources—collections, exhibitions, public programs, and staff expertise—into their curricula. The benefits of academic engagement may extend across departments and schools in a multi-disciplinary manner: object-based research, writing and communications skills, analytical thinking, visual and media literacy, observation and description, etc. Some academic museums appoint faculty members as guest curators, integrate the curation of exhibitions into the content of courses, or engage students, faculty, staff and/or alumni on their advisory boards or board committees (e.g., collections, exhibitions, and public programs). Because museums offer practical training and work experiences, students may hold internships, fellowships, or paid staff positions; volunteer as community service (possibly serving as docents or guides); or engage with the museum through student organizations and student museum membership programs.

Academic museums are especially well positioned to support certificate- or degree-granting programs that lead to museum careers (e.g., museum studies, art history, history, anthropology, scientific disciplines, education, non-profit administration, etc.). Some museum staff teach courses; others serve as guest lecturers and/or supervise students through internships or other pragmatic learning arrangements. On the other hand, many academic programs in the sciences, arts, and humanities that promise a path to museum careers do so independently of their own academic museum, thus depriving their students of the kinds of hands-on, object-based experiences that might lead to future success. AAMG encourages such programs to re-envision their curricula so that experiential learning and academic studies reinforce one another in optimizing the pre-professional preparation that such programs promise and that students need to launch museum careers. In forming such plans, AAMG also recommends that academic departments work collaboratively with their museum, on an equal basis, to coordinate learning opportunities, share teaching responsibilities, and allocate tuition revenue to both entities based on time and resource commitments.

Public Engagement

The museum's collections, exhibitions, and educational programs often play a prominent role in supporting a local or regional community, as well as targeted groups such as K-12 students, the elderly, tourists, etc. In many instances, the campus museum may serve a parallel mission as the region's public museum or cultural center, thus placing dual responsibilities on staff and demanding a mission and program that balance the needs of "town and gown," particularly if there are no other nearby museums to serve such a public function.

Community service may take the form of hands-on workshops, after-school programs, and summer camps that offer creative and therapeutic vehicles for youth, artists, and underserved constituents. Museum educators may utilize Visual Thinking Strategies (VTS) to enhance K-12 learning or to support service personnel in medical, security, and other fields that require close observation and visual analysis. Museums and galleries also support social infrastructure by bringing people together for exhibition openings, public programs, family days, and special festivals. In this community capacity, the museum should be open to constituent recommendations and feedback, especially as it seeks to welcome underserved communities and engage an ever-increasing and diverse public.

Research and Evaluation

Research plays an especially important role in academic museums, because it aligns with higher education's broader, scholarly mission of advancing the frontiers of knowledge. In addition to supporting faculty and student research, museum staff members conduct ongoing research specific to their collections, exhibitions, educational programs, and museum practices, as appropriate to their expertise, interests, and professional positions. Publication is important, be it through exhibition catalogues, scholarly articles, conference presentations, or other means of disseminating knowledge.

Evaluation, too, can be an essential component of ongoing museum work, allowing for constituency of input, thoughtful reflection, strategic planning, prioritization, and re-direction of initiatives. Ongoing visitor engagement surveys can help museums understand their demographics and differentiate what they are doing well from what they should improve. Because research and evaluation are such essential partners in strengthening museums and the field as a whole, staff members should be encouraged to document and share their work with their governing authority as well as other academic museum professionals through publication, online communications, and participation at conferences.

Ultimately, the exhibition program of an academic museum, as well as its display of permanent collections and its educational programming, comes from an understanding of its academic and public audiences' needs in combination with an awareness of the didactic capabilities of its collections and the appropriateness of the exhibitions it organizes. This is a matter for judgment, dialogue, experience, expertise, collaboration, a commitment to excellence, and a belief in the transformative engagement that museums and galleries, at their best, can provide.

The Issue of Censorship

AAMG institutions take pride in the reputations they have earned as safe havens for free expression. Yet we know that leaders of museums and galleries sometimes experience pressure to shape their programming to avoid offending stakeholders—be they in positions of authority, visitors, or members of the academic community. We oppose censorship.

