

ACCREDITATION SITE VISIT REPORT (IN-PERSON VISIT)

Institution	Milwaukee Public Museum
Visit Start Date	October 26-27, 2020
Peer Reviewers	Daniel Joyce Executive Director Kenosha Public Museums Kenosha, WI
	Susannah Koerber Chief Curator and Research Officer Indiana State Museum Indianapolis, IN
Report Due Date	December 4, 2020

Accreditation Site Visit Report Form

Special Instructions for this Site Visit

The Accreditation staff has flagged the items below for review by the Visiting Committee while on site. Please indicate whether the issue has been resolved and comment on how it was or is being addressed.

No special instructions – Danyelle Rickard, Accreditation Program Officer

Collections Stewardship Role

Activities

Describe any concerns in the Overall Summary at the end of this section.

1. Visually inspect all areas where collections are stored (including offsite locations), exhibited or treated (conservation, preparation areas, etc.). Look for pests, leaks, inappropriate materials/housing or other circumstances that put collections at risk.

Mark if *not* acceptable:

☒ Collections Storage (onsite)

☐ Collections Storage (offsite)

☐ Exhibition areas

☐ Treatment areas

2. Observe the museum's environmental conditions and equipment as well as procedures for monitoring those conditions. Ask collections and/or facility management staff:

- How often are areas monitored? How? By whom?
- Show me some recent readings for various spaces.
- Do you have any current challenges in providing a stable environment for collections? How are they being addressed?

3. Look at documents used in the management and care of collections, including:

- Deeds of gift
- Incoming and outgoing loan agreements
- Physical and digital catalog records
- Conservation policies and plans
- Lending policies and agreements with non-museum entities (if applicable)

Questions		
	YES	NO
Are environmental conditions appropriate for the collections?		X
Are environmental conditions adequately monitored?	X	
Are temperature and humidity levels within acceptable limits?		X

Are measures in place to mitigate significant climate fluctuations?	X	
Are collections adequately documented?	X	
Are collections adequately secured?	X	
Are collections on exhibition, in storage, on loan and in transit adequately protected?	X	
Are there opportunities for relevant stakeholders to be involved in decisions about the content and use of collections?	X	

Core Standards		
	YES	NO
The museum owns, exhibits or uses collections that are appropriate to its mission.	X	
The museum legally, ethically and effectively manages, documents, cares for and uses the collections.	X	
The museum's collections-related research is conducted according to appropriate scholarly standards.	X	
The museum strategically plans for the use and development of its collections.	X	
Guided by its mission, the museum provides public access to its collections while ensuring their preservation.	X	

Overall Summary: Collection Stewardship Role

The staff is extremely professional, dedicated, and forward-thinking in their stewardship of the collection. They are, however, in an ongoing struggle with the current museum building and its shortcomings, which put the collections at significant risk. Issues include leaks in numerous collections storage areas and exhibition spaces; changes in building design that have created additional problems such as kitchen waste leaks in one storage area; possible structural damage to the building; and the inability of the HVAC system to maintain suitable environmental levels in the uninsulated building. These are complicated by extended deferred maintenance on the building, which is owned by Milwaukee County, and the need to fit into a budget that includes hundreds of other county buildings. As a result, major repairs often must rise to the level of emergencies before they are funded, despite museum leadership and staff maintaining strong relations with the county. This has had serious consequences for both the ongoing care of the collections and in specific cases where mold infestations and other issues have developed, requiring abatement and object treatment. The museum has, after much study, determined that these issues cannot be fixed in the current facility and is planning to construct a much-needed new building.

Milwaukee Public Museum (MPM) staff works hard to mitigate these issues. There are moisture monitors in addition to HOBOS throughout spaces where collections are held. Staff have moved or covered items in areas with known issues and closely monitor the conditions of collections. Their diligence has prevented the destruction or permanent damage to collections items. Facilities staff have designed workarounds to help prevent leaks and improved the spaces

where possible. There is excellent coordination between facilities and collections staff, and everyone is knowledgeable and devoted to the collections' safety.

The collections departments suffer from low staffing levels, with most areas having only one curator or collections manager to cover extensive stewardship, access and research responsibilities. These conditions represent a long-term erosion of the collections staff, much of it dating back to the 2005-2006 fiscal crisis and exacerbated by the current COVID-19 crisis. As part of the Self-Study, MPM prepared a detailed explanation of the current staffing levels, the underlying strategy, and how they are functioning under the current conditions. It lays out impressive work in ramping up capacity through grant-funded projects; managing a robust adjunct, internship and fellowship program to augment staff; and using emeritus staff. In doing so, they pay close attention to space, research and other needs of their partners, especially colleges and universities. They have made thoughtful decisions on where to concentrate their resources, focusing on accessibility to the collections, especially for researchers, and collections management projects such as bar-coding that also prepare for the move to a new building. Through grants, they have built two molecular labs that help make working with the museum more attractive—some academics use the museum as a base for their grant projects. They are involved with numerous national and international initiatives, such as contributing records to natural science aggregator sites and joining multi-institutional grants. Staff serve on boards and advisory groups, consistently giving back to the field and to their community.

