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, access, 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.