Recent history, however, makes us aware that the scope and limits of free expression on campus are subject to disagreement. Academic communities are actively redefining free speech, hate speech, academic freedom, and to what extent protections for "speech" might cover other forms of expression. Local or state law may also apply. In the absence of consensus, wisdom calls for due diligence before invoking presumed protections against censorship, or conversely, before succumbing to self-censorship. In preparing for a potentially challenging display or program, museum or gallery leaders should assess their own capacity to test the limits of programmatic or curatorial content by first asking probing questions:

- Whose expression might be restricted? (artist, curator, speaker, other?)
- Might this become an issue of institutional expression and, if so, whose? (museum, university, both?)
- Are individual and institutional interests aligned or at odds?
- Who are the stakeholders, and what are their concerns? (students, faculty, administration, trustees, donors, community?)
- Should certain officials be consulted in advance? (advisory board, institutional communications office, dean, provost, president?)
- Are communications sufficiently planned to frame potential controversies? Are we prepared to respond to misinterpretation or misinformation?

Some institutions have created policies that include how to respond to censorship attempts. Others have undergone training or engaged in scenario planning. Notwithstanding preparation, however, unanticipated conflicts can break out that challenge the reputations and values of institutions and their leaders. Before taking a public position, more questions may inform a course of action:

- Can we mitigate the conflict without censoring content? Is there a viable, even if imperfect, compromise?
- Have we clearly identified our opponents and allies? Can we engage in constructive dialogue?
- Who, or which office in the administration, might be able to help?
- Can colleagues at other institutions provide experienced advice?
- If the conflict cannot be resolved, or if we feel that we are victims of censorship, to what jurisdiction are we prepared to appeal: Law? Ethics? The court of public opinion?
- What remedy can we reasonably expect?

As institutions reliant upon the public trust, it is vital that, should a decision be made that alters or cancels a program or exhibition due to potentially problematic content, communication of the decision must be candid and clear. False excuses, even if temporarily expedient, undermine institutional credibility.

Museums and galleries can be bold and brave, but doing so requires self-awareness, understanding audiences, anticipatory planning, consulting with potentially impacted stakeholders, and forthright communications before, during, and after a contentious issue arises.

Facilities, Risk Management, & Sustainability

Academic museums and galleries are usually housed within a building owned by the university, which may or may not have been purpose built. While some museums may have their own facilities staff, others rely upon personnel assigned to them from the university's facilities management or physical plant department. Similarly, climate control and security may be managed by museum staff or independently by others at the university. The less control the museum has over its building maintenance, HVAC, and security, the more important it is to communicate best practices to university staff responsible for those areas and to assure that funding is sustained to maintain the highest possible standards. This is especially the case for historic houses, where the structure itself must be treated as a vital collection object.

The director should participate in all decisions regarding the redesign, renovation, construction, repair, or capital improvements of the physical plant, to ensure appropriate museum standards are followed for collections management, rotation of exhibitions, educational programs, security, and the long-term maintenance of facilities. When the museum is used by other university or community groups or individuals, protocols must be in place to ensure the safety, security, and integrity of the collection, exhibitions, and facility. Revenue generated from the rental of the museum should offset direct and indirect costs to the museum.

Because the academic museum prioritizes student learning, all efforts should be made to provide access to collections and exhibitions, which may require significant staff resources (collections staff, gallery attendants, and security officers), as well as flexibility to meet academic scheduling and class needs.

Risk Management

Museums must ensure the safety of their staff, visitors, and neighbors; maintain their buildings and grounds; and minimize risk to the collections they preserve for future generations. Minimizing risk requires a clear understanding of potential hazards and threats as well as a comprehensive plan to mitigate them, supported by the appropriate allocation of resources necessary to implement such plans. Regular reviews and updates should be made with all appropriate museum and university staff. Preparation requires regularly scheduled training sessions and drills—often available through the central facility or health & safety departments of most academic institutions.

For facility risk, staff must ensure that the building is maintained and preventative maintenance accomplished, that spaces are used to the best of their potential in fulfillment of the museum's mission, and that the building and its grounds are attractive and accessible to visitors. For museums in historic structures, the preservation needs of the building must be balanced against risk to people and the collections within.

For collections, minimizing risk includes having an emergency preparedness plan, an integrated pest management protocol, procedures for safe handling and secure storage of collections (e.g., museums in earthquake and hurricane zones will need to secure collections in storage and on view to avoid possible damage), precautions for the use of hazardous materials, and appropriate insurance. This may include preparing disaster kits and undergoing periodic training, such as tabletop drills with museum staff and security and facilities personnel.