That said, there are clearly consequences, including heavy workloads and decisions to lay some projects aside. With the promotion of Dr. Ellen Censky from research dean to President and CEO, her previous position was not filled and is currently held in an interim capacity by the two research curators, with one also overseeing exhibitions and major grant projects. Cross-departmental collections management staff consists of a registrar and a digitization manager. The digitization manager helps drive the ongoing efforts to make the collections available online. The registrar also has responsibility for conservation, which of necessity focuses on preventive conservation. This has impacted the rotation of objects in some areas of the permanent exhibitions. With staff stretched in collections, exhibitions and graphics, and the pressures of maintaining 150,000 square feet of exhibition space, some of which has not changed for decades, difficult decisions must be made. One of these is to leave light-sensitive artifacts on view in some of the older galleries, recognizing that they have already sustained damage and that the resources are not in place to guarantee regular rotations if other collections items were to be put in their place. That said, staff is far from abandoning those galleries and is in the middle of a project to replace problematic mounts that could pose a risk to artifacts.

The MPM leadership and board are upfront about the staffing difficulties and are looking toward the future in a new building where fewer resources will be needed to cope with the facility and more can be devoted to staff and collections in the service of the mission. The collections staffing levels will be of increasing concern as planning for the new facility moves forward. Staff will need sufficient time to devote to the planning process and will be stretched as they prepare to move the collection and implement new exhibitions.

Major Concerns:

Issues with the facility pose a threat to the collections, as appropriate environmental conditions cannot be maintained; leaks and moisture infiltration in storage areas have caused mold infestations and water damage; and the building's structural condition is

questionable. More than \$100 million in deferred maintenance and problems inherent to the building's design make it unlikely that these issues can be successfully resolved in the current facility. MPM recognizes this and is planning for a new facility.

Minor Concerns:

Staffing levels are low and have been for several years. MPM is using effective and innovative methods to help compensate and is strategic in how staff uses their time, but stresses from chronic understaffing are evident. These stresses are likely to increase as staff becomes more involved in planning for the new facility and preparing for the move.

Exemplary Practices:

MPM demonstrates many exemplary practices related to the care and use of its collections:

They have a longstanding commitment to making the collections accessible and have prioritized work within the division to digitize collections and disseminate information. They have created effective workflows and processes that help streamline and ensure quality control as multiple staff, volunteers and interns work on a variety of projects that support the larger goal of making the collections widely available and more usable for research, exhibitions and program development.

MPM has built many strong partnerships, with universities, researchers, other museums, and scientific/professional groups. They use these partnerships effectively to increase knowledge and use of the collection; support research that uses MPM's collections to contribute to larger bodies of knowledge; and help address their partners' needs.

A related strength is how they successfully use grants to build capacity for research, digitization and improved collections stewardship.

MPM is efficient and smart in how they use their resources—the projects they pursue advance their strategic goals and are often oriented toward preparing for a new museum facility while also improving the current situation.

If the museum noted any areas of change in the Self-Study, comment on how well the museum has handled them or is preparing for them.

Other comments (optional)

Organizational Health

Activities

Describe any concerns in the Overall Summary at the end of this section.

1. Visually inspect all spaces used by the general public and the staff, as well as those that are unoccupied. Look for any potential risks to the facility or the people who use it. Look for signs that the facility is anything other than clean, safe and well-maintained.

Mark if *not* acceptable:

- ☐ Public areas (indoor and outdoor)
- ☐ Office areas
- ☐ Other non-public areas (indoor and outdoor)

2. Observe the relationships between staff and the governing authority. Learn what staff members, volunteers and governing authority representatives think about the institutional culture, staff morale and the ability of the institution to meet the needs of its stakeholders with the resources available.

