

## MUSEUM NOTE

### GOVERNANCE: Mission Statements

As a governing body of a community museum, this tip sheet will help your museum to comply with the Ontario government's **Governance Standard** outlined in the *Standards for Community Museums in Ontario*.

Standards enable community museums to:

- provide the appropriate care and management of collections
- meet visitors' expectations
- be accountable and transparent to the community, funders and donors

### Objective of the Governance Standard

As a community museum, you must be governed according to standards and be open and accountable to the public for your decisions.

### *Requirements*

1. A community museum must be:
  - a. governed by a publicly accountable body<sup>1</sup>
  - b. established by a written document(s) which include(s) descriptions of:
    - authority for the museum
    - **museum's mission statement that**
      - **defines the museum's purpose**
      - **makes a commitment to the museum's role in the public trust**
      - **identifies who the museum serves**
      - **identifies what the museum will collect**
      - **identifies the impact it will have in its community**
    - how the museum will dissolve its assets and liabilities should it cease to operate

### Objective of the mission statement

*"The mission statement is the centerpiece for an institution. It explains the museum's purpose and is the guidepost for institutional planning, development, and positioning for the future.*

---

<sup>1</sup> Municipal museums may be governed by a committee or board of management that advises council.

*A well-conceived mission statement provides the foundation for leadership to shape institutional vision, values and strategic plans as well as other operational documents, such as policies, that guide the work and direction of the institution.*<sup>2</sup>

— Gail Anderson, *Museum Mission Statements: Building a Distinct Identity*

Many museums are operating with mission statements drafted in the early 1980s. These often describe what museum staff do – “collect, preserve, educate, exhibit, research” – and then conclude with a vague purpose “for the benefit of future generations.”

Such a narrow focus impedes a museum’s public accountability.

Your museum’s mission statement should be:

- specific
- developed by the museum’s governance board and staff, in consultation with your community
- unique to its purpose i.e. community-focused , not internally focused

Your mission statement should answer the questions:

- What business are we in?
- Who do we serve? *The community or audience we want to serve.*
- Why do we exist? *The difference the museum makes in its community and what it will provide the community (audience) it serves in support of the end goal*

If your museum is also a designated heritage property, such as a national historic site, your mission – to protect and conserve the site – is established by the designation.

Your challenge is to work with the community to define your mission statement as something other than an end in itself. For example, the mission statement of a local museum in a nationally designated post office can be to build a sense of place and identity, helping to define the town, village or hamlet.

## **Examples of appropriate mission statements**

The mission statements below clearly identify the museum’s **purpose and end goal**, as well as the relationship to its audience and community:

---

<sup>2</sup> Gail Anderson, ed. *Museum Mission Statements: Building a Distinct Identity*. Washington, D.C.: American Association of Museums, 2000, p.1.

Museum of Ontario Archaeology

*Through stewardship, research, and education the Museum continually strives to advance our understanding of Ontario's archaeological heritage. We bring the human past to life, **make it relevant to understanding the present, and inspire an appreciation of, and respect for, Ontario's cultural diversity.***

Textile Museum of Canada

*The Textile Museum of Canada's mission is to engage the public in the discovery, appreciation and understanding of diverse cultural experiences through the art and craft of textiles, both past and present, and through this rich lens **advance understanding of local and global issues.***

Waterford Heritage & Agricultural Museum

*Waterford Heritage & Agricultural Museum (WHAM) offers a vibrant public space where community members can gather to learn, to create, to discuss, to perform, and to socialize. Through its collection, research, exhibitions, and programming, WHAM creates **opportunities for connections and participation.***

### **Put your mission statement to work**

A well-crafted mission statement should guide all aspects of museum operations and decisions.

As the governing board, this is where your investment of time and critical thinking will pay off for the success of your museum in its community.

Your statement will help you make governance (e.g. policy) and operational (e.g. staff) decisions about your:

- collections
- exhibits
- programs
- organizational (strategic) planning
- research
- community focus
- new initiatives (e.g. project grant funding, partnerships)
- work plans and performance indicators

### **Evaluating Success**

As an organization operating in the **public trust**, a museum's governing board and staff must regularly review and evaluate its success in carrying out its mission.

*"In the long run, it is these outcomes that matter – not good will, not an accumulation of resources, not good process, and not even highly acclaimed programs, **but actual outcomes, impacts and results.**"<sup>3</sup>*

## Recommended Resources

Alberta Museums Association Standard Practices Handbook for Museums, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition. 2014. *Excellent Governance and Operations resource which includes Purpose "The Reason for Being" and Drafting a Mission Statement, pp.68-70.*

Anderson, Gail (ed.). *Museum Mission Statements: Building a Distinct Identity.* Washington, D.C.: American Association of Museums, 2000

CMOG Standards Resources: <http://www.museumsontario.com/en/35/597/148> for: Linton, Jon. Archived OMA webinar and notes on Mission and Vision Statements. March 2013

<http://uncatalogedmuseum.blogspot.ca/2012/02/mission-accomplished.html>

---

<sup>3</sup> Stephen Weil, "From Being *about* Something to Being *for* Somebody: The Ongoing Transformation of the American Museum" in *Daedalus*, Journal of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, Summer 1999, p.240.