For collections and people, risk management requires a well-trained security force that usually includes video surveillance and a physical presence in the galleries. The security program must have written protocols for staff access to the museum building and secure areas, supervision of students and volunteers, and annual security training and emergency preparedness drills for all staff and volunteers. A knowledgeable visitor services staff is essential. The frontline personnel can welcome and orient visitors to the museum, answer questions about the university and region or direct questions to others, and support safety and security with an additional set of eyes. The museum is also expected to comply with university, local, state, and federal laws, codes, and regulations and to make sure that those with whom it contracts for various services are versed in museum practices pertaining to their specific areas.

For the institution itself (museum and parent institution), we must also recognize that not all risk is physical. Reputation is a precious intangible asset that can be easily damaged by individual behavior or institutional practice. Professionalism, courtesy, ethical conduct, and a positive working culture require preparation and commitment.

Emergency Planning

In developing emergency preparedness plans, academic museums can often call upon their university's central safety and security departments to provide training, communications, and resources to support personal safety for such emergencies as fire, severe weather, medical emergencies, utility failures, the release of hazardous materials, and incidents that may involve an active shooter, suspicious package, or bomb threat.

Museum specialists should take a leading role in developing plans to secure collections in anticipation of emergencies and, should an emergency befall, through post-incident recovery. This often involves forming a Museum Security and Recovery Unit that can be activated if museum facilities and/or artifacts are exposed, threatened, and/or damaged from a natural disaster, vandalism, or environmental incident. Senior museum officials in charge of collections, security, and facilities may benefit from resources, communications, and courses offered by museum-related organizations, as well as the Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA) National Incident Management System (NIMS) and its Heritage Emergency National Task Force (HENTF). Other sources of aid, training, and expertise include the National Heritage Responders and state and local Community/Volunteer Organizations Active in Disasters (COAD/VOAD), which collaborate with state Departments of Homeland Security and Emergency Management.

Communications are an essential component of emergency management. This often involves a senior leadership group that assesses situations and assures that appropriate staff members and college or university officials are notified, consulted, and updated as circumstances dictate. Careful consideration must also be given to external communications, including informing academic and community stakeholders and the public at large. In such instances, the central communications office can offer guidance and assistance.

Sustainability

Environmental sustainability has become an increasingly central responsibility for academic museums and galleries, both through practice and as content that informs exhibitions and programs. Of recent importance, publication of The Bizot Green Protocol has provided recommendations by a consortium of major museums that promise to help the field embrace sustainable practices.

New and renovated facilities can utilize the LEED certification rating system, administered through the U.S. Green Building Council (USGBC), to guide design and functionality toward established environmental standards that certify the building's contribution to reducing its carbon footprint, preserving energy, saving water, and other means of prudent conservation. LEED certification also provides a publicly visible statement of environmental commitment.

There are many ways that academic museums and galleries can contribute to sustainable practice through their own policies, practices, and protocols. For instance, HVAC climate controls can be adjusted to minimize energy use while still providing safe temperature and humidity levels to preserve collections. Exhibition designers can reuse old casework in lieu of custom designing from scratch. Modular wall systems can reduce exhibit-by-exhibit carpentry. Repainting changing exhibition galleries can be limited, rather than de rigour. LED lighting can replace less energy-efficient exhibition lighting. Office practices can promote recycling. Plastics can be replaced by biodegradable products, while reliance on distributing throw-away promotional materials can be reduced. The gift shop need not sell unsustainable products or synthetic garments. Requirements for loaning objects can be pared back to minimize the use of couriers and customized crating, among other measures.

The subject of sustainability has become increasingly central to the content of exhibitions themselves, particularly in natural history museums, science centers, or museums that care for living collections. Regardless of the type of museum collection, educational programming can extend beyond exhibition content, sometimes supporting student-led initiatives, courses, or community projects. In such cases, it is even more important that the institution practices the behaviors that its exhibits and programs endorse.

AAMG recommends that every academic museum and gallery create its own sustainability plan—or include it in its institutional plan—and conduct periodic reviews of processes and procedures to maintain best practices in environmental accountability. In many instances, the academic institution may have a sustainability office, program, or interdepartmental teaching initiative that can offer expertise and assistance.

Institutional Retrenchment

Budget Reductions

An academic museum or gallery may, at times, be faced with a reduction in operations due to its own financial situation or that of its university. Budget reductions required by the parent institution should be compatible with reductions in other areas of the university, i.e., the museum should not be singled out for more reductions than other areas. In such cases, the museum may have to adjust its plans proportionally, based upon its ability to fulfill its mission and serve its community, while taking into consideration the effect of its actions on staff, stakeholders, and the collections held in public trust.

