



**AASLH**  
American Association  
for State and Local History



**American  
Alliance of  
Museums**

American Alliance of Museums  
and  
American Association for State and Local History  
Statement of Collaboration  
Regarding Standards and Excellence Programs

## I. History

The American Association for State and Local History (AASLH) and the American Alliance of Museums (The Alliance / AAM) share the goals of increasing the level of professionalism in individual museums and the museum field overall. Both organizations help advance excellence by promulgating standards and best practices, and offering assessment programs based on them.

AASLH began developing the Standards and Excellence Program for History Organizations (StEPs)—a discipline-based assessment program for small- and mid-sized history organizations—in 2005 with a grant from the Institute of Museum and Library Service (IMLS). AASLH created the program out of a need to raise awareness of national standards and help history organizations achieve those standards in an incremental manner; and to offer an alternative for museums that weren't ready for other programs (such as the Museum Assessment Program or Accreditation). Over 130 people from across the country participated in the development of StEPs, including an Alliance representative. The self-study program is based on the core national standards but also has specific standards for history organizations. For every standard, there are assessment questions with related Basic, Good, and Better performance indicators that help organizations evaluate how well they are meeting a standard. AASLH believes that because history organizations utilize a unique style of interpretation, historic structures and landscapes, artifacts, and archives they need and deserve their own roadmap, such as StEPs, to assess their operations and implement improvements. The program was introduced to the public in 2009 and has over 400 participants at this time.

The Alliance and IMLS developed the Museum Assessment Program in 1981 after seeing a need in the field to help museums that weren't ready for Accreditation but wanted to improve their programs and operations. The Museum Assessment Program started with an Organizational self-study and has expanded over the years to include Collections Stewardship, Community Engagement and Leadership. MAP is also based on national standards and consists of self-study, peer review and implementation of recommendations. MAP has served over 4,300 museums with 6,500 assessments in the past 30 years. The Alliance and AASLH have collaborated on presenting numerous sessions about StEPs and MAP at regional, state and national museum meetings over the past 3 years.

The Alliance has also been operating the field's museum accreditation program since 1971. The rigorous review includes self study, a site visit by two peers, and final review by the Accreditation Commission. The current core national standards emerged from the Accreditation Program in 1996. Today about 5% of the museum field is accredited. Twenty-two percent of accredited museums are history museums or historic sites. The Accreditation Program is currently undergoing reinvention to make it more accessible and relevant to all types and sizes of museums. AASLH and history organizations have participated in surveys, interviews, and convenings about the reinvention. This MOU is particularly informed by the Chicago 2011 Accreditation Summit, the 2012 MAP convening on Building Bridges to StEPs & Accreditation, and the 2012 meeting of key discipline specific associations around accreditation and standards.

## II. Collaboration Overview

AASLH and the Alliance will collaborate in several areas to connect our respective excellence programs and standards:

- MAP-StEPs: Streamlining the self assessment portion of the MAP process (by about 50%) for StEPs participants that have achieved all of the "Basic" performance indicators and at least 50% of the "Good" ones in each of the six program sections.
- Accreditation: Consider the MAP-StEPs component to be a building block to a similar StEPs-Accreditation streamlining agreement; also, offer AASLH input opportunities to inform and customize the Self-Study to make it more relevant to history organizations; and to shape representation of the history field perspective on the Accreditation Commission.
- Information Sharing: On programmatic participation and awards.
- Training & Resources: Developing both for Alliance Peer Reviewers and the Accreditation Commission.
- Cross promotion & Communication: About our respective programs to encourage participation and highlight achievement.

See specific details below.

## III. Why Collaborate?

- Cooperation between the two associations with respect to standards and our respective excellence programs will: Serve as a model for the museum community of a discipline-based assessment program (StEPs) and its connection to the Alliance's assessment and excellence programs.
- Clarify and demonstrate to the field the StEPs-MAP-Accreditation connection and the benefits for history organizations that commit to this continuum.
- Encourage participation in both Alliance and AASLH programs, and increase awareness of national and history-specific standards and practices, thus increasing professionalism at individual museums.
- Strengthen the entire museum field, and boost collective advocacy efforts by encouraging more institutions to participate in a standards based program. More museums in the continuum of excellence equals more institutions meeting standards.
- Bring awareness of the resources of AAM and AASLH to new audiences.
- Boost relevance and accessibility of Accreditation for history organizations.

- Helps raise visibility of history museums in the national museum community.

#### IV. Collaboration Details / Roles and Responsibilities

##### A. MAP – StEPs Self-Study Process

- The Alliance will allow StEPs participants that have achieved all of the “Basic” performance indicators and at least 50% of the “Good” ones in each of the six program sections and that apply for the MAP Organizational Assessment to have a modified and streamlined MAP Self-Study process. This could reduce the time and paperwork for MAP by about 50%.
- These museums may substitute *some* of their MAP Self-Study with their StEPs workbook. In lieu of the full MAP workbook the museum will submit a copy of its StEPs workbook (or forms provided by the Alliance that document achievement, progress, and activities undertaken), answer some MAP specific questions, and summarize current major challenges and greatest achievements. Museums must also complete the MAP Organizational Assessment Activities. Information and documents required will be at the sole discretion of the Alliance.
- In order to receive these benefits, institutions must:
  - Apply to MAP using the standard process and deadlines
  - Meet all eligibility criteria for MAP as set by IMLS
  - Provide the Alliance with copies of their StEPs workbook and any related materials.
  - Have AASLH verify StEPs enrollment and any certificate earned.
  - Provide AASLH written permission to share with MAP staff any information about the institution’s StEPs experience as deemed relevant.
- This modified MAP self study process applies only to the Organizational Assessment at this time, not the Collections or Community Assessments.