Questions		
	YES	NO
Do the knowledge, skills and abilities of the museum's governing authority enable the group to effectively govern the museum?	X	
Is there a real, practical delegation of authority from the governing authority to the director?	X	
Does everyone understand the organizational structure?	X	
Are the workplace dynamics healthy?	X	
Is the museum living within its means?	X	
Do the museum's facilities meet the needs of its staff as well as its visitors?	X	
Does the decision-making structure accommodate change from the bottom up as well as from the top down?	X	
Is the composition of the staff, governing authority, and volunteers reflective of the communities the museum serves?	X	
Are principles of equity incorporated into human resource decisions and processes/policies (e.g., pay, hiring, advancement)?	X	
Is the museum cognizant of its legal obligations under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)?	X	

Core Standards		
	YES	NO
The governance, staff and volunteer structures and processes effectively advance the museum's mission.	X	
The governing authority, staff and volunteers have a clear and shared understanding of their roles and responsibilities.	X	
The governing authority, staff and volunteers legally, ethically and effectively carry out their responsibilities.	X	
The composition, qualifications and diversity of the museum's leadership, staff and volunteers enable it to carry out the museum's mission and goals.	X	
There is a clear and formal division of responsibilities between the governing authority and any group that supports the museum, whether separately incorporated or operating within the museum or its parent organization.	X	
The museum legally, ethically and responsibly acquires, manages and allocates its financial resources in a way that advances its mission.	X	
The museum operates in a fiscally responsible manner that promotes its long-term sustainability.	X	
The museum allocates its space and uses its facilities to meet the needs of the collections, audience and staff.		X
The museum has appropriate measures to ensure the safety and security of people, its collections and/or objects and the facilities it owns or uses.	X	
The museum has an effective program for the care and long-term maintenance of its facilities.		X
The museum is clean and well-maintained, and provides for the visitors' needs.	X	
The museum takes appropriate measures to protect itself against potential risk and loss.	X	
The museum complies with local, state and federal laws, codes and regulations applicable to its facilities, operations and administration.	X	

Overall Summary: Organizational Health

It is obvious in interviewing the staff and board that all are on the same track. There is enthusiasm and among the staff a willingness to work hard, work smart and go beyond their job descriptions in getting the work done. It is also obvious that the museum is terribly understaffed in some areas and the stress shows.

Pre-COVID staffing is at the 2007 level. Since COVID, one position has not been filled and another four eliminated. With this level of staffing, the staff is even more stressed. It is obvious that despite building issues the staff are strategic thinkers and role models to students and each other. Their enthusiasm, teamwork and willingness to do what it takes to succeed is admirable. Although working smart, the level of staffing and services in some areas is at a bare minimum. All are enthusiastic about the future of the museum and the direction they are going.

The Board is engaged and knowledgeable about their role as well as their place in relation to the staff. They respect the staff's professional input and do not appear to dominate. Their role and the staff's are clear. The concern for transparency by all shows an understanding of how to effectively and ethically advance the museum's mission, especially in light of the 2005 difficulties. The organizational culture is one of an enthusiastic and collaborative team.

Like most museums, diversity, equity, accessibility and inclusion was a priority for the last few years but not aggressively acted upon until recently. Nationwide events highlighting inequities has led to a more active program at the museum. Hiring a diversity staff position and establishing a diverse DEAI team shows a commitment to making a difference. Their commitment extends to the Human Resources staff as well. The museum's efforts to accommodate their visitors goes far beyond just the ADA. They have resources available to serve not only physically handicapped but also persons with dementia, autism, and sensory limitations. Programs and resources from early learning opportunities to those for adults with special needs are in place. The accessibility team regularly audits the building, programs and services making recommendations for improvement. In addition, many way finding labels are in the three most used languages in the state.

Through admirable financial planning the Milwaukee Public Museum has overcome the 2005 financial disaster emerging stronger than before but there are still ripple effects at the museum. The financial condition of the museum is much more solid and as of 2020, \$25 million in debt has been paid. The reputation of the museum is better than it ever was and in its place as a beloved icon of Milwaukee more secure than ever.

Major Concerns:

The museum does not and cannot have an effective program for the long-term maintenance of its facilities, nor can it use its facilities to meet the needs of its collections. The building is leaking and physically falling apart. It is beyond repair with \$100 million in deferred maintenance. Long term sustainability in this building is not possible. The museum cannot spend publicly raised money to bring this county-owned building up to being merely adequate and not addressing outdated exhibits.

Minimal staffing in some areas especially collections staff to care for four million objects. This will be addressed by moving into a smaller building and allowing reallocation of current operational costs to staffing.

Minor Concerns:

The budget is only slightly more than it was after the 2005 restructuring. It has not kept up with inflation which has been 29% during those years.

Exemplary Practices:

The present staff has worked wonders in all they do despite short staffing. Their teamwork ethic is commendable as well as their enthusiasm.

The recovery from the 2005 financial collapse and the elimination of \$25 million in debt.

Building the endowment from a 2005 low of \$300,000 to \$6.1 million while simultaneously eliminating debt.

If the museum noted any areas of change in the Self-Study, comment on how well the museum has handled them or is preparing for them.

Other comments (optional)

Educational Role

Activities

Describe any concerns in the Overall Summary at the end of this section.

