



THE ACCREDITATION PROCESS:

Summary of Steps and Timing

This document explains the steps in the accreditation process in two formats: in a detailed narrative and in a more simplified at-a-glance format. The [quick reference guides](#) at the end are the at-a-glance version and include the timeframes associated with each step of the process. More detailed information on each step is provided to the museum as it moves through the process, much of which is available at www.aam-us.org/accred. *A Higher Standard: The Museum Accreditation Handbook* is also a valuable resource¹.

PREPARATION

For the first-time applicant museum: Submit an Application Form

1. When it is ready to pursue accreditation, the museum downloads an Application Form from the Accreditation Program section of the AAM website, completes it, and sends it in. The Accreditation Program staff processes and reviews the application at the close of the established application period. The staff ensures the museum is eligible and that there are no obvious factors that may prevent or impede its participation in the program.
2. The Accreditation Program staff notifies the institution regarding its application. If the museum's application is accepted, it will be assigned a date to start the self-study process and sent an invoice for the application fee.
(See www.aam-us.org/museumresources/accred/costs.cfm for program fees.)

For the accredited museum: Schedule a subsequent review (“reaccreditation”)

1. All accredited museums must undergo a subsequent accreditation review within ten years of their last accreditation award, or earlier if deemed necessary by the Accreditation Commission. On behalf of the Accreditation Commission, the Program staff initiate the review in the eighth anniversary year so it can be completed (approximately) by the 10-year anniversary of the museum's last accreditation date. (No application fee is assessed for subsequent reviews. See www.aam-us.org/museumresources/accred/costs.cfm for a breakdown of program costs and fees.)

¹ Museums participating in the Accreditation Program should contact the staff for a free copy. See the end of this document for contact information. The *Handbook* is available to all others as part of the *Accreditation Resource Kit*, which is purchased through the AAM Bookstore.

2. One or two years before the subsequent review is to begin, the Accreditation Program staff sends notification to the museum about its upcoming review schedule. This correspondence indicates the timeframe during which the review must begin and provides materials on preparation and timing. The museum is given the opportunity to select a preferred month within a general timeframe for the review to begin.

SELF-STUDY

3. During the established start month, the Accreditation Program staff officially initiates the museum's review by sending the museum its Self-Study Questionnaire and other necessary materials and instructions to complete it. The Self-Study is a detailed questionnaire, based on the *Characteristics of an Accreditable Museum* designed to gather basic information about all aspects of operations and programs through objective and subjective questions and supporting documentation. The museum is assigned one year to complete the Self-Study.
4. The museum submits its Self-Study by the established due date.
5. The Accreditation Program staff reviews the Self-Study to determine if any clarification or additional information is necessary, and if anything stands out that could potentially delay the review process. The results are issued to the museum in approximately 3-4 months in the form of the Self-Study Review Checklist.
6. The museum responds to any requests for missing documents, information or clarification of materials (usually within 4-6 weeks).
7. *For first-time applicant museums only:* Once the Self-Study is complete and any requests for clarification have been appropriately responded to, the staff assign the museum to the agenda of one of three Accreditation Commission meetings held each year. The Accreditation Commission reviews the museum's Self-Study and takes one of the following actions:
 - **Grants interim approval:** This signifies that the museum's Self-Study is complete, and the museum appears eligible and ready for a site visit. The museum proceeds to the site visit phase of the process.
 - **Tables its decision:** The Commission requires further information/clarification or the correction of specific deficiencies. The museum has 6-12 months to address the Commission's concerns. If the required actions have been taken when the Commission reviews it again (see #17 for details on possible decision types/outcomes), the museum moves to the next step in the review process. If concerns are not adequately addressed, then interim approval is denied.

- **Denies interim approval:** Interim approval is generally denied because the museum proves ineligible for accreditation, does not appear to be a strong candidate or has problems too severe to be addressed within one year. The museum must withdraw and can reapply in the future.

The museum receives the decision within one month of the meeting.

