



American
Alliance of
Museums

EXCELLENT TO THE CORE: AN INTRODUCTION TO CORE MUSEUM DOCUMENTS

An Overview Presented
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Core Documents: Required Elements

The following five documents have been designated as core documents because they are fundamental for basic professional museum operations and embody core museum values and practices. They codify and guide decisions and actions that promote institutional stability and viability, which in turn allows the museum to fulfill its educational role, preserve treasures for future generations and be an enduring part of its community.

The required elements are based on national standards and are also used in the Accreditation program. A museum's core documents must have, but are not limited to, the required elements listed below.

Mission Statement

Required elements:

- Educational in scope
- Describes the institution's unique purpose/focus /role
- Is approved by the governing authority

Institutional Code of Ethics

Required elements:

- States that it applies to members of the governing authority, staff and volunteers
- Is consistent with the Alliance's Code of Ethics for Museums or other code of ethics issued by a national museum organization appropriate to the museum's discipline
- Is tailored to, and developed specifically for, the museum (i.e., it is not simply a restatement of, or a statement of adoption of, the Alliance's Code of Ethics for Museums or other organization's code and is not simply a copy of any parent organization's code)
- Puts forth the institution's basic ethical, public trust responsibilities as a museum and nonprofit educational entity and is not solely about individual conduct (e.g., conflict of interest issues)
- Includes a statement on use of proceeds from deaccessioning (limiting their use to new acquisitions and/or direct care/preservation)
- Is a single document, not a compilation or list of references to other documents
- Is approved by the governing authority

Strategic Institutional Plan

Required elements:

- Current (up to date)
- Approved by the governing authority
- Aligned with current mission
- Articulates a big-picture vision as well as operational tactics to achieve the vision
- Covers all relevant areas of museum operations (e.g., is not just a facilities master plan or an expansion plan)
- Includes:
 - Goals (specific things the museum wants to achieve)
 - Action steps (specific assignments to achieve these goals)
 - Assignment of responsibility for accomplishing action steps

- Assessment of resources (human and financial) needed to implement the plan
- How the institution will obtain these resources
- Timeline for implementation
- Priorities
- Evaluation mechanisms and measures of success

Disaster Preparedness/Emergency Response Plan

Required elements:

- Is tailored to the institution's current facilities and specific circumstances
- Covers all threats/risks relevant to the institution
- Addresses staff, visitors, structures, and collections
- Includes evacuation plans for people
- Specifies how to protect, evacuate, or recover collections in the event of a disaster
- Delegates responsibility for implementation

Collections Management Policy

Museums that do not own or manage collections, but borrow and use objects for exhibits, education or research should instead submit custodial care and borrowing policies; museums with living collections may use different terminology for the policy that governs the management of their plants or animals.

Required elements for institutions with collections:

- Acquisitions/Accessioning
- Deaccessioning/disposal of collections/use of proceeds from the sale of deaccessioned collections
- Loans, incoming and outgoing (if the museum does not lend/borrow, it should at least state this)
- Collections care
- Inventories and/or documentation
- Access and/or use of collections

Required elements for institutions that do not own or manage collections, but borrow and use objects for exhibits, education or research:

- Care/responsibilities for objects in temporary custody
- Borrowing policies

Take the Next Steps

1. Create, assess, or improve your Core Documents so they meet national standards by using free Reference Guides and Activities on the Alliance web site. Tier 3 museum members can get also samples of these documents by contacting the Information Center at infocenter@aam-us.org.

2. Have your Core Documents reviewed and approved by the Alliance through the Core Documents Verification program. Get expert feedback and earn a public stamp of approval for meeting national standards for these essential museum documents.

The Document Life Cycle

Assemble a Team

Institutional plans and policies impact many people inside and outside the museum. Include a manageable variety of perspectives in developing these plans, including the staff responsible for implementing them.

Develop the Plan/Policy

Use the museum mission statement, vision, values and other institutional documentation to develop broad, institution-wide plans and policies.

Review the Standards

Ensure that the plans and policies are based on current legal, ethical and professional standards, and that they adhere to the museum's code of ethics.