1. Look at the museum's website. Pay particular attention to how/how well the museum is using the internet to deliver content and share information about its educational activities and resources.
2. If possible, observe a program, tour or other educational activity in progress. Note whether the individual conducting the program appears informed and well-trained and if the content is appropriate to the museum's mission and audiences.
3. Examine all the interpretive materials or equipment in the exhibition spaces (e.g., gallery guides, wall text, labels, videos, audio guides, interactives, etc.) to inform your answers to the questions below.

Questions		
	YES	NO
Are the interpretive materials accurate, informed and professionally presented?	X	
Are the interpretive materials and equipment appropriate and accessible to different audiences?	X	
Is the museum's educational programming developed in accordance with and presented with clear ties to educational standards and curricula?	X	
Does the museum actively, consistently evaluate interpretive programming and educational content?	X	
Does the museum include community/stakeholder voices in interpretation or interpretive activities?	X	
Are the museum's programs, exhibits, and other interpretive activities welcoming to a diversity of audiences?	X	

Core Standards		
	YES	NO
The museum clearly states its overall educational goals, philosophy and messages, and demonstrates that its activities are in alignment with them.	X	
The museum understands the characteristics and needs of its existing and potential audiences and uses this understanding to inform its interpretation.	X	

The museum's interpretive content is based on appropriate research.	X	
Museums conducting primary research do so according to scholarly standards.	X	
The museum uses techniques, technologies and methods appropriate to its educational goals, content, audiences and resources.	X	
The museum presents accurate and appropriate content for each of its audiences.	X	
The museum demonstrates consistent high quality in its interpretive activities.	X	
The museum assesses the effectiveness of its interpretive activities and uses those results to plan and improve its activities.	X	
The museum demonstrates a commitment to providing the public with physical and intellectual access to the museum and its resources.	X	

Overall Summary: Educational Role

MPM recognizes the importance of the museum's educational role and stresses the involvement of all its staff: every department has a part in public programming. Across the board, there is effective integration and coordination among staff of different departments in supporting education. Together they are building a thoughtful and impressive program for engaging visitors and going beyond the museum's walls.

The education staff is guided by an interpretive plan that reflects MPM's mission and vision; is audience-focused; stresses the accuracy and trustworthiness of information, emphasizing MPM's research and collections; and is relevant to their audiences and to larger conversations. These are borne out in their offerings and in the breadth of the audiences they serve. Programs are inquiry and object-based, reflecting the strengths of the museum. Staff estimate that there are approximately 100,000 engagement points each year shaped by their work. They have a clear sense of who their audiences are and where the potential lies while working in concert with the museum's strategic goals.

The department has been growing and now consists of 11 staff members, headed by the senior director of education and public programs. There are active docent and intern programs (20-30 interns per year). Staff members are working with HR and other departments to increase training and opportunities across the museum and to develop a more diverse pool. Professional development for department staff is also emphasized and the department is currently working through the Reflecting as Practice program for informal STEM educators.

The process for developing programs has been standardized and staff meet regularly to evaluate offerings and to assess their progress toward departmental and institutional goals. Collections and research staff are consulted early in the development process, so that their expertise and knowledge of the collection can shape the content. Community and teacher input is sought throughout, from helping to identify potential topics, to informing program design and content, to evaluation. Community partnerships, including with the Milwaukee public schools, libraries, social service agencies, and neighborhood centers, are key to many of the offerings. In their planning and evaluation, the staff is thinking about the future of the museum and how they can bridge between their current offerings and the opportunities presented with the new museum facility.

The education department has worked closely with facilities and visitor services staff to develop spaces that welcome all visitors. These include a sensory room which is always unlocked and available during open hours, classroom spaces for early childhood and other programs, multi-sensory backpacks that can be checked out, and a changing room that can accommodate adults, designed with great sensitivity for comfort and practicality.

Many of these initiatives are among the accessibility offerings that the museum has championed in recent years. The education staff includes a dedicated access coordinator who is included in plans for new exhibitions and facility changes from the beginning. She has worked with community partners to implement multiple programs, from the museum's 10-year involvement with SPARK, a multi-museum initiative for adults with Alzheimer's and other memory deficits, to new programs for those with visual impairments, autism-spectrum conditions and other special needs. The programs include touch tours and Accessible Adventures for school groups. In designing these programs, members of the community have been involved to make sure that they are truly effective and provide a meaningful experience for the visitors. What is most impressive is the systematic and sustained character of the museum's commitment. They completed an internal audit of the building and their programs, identifying barriers to the visitor experience. They focused on training the entire staff and establishing clear goals, even including access training as part of the onboarding process for new staff. All education programs are expected to incorporate universal design and are evaluated for their accessibility. MPM staff have embraced accessibility on every level, so that other departments often take the initiative to propose new approaches and universal design principles are followed throughout the museum.

