

The Importance of Accreditation to Children's Museums

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Accreditation

A Mark of Distinction



Peer-based validation that the museum is meeting professional standards for education, public service & collections care

The Continuum of Excellence

Supporting and celebrating your museum's commitment to standards



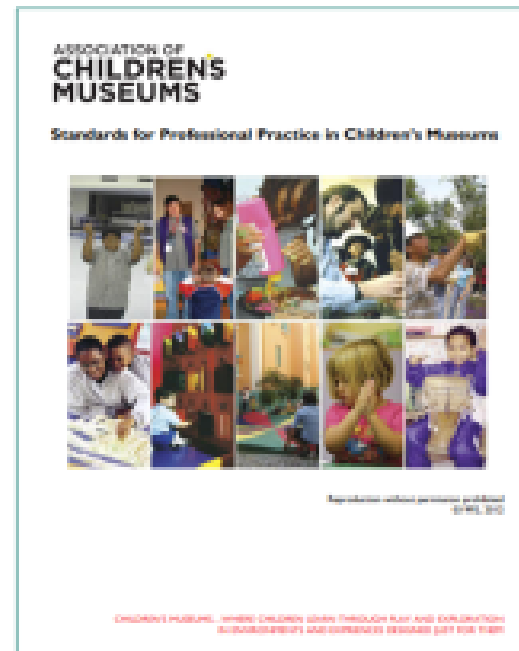
“Accreditation Standards”

Core Standards for Museums

- 38 broad based outcomes
- 7 categories – cover all areas of operations
- Not prescriptive or quantitative



Discipline-Specific



Steps in the Process

1st
time
only!

1. Core Documents Verification
2. Application
3. Self-Study (*questionnaire + attachments*)
4. Site Visit
(*2 Peer Reviewers, aka the Visiting Committee*)
5. Accreditation Commission: Review & Decision
6. Repeat every ~ 10 Years

An icon showing a white envelope with a brown flap, with the words "Mission Statement" written in black on the envelope.

Mission Statement

An icon showing a pair of black scales of justice with the words "Code of Ethics" written in white on a dark background.

Institutional Code of Ethics

An icon showing a colorful graphic with the word "planning" in large orange letters and "Strategic" in smaller blue letters below it.

Strategic Institutional Plan

An icon showing a perspective view of a library's wooden bookshelves filled with books.

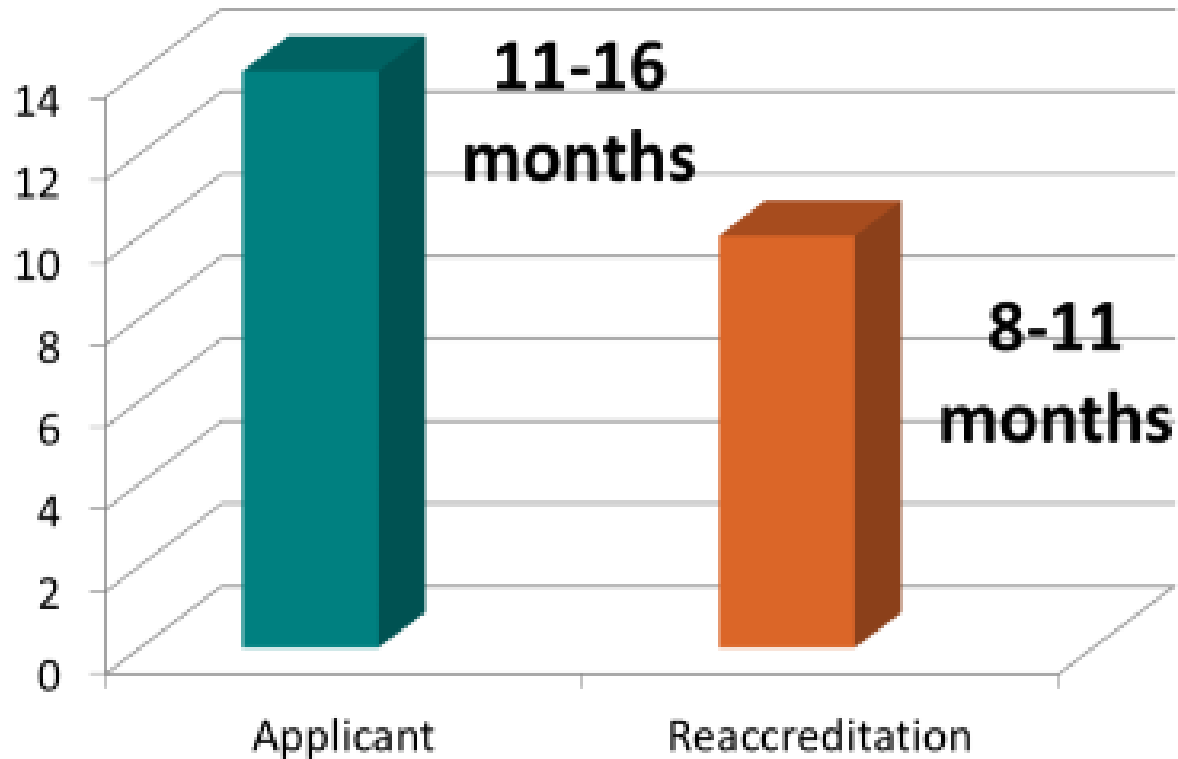
Collections Management Policy

An icon showing a white document titled "Emergency Response Checklist" with a blue pen resting on it.