Get Feedback

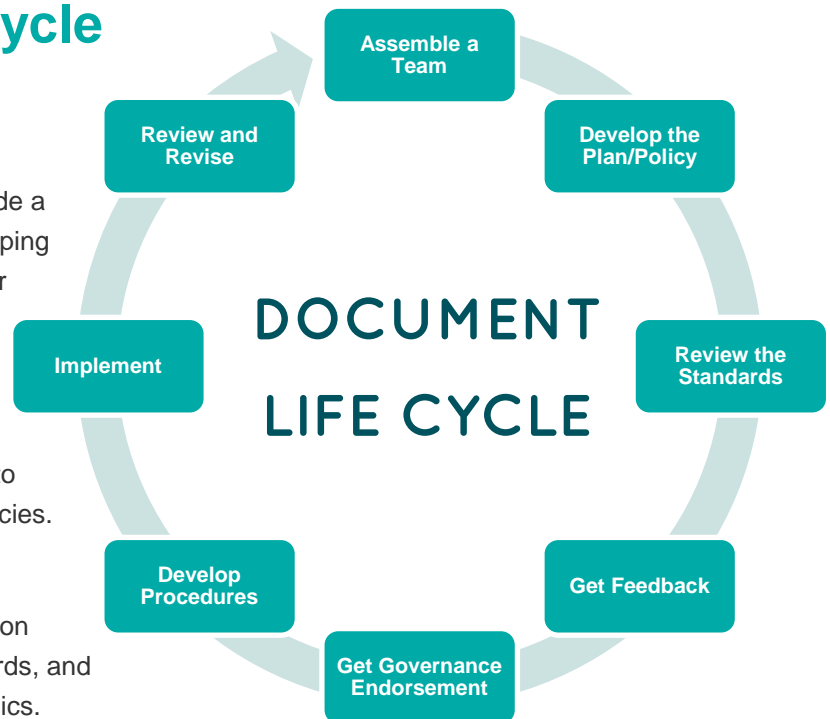
Ask staff and community members to comment on successive drafts of the policies. Once you have received feedback, revise the policy as necessary.

Get Governance Endorsement

Following staff review and revision, present the policies to the museum's governing authority for approval. Be prepared to explain and defend each policy, as well as to incorporate the governing authority's suggestions.

Develop Procedures

Once the plans and policies are approved by the governing authority, prepare a set of procedures for implementing each policy.



Implement the Plan/Policy

Completed plans, policies and corresponding procedures are implemented and carried out by staff. Relevant staff should have been included in developing the policies and procedures, but there still may be need to talk about how to carry out their responsibilities.

Review and Revise

These policies and procedures will evolve as the museum grows and thrives. Procedures might need revision more often than policies.

Activity # 2

Does Your Mission Measure Up?

Mission Activity A

Read the three mission statements below.

List things about each that you particularly like. Why do they resonate with you?



Mission

The Gadsden Arts Center's mission is to foster understanding and appreciation of the visual arts to improve the quality of life in Gadsden County and the region. The organization works to enhance arts education, provide cultural opportunities, and stimulate economic growth in the community.



Mission

Be a catalyst! Ignite our community's passion for nature and science.



Our Mission

To preserve the National Historic Landmark known as Morven by operating it as a museum and public garden that educates diverse audiences and showcases its rich history and the cultural heritage of New Jersey.

Mission Activity C:

Pull up a copy of your museum's mission statement.

- Compare it to the Required Elements—does it measure up? Does it meet them?
 - Educational in scope
 - Describes the institution's unique purpose/focus /role
 - Is approved by the governing authority

- When was it last reviewed? How has your institution changed since the mission was created/last revised?

- Is it current and contemporary? Does it align with your current focus, collections, community, educational goal, audiences, etc.?
- Does it inspire?
- Does it communicate why the museum exists and who benefits as a result of its efforts?
- Does it project the image you want for your institution and its role/relationship with its community and stakeholders?

What's good about it?	What's a drawback to it?

Institutional Codes of Ethics: Sample Content

The following list contains topics that are considered best practice to include in an institutional code of ethics. Some may not be appropriate for your museum; and there may be others not on this list that address a unique or discipline-specific issue relevant to your museum (e.g., sacred objects, human remains, etc.).

For more detail, see the *Alliance Reference Guide: Developing An Institutional Code of Ethics* (in your handouts and also on the AAM website.)

- Guiding Principles
- Ethical Duties
- Governance Authority & Responsibility
- Conflict of Interest
 - Affiliation with Other Institutions
 - Business Dealings
 - Dealing
 - Disclosure
 - Gifts, Favors
 - Loans
 - Outside Employment
 - Outside Volunteer Activity
 - Personal Collecting
 - Political Activity & Public Issues
 - Purchase of Museum Property
 - Referrals
 - Use of Assets
 - Use of Information (Confidentiality)
 - Use of Name
- Collection
 - Acquisition
 - Deaccession
 - Care & Preservation/Conservation
 - Appraisals
 - Availability of Collection
 - Truth in Presentation
- Trustee/Director Relationship
- Museum Management Practices
 - Business Dealings with Related Parties
 - Compliance with Laws
 - Fundraising
 - Loans
 - Museum Store & Other Commercial Activity
 - Ownership of Scholarly Material
 - Personnel Practices
 - Professionalism
- Responsibility to Public
- Implementation
- Definitions

Activity # 3 A

Are You Covered?