##### B. Accreditation

- The Alliance and AASLH agree to work together to explore how organizations that complete the StEPs program (definition of “complete” tbd) will be offered a streamlined process for Accreditation. Both organizations agree one of the first steps is to study some StEPs participants in a pilot project that measures “readiness” in terms of what percentage of “Basic,” “Good” and “Better” performance indicators must be met in order to be eligible for Accreditation streamlining.
- The Alliance will explore ways that AASLH can play an active role in the identification and/or nomination/appointment of Accreditation Commissioners.
- The Alliance will offer AASLH opportunities to inform and customize the Self-Study to make it more relevant to history organizations.
- AASLH and the Alliance will explore opportunities for how a museum that has completed StEPs (definition of “complete” tbd) can apply this work/achievement towards accreditation.
- Together the Alliance and AASLH will test a mentoring system for history museums interested in seeking accreditation.

##### C. Information Sharing

- AASLH will embed questions about interest in MAP in the StEPs enrollment form and will share information about participants’ MAP interest with AAM staff.
- AASLH will identify non accredited history organizations that would be good candidates to individually approach about Accreditation.
- AASLH will provide the Alliance with a list of StEPs participants and certificate awards at least once a year.

- The Alliance will embed questions about StEPs participation in the MAP and Core Documents Verification application forms.
- The Alliance staff will share information with AASLH staff about StEPs participants who are participating in MAP and Accreditation at least once a year.
- The Alliance will contact StEPs participants who have achieved a certain level of certificates to encourage them to apply for MAP and Core Documents Verification.
- The Alliance will share a museum's StEPs history with its Accreditation Visiting Committee and the Accreditation Commission.
- Both associations agree to be sensitive to the sharing of program participant information and agree that shared contact information will not be used for marketing purposes.

#### D. Training & Resources

- The Alliance will make history-specific standards and performance indicators available to MAP and Accreditation Peer Reviewers via training and resources.
- The Alliance and AASLH will collaborate on the training and development of resources for all Peer Reviewers and the Accreditation Commission so they can effectively evaluate history organizations and/or make recommendations (MAP).
- AASLH program staff are invited, with advance notice and approval, to sit in on segments of the AAM Accreditation Commission meeting as observers and/or to take part in a planned discussion, training, etc.

#### E. Cross promotion & Communication

- AASLH and the Alliance will regularly cross promote StEPs, MAP, Accreditation, Pledge of Excellence, and Core Documents Verification to encourage participation.
- AASLH will acknowledge/highlight its member museums that are participating in MAP and/or that have been recently accredited or reaccredited. The Alliance will provide the data.
- AASLH standards and StEPs information (links) are embedded in the Alliance's Information Center and standards web pages.
- AASLH will encourage its members to become Alliance peer reviewers.
- The Alliance will build references to StEPs into the next revision of the Continuum of Excellence infographic; and into Continuum "diagnostic" tools being developed to help users navigate the options/find the right option.
- Promote, as appropriate, information and news about the Alliance-AASLH collaboration at Alliance and AASLH conferences, and other communication platforms.

### IV. Implementing and Maintaining the MOU/Relationship

A. AASLH and Alliance program staff will assess, at least once a year, how the above described processes and relationship are working and discuss further improvements.

#### B. Timeline

2012

- Make joint/simultaneous announcement about AAM-AASLH collaboration to our respective stakeholders in the fall.
- Message: AASLH and AAM are collaborating around our standards and excellence programs; describe nature of the collaboration and any details that have been decided upon and confirmed; explain benefits to both sets of stakeholders; explain next steps.

- Terry Davis (AASLH President & CEO), Ford Bell (Alliance President), Burt Logan (Accreditation Commission Chair) make a joint presentation to attendees at AASLH conference plenary session (October).
- AASLH representatives attend November Accreditation Commission meeting to provide training and awareness on the StEPs program and history standards and performance indicators.
- Develop and submit a proposal for StEPs-MAP- Accreditation streamlining session for the 2013 AASLH conference.
- Begin scoping out implementation details for the collaborative efforts described in this MOU.


2013 (partial list)

- Targeted application solicitations begin:
  - The Alliance begins contacting StEPs participants who have achieved all of the "Basic" performance indicators and at least 50% of the "Good" ones to encourage them to apply for MAP and Core Documents Verification.
  - AASLH identifies non accredited history organizations that would be good candidates to approach about accreditation.
- Take first step in exploring StEPs-Accreditation streamlining; AASLH will identify and solicit StEPs participants to take part in a pilot study to measure "readiness" in terms of what percentage of "Basic," "Good" and "Better" performance indicators must be met in order to be eligible for Accreditation streamlining. AASLH will work with the Alliance to plan how "readiness" will be assessed,
- Draft StEPs-Accreditation streamlining agreement.
- The Alliance and AASLH do joint marketing about the value of respective programs.
- Develop peer review training regarding StEPs and history standards/performance indicators.

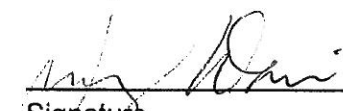
2014

- Finalize StEPs-Accreditation streamlining agreement.

**American Alliance of Museums**

  
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Signature  
PRESIDENT  
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Title  
10/23/12  
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Date

**American Association for State and Local History**

  
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Signature  
CEO  
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Title  
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Date