SITE VISIT

8. The Accreditation Program staff sends the museum a list of names of potential Visiting Committee members along with professional profiles of each individual listed. The director is asked to indicate any conflicts of interest with these people and return the list by a specified due date (usually about one month).
9. Upon receipt of the list from the museum, the Accreditation staff ask one of the approved candidates from the list to serve as the Visiting Committee Team Contact. The peer reviewers who conduct site reviews are senior museum professionals who volunteer their time. Therefore, because of busy schedules and other commitments, requests to multiple people may have to be made before the Team Contact is secured. This process can take anywhere from six weeks to six months or more.
10. The Team Contact selects the second Visiting Committee member from the list of individuals already approved by the museum. The Team Contact works with the second team member and the museum directly to schedule a visit. The site visit usually takes place within 3-9 months of the match from the time the full team is secured, but can be scheduled up to one year in advance if necessary.
11. The museum director and the Visiting Committee confer regarding schedules, interviews, facility tours and any other arrangements necessary for a complete on-site survey of the museum's operations. The visit requires 1½ -2 full days. The museum is expected to accommodate the Visiting Committee in a manner that allows for a thorough review of the institution. The museum director is responsible for arranging an agenda for the visit in consultation with the Team Contact.
(For more about the site visit expectations and peer reviewers duties associated with a visit, see the Site Visit Expectations and the Peer Reviewer Manual at www.aam-us.org/getinvolved/pr/index.cfm).
12. A minimum of one month prior to the visit, the Accreditation Program staff sends the Visiting Committee the museum's Self-Study.
13. While on site, the Visiting Committee's charge is observe the institution's operations and determine whether the museum meets the Characteristics of an Accreditable Museum and the Accreditation Commission's Expectations, verify the accuracy of the contents of the Self-Study, assess the museum in light of the Accreditation Program's two core questions, and communicate its findings in writing to the Accreditation Commission. The team will tour

public and private spaces, explore the facilities and collections, meet with the director, and interview key staff members and representatives of the governing authority.

14. All expenses incurred by the Visiting Committee are the responsibility of the host museum. Expenses for the Visiting Committee *generally* range from \$1,500 to \$2,400 in total for two members. Committee members pay their own expenses and file an expense report with AAM, who reimburses each member directly, then invoices the host museum for the committee's expenses.
15. Within four weeks following the visit, the Visiting Committee writes a report for the Accreditation Commission which details its observations about the museum. The Visiting Committee also provides its confidential advisory conclusion to the Commission on whether to grant accreditation. The report and the museum's Self-Study materials are returned to the Accreditation Program staff. During this same time, the museum completes an evaluation of the peer reviewers' performance during the site visit and submits it to the program staff (the Visiting Committee does not receive the results until after the Accreditation Commission's decision is made).

FINAL ACCREDITATION DECISION

16. Once Accreditation Program staff receives the Visiting Committee's report and the Self-Study, the museum is assigned to the next available Accreditation Commission meeting agenda. Program staff notifies the museum director when the Commission is scheduled to review the museum (based on the meeting dates, the waiting period may be up to 5 months).
17. At the meeting the Accreditation Commission reviews the museum's Self-Study and the Visiting Committee's report, and makes a determination on accredited status. The Commission makes one of the following decisions:
 - **Grants accreditation:** The Commission decides to grant or continue accredited status. Accreditation can be granted for the full 10 years or the museum can be flagged for an early review at 5 years if concerns are cited.
 - **Tables its decision:** The Accreditation Commission tables its decision on a museum's accreditation when it identifies one or more specific concerns/operational deficiencies that are barriers to the institution's ability to meet the Characteristics of an Accreditable Museum, program requirements, eligibility, and/or Accreditation Commission Expectations, but which it anticipates can be addressed within one-year or less. Tabling provides the Commission with an alternative to denial so the museum can resolve very specific operational challenges in a focused and timely manner. Museums are required to submit a progress report half-way through the year and a final report at the end. The Accreditation Commission reviews each report, and after the final report, decides to accredit or deny.

- **Denies the award:** A decision of denial is reserved for failure to meet multiple Characteristics of an Accreditable Museum and eligibility criteria, and/or for numerous serious deficiencies that are so fundamental and systemic that they affect many, or all, other aspects of an institution's operations and ability to fulfill its mission according to best practices and standards for museums. A denial decision can also result if a museum that was tabled was unable to demonstrate adequate progress and/or sufficiently address the Commission's concerns by the end of a one-year tabling period.
 - **Defers a decision:** The Accreditation Commission may defer making one of the above decisions when it feels it needs more information, clarification or expertise on an issue in order to fairly assess an institution.
18. Within one month of the meeting, the museum receives a letter from the Chair of the Accreditation Commission, officially conveying the Commission's decision. A copy of the Visiting Committee's report accompanies the letter. Museums accredited also receive an official certificate and other materials to help publicize the award.
19. Regardless of the final decision, all Self-Study materials are returned to the museum. The Accreditation Program does not maintain copies of a museum's Self-Study once the review is complete, only official correspondence and a copy of the Visiting Committee's report are kept on file.
20. Accreditation is a dynamic process that does not conclude with the Commission's decision. Once accredited, all museums are expected to exhibit the characteristics of an accreditable museum, maintain current professional standards and practices, and work to keep pace with them as they rise and evolve. Therefore, to maintain accredited status, all accredited museums are required to undergo a subsequent accreditation review within every ten years or sooner if accreditation is granted with concern.