Education staff have embraced their part in establishing MPM as Wisconsin's museum of natural science, overseeing the Museum on the Move outreach program and related citizen science initiatives with the potential to involve communities around the state. In designing the program, the education team worked with teachers to determine topics and sought community input. Knowing that the type of venue, audience composition and size would be highly variable, the staff designed flexible frameworks that can be delivered as appropriate to the circumstances. This program, slowed by the coronavirus, is part of the museum's larger outreach strategy. They distinguish between their visitors and audiences, the latter often more diverse, whom they can reach through programs such as taking summer camp offerings to organizations around the city and extending family memberships to participants. They also partner with museums nationwide, notably through the original planetarium shows they create.

As with other museums, MPM education staff pivoted to online offerings when the coronavirus closed the physical building, creating the Community of Curiosity suite of programs accessible through the museum's website and on-site through barcodes in the galleries, and the Curious Classroom with resources for teachers and students. They recognize that the pandemic has accelerated what was already a necessary direction toward more virtual offerings and are prepared to build on what they learn during this difficult year.

Major Concerns:

None

Minor Concerns:

None

Exemplary Practices:

The museum's emphasis on accessibility shows a true commitment to making the museum available to all on as equal a basis as possible. MPM created an access coordinator position to oversee programs and the integration of accessibility initiatives across every aspect of the museum experience. They have invested in the physical infrastructure as well as new programs and involved staff from all areas of the museum, creating a culture where each person is committed to and looks for the potential in their own areas of responsibility.

Effective and welcoming use of all spaces within the museum to engage visitors, including in the permanent exhibition galleries.

Flexible frameworks for outreach programs that can be adapted to a variety of situations, based on available resources and audience needs.

Efforts to build and diversify the museum's audiences in sustained ways, including community partnerships and giving memberships to families who take part in outreach programs for underserved audiences.

Successful pivot to online programming as necessitated by COVID, with an eye toward the longer-term development of digital offerings.

If the museum noted any areas of change in the Self-Study, comment on how well the museum has handled them or is preparing for them.

Other comments (optional)

Planning

Activities

Describe any concerns in the Overall Summary at the end of this section.

1. Ask the staff, volunteers and governing authority representatives for their perspectives on the museum's strategic planning process. Do they feel involved in planning for the museum's future? Are they familiar with the contents of the museum's current strategic plan?
2. Ask at least one staff member, one volunteer, and one governing authority member what the mission of the museum is (verbatim or in spirit) and how it connects to their work. Can they explain the mission and the effect it has on the museum's day-to-day operations?
3. Discuss with the leadership how/if the museum is incorporating diversity, equity, access, and inclusion (DEAI) principles and efforts into its plans / planning.

Questions		
	YES	NO
Do the staff and governing authority members agree on the museum's vision and strategic goals and how it is going to achieve them?	X	
Is there a culture of institutional planning, self-reflection and continual improvement?	X	
Are staff, volunteers, and governing authority members involved in strategic planning in some way?	X	
Is the planning process inclusive of community members and other relevant stakeholders?	X	
Is the plan being followed? Does the reality of what's happening at the museum generally match the institutional planning documents?	X	
Is the plan guiding decisions?	X	
Does the leadership actively gauge progress on the plan and make adjustments?	X	

Core Standards		
	YES	NO
The museum has a clear understanding of its mission and communicates why it exists and who benefits as a result of its efforts.	X	
All aspects of the museum's operations are integrated and focused on meeting its mission.	X	
The museum's governing authority and staff think and act strategically to acquire, develop and allocate resources to advance the mission of the museum.	X	
The museum engages in ongoing and reflective institutional planning that includes involvement of its audiences and community.	X	
The museum establishes measures of success and uses them to evaluate and adjust its activities.	X	

Overall Summary: Planning

Since the 2005 financial collapse of the Milwaukee Public Museum, the board, and staff have been planning on the resurgence of a better, more efficient, transparent museum. Their efforts show a well-conceived plan to build a bigger and better future for the museum and the community they serve. One piece of this was hiring a Chief Planning Officer.

The staff and board agree on the vision and strategic goals of the museum and are working hand in hand. A culture of institutional planning is evident and includes continual progress assessment and self-reflection. This leads to ongoing improvement in the plans as well as an enthusiasm for the future of the museum. The key to the planning is the strategic plan. The plan was created through a collaborative effort that included the community, focus groups, workshops, volunteers, staff and the board of the museum. The plan is focused around the mission as it should be. The strategic plan is not one to sit on a shelf like many do. There is a timeline and accountability for its execution. It is followed and progress regularly reviewed. Many departments also have annual goals which mesh well with the strategic plan. Strategic thinking by all is evident and all seem dedicated to the advancement of the museum.

