

COLLECTION MANAGERS COMMITTEE

NEWSLETTER

June - July, 1989

This issue of the Collections Managers Newsletter addresses the process of a MAP II (Museum Assessment Program for Collection Management.) The reviewer's point of view will be first, followed by MAP II as seen through the eyes of the staff of the museum being reviewed.

The reviewer's point of view is by Richard Casagrande. Richard has been the Keeper of Collections of the San Antonio Museum Association for ten years. He has been a MAP II reviewer for 4 years and had done 4 reviews in that time.

MAP II: THE REVIEWER

Without question, the MAP II (Museum Assessment Program II: Collection Management) is a serious undertaking for any museum. The process requires a commitment of considerable staff time prior to the review, and logically, a future commitment of resources and time if the assessment is to have an impact on the museum's operations. With this in mind it is incumbent upon the reviewer to consider a wide variety of factors, some common and some unique, which influence the management of the museum's collections. Therefore, for the benefit of museums considering applying for a MAP II, I would like to explain briefly what MAP II is, how the review proceeds, the responsibilities of the reviewer, the difficulties which may be encountered and, the potential benefits received by the museum as well as the reviewer.

A MAP II usually entails a day long on-site visit to a museum or site to conduct a general assessment of collection related concerns such as storage, record keeping, conservation, governance, administration and exhibition. The instructions to the reviewer clearly state that "The MAP survey is not meant to rank or judge a museum's performance. Instead, the purpose of assessment is to provide each participating institution with a general diagnosis of its strengths and weaknesses as well as positive, concrete suggestions for improvements."

The process for the reviewer begins with the receipt of a lengthy questionnaire completed by the museum. The questionnaire addresses collections management plans, policies, procedures and resources. At the end of each section the participating museum is asked to state any special concerns which the reviewer may be able to address. It takes several hours to study thoroughly the completed questionnaire; to make notes on areas of particular concern; and when necessary, to assemble additional information which may be of use to the museum.

The museum also provides the reviewer with extensive supporting documents such as annual reports, newsletters, governing documents, sample forms, and long-range plans. It is vital for the surveyor to review all the material provided and to request, if necessary, additional items or clarification to questions prior to the visit, as on-site time is extremely limited.

The reviewer is provided with a 21-page MAP II Professional Concerns Checklist from the AAM. The introduction states that "The Checklist is designated to assist the surveyor in highlighting the institution's accomplishments, identifying problem areas, establishing priorities and making recommendations." The checklist is especially useful developing the final report and being sure all relevant areas of collection management have been addressed.

The procedures for the actual visit are flexible and can vary depending upon a variety of circumstances. I begin the day by meeting the staff and touring the facilities. I expect to be shown all storage and exhibition areas, offices and work spaces and to have an opportunity to review the record keeping systems. Generally, one person, usually the registrar or the collection manager, accompanies the reviewer. The afternoon is spent going over the questionnaire and addressing specific areas of concern identified in the morning tour. I like to conclude the visit by again meeting with the director, collections staff and, if possible, trustees involved or concerned with collection maintenance.

The final responsibility of the reviewer is to assess all the information received from the museum and to develop a comprehensive written report which can be used by the museum as guidelines in maintaining and improving the care and maintenance of their collections. A list of additional technical resources is a required portion of this report. It is vital that the reviewer at all times be constructive and provide useful suggestions which are practical within the current structure and financial situation of the institution. For example, it is not helpful to tell a museum they should spend \$10,000 on conservation when they only have a \$500 budget unless the surveyor also tells the museum how they might go about securing the needed \$10,000.

In writing the final report, your diplomatic skills are frequently put to the test. At times, the reviewer may find that staff members or staff and trustees have conflicting points of views. When this occurs, the reviewer must attempt to identify the source of the conflict and to respond honestly, remembering that it is for the benefit of the collection that the

assessment is being made. It is essential, therefore, for the reviewer to ask and for the staff and trustees to know why they are having the MAP done.

Finally, and most importantly, both the reviewer and the museum should enjoy the process. I have found that each visit has been a tremendous learning experience and I have always left knowing I have developed new professional ties and friendships. Reviewers should make it clear that they are available for future consultation if necessary. Hopefully, the final report will be a springboard from which the museum can grow and prosper.

* * * *

The following article: the other side of the coin - the museum being reviewed, is by Kathleen S. Roland. Kathy has been the Curator of Collections at Fort Concho National Historic Landmark for 11 years.

MAP II: THE MUSEUM BEING REVIEWED

I learned about the MAP I Program many years ago and when MAP II for Collections Management was announced, I decided that I wanted my museum to benefit. MAP II is a non-competitive grant awarded to applicants who have completed the questionnaire and returned it on time. It is awarded on a first-come first-served basis.