People may suffer should the museum be forced to reduce staff size to achieve budget reductions. It is better to explore leaving open positions temporarily vacant or reducing programming expenses to maintain morale and the positive working culture to which both the museum and academic institution are committed. In many instances, short-term "belt-tightening" measures may suffice to survive an institutional retrenchment, especially given the potential of museums and galleries to attract public support.

Collections often receive special scrutiny during retrenchment, either because of the expense of maintaining them or because of their potential cash value. However, museum collections are held in trust for the academic community and general public, thus making preservation of this trust a primary responsibility of the museum and governing authority. In many instances, a question of donor intent or gift restrictions may also arise, potentially pitting the expedience of downsizing against a long-term commitment to alumni and donor stewardship.

Deaccessioning is neither a fast nor simple solution. It takes time and laborious research to determine provenance, identify any restrictions on the title, prepare documentation, and arrange for appropriate and safe transfer. Deaccessioning should be part of a long-term, thoughtful decision about how best to fulfill the museum's mission with available resources, in accordance with standards and best practices in the field, and in alignment with the museum's own code of ethics, and collections planning and collection management policies. AAMG provides access to resources through its "Deaccession Toolkit," available on the AAMG website.

Extreme Circumstances

There may be times when a parent organization needs to make financial cuts to such an extent that the museum or gallery bears a disproportionate portion of the burden. The governing authority should be made aware of the possibility that the museum could lose accreditation due to extreme cutbacks that would compromise its duties of care or basic obligations of service. Advocacy efforts by staff, faculty, advisory

board members, and community leaders can sometimes help to delay or reverse excessive measures. AAMG volunteers stand ready to advise academic museums and their governing authorities when faced with emergencies that may seriously affect the sustainability of museum operations.

AAMG recognizes that parent organizations may not have a legal obligation to operate a university museum. Before dismantling or radically cutting back a museum or gallery, however, the parent organization must consider its responsibility to serve the surrounding community and its obligation to steward the collections it holds in trust. There may also be other ways to achieve necessary savings, such as consolidating display spaces on campus or even potential mergers.

Academic museums and galleries are usually part of an institution's long-term strategy of civic engagement. Any decisions regarding the future of museums operated by a parent organization should take into account their long-term, pragmatic impact on serving the broader public good. While in the short run, cutbacks to a museum may result in financial savings, in the long run they may damage the parent organization's civic obligation to serve its community.

If the university's governing authority is considering downsizing or closing a museum, it has an ethical obligation to do so in a manner that safeguards the public's interest. The fate of the collections must be carefully considered. Having taken on the obligation of caring for collections, the university must plan to transfer this stewardship to another suitable caretaker in an orderly manner that safeguards the collections and their documentation. The new caretaker should be carefully identified based on its ability to care for the collections and to continue to provide public and scholarly access. As referenced earlier in this standard, this process may require additional resources in the short term and may not be a useful strategy for immediate cost savings.

Strategies for Resilience

Diversify Funding

Unlike individual departments or other academic units that primarily rely on central distribution of annual budgets, university museums and galleries can often generate supplemental funding through museum-based philanthropy, grants, membership programs, fundraising events, and sometimes earned revenue such as fees from facility rentals or proceeds from a store or café. Museums that derive significant portions of their income from outside sources are less dependent on funding from their parent organizations. This minimizes the impact of funding cuts from the parent and the likelihood that eliminating the museum will appear to be an attractive financial strategy. Dedicated endowments explicitly directed to museum programs, exhibitions, acquisitions, staff positions, or general operations can be especially effective in preserving museum or gallery operations for the long term.

Membership Programs

One of the most effective means of expanding beyond an alumni base can be through museum or gallery membership programs that welcome the entire community. Some programs develop as incorporated friends or membership organizations, operating as separate not-for-profit support groups that can generate significant income, provide advocacy for the museum, and buffer it against sudden organizational changes. A formal memorandum of agreement between the parent organization and the friends group can ensure that the support organization has a voice in decisions concerning the museum's future. This document should include policies and procedures for fundraising, maintaining and accessing funds, and the election or appointment of representatives who work directly with the museum staff. As an added benefit, museums can enroll their members in reciprocal membership programs or take advantage of affiliate partnerships.