The most obvious commitment to planning is to leave a building that is too large and actually physically falling apart. The plan for the new museum is for a smaller facility (half-size – 240,000 square feet). This will lead to a significant reduction in cost while still having the same operating budget. Some money will be reallocated to address staff shortages and another surplus of \$400,000 per year put into a repair/maintenance fund. These are a few of the steps taken toward sustainability. Others include a facility that is more amenable to rentals, parking revenues and much more. Planning for the new museum involves the staff, volunteers and board. There is an exhibits core team and a facilities team. Public presentations about the new building number in the dozens. During all this the museum is working diligently with the county to identify building issues. Their engagement with the county is much closer and their board more engaged than it was in the past. The staff is more engaged and enthusiastic than ever before, but there are stresses associated with the staff size being less than half what it was in 2005 when the financial collapse occurred.

There are issues that only moving into a new building can address. Their view and planning for such is well thought out. The staff is bravely meeting the needs of their visitors despite the current condition of their existing building, but are only putting out “fires”. While there are no public safety issues at present, that situation will not last much longer. It is to the point where a rear area cement stairway is propped up with timber. The county has \$100 million in deferred maintenance that is now not worth addressing at this point. One part of the building is separating from another and there are new roof leaks, as well as sewer and environmental issues in the basement where many of the collections are stored. This year there were two leaks in history storage, one major leak in an exhibit area, and the planetarium roof leaks. The fire system is outdated with no sprinklers in collections or the exhibits. There is no zoning of the HVAC and the building is not insulated from the Wisconsin climate. Now there are over 100 critical items and 85 code compliance issues. The plan is to build a new building with state, county and private support and demolish the existing one.

Part of the planning for a new building involves Development. A significant amount of money must be raised for the effort. A feasibility study indicates that the money can be raised, and a major gift officer has been added. Other development staff will be hired soon. As to the endowment, this will also be a significant part of the fundraising effort. The goal is to comfortably have 4% per year go towards the budget while still increasing the principal.

The museum is on the cusp of working to get state and county funding to do so before launching a public fundraising effort.

With a new, smaller building the cost of operation would lessen considerably, and the issue of subpar basement collections storage conditions would be corrected. At the same time, with fewer operational costs, more staff in research, collections and exhibits and other areas of need would be possible.

The museum is also initiating diversification of its staff and board. They have established a Diversity Committee made up of diverse persons. This ten-person team meets every two weeks and is dedicated to implementing DEAI.

Major Concerns:

None

Minor Concerns:

If the new building does not materialize, the staff and board must plan to better house and protect the basement collections through an alternative plan, either off-site or within the present building.

Exemplary Practices:

Continuing their old and successful vision of emphasizing the nexus of nature and culture in their new plans.

Their public science programs both engage the public and continue useful research data that feeds back into their exhibits and programs.

The hiring of a Chief Planning Officer.

All aspects of planning for a new museum show a thorough and intelligent approach.

If the museum noted any areas of change in the Self-Study, comment on how well the museum has handled them or is preparing for them.

Other comments (optional)

Public Service Role

Activities

Describe any concerns in the Overall Summary at the end of this section.

Prior to the site visit:

1. Review the museum's online presence:
 - Google it and review the results.
 - Look at its presence on social media sites like Facebook and Twitter.
 - Read online reviews of it on sites like Trip Advisor and Yelp.
 - Get a feel for the museum's culture, voice and persona. Notice how people talk about the museum in the community at large. Note your perception of the museum's self-identified communities.

During the site visit:

1. Discuss with staff and leadership how the museum works to understand the composition of its audiences and how it uses this information to craft/inform its public offerings.
2. Talk to community members, either formally or informally, to get their impressions of the museum. Use your interactions with hotel staff members, taxi drivers, food service personnel and other local residents to gather their impressions of the museum.

Questions		
	YES	NO
Does the museum encourage and facilitate community dialogue about the programs and services it offers?	X	
Is a commitment to physical accessibility apparent throughout all facilities and programming?	X	
Did you see evidence that the community values and supports the museum, and sees it as a trusted resource?	X	
Is the museum meaningfully engaged with its professional, geographic, and cultural communities/organizations?	X	

Core Standards		
	YES	NO
The museum is a good steward of its resources held in the public trust.		X
The museum identifies the communities it serves and makes appropriate decisions in how it serves them.	X	
Regardless of its self-identified communities, the museum strives to be a good neighbor in its geographic area.	X	
The museum strives to be inclusive and offers opportunities for diverse participation.	X	
The museum asserts its public service role and places education at the center of that role.	X	
The museum demonstrates a commitment to providing the public with physical and intellectual access to the museum and its resources.	X	
The museum is committed to public accountability and is transparent in its mission and its operations.	X	

Overall Summary: Public Service

The Milwaukee Public Museum started as a Milwaukee County funded museum enmeshed in their public service role. Their dedication to public service has not changed since they became MPM, Inc. The staff, board, and volunteers all realized that this is core to their mission. The exhibits, educational programs, outreach and public programming are exemplary and reflect recent developments within the museum field. The coordinated efforts of mission delivery departments and support departments like marketing and development show a dedication to the museum mission through public service. Their link to the community both direct and indirect is commendable.

