

Minimum Standards and Best Practices for museums and historical societies receiving Absolute Charters in New York State cluster around six overarching principles of practice. They are designed to guide organizations in their development, elucidate expectations of acceptable performance, and help an organization measure its effectiveness as an educator and steward of public assets.

## **I. Organization**

A museum or historical society with an absolute charter has complied with all local, state, and federal laws and regulations. It is incorporated to serve a public purpose, has gathered appropriate resources to serve its mission and is open and accessible to the public on a regular basis.

- It is legally organized as a nonprofit or is a functional area of a larger nonprofit organization, an educational institution or a governmental entity.
- It is essentially educational in nature.
- It has been open to the public for at least five years.
- It is open to the public at least 1,000 hours per year if operating budget is in excess of \$100,000 per year. (Any other activities that the organization does through out the year can be contributed to the 1,000 hours.)
- It has fiscal resources allocated appropriately to accomplish its mission.
- It has a clear memorandum of agreement with auxiliary organizations, such as Friends groups, if applicable, governing mutual responsibilities and shared resources.
- Have a written plan in place for dissolving the organization should the Board and members deem it necessary. This plan identifies where resources will be deposited or transferred and why. The plan will determine how the public interest in the collections, properties, lands, buildings or other assets will be protected.

## **II. Mission**

A museum or historical society with an absolute charter has a clear sense of mission and prioritizes its activities to meet its stated mission.

- It has a written mission statement that is a clear, written declaration of the organization's public purpose. At a minimum, this statement defines

whom the organization serves, what actions it engages in to meet its mission, and how these actions are carried out.

### **III. Governance**

A museum or historical society with an absolute charter organizes its governing authority, staff, financial resources, collections, public programs and other activities to meet its stated Mission and to fulfill its public trust obligations. The governance structure and process effectively advance diversity of participation and the organization's mission. The staff and governing authority have a clear and shared understanding of their roles and responsibilities. The Board understands and exercises fiduciary responsibility for all the institution's assets. The Board sets policy and the staff implements policy and reports to the full board. The organization manifests current and appropriate evidence of planning for the future.

- It has a functioning constitution or by-laws that is board-approved and is filed with the State Education Department which states the organization's name, purpose, governing structure, lines of authority, board duties, officers, and terms of office for setting a course of trustee membership and organizational renewal.
- It has at least three board members who are independent of each other (they are not related nor associated in any business activity).
- There are regularly scheduled board meetings, an annual meeting, and annual elections.
- There is a printed organizational chart mapping out the relationships of the board to its committees, its staff, and its constituents, and/or a written chain of command.
- There is a written, approved, and active conflict of interest, whistleblower and a code of ethics. The American Alliance of Museums has an outline for the code of ethics at <http://aam-us.org/resources/ethics-standards-and-best-practices/code-of-ethics-for-museums>
- Has 501(c)(3) tax exempt status from the IRS

### **IV. Administration, Human Resources, Finance, and Facilities**

A museum or historical society with an absolute charter has educated and future-focused leadership and management personnel in place to develop and manage its activities. It is committed to incorporating diversity in its staff and volunteers.

It has adopted professional systems and practices to assure accountability to the management of its resources and to sustain financial viability. It demonstrates prudent management of its resources and adherence to its mission by engaging in regular planning and review that takes all parts of the organization into account.

It owns or occupies through lease or special arrangement safe, well-maintained, accessible, and visitor-friendly facilities that enhance the organization's mission, protect collections, and provide programmatic and work space.

- If staffed, there is a written personnel policy in use.
- It has a published and easily accessible schedule of public hours.
- It produces an annual budget and regular financial statements that are reviewed by the board.
- It has formal financial policies and accounting practices in place.
- It maintains written records of financial transactions and reports.
- It owns or rents its headquarters which is a permanent location and the location is insured
- Its physical plant is ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act) compliant to the furthest extent possible.
- There are emergency action and disaster preparedness plans in use.
  - If needed please go to <http://nedcc.org/free-resources/dplan-the-online-disaster-planning-tool> for further free assistance. There is a demi version and a full version.
- The facility has fire, smoke, and intruder detection systems.
- There is a cyclical maintenance plan for the physical plant.

## **V. Collections Stewardship**

A museum or historical society with an absolute charter owns a tangible collection of objects, historical records, buildings, archeological remains, properties, lands or other tangible and intrinsically valuable resources that is appropriate to its mission and effectively manages, houses, secures, documents and conserves it, and shares it with the public.

- It has a written collections management policy that is in regular use and meets the standards authorized by the New York Board of Regents.  
Policy must address four subject areas; Acquisition, Loans, Preservation, Access & Deaccession

- Own its collection outright and without restriction, as opposed to holding large numbers of objects as “permanent loans” or with other uncertain status.
- Have accessioned a majority of the collection (as measured by number of total objects or number of distinct accessions) using standard museum, library, and archival registration methods. Have in place a system for uniformly naming collections for cataloguing purposes using standard museum, scientific, and/or archival practices
- Store collections only in buildings or facilities owned, rented, or leased by the organization or in commercial warehouses, or in suitable buildings or spaces provided by government or another chartered institution. Forbid the use of private homes, apartments, offices, garages, barns or similar spaces for collections storage.
- Protect collections and collection records to the extent possible from adverse environmental conditions, such as light, heat, humidity, pollution, pests, and unsuitable storage containers and/or shelving.

## **VI. Education, Interpretation, and Presentation**

A museum or historical society with an absolute charter draws upon its collections to present programs, publications, and exhibitions that address the organization’s mission. The organization’s public educational offerings are built upon the best scholarship and make use of knowledge about the organization’s audiences and their learning styles. These offerings are promoted or offered to as broad a segment of the population as possible.

- There is evidence that regularly scheduled public programs, exhibits, and/or other educational activities are presented to the public.