Networking and Partnerships

College and university museums or galleries often serve departments and schools that cross disciplines and span the academic spectrum. Relationships with faculty members from diverse departments—especially in service to teaching or research—can affirm the museum's broad academic relevance, contributing to institutional sustainability. Student groups often seek homes for their activities or unusual spaces for meetings and special events, positioning a welcoming museum or gallery as a community center on campus. Offering special events for alumni groups may also help to wed the museum or gallery to the very identity of the academic institution. Local residents and other non-profits also seek special places to gather and programming that builds a sense of community. Longstanding relationships with faculty, student groups, alumni, and local residents can go a long way toward establishing an academic museum as an essential, irreplaceable component of the college or university.

Academic Contributions and Credentials

Sometimes museums or galleries can be so focused on public service that they under-communicate their value to the academic community. Because of the dual nature of their audiences—town and gown—reporting can be more nuanced than for a stand-alone museum, where visitor attendance commonly stands as a proxy for success. Just as faculty serve teaching and research, so may museums and galleries assess their academic contribution through measures of object-based learning and contributions to knowledge. Classes accommodated and students served, research projects or publications, public programs or workshops or symposia—such are the kinds of activities that academic museums facilitate yet tend to understate. The very kinds of teaching and research that faculty members pursue often parallel the contributions that academic museums or galleries make to campus life. Such activities should be tracked, counted and reported—accompanied by photographs, testimonials, and other documentation necessary to position the museum or gallery at the center of campus life and as a valued contributor to academic scholarship and prestige. A communications plan that spans website, social media, and traditional media outreach can position an academic museum or gallery at the heart of its institution's academic mission.

As degree-granting institutions, colleges and universities value credentials. AAM accreditation offers a meaningful and respected "seal of approval" that contributes to academic reputation as an imprimatur of excellence. AAMG urges university museums to pursue accreditation or, if only en-route, to participate in AAM's core documents verification program. Independent validation by nationally respected associations commands the respect of university administrators and contributes directly to their institution's status and standing.

Universities themselves are accredited by various bodies, depending on their research status and private or state mandates. While library goals and achievements are normally included in these essential evaluation documents, museums are normally not required to submit reports (because not all universities have museums). This should not preclude their recognition in university accreditation documents as vital academic units on campuses where they do exist.

A museum that is an integral part of its parent organization is less likely to be a target for financial reductions by the university. By being strongly connected to the academic community, reaching out to a broader constituency, attracting new sources of funding, garnering positive publicity and, most of all, being valued by a large number of people, a museum makes itself less vulnerable to cutbacks. An active and engaged constituency encourages the parent organization to continue its support.

In Conclusion: The Privilege of Academic Service

Notwithstanding the constraints of being embedded in a larger institution (limited space, smaller staffing, bare-bones budgets, and indirect operational control relative to stand-alone museums), academic museums and galleries enjoy access to a seemingly boundless array of resources: faculty expertise across the spectrum of human knowledge; administrative support provided at no cost; and access to young, diverse audiences that most stand-alone museums would be desperate to attract. Such conditions require special skills: a willingness to collaborate and an ability to work in partnership with individuals and groups; a capacity to listen, learn, and adapt programming to align with the personal interests and pedagogical demands of students and faculty; flexibility and the entrepreneurial skills to leverage academic priorities and community needs into the fabric of museum offerings.

Academic museums provide valuable and essential support of their university's teaching mission. By offering experiential learning opportunities with authentic, extraordinary objects of history, nature, and human creativity, museums provide value unavailable online, thus validating the benefits of in-person learning in support of teaching and research.

Whether civic or academic, museum displays inform visitors and inspire people to expand their understanding of art, history, and nature—sparking curiosity to learn and a hunger for new experiences. We who labor in academic museums and galleries enjoy an additional privilege because our relationship with learners enables us to take students behind the scenes to engage directly with collections that might otherwise remain sequestered in storage. We do this through object-based classes, research projects, internships, and a host of other means. Our special access to future generations, structured around the academic experiences of formal learning and the social structures of campus life, affords us opportunities to sow the seeds of interest and passion necessary to inspire lifetimes of learning. In certain instances, we may even shape the careers and future success of aspiring professionals in our own chosen fields. There is a special value in this work.

For source references and links to supplemental information, AAMG's website provides a chapter-by-chapter appendix for this document. It will be updated periodically.

