

MUSEUM NOTE

GOVERNANCE: Policy versus procedure

This Museum Note will help your museum to comply with the Governance Standard outlined in the *Standards for Community Museums in Ontario*. It will help you fulfill the obligations of **public trust** by creating standard practices that you can work towards.

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.ⁱ
- 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

2. The museum's governing body must:

- a. be established by a *written document* which outlines:
 - its composition and structure – including selection of members and terms of office
 - its obligation to ethical behaviour and the avoidance of conflict of interest – as a body and as individuals
 - its obligation to meet municipal, provincial and federal legislative requirements that have an impact on its decisions or activities
 - its responsibilities and duties, including:
 - recruiting, supervising and evaluating the museum's curator or director (i.e. the museum's chief manager)
 - *formulating the museum's statement of purpose*
 - *formulating written policy governing operations and defining programs*
 - securing funding necessary to carry out the museum's programs

- preparing or approving an annual budget and monitoring it to ensure public accountability
 - *ensuring that the purposes for which the museum exists are being fulfilled*
 - ensuring that the collection is being cared for under proper conditions
- b. meet regularly and as often as necessary to conduct its business effectively
- meetings must follow a written agenda and a written record must be kept of all discussions and decisions
3. The museum's operation and administration must:
- a. meet municipal, provincial and federal legislative requirements that have a bearing on its operations and activities
4. The museum and its staff must:
- a. demonstrate a commitment to ethical behaviour as an institution and as individuals.
5. The museum's operations and activities must be:
- directed by short and long-term written plans (e.g. business plan, strategic plan, visioning plan or master plan) that are:
 - approved by the governing body
 - *contain goals and objectives relevant to the museum's statement of purpose*

The *Standards for Community Museums in Ontario* are a guide for what museums, in general, must do.

The policies created by an individual museum provide the internal framework for your work and take into consideration the type and size of your museum, your mission and the broader community.

The goal of policy development is to:

- help a museum achieve its vision, statement of purpose or mission
- gives the governing body and staff the authority and guidance to do their jobs
- clarifies expectations
- provides a concrete method of accountability

Policy

A museum should have policies in place for:

- governance
- finance
- community relations
- collections management and development
- conservation
- education and interpretation (programming)

- exhibition
- research (publications)
- human resource development (including volunteers)

While the board may delegate the role of developing these policies to a senior staff member it is responsible for ensuring these policies are in place and that all policies relate to each other without contradiction or inconsistency.

The board must also approve the final policies and ensure they are reviewed – and revised as necessary – on a regular basis (i.e., at least every three years).

Procedures

A policy is only as good as its implementation plan.

Policies commit to following established procedures (such as public accountability and openness of operations) and may be reviewed and approved by the governing body.

Procedures are commonly created for:

- museum activities related to collections management
- planning and delivery of public programs (including exhibits)
- emergency and disaster preparedness (human and collection)
- facilities maintenance and housekeeping.

Human resources (hiring, orientation and performance review), general office and financial administration procedures may also be beneficial and support public accountability.

Procedures are usually developed separately by staff and are **not** included in the policies themselves.

Procedures should be reviewed constantly – with changes approved and implemented by senior staff.

All staff and volunteers should have access to the museum's Procedures Manual, which may contain copies of the relevant policies they support.

Roles

The establishment of policy is a key role of your museum's governing body.

It is responsible for:

- policy direction
- review of the policy
- oversight of the policy

Museum staff are responsible for:

- planning and general decision-making

- evaluating the success of the policy

A good policy:

- clearly states how it relates to the museum's statement of purpose
- defines key elements of the policy
- briefly describes the goal of the policy
- outlines essential roles and responsibilities of museum staff to achieve these goals
- allows for changing circumstances without requiring revision
- should be reviewed periodically – and changes must be approved by the board

By-laws and policies

While museums that have been established through by-law already address many governance policy requirements, including governance, human resources and finance, they must be reviewed regularly

Many by-laws are outdated or combine the governance of a museum with that of the municipality. They can also be cumbersome to revise.

The *Standards for Community Museums in Ontario* and the resources recommended below identify topics that your governing body should address when developing museum policy.

Recommended Resources

Alberta Museums Association. *Standard Practices Handbook for Museums*, 3rd edition. 2014. “*Outlines the guidelines and standards of leading and managing museums to make the most effective possible contributions to the communities they serve with the resources available to them.*” pp.53-157.

CMOG Standards Resources: <https://members.museumsontario.ca/resources/tools-policies/CMOG-standard-resources>

Brooks-Joiner, Carrie. Archived OMA webinar and notes on Roles and Responsibilities of Boards. February 2013.

Governance

Governance policy examples shared by: Hamilton Civic Museums, Simcoe County Museum, Owen Sound Museums. Other policy samples can be found in the remaining sections of the Standards Resources along with:

Kathryn Pankowski. *Good Practice in Exhibit Policy*

Department of Museum Studies, University of Leicester. *Writing a Museum Education Policy*

Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport. *Museum Note #4 Developing a Conservation Policy for the Museum.*

Policy and Planning

Museums Association of Saskatchewan. *Museum Standards & Policies: Make Them Work For You*. February 2011

ⁱ Municipal museums may be governed by a committee or board of management that advises council.