Instructions

1. Listen to the Presenter describe three *imagined* scenarios (repeated on the reverse) taking place at Punxsutawney Groundhog Museum & Gardens (PGMG).
2. Think about your museum's code of ethics: if it was the PGMG's code, does it contain elements that would help to guide the garden's decision's and help it handle the scenario presented?
3. Make some notes to inform your institution's code of ethics.
Note the issues the scenarios raise. Could similar scenarios happen at my institution? Does my code address them?

Activity # 3 B

What special ethical issues might my institution face?

There are issues common to most museum and thus common elements most codes should contain as a matter of best practice—see the list of common topics on the previous page of this workbook. But codes must to be tailored to the museum. Ethical issues will vary from museum to museum depending on subject area, mission, values, programming choices, activities, governance, and other factors. For example, do you collect or display sacred objects or human remains? Do you deal with living artists, or deal with sensitive historical or contemporary subjects?

Instructions

1. Think about the types of ethical issues and conflicts that may be unique to your institution, or the area of operations you focus on (e.g., development, collections).
2. List them below (note if they are in your code)
 -
 -
 -
 -
 -
3. Continue this activity when you go back to your museum by using the “Alliance Activity Guide: Code of Ethics Activity” in your handout packet (and available on the AAM website).

Activity # 4 A

Engaging Stakeholders in the Planning Process

List your museum's internal and external (community) stakeholders

Internal	External

How can I engage my community in our planning process?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

Activity # 4 B

Assess Your Plan Like A Pro

Instructions

Evaluate your plan against this the list of Required Elements, the sample content listed on the next page, and the questions below. Make notes on areas where the plan should be strengthened or further fleshed out.

- Does it meet the required elements?
- Is it realistic/achievable based on current capacity? If not, is capacity building embedded in the plan?
- Are goals quantifiable in some way? Does the plan articulate what success looks like?
- Are there specific action steps? Is responsibility assigned? Are the necessary resources articulated?
- Is it reflective of a thoughtful process that included internal and external stakeholders? If not, how could you bring in community voices?

Institutional Strategic Plan: Sample Content

The following list contains topics that are considered best practice to include in an institutional strategic plan. The list is inclusive of the required elements. Each institution's plan will be different and should be organized in a way that best fits its needed.

For more detail, see the *Alliance Reference Guide: Developing an Institutional Plan* (in your handouts and also on the AAM website.)

- Mission statement
- Vision statement
- Core values
- History of museum
- Overview of museum's current operations & programs
- Organization chart
- Summary of planning process
- Planning assumptions
- Summary of external & internal opportunities & challenges
- Reference to other planning documents
- Goals, strategies, priorities
- Action steps
- Identification of financial resources needed
- Identification of human resources needed
- Plans to secure financial & human resources
- Timeline
- Responsible parties
- Evaluation methods/measures of success
- Monitoring and Updating process / schedule

Collections Management Policy: Sample Content

The following list contains topics that are considered best practice to include in Collections Management Policy. The list is inclusive of the required elements. Each institution's policy will be different based on the type and scope of its collections and other factors (facility, geography, etc.) Your policy may be organized differently, use different terminology, and/or have additional topics.

For more detail, see the ***Alliance Reference Guide on Collections Management Policies*** (available on the AAM website under Core Document Verification>Core Documents.)

- Mission Statement
- Scope of Collections
- Authority
- Ethics specifically related to collections stewardship and management
- Categories of Collections
- Acquisitions/Accessions
- Deaccessioning/Disposal
- Loans
- Objects Found in Collection
- Objects Left in Custody
- Abandoned Property/Unclaimed Loans
- Care of Collections
- Housekeeping
- Insurance & Risk Management
- Documentation/Collections Records
- Inventories
- Access
- Appraisals
- Laws
- Cultural Property
- Rights & Reproduction
- Photography
- Review/Revision
- Glossary



COMPASS for PROGRESS

Standards of Excellence in Plant Collections Management



Scope

STANDARD 1

Plant collections reflect and support the institution's mission, and long-range institutional plans.

STANDARD 2

Collections are well-defined, appropriate for the site's growing conditions, facilities, and space, and can be realistically developed given institutional resources.

STANDARD 3

Plants within collection represent broad taxonomic and genetic diversity, with current holdings comprising a minimum of 50% of the stated collection scope.