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We believe that "Great Universities Have Great Museums." AAMG leads a national effort to ensure the best practices for academic museums, galleries and collections through its educational and advocacy efforts.

APPENDIX:

Notes, References, & Links to Supporting Documents

Introduction (General Resources)

AAM provides an excellent overview of museum best practices in National Standards and Best Practices for U. S. Museums. Washington: American Association of Museums, 2008. AAMG's document rests upon the principles of AAM's guidelines, seeking to add depth and clarity on issues that are particularly relevant to embedded academic institutions. Unless otherwise cited, quotations attributed to AAM come from National Standards and Best Practices for U. S. Museums. AAM has made much of its guidance accessible online in Ethics, Standards, and Professional Practices.

The membership of AAM's Council of Affiliates spans the spectrum of discipline-specific associations. A list of affiliated associations with links to their websites is available on AAM's web page, Council of Affiliates.

Mission and Strategic Planning

AAM offers helpful guidance on developing mission statements, strategic planning, and practices for inclusion in Mission and Planning Standards and Excellence in DEAI. AAMG Sample Documents [link forthcoming] provide online examples of mission statements, strategic plans and other core policies.

Governance, Organizational Structure, and Leadership

In 2014 AAMG published AAMG Recommendation for Hiring an Academic Museum Director and in 2017 conducted a member survey on Academic Museum Reporting Structures. It should be noted that a terminal degree is not considered a requirement for a museum director. The College Art Association offers guidelines for the academic appointment of museum professionals in Standards for Tenure-Track Curatorial Appointments (2021).

For museums and galleries affiliated with community colleges, Leading Community College Art Museums & Galleries in the United States (2025), explains four distinctive areas of focus: educational value, workforce development, community connections, and accountability through the parent organization.

Code of Ethics

AAM provides guidance in Public Trust and Accountability Standards and links to standards published by other associations in Discipline-Specific and Technical Standards and Professional Practices; see also AAM's Code of Ethics for Museums. For other discipline-specific ethics policies, visit the National Parks Service's Appendix D: Code of Ethics for NPS Museums, pages D-12 to D-17. Here are links to codes of ethics from some major museum associations: AAMG Code of Ethics,

International Council of Museums (ICOM), Association of Art Museum Directors (AAMD), American Association for State and Local History (AASLH), ICOM Code of Ethics for Natural History Museums—there are many others. An emerging area of museum ethics concerns the cultural contexts and sovereignty of data, for instance, for biocultural labels see Local Contexts' BC Labels; see also the Center for Braiding Indigenous Knowledges and Science.

Financial Stability and Fundraising

Resources on Development & Membership are available through AAM.

Collections Stewardship

FASB No. 116 affirms that contributions of works of art, historical treasures, and similar assets need not be recognized as revenues and capitalized if the donated items are added to collections held for public exhibition, education, or research in furtherance of public service rather than financial gain. Excellent context is provided in the AASLH's The Capitalization of Collections: Ethics Position Paper #1.

In 2021 AAMG issued its Statement Against Monetizing the Collections of Academic Museums & Galleries and also published a "Deaccession Toolkit" to assist academic leadership understand the legal and ethical issues surrounding the deaccessioning of collection objects. For an example of the prohibition against encumbering collections as collateral for loans, see AAMD's Professional Practices, appendix B, item d: "Member museums should not capitalize or collateralize collections or recognize as revenue the value of donated works."

In Collections Stewardship Standards, AAM provides links to documents relevant to special issues in collecting for museums, including objects unlawfully appropriated during the Nazi era, archaeological materials and ancient art, loaning collections to non-museum entities, and more. See also SPNHC Guidelines for the Care of Natural History Collections, Building Natural History Collections for the Twenty-First Century and Beyond, and Extending U.S. Biodiversity Collections to Promote Research and Education. Here follow links to laws and statutes that may pertain to specialized collections:

- The U.S. Antiquities Act of 1906 specifies that domestic antiquities cannot be removed from lands owned or controlled by the government without the permission of the Secretary of the department who has jurisdiction over the land in question.
- The Archaeological Resources Protection Act of 1979 expands the U.S. Antiquities Act to protect archaeological materials on federal land.
- The National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 establishes the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) and provides for financial assistance for preservation projects and mandatory review of proposed changes to properties on the NRHP.
- The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service issues permits under various wildlife laws and treaties at different offices. Permits enable the public to engage in legitimate activities that would otherwise be prohibited by law.
- The Endangered Species Act prohibits the importation and exportation—and the sale, trace, or shipment in intestate and foreign commerce—of listed endangered or threatened species, their parts, and products made from them.