For more information about the AAM Accreditation Program:

visit: www.aam-us.org/accred

call: (202) 289-9116

write:

**AAM Accreditation Program
1575 Eye Street, NW, Suite 400
Washington, DC 20005**

e-mail: accreditation@aam-us.org

QUICK REFERENCE GUIDE TO THE ACCREDITATION REVIEW PROCESS

The Initial Accreditation Review (for Applicant Museums)

	TIME * (months)	CUMULATIVE TIME (months)
APPLICATION <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Museum submits application. Application reviewed at one of the predetermined application review periods during the year; upon confirmation of acceptance, the Self-Study Questionnaire, its assigned due date, and the application fee invoice are sent to museum. 	1 (from application deadline)	1
SELF-STUDY <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Museum spends one year completing questionnaire and assembling supporting documents. Museum submits all materials by assigned due date. Accreditation Program staff confirms receipt and begins thorough review of materials for completeness and eligibility. In 3-4 months, museum receives review results in the form of the Self-Study Review Checklist. Museum responds to any requests for clarification or information, and/or submits any missing documents. 	15-16	16-17
INTERIM APPROVAL <ul style="list-style-type: none"> When Self-Study is complete (all requests appropriately responded to), museum is placed on the next available Accreditation Commission meeting agenda. Commission reviews Self-Study to determine if museum is ready to move to next step in the process. Commission grants or denies interim approval, or votes to table its decision. Museum notified of decision within one month. 	3-4	19-21
SITE VISIT <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Museum receives list of potential Visiting Committee members to approve; museum returns list within one month. Accreditation Program staff makes request (more than one if necessary) to one of approved individuals to serve as the Visiting Committee Team Contact. The confirmed Team Contact selects second team member; coordinates with museum and second team member to set visit date. Museum prepares for site visit (scheduled several months in advance). Visit occurs. Visiting Committee writes and submits report. Museum placed on next available Commission meeting agenda. 	8-16	27-37
FINAL ACCREDITATION DECISION <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Accreditation Commission reviews all Self-Study materials again, along with the Visiting Committee's report. Commission grants or denies accreditation, or votes to table decision. Museum receives decision letter and a copy of the Visiting Committee report. (Self-study materials are returned to museum separately) If accreditation is granted, the next review date is stated in the decision letter (5-10 years). 	4-6	31-43

QUICK REFERENCE GUIDE TO THE ACCREDITATION REVIEW PROCESS

The Subsequent Review (for Accredited Museums)

	TIME* (months)	CUMULATIVE TIME* (months)
<p>NOTIFICATION / SCHEDULING THE SUBSEQUENT REVIEW</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Museum notified of upcoming subsequent review, 7-8 years after last award. • A specific start time is established at the beginning of year 8. • Accreditation Program staff officially initiates the review in the chosen start month; museum receives the Self-Study Questionnaire and its assigned due date. 	--	--
<p>SELF-STUDY</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Museum spends one year completing questionnaire and assembling the supporting documents. • Museum submits all materials by assigned due date. • Accreditation Program staff confirms receipt and begins thorough review of materials for completeness and eligibility. • In 3-4 months, museum receives review results in the form of the Self-Study Review Checklist. • Museum responds to any requests for clarification or information and/or submits any missing documents. 	15-16	15-16
<p>SITE VISIT</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Museum receives list of potential Visiting Committee members to approve; museum returns list within one month. • Accreditation Program staff makes request (more than one if necessary) to one of approved individuals to serve as the Visiting Committee Team Contact. • The confirmed Team Contact selects second team member; coordinates with museum and second team member to set visit date. • Museum prepares for site visit (scheduled several months in advance). • Visit occurs. • Visiting Committee writes and submits report. • Museum placed on next available Commission meeting agenda. 	8-16	23-32
<p>ACCREDITATION DECISION</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accreditation Commission reviews all Self-Study materials along with the Visiting Committee's report. • Commission grants or denies accreditation, or votes to table decision. • Museum receives decision letter and a copy of the Visiting Committee report. • If accreditation is granted, the next review date is stated in the decision letter (5-10 years). • Self-study materials are returned to museum. 	4-6	27-38

** Times given are approximate and do not factor in possible extensions to the Self-Study period and/or tabling actions by the Commission at either the interim or final decision stage.*