



**Arizona Historical Society  
Certified Museum and Historical Organization**

**Guidelines**

Museums and historical organizations certified by the Arizona Historical Society (AHS) have certain common characteristics. In developing guidelines, AHS follows standards or “best practices” established by the American Association for State and Local History (AASLH) and the American Alliance of Museums (AAM). If requested, AHS staff can connect you with museum professionals across the State who are willing to assist with questions about collections management, audience engagement, and operations as a demonstration of AHS' commitment to preserving, interpreting, and promoting Arizona history. The following guidelines must be met to be considered for approval as an AHS Certified Museum or Historical Organization:

- Is guided by a mission statement that clearly describes the purpose of the organization, and a vision statement that clearly describes the organization's future direction.
- Operates as a not-for-profit organization.
- Has a governing structure including by-laws, articles of incorporation, and a board of directors/trustees.
- Conducts meetings and holds elections on a regularly scheduled basis.
- Develops membership or volunteer groups that support the organization.
- Is open to the public or offers interpretive programs on a regularly scheduled basis for at least 208 hours per year.
- Offers educational and public programs, special events, and other activities tied to its mission. Is accessible to academic and avocational researchers.
- Engages in regular audience engagement that promotes the value of Arizona history in the context of today's society.
- Responsibly and securely manages the archival and/or object collections in its care and ensures they relate to the mission of the organization.
- Ensures a welcoming environment for all staff, volunteers, and visitors, regardless of personal identity characteristics.

## **Guideline Definitions**

### **Not-for-Profit**

To become a not-for-profit organization in the State of Arizona, Articles of Incorporation are filed with the Arizona Corporation Commission (ACC). When approved and registered as a museum or historical organization by the ACC, it can file with the IRS for 501(c)(3) designation. The 501(c)(3) status not only exempts the museum or historical organization from federal income taxes, but permits donors to deduct monetary and in-kind contributions.

### **Governing Structure**

In the not-for-profit application process, both the State of Arizona and IRS require documents, including Articles of Incorporation and By-laws, which govern the organization. Governing documents define policies and assign responsibilities of board members, staff, and volunteers.

### **Regularly Scheduling Meetings and Election of Officers**

The success and vitality of museums and historical organizations depend on regularly scheduled meetings that bring together staff and board members to discuss and assess current operations, activities, and future directions. Election of officers, too, is conducted on a defined schedule, preferably with established term limits (for both officers and board members).

### **Developing Membership and Volunteers**

Members and volunteers are invaluable to the success of most museums and historical organizations. They contribute time as docents, assist curators, provide administrative support, and make monetary donations. They often serve as the conduit linking the museum or historical organization to the community it serves.

### **Offering Public Visitation and Participation**

AHS certified museums and historical organizations are open to the public an average of at least four hours per week (208 hours annually), with many following a seasonal schedule based on climate and tourism patterns. Public hours are posted at the museum entrance and advertised using signage, flyers, brochures, the internet, and other forms of media. Historical organizations that do not operate a museum facility provide interpretive programs and activities to fulfill certification requirements.

### **Promoting Public Programs**

AHS certified museums and historical organizations promote Arizona history through public programs of various types, including exhibitions, docent tours, classroom presentations, access to collections for researchers, hosting special events, celebrations,

and commemorations. Importantly, an organization's public programs relate to its mission statement.

### **Encouraging Public Awareness for Arizona History**

In addition to networking with AHS, historical museums and organizations may partner with local governments, businesses, civic and service clubs, schools, and libraries to champion the history of their communities. Many certified organizations take advantage of AHS workshops and seminars, as well as through individual contact with staff to exchange ideas and be of mutual assistance. They may become members of state, regional, or national museum organizations.

### **Endorsing Sound Collections Management Practices**

AHS certified museums and historical organizations that collect must have, or be in the process of developing, a collections policy that governs the acquisition, accession, care, and use of objects, documents, oral histories, maps, and photographs (including electronic formats) related to their mission statement. AHS staff is available to assist with collections management.

### **Ensuring Safe Environments for Staff, Public and Collections**

Security measures must exist to protect the museum and its contents from theft and vandalism, while safety precautions are taken to protect staff, volunteers, and the general public in a pleasant environment. In addition, conservation methods are comprehensive and in place to shield collections from detrimental elements including direct sunlight, insects, moisture, or temperature fluctuations.