• The Migratory Bird Treaty Act makes it unlawful to kill, capture, collect, possess, buy, sell, ship, import, or export most migratory game and non-game birds, including their nests or eggs, unless an appropriate federal permit is obtained.
• The Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act makes it unlawful to take bald or golden eagles or to sell, purchase, or barter their parts (including feathers) or products made from them.
• The African Elephant Conservation Act eliminates the import and export of raw ivory into and out of the U.S. and restricts movement of worked ivory into and out of the U.S.
• The National Firearms Act of 1934 and the 1968 Gun Control Act makes it illegal for any individual or organization to have a machine gun not registered with a permit. A state or federally funded museum can legally register all firearms under both of these acts. Most academic museums that are state funded would qualify. Museums at private universities would not qualify to keep these arms in their collections. Furthermore, directors and curators might want to apply for their "Collectors and Curios and Relics Federal Firearms License" to be able to obtain and curate the museum's firearm collection.
• The Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act of 1990 provides protection for Native American graves and associated funerary objects and for unassociated funerary objects, sacred objects, and cultural patrimony. NAGPRA was updated in 2024 and now poses requirements for permission from originating tribes prior to publication or display.

For a full explanation of AAM's "direct care," see Direct Care of Collections: Ethics, Guidance and Recommendations (March 2019). For general care of collections, see Code of Ethics and Professional Practices for Collections Professionals (revised February 2021). For guidance on copyright and rights of reproduction, see the College Art Association's Code of Best Practices in Fair Use for the Visual Arts (2015).

For a comprehensive review of issues relating to university-owned collections, see AAMD's "Art on Campus" Guidelines prepared by William U. Eiland, Chair, Professional Issues Committee, July 7, 2009.

The Bizot Green Protocol offers guidance regarding loan requirements, storage and display conditions, and building design and air conditioning systems with a view to reducing carbon footprints.

Education, Exhibitions, and Interpretation

See AAM's Education and Interpretation Standards and the College Art Association's Guidelines Regarding the Hiring of Guest Curators by Museums.

Dr. Amy Werbel provides a comprehensive overview in "We all want to talk about this." A Study of Freedom of Artistic Expression in Academic Art Museums and Galleries, published by the University of California's National Center for Free Speech and Civic Engagement. More resources on issues concerning free expression are available through The National Coalition Against Censorship—Arts & Culture Advocacy Program, The Academic Freedom Alliance, and PEN America. In partnership with AAMD, PEN America reports on a survey of art museum directors in The Censorship Horizon—A Survey of Art Museum Directors, (January 2025).

Facilities, Risk Management, and Sustainability

For more on the special care required for historic houses and properties, the National Park Service offers guidance in The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties.

As the literature on emergency management for museums is vast, here follows just a sample: AASLH offers comprehensive guidance with numerous links in Disaster Planning and Response Resources as does AAM in Facilities and Risk Management Standards and Disaster Preparedness and Emergency Response Plan. For more on programs administered by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), visit the websites of the National Incident Management System (NIMS) and the Heritage Emergency National Task Force (HENTF). FEMA also offers courses through its Emergency Management Institute. The Smithsonian's Cultural Rescue Initiative provides links to a wide variety of resources pertaining to emergency preparedness, response, recovery, training, and more. See also the Smithsonian Museum Conservation Institute's Preparedness and Response in Collections Emergencies (PRICE) and the American Institute for Conservation's (AIC) Emergency Preparedness, Response, and Assistance, as well as National Heritage Responders and National Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster (COAD/VOAD).

Retrenching or Downsizing

Excellent guidance on this topic is offered through AAM, Retrenchment or Downsizing.

Strategies for Resilience

Reciprocal membership for admission to other museums can be an attractive incentive for community member support. For more information, visit the North American Reciprocal Museum (NARM) Association® network.

For more on credentialing through AAM's "Continuum of Excellence," see Accreditation & Excellence Programs.

In Conclusion: The Privilege of Academic Service

The combined AAMG and ICOM-UMAC annual meeting in Miami, June 2018, featured plenary presentations on the importance of academic museums, published in the University Museums and Collections Journal, Vol. 11 No. 2, 2019, pages 177-202.