



## Continuum of Excellence

Supporting and celebrating your museum's commitment to standards



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### What is the Continuum of Excellence?

The Continuum is a pathway of standards-based programs from AAM and other organizations that nurtures a culture of excellence. It supports, motivates and recognizes your museum's ongoing commitment to professionalism, standards and best practices.

Learn about one museum's [Continuum of Excellence journey and Accreditation experience](#).

### Why Strive for Excellence?

Commit to a culture of excellence your museum will:

- Be a stronger asset for its community
- Demonstrate it is worthy of support and public trust
- Ensure sound stewardship of its collections
- Enhance funding opportunities
- Raise the quality of its operations
- Leverage change
- Improve staff and board skills
- Distinguish itself among peers

The Continuum of Excellence helps your museum get there. Whether taking the first step in its professional journey or already accredited, your museum can benefit from the Continuum of Excellence.

### How Does the Continuum Help?

- **It's Flexible:** There are a variety of program options to fit your institution's goals and available time and resources. You choose the program that's right for your museum and decide if and when to move to the next step.
- **It's Accessible:** Programs are open to museums of all sizes and types. You'll find multiple entry points so you can choose the program that works best for your museum.

- **It's Efficient:** The various levels of assessment, feedback and recognition build on one another. Cooperative partnerships with other organizations reduce the time and steps needed to become accredited.
- **It Offers Recognition:** Your museum gets national recognition for each step it takes, enhancing its credibility, exposure, community standing and positioning for funding.
- **It Provides Standards Education and Resources:** Learn about standards and best practices, and benchmark your museum against them through sample documents, online training, peer experts, self-assessment and third-party vetting processes.

## Museum Membership

The Alliance's institutional membership is your museum's first step on the Continuum of Excellence. As a member you and your staff gain access to resources that your museum needs to excel, including: standards and best practices, online learning opportunities and informative publications. The Alliance embraces all museums from "A to Z," art museums to zoos and everything in between. Three membership tiers, beginning with a "pay what you can" option, allow you to self-select your ideal level of benefits.

## Pledge of Excellence

*Show your museum's commitment to ethics, standards and best practices by taking the Pledge online or by email.*

"My museum pledges that, in fulfillment of its educational mission, it will strive to operate according to national standards and best practices to the best of its abilities and in accordance with its resources."

The Pledge is an easy and achievable step along your museum's path to excellence. Showcase your museum's commitment to the field by joining a public list of museums whose staff and leadership have pledged to strive to operate according to field-wide standards and best practices.

## Standards and Excellence Program for History Organizations (StEPs)

*Benchmark your museum against standards at your own pace using performance indicators to tackle challenges in small, manageable steps*

This self-paced, self-study program from the Association of State and Local History is designed specifically for small- to mid-sized history organizations, including volunteer-run institutions. Through a workbook, online resources, and an online community, StEPs helps your museum benchmark its policies and practices against national museum standards by breaking them down into manageable levels: Basic, Good, and Better. You'll receive a certificate after you complete each level.

## Collections Assessment for Preservation (CAP)

*A great first step for small institutions that wish to improve the condition of their collections*

CAP provides small and mid-sized museums with partial funding toward a general conservation assessment that includes all of the institution's collections, buildings, and building systems, as well as its policies and procedures relating to collections care. Participants who complete the program receive an assessment report with prioritized recommendations to improve collections care. CAP is administered by the Foundation of the American Institute for Conservation.

## Museum Assessment Program (MAP)

*Benchmark your museum's practices to standards and strengthen operations through self-assessment and expert peer consultation.*

The Museum Assessment Program (MAP) is a powerful tool designed to support your museum at any point along the Continuum of Excellence. Through a one-year process of self-assessment, institutional activities and consultative peer review, your museum emerges with an analysis of its strengths, weaknesses and opportunities; and a prioritized roadmap for improving operations and meeting standards.

## Core Documents Verification

*Receive recognition and validation that your museum's mission and core policies meet standards for professional museums.*

Build on your museum's accomplishments with a document review program that verifies that your institution's educational mission, strategic plan, emergency plan, code of ethics, and collections management policy meet the standards for professional museums. Use Core Documents Verification as a launching pad for accreditation, as part of the implementation of MAP recommendations or for third-party vetting of documents created as part of earning StEPs certificates.

## Small Museums Accreditation Academy

*An Accreditation readiness program launched for a pilot group of museums in 2016, generously supported by the National Endowment for the Arts.*

The Small Museums Accreditation Academy has concluded for the pilot group of participants. We are currently evaluating their experiences and will reshape the program to ensure that it is as useful as possible to future participants. More information will be available later this year. Contact the accreditation program staff with any questions.

## Accreditation

*Earn recognition for your museum's commitment to, and demonstration of, the professional standards for education, public service and collections care.*

As the museum field's mark of distinction, accreditation offers high profile, peer-based validation of your museum's operations and impact. Accreditation increases your museum's credibility and value to funders, policy makers, community and peers. Accreditation is a powerful tool to leverage change and helps facilitate loans between institutions. The recently streamlined process maintains the same high standards while significantly reducing the time needed for completion.

For more than 40 years, the Accreditation Program has been recognized as the "gold standard" of museum excellence. With its mix of self-assessment, peer review and public recognition, AAM Accreditation helps to ensure the integrity and accessibility of museum collections, reinforce the education and public service roles of museums and promote good governance practices and ethical behavior.

## Getting Started

Step 1: [Join](#) the Alliance today. Complete a membership enrollment form at [aam-us.org/join](http://aam-us.org/join) to begin receiving benefits immediately, including a free PDF copy of *National Standards and Best Practices for U.S. Museums*.

Step 2: Access online resources. The Alliance website ([aam-us.org](http://aam-us.org)) has free resources on [ethics, standards and best practices](#), and an [Excellence Diagnostic Tool](#) to help you determine which program is right for your museum. Sample documents are available to Tier 3 members.

Step 3: Start a conversation with your staff and board. Make a commitment; set a goal. The Alliance has resources to help you every step of the way.

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