The community has embraced the museum as an icon of Milwaukee for over 100 years. It is rare that a museum is proudly seen in this way for this long, especially when confronted by controversy. The people of Milwaukee proudly point to the museum as the museum of Milwaukee. The museum engages the community through its programming decisions and has had many sessions with the public about moving to a new building. Their professional collaborations are extensive and relate to their research mission of connecting research to their exhibit and educational programs. Their programs and on-site resources regarding physical and mental accessibility are excellent. Their recent full commitment to DEAI with the hiring of a full-time diversity position as well as a diverse DEAI team shows intent to make a permanent difference. The museum also reaches out to communities beyond their neighborhood and this will be even more evident when they move even closer to a more marginalized part of the city.

There is an amazing amount of programming and collections work that is completed within the limitations of budget and staffing. However, the overall result is the excellent public service that is embraced by both staff and board.

Major Concerns:

A part of the museum's public service is caring for resources held in the public trust. The collections are owned by Milwaukee County and museum is paid to care for them. While the limited collections staff does wonders caring for collections numbering four million, the majority of the collections are stored in the basement. The environmental conditions are very poor. As noted earlier, repeated leaks, sewer issues and the overall inappropriateness of the basement need to be dealt with as soon as possible.

Minor Concerns:

None

Exemplary Practices:

Using interns, museum students, advanced degree students, adjunct curators, research assistants, emeritus curators to re-energize the research aspect of the museum is a smart and practical program despite research staff shortages.

Accessibility programs and an accessibility team show a commitment to all persons regardless of disability.

Their commitment to DEAI by hiring a full-time diversity position as well as establishing a diverse and active DEAI team.

If the museum noted any areas of change in the Self-Study, comment on how well the museum has handled them or is preparing for them.

Other comments (optional)

Concluding Narrative

The site visit took place over two days, as coronavirus levels were spiking. MPM staff were well organized and welcoming, while observing public health guidelines throughout our visit. We would like to thank President and CEO Dr. Ellen Censky, all the staff, and the board members who spent so much time preparing and ensuring a thorough, informative and positive experience. We would also like to recognize Sara Podejko, the museum's Registrar, who was an efficient guide, keeping us on schedule while responding to any requests we made. We were able to extensively tour the facility with insights from varied perspectives—collections, facilities, education, and visitor services among others. The tours were complemented by thoughtful discussions with staff from across the museum, the leadership team and board members.

The Milwaukee Public Museum (MPM) is beloved by its community to a degree that most museums aspire to. Multiple board members spoke movingly about what the museum meant to them growing up, how it opened a wider world and shaped their future directions. For some, the museum was a multi-generational experience, to which they brought their children and grandchildren. Yet it is also clearly welcoming to the newest arrivals in the community. This sense of connection to MPM, whether to favorite experiences or to the museum's broader presence, was evident among community members, online comments about the museum, and reflections from staff members who grew up in its orbit.

The staff and board see the Milwaukee Public Museum as a museum of the people, and it is their job to engage them – all of them. They believe that their work today will be there for generations to come. Since the 1960's, the museum has emphasized the intersection of nature and culture and purposefully connected their research with their exhibits and education. The addition of public science programs like Museum on the Move, the annual BioBlitz and statewide citizen science program show a forward-thinking plan that engages the community and is an important part of the museum's future.

MPM continues to earn respect and affection by working steadily to ensure that the museum's facility, collections and programs are accessible, welcoming and relevant. In many areas, MPM is a model for the field, as shown by the number of exemplary practices highlighted throughout this report. It is committed to accessibility in the broadest sense, creating physical spaces and programs to serve all visitors; making its collections more widely available and reaching out to new audiences, locally and statewide. This commitment is evident in the systematic and ongoing community involvement in planning for the new building, carried out under the direction of the Chief Planning Officer, Katie Sanders. The new museum's location, announced shortly before our visit, is in keeping with this focus on accessibility and community, and was received as such in the responses we saw. MPM will also be partnering with the Betty Brinn Children's Museum, to be located in the new facility.