STANDARD 4

Plants are acquired legally and ethically according to their collection's stated purpose.

STANDARD 5

Plant species are of known wild provenance for greatest conservation value; cultivars are obtained directly or indirectly from breeder/introducer.



Documentation

STANDARD 1

Thorough records are actively maintained for accessioned plants tracking what/where/how plants were obtained, their garden location, and any conditions regarding their acquisition, use, or distribution.

STANDARD 2

Durable accession tags and maps link plants in the collection to their documentation, and to any associated collections of images, herbarium vouchers, and DNA.

STANDARD 3

Periodic field inventories are conducted, records and maps updated, and missing/damaged labels replaced.

STANDARD 4

Records are kept of plant evaluations, verifications of identity and nomenclature, documented use, propagation, and distributions



Use

STANDARD 1

Reasonable access to the collections and their documentation are provided for researchers, breeders, and other professionals as well as the public, while ensuring the collection's preservation and security.

STANDARD 2

Collection records are shared online through databases to maximize use and facilitate coordination with other collection holders.

STANDARD 3

Plant collections are utilized throughout the institution for education, engagement, evaluation, research, and/or conservation.

STANDARD 4

The institution commits to strengthening staff expertise through ongoing professional development and study of the collections.

STANDARD 5

Strategic partnerships with outside experts, relevant plant societies, and other public gardens are leveraged to maximize collection use and ensure relevance.



Management

STANDARD 1

Living plant collections are maintained for optimum health, and monitored for pests, diseases, and potential invasiveness.

STANDARD 2

High priority collections are safeguarded, documentation frequently backed up offsite, and a disaster plan provided for rapid response and triage of the collection.

STANDARD 3

A recently approved collections policy and development plans for each collection guide decision-making; prioritized maintenance standards and management procedures govern collections care.

STANDARD 4

Long-term institutional support is provided to maintain an active collections program with sufficient funds for acquisitions, documentation, maintenance, and professional curation.

TYPES OF THREATS

EXAMPLES	Natural	Mechanical	Biological	Human
	Tornado	Power Failure	Insects	Terrorism
	Flood	Explosion	Rodents/Animals	Bomb Threats
	Earthquake	Chemical Spill	Disease	Vandalism
	Hurricane	Gas Leak	Poison	Theft

FOUR STAGES OF RISK MANAGEMENT

Mitigation	<p>How does the museum prevent disasters and emergencies from impacting collections, occupants and operations?</p> <p>» <i>Examples: Integrated Pest Management, Facility Assessments, Housekeeping, etc.</i></p>
Preparedness	<p>How does the museum prepare staff and visitors to effectively respond to and recover from the disasters or emergencies the museum may experience?</p> <p>» <i>Examples: Training, Drills and Exercises, Emergency Kits, Salvage Priorities, etc.</i></p>
Response	<p>What should staff and visitors do in the event of specific disasters or emergencies the museum may experience?</p> <p>» <i>Examples: Emergency Systems, Evacuation Routes, CPR/First Aid, Salvage Procedures, etc.</i></p>
Recovery	<p>What measures are in place for the museum to recover from the types of disasters and emergencies that it may experience?</p> <p>» <i>Examples: Media Relations, Collections Triage, Facilities Assessments, Clean-up, etc.</i></p>

Activity # 6

Create Your Risk Profile

Physically or mentally draw a map of your museum’s geographical surroundings (go as local or regional as you like), and or the actual physical facility. What’s unique about your community or building.

Identify some potential natural, biological, mechanical and human threats unique to your museum that could impact your staff, visitor, facilities, and collections.

Do you have plans and procedures in place to address and manage these risks?

Natural	Biological	Mechanical	Human

Disaster Preparedness/Emergency Response Plan: Sample Topics

The following is a list of topics that are considered best practice to include in a Disaster Preparedness/Emergency Response Plan. Not all items on the list may be applicable to your situation. Each institution's policy will be different based on location, the physical facility, type of activities and objects that are in the museum, etc.

For more detail, see the ***Alliance Reference Guide: Developing a Disaster Preparedness/Emergency Response Plan*** (in your handouts and also on the AAM website.)

