

Governance Policy and Procedures

Good governance is essential for a museum's public accountability, sustainability and effective operations. Clear policy and leadership provide guidance to staff and volunteers, ensure that roles and values of the museum are defined and communicated. Good governance also ensures an effective use of the museum's resources as well as functional and consistent museum operations.

Museum governance can vary from boards that focus on the policy development or act as advisors to museum management, to those that actively participate in museum management and day to day operations. Often the type of museum board depends on the resources that are available to the board for museum operations.

As a governing body, the board assumes responsibility for the museum and its collection and ensures that the purposes for which the museum exists are fulfilled. The board accepts all legal responsibility for the organization, defines policy and procedures, manages and coordinates resources and develops long-term strategy and direction. As trustees of the museum's collections, the museum board has a role of public accountability and should be open in its decisions and operations.

To insure that the roles and responsibilities of the museum board are clear and consistent, boards should operate under a written constitution and bylaws and follow a written document that defines the purpose and objectives of the museum, as well as the duties and responsibilities of the board, its officers and committees. Specifically, this document should address the mission, values and mandate of the museum, the size and characteristics of the board, the operational realities of the museum and even provisions for the dissolution of the board, if required.

Museum governing bodies are responsible for the following:

- Defining the museum's purpose, values and priorities and ensuring that they are reviewed on a regular basis.
- Ensuring that operational policies and procedures exist for each area of the museum monitoring the activities of the museum against these standards.
- Monitoring and evaluating staff that report directly to the board and ensuring that these measures are in place for those that report to other administrators of the museum such as a director.
- Developing, implementing and monitoring fundraising initiatives and budgets and insuring the all financial actions of the museum are recorded using generally accepted accounting principles and filled with the necessary level of governments and agencies. This may include a regular system of financial audits.

- Working with other stakeholders of the museum such as the community and staff to create and regularly review business, strategic and operational plans for the museum.
- Safeguarding the museum's tangible and intangible resources through the development of risk management policies and procedures. This includes ensuring that various liabilities and insurance requirements are addressed.
- Ensuring that the museum's operations and activities are transparent to the museum stakeholders and ensuring that good communications standards are in place for the museum through communications policies and procedures.
- Ensuring that the governing body operates under a constitution and bylaws that defines the organization of the body, the terms of membership, and operations of the body. This will also define officers of the board, authority and how decisions will be made. For incorporation purposes, review the regional and provincial regulations.
- Ensuring that a framework and schedule for general and annual meetings is established where reports on the various operation of the museum are made.

Specifically, governance policy and procedures documents should address:

- Museum board governance, performance and reporting
- Museum operations policies and procedure development and review
- Financial management of the museum
- Human resource management
- Accountability and communications
- Business and strategic planning

For more information on this topic see:

Guidelines for the Operations of Community Museums in Newfoundland and Labrador
Governing Body and the Museum Board – Page 19.

Resources for Developing Governance Policy and Procedures

British Columbia Museum Association Best Practices Module: Governance

<http://www.museumsassn.bc.ca/Images/Archives/BP%206%20Governance.pdf>

Western Australian Museum - Structures for Museum Management

<http://www.museum.wa.gov.au/services/map/musmanage.asp>

Scottish Museum Council Stewardship Division - Guidance Notes: Forming a Constitution

http://www.scottishmuseums.org.uk/pdfs/Factsheets/forming_a_constitution_June_2003.pdf

Examples of Governance Policy and Procedures: Available Offline

Museum of Health Care at Kingston Governance Standard

<http://www.museumofhealthcare.ca/>

Orillia Museum of Art and History Operations and Policy Manual,
December 2005

http://www.orilliamuseum.org/manual/Operations_and_Policy_Manual_December_2005.pdf

Robert V. Fullerton Art Museum Governance Policy

http://policies.csusb.edu/museum_governance_policy.htm

Marine Museum of the Great Lakes at Kingston – Constitution and Bylaws

<http://www.marmuseum.ca/constitution.html>