At the time of its previous accreditation in 2007, the museum was emerging from a major financial and governance crisis. In the years since, it has become a much healthier institution. They have demonstrated fiscal responsibility with strong board oversight and transparency throughout the period and paid off the last of their long-term debt in February 2020. The board is engaged, well-informed and fully aligned with museum management. The board members we spoke with were passionate about the museum and actively advocating for it throughout the community. Public memory of the 2005 crisis has been replaced with support for the museum's direction and future as well as broad recognition of its centrality to the community. Staff is

unified in their commitment to the museum's mission, well-integrated operationally and fully invested in the MPM's strategic goals. Staff and board consistently expressed confidence in the museum's management and CEO Ellen Censky's leadership.

Challenges remain. While the financial management is excellent, there are structural budgetary issues that affect MPM's ability to fully carry out its mission. As noted, the budget has not kept pace with inflation. This is coupled with the enormous drain on financial and staff resources from the current building. These include ongoing maintenance demands of a large and deteriorating facility, gallery spaces too extensive to be handled at current staffing levels, and enormous utility bills. These have resulted in an imbalance between operational expenses and the funds needed to support staffing at an adequate level. The 2005 and 2007 cuts in staff, with further cuts in 2017, have continued to affect the museum. In addition, the COVID pandemic has led to more cuts, the elimination of four positions in July and an additional position left vacant. The museum leadership and board are candid about staffing and budgetary issues and in agreement on the need to address them over the long term. The plans for a new building will allow less expense for operational costs and free up more for staffing. This is essential to a museum of this size, scope, and activity level.

MPM has responded in creative and laudable ways, but the collections and exhibitions areas remain understaffed, as they were in 2007, creating significant stress. They are even more deserving of recognition, then, for the incredible work they have achieved, especially in stewardship, research, community partnerships and public service.

Each area of the collection has a curator or collections manager, but this coverage represents a major and sustained reduction over the past decade and a half. For example, the anthropology department, which is very active with exhibitions, public programs, research, NAGPRA, museum studies, and other responsibilities, went from seven curatorial and collections staff to just one. The academic dean position has remained open since Dr. Censky became CEO and is currently filled in an interim capacity by the two research curators. A digitization manager was hired to further the museum's digitization and access work, working closely with curatorial and collections staff to digitize a considerable amount of material. Other collections work, such as object rotations and conservation, have had to drop further down the priority list. Planning for the new facility and preparing to move the collections will put even more pressure on staff time and energies. MPM's response to meeting these challenges has, in many ways, been impressive. In the collections and research area, they have supplemented staff through a variety of means, including adjunct and emeritus positions, internships and fellowships, that advance research and dissemination. Still, this remains an area of significant concern.

On the exhibition front, also noted as a concern in 2007, MPM has made updates to the highest profile spaces, adding a small multi-sensory gallery, Arthropod Scents, opening the Crossroads of Civilization gallery in 2015, and updating the popular Streets of Old Milwaukee. Staff are also refreshing labels and upgrading mounts. There are two large changing galleries (currently empty because of COVID-19) for traveling exhibitions and in-house temporary shows. But the 150,000 square feet of permanent exhibition space is too much to maintain overall, and many galleries have remained largely unchanged over the past 50 years. The exhibition emphasis appears to be shifting toward planning for the new building. Luci Creative has been retained to help with the initial planning process; the exhibition design firm for the new building will be hired in tandem with the architect and the general contractor. The exhibitions department is currently

headed by Dr. Jen Zaspel, who is also co-interim academic dean and as research curator of zoology involved in multiple major grants. We did not speak with any other exhibition staff. We understand that it is a very small department that also utilizes emeritus staff to fulfill its duties, raising concerns about the long-term sustainability of this arrangement, which will presumably change with the move into the new facility.

The single biggest issue facing MPM is its current building. It is much too large (800,000 square feet) for the museum to efficiently operate. More seriously, design flaws, aging, and more than \$100 million in deferred maintenance contribute to environmental and structural issues that endanger the collections, drain resources, and lead to questions about the building's integrity. Milwaukee County owns the building as well as the collections. While museum leadership and staff have excellent relationships with the county officials, the scope of the county's facility responsibilities means that projects often are in the queue for funding until they become emergencies. MPM has absorbed some smaller capital projects to improve its operations and stewardship, but these cannot begin to address the facility's problems.

Much is riding on the plans for a new building to remedy these issues, including the museum's ability to fully meet its mission while operating sustainably and the long-term stewardship of the collection. MPM would plan, own and run the new facility (the county would continue to own the collections.) In addition to reducing costs, they would have new revenue streams to help the overall budget. Much of MPM's energy and strategic planning is directed toward the new building—they are not in a holding pattern, but rather designing and testing programming, collections management and other activities so that they help prepare for the move. The museum is in the early stages of its capital campaign at the time of this report.

Overall, we were very impressed by the museum's direction, its dedication to mission, its well-earned place in the community, and the thoughtful and strategic ways it uses its resources. Staff cohesion is exceptionally strong. Over and over we saw excellent cooperation and coordination among