Emergency Preparedness/Response Procedures

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> General Guidelines | <input type="checkbox"/> Medical/Health Emergency |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Accidental Damage | <input type="checkbox"/> Mold |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Bomb Threat | <input type="checkbox"/> Neighboring Emergency |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Civil Disturbance | <input type="checkbox"/> Nuclear Disaster |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Earthquake | <input type="checkbox"/> Pests |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Environmental Emergencies | <input type="checkbox"/> Power Loss/Energy Cutback |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Fire | <input type="checkbox"/> Safeguarding Records |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Flood | <input type="checkbox"/> Security/Theft/Vandalism |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Hazardous Materials | <input type="checkbox"/> Structural Failure |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Hurricane | <input type="checkbox"/> Terrorism |
| <input type="checkbox"/> List of Emergency Supplies | <input type="checkbox"/> Tornado/Windstorm |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Mechanical Failure | |

Emergency Cleanup Procedures

Collections

- | | |
|---|--------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> General Guidelines | <input type="checkbox"/> Fire |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Active Infestation | <input type="checkbox"/> Mold |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Dirt & Debris | <input type="checkbox"/> Water |

Continued



Non-Historic Buildings

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> General Guidelines | <input type="checkbox"/> Office Equipment |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Air | <input type="checkbox"/> Painted Surfaces |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Electronic/Magnetic Media | <input type="checkbox"/> Plaster & Drywall |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Documentation | <input type="checkbox"/> Plastic |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Glass | <input type="checkbox"/> Textiles |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Masonry/Concrete/Brick | <input type="checkbox"/> Tile & Porcelain |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Mechanical & Electrical Systems | <input type="checkbox"/> Wood & Woodwork |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Metal | |

Institution-Specific Information

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Building Floor Plan | <input type="checkbox"/> Emergency Contacts/Call List |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Chain of Command | <input type="checkbox"/> Emergency Resources/Suppliers |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Collection Priorities | <input type="checkbox"/> Evacuation Procedures |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Community Emergency Information | <input type="checkbox"/> Public Relations |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Computer Backup Procedure | <input type="checkbox"/> Staff Responsibilities |

Forms and Checklists

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Accident Report | <input type="checkbox"/> Maintenance Checklist |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Bomb Threat Report | <input type="checkbox"/> Recovered Property Report |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Chemical Exposure Report | <input type="checkbox"/> Response Checklist |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Condition Report | <input type="checkbox"/> Suspicious Persons Report |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Incident Report | <input type="checkbox"/> Threats by Telephone Report |

Taking It Home: Build Your Core Document Action Plan

Go back through your workbook and look at your activity results and your notes; identify the gaps or weakness you need to address in each Core Document.

Start mapping out next steps and building an action plan to get your museum's Core Documents aligned with all the Required Elements, standards, and best practices.

- List immediate, short, medium, and longer term action steps for each document.
- Either pick one document to focus on, or come up with an overall strategy for getting all five completed.
- Aim for at least one or two immediate action steps to keep up the motivation and act while the workshop is fresh.

Use the worksheets provided or whatever format works for you—just put something in writing.

	Immediate (within the next week)	Short Term (3 months)	Medium Term (6-12 months)	Longer Term (1 year+)
Overall				
Mission				
Code of Ethics				
Strategic Plan				
Collections Management Policy				
Disaster/ Emergency Plan				

Mission Statement

Action Step(s):

When: _____

Who: _____

Resources: _____

Goal for submitting document to AAM for Verification: _____

Notes:

Code of Ethics

Action Step(s):

When: _____

Who: _____

Resources: _____

Goal for submitting document to AAM for Verification: _____

Notes:

Strategic Plan

Action Step(s):

When: _____

Who: _____

Resources: _____

Goal for submitting document to AAM for Verification: _____

Notes:

Collections Management Policy

Action Step(s):

When: _____

Who: _____

Resources: _____

Goal for submitting document to AAM for Verification: _____

Notes:

Disaster Preparedness/Emergency Response Plan

Action Step(s):

When: _____

Who: _____

Resources: _____

Goal for submitting document to AAM for Verification: _____

Notes:

Interpretive Master Plan: Sample Content

The following list contains topics that are considered best practice to include in an interpretive master plan. Each institution's plan will be different and should be organized in a way that best fits its needed. (Adapted from AAM document library).

- Mission statement
- History of Museum & Collections
- Summary of Interpretive Planning Process
- Education Philosophy & Goals
- Interpretive Philosophy & Goals
- Audiences
- Presentation
 - Interpretive Resources
 - Interpretive Themes
 - Interpretive Methods / Delivery Vehicles
- Implementation
 - Budget
 - Personnel
 - Timetable
- Evaluation
- Other
 - Tied to Collections Policies & Plans
 - Tied to Strategic Plan
 - Bilingual Protocols: Spanish Translation & Implementation
 - Design / Accessibility Guidelines
 - Challenges / Opportunities Identified
 - Standards for Interpretive Writing