My assistant and I began to filling out the application and questionnaire about two months before it was due. It took approximately one month to complete the 40-page questionnaire which detailed everything about the museum: including what issues we specifically wanted our review to address, what progress had already been made in caring for the collections and what we thought needed to be done in the future. Every facet of the museum's operation - governance, finances, staff and volunteers, facilities, etc. was to be explained in detail. The largest part of the questionnaire, of course, dealt with collection policy and procedures. Twenty-three pages were filled out on all aspects of collections - including policies, statement purpose, acquisition, deaccession, loans, documentation, risk management, inventory, care & storage, condition reports & conservation, exhibits, along with long-range planning.

Just filling out the questionnaire was a great learning experience. It gave us greater insight into our current situation and what needed to be done in the future. We could see immediately that our procedures taken the time to put them into writing.

Next we needed to gather available documentation and compile it into a notebook. Annual reports, newsletters, founding documents, staff lists and resumes, trustee information, organizational charts, current budget, procedure's manual, sample collection forms, current exhibition

schedule, long-range plans, etc. were all to be sent to the surveyor prior to the on-site visit.

I had decided that I would have everything ready to be mailed long in advance of the deadline. I am happy to say that I was successful in sending the application and the questionnaire exactly one month before the due date. Less than three months later, notification was received that we had been awarded the MAP II grant. IMS sent us a check for the entire grant sum and we, in turn, were to send back a certain amount to cover the registration fee and consultant's honorarium. They sent us the names of several possible reviewers to pick from and arrangements were made for the on-site visit.

About three months prior to our on-site visit, our museum director announced that we were to move our collections storage facility from our present building to another location. This came as quite a surprise! We had known that we were going to be moving one day but no one had any idea that it would be so soon. Because of the move, we had to entirely re-write the section of the questionnaire dealing with the storage facilities and forward this information to the reviewer before the visit.

The on-site visit was everything I had imagined it would be -- very hectic. We had to show our reviewer all the fort buildings containing collections (13 buildings in all-12 exhibit buildings plus collections storehouse.) We toured each building looking at the good and the bad. We took apart each aspect of our collections - documentation, storage, conservation, exhibits - everything which had been covered in the questionnaire and the check-list. The reviewer talked at length with our director and our museum board collections liaison - detailing what the written MAP II report would cover. After the tour, each section of the questionnaire and checklist was analyzed and scrutinized. Before we knew it, the day was over and we were all exhausted. By the time we said good-bye, I felt that I known my reviewer for a long time. I had met a new colleague and made a new friend.

Even before the written report was received, I felt that we had a better grasp of the problems we faced: what needed to be done to solve problems and also, what we had been doing correctly. Our reviewer had already made many helpful suggestions. We took copious notes during the on-site visit so we could start to work immediately on the suggestions the reviewer had made. We could also boast of the compliments we had received. We felt that we had already benefited by the experience.

The written report put into words the problems we had been facing and made many helpful suggestions for solving those problems. The report focused attention on the Collections Department. We had a full

staff meeting to discuss the report and make decisions on how to solve some of the problems facing us. By putting our problems on paper - the budget problems, small staff size, the need for better security and our exhibit problems - the whole museum benefited from the MAP II process. I was given permission to solve many of the problems immediately, others were prioritized to be solved in the near future or in a long-range plan. During the year following the MAP II review we have been able to upgrade our collections department. We also felt that the staff and board members know much more about what we are facing.

I would recommend that any museum make use of the MAP II Program. It is well worth all the labor that goes into it.

If you are interested in additional MAP I or II information, contact:

Kim Igoe, Coordinator
Museum Assessment Program
American Association of Museums
1225 Eye Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20005
202/289-1818

Or write or call either of the authors if you wish.




NOTICE!

Keep your eyes open for a flyer in the coming weeks. The Collection Managers Committee will be sponsoring a seminar/workshop some time this fall. A topic, date and location decision will be made in July and a notice will be mailed out soon.

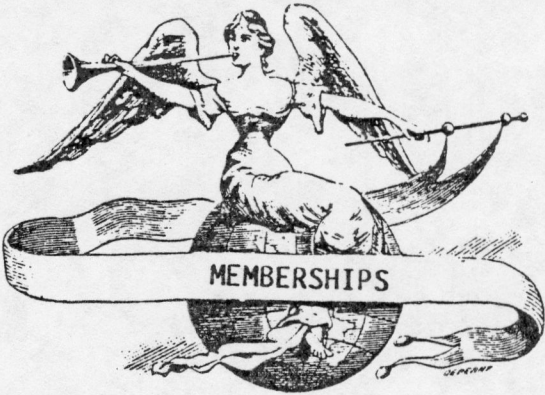
Put your museum on the

MAP MAP II

Museum
Assessment
Programs



American
Association of
Museums



CMC MEMBERSHIP

PLEASE remember to encourage your colleagues to become members of the Collection Managers Committee. As we are so new, we do not yet have a comprehensive network or bank account set up, both of which are necessary to our future success. To become a member, please send \$10 to:

Terry Grose, Collections Registrar
Fort Worth Museum of Science & History
1501 Montgomery
Fort Worth, TX 76107.