Disaster Preparedness and Emergency Response Plan

- ## Core Documents Verification Is...
- ✓ Document review
 - ✓ A demonstration of professionalism
 - ✓ Confirmation key policies meet standards

Time



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Costs = Investment in Your Museum



- Review Fee (every 10 years)
- Site visit expenses (travel, lodging, food)
- Annual fee (for some museums)



Staff, board, volunteers



The work leading up to being ready for accreditation + the process itself + keeping up with standards

AAM Accreditation at The Children's Museum of Indianapolis

Chris Carron, Director of Collections



Beginnings of AAM Accreditation Program & my museums

- AAM launched its accreditation program in 1971 with 16 museums
- The first museum officially accredited was my former employer the Grand Rapids Public Museum
- Another one of the 16 was a children's museum - my current employer - The Children's Museum of Indianapolis



My interactions with Accreditation

- ▶ I've been through the process of reaccreditation three times
- ▶ I'm an AAM peer reviewer for both their Museum Assessment and Accreditation Programs



Why are so few children's museums accredited?

- Before 1995 AAM defined museums as keepers of collections, and many children's museums aren't collecting institutions
- The Accreditation process used to be voluminous
- Accreditation does cost some money, time, and resources
- Many children's museums are small and relatively young



Accreditation for non-collecting museums



- ▶ In 1995 AAM changed the eligibility requirements for accreditation to allow non-collecting institutions
- ▶ Three categories of collection stewardship in the Self-Study:
 - ▶ Museums that own or manage collections
 - ▶ Museums that use or borrow collections
 - ▶ Museums that are non-collections based
- ▶ The policies required for accreditation also differ depending on which category fits your institution

Tips for Success: Start Early

- If this is your first time follow *The Continuum of Excellence*
- There is no fixed “right time” to begin the accreditation process
- If you’re seeking reaccreditation, you already know the year of your next review
- Allow time to study the new rules and guidelines
- We had to write or rewrite some core documents and get them approved
- The whole process could take 1½ to 2 years
- AAM will be flexible if your institution is in the midst of dramatic change



Tips for Success: Be Honest



- Don't expect to be perfect. Excellence is an ongoing process
- Reviewers work for museums too. They know all the challenges you face
- Yes, there are some foundational things you need to have...
- But if you're not done in a certain area be honest about it
- Tell them you recognize where you are and where you want to be
- Tell them about your progress to get to this point
- Tell them your plan for the future

Tips for Success: Involve your whole institution



- ▶ Accreditation compares every aspect of your operation to accepted standards
- ▶ Lots of people will need to help you answer the Self-Study questions
- ▶ The Self-Study process and Peer Reviewer Visit are learning opportunities for your staff and your Board
- ▶ Everyone should feel accomplished when you achieve accreditation!

Tips for Success: Incorporate accreditation work into your overall work plan

- ▶ Nobody wants an extra assignment
- ▶ If staff view accreditation as a burden or an “add-on” they’ll be reluctant to participate
- ▶ If they realize accreditation can help them achieve existing goals, and improve what they do, they will approach the process with the right attitude
- ▶ Your Self-Study and Accreditation Report can be great tools for strategic planning, getting grants, and setting priorities



Benefits to your museum: Why should you consider accreditation?



- ▶ It is validating to be validated!
- ▶ Your museum will be better
- ▶ Accreditation signals to others that your museum knows what it's doing
- ▶ The museum profession can learn a lot from children's museums!

Benefits for your own professional development

- ▶ Working on the self-study and site review exposes you to every aspect of your museum's operations
- ▶ It helps you think critically and strategically about what you do
- ▶ You'll be more familiar with how best standards and practices look
- ▶ You may want to apply to be a peer reviewer, which is a great way to learn best practices from other museums



Long Island Children's Museum's AAM Accreditation Journey

Jeanmarie Walsh Mansfield
Director of Special Projects &
Community Initiatives



Core Documents

- Main point person
- Document teams
- Shared documents
- Realistic timeline
- Utilize resources
- Collections are a unique situation



Information Dissemination

- Morning Meetings
- Department Meetings
- Director's and Senior Staff Meetings
- Board Meetings



Site Visit Preparation

LICM did a virtual one

- Peer Reviewers
- Prepare in advance
- Reach out to stakeholders and board early
- Create comprehensive videos
- Incorporate the entire staff



After Accreditation



- Celebrate!
- Continual training for new staff
- Update addenda and documents on rolling basis



Accreditation Experience

Who we are

- > dedicated to children birth-12 and their families since 1980
- > 1+ million served annually, including 250k in neighborhoods
- > audience reflects Houstonians
- > bilingual, English and Spanish

A Playground for Your Mind™



Project-based learning

linked to school standards

Exhibits

12 exhibits

Tot*Spot

SECRET spy missions

Learning labs

- Science Station
- Power Science Lab
- Maker Annex
- Library



Onsite STEM Labs

Community programs

100% free to families

Out-of-school time programs

- Afterschool STEM
- Summer literacy camps
- Activity kits for home use



Parent engagement programs

- Parent/child workshops
- School family learning events
- Literacy kits for loan & to keep

Our catalyst for pursuing accreditation (CMH is non-collecting)



Get A Grant.

Learn more about available grants, obtaining grant funding, applicant demographic information, as well as grant panelist expertise and characteristics.

[See Available Grants](#)



Our process flow

1. Found a friend/mentor to help
2. Led by Executive Director
3. Searched the internet for examples
4. Self Study supported by Summer Intern from Baylor University
5. We waited
6. Then COVID hit and our site visit was virtual
7. We were anxious
8. Then we were awarded accreditation

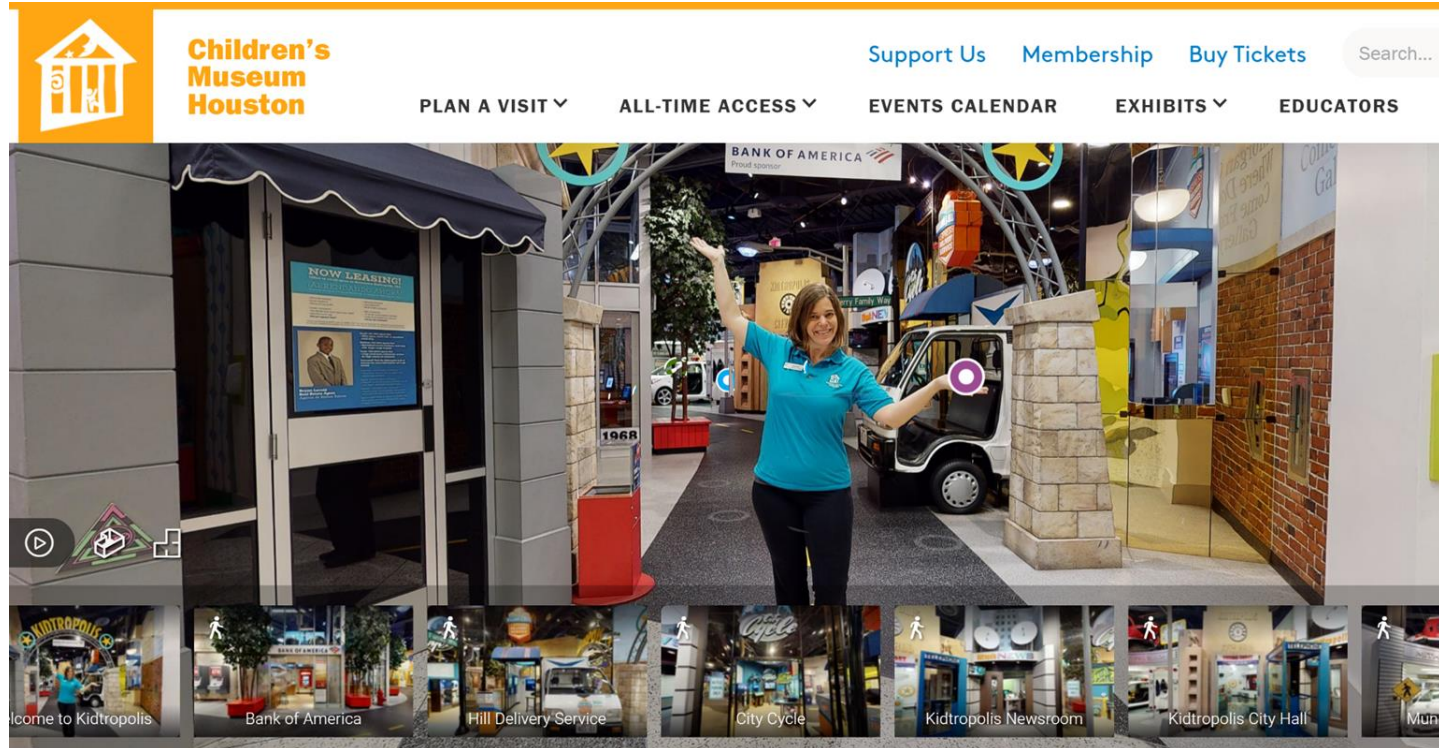


How did virtual work for us?





How did virtual work for us?



Accreditation advantages to CMH



1. Well-regarded credentialing
2. Process that required consolidation and filling of gaps
3. Scheduled updates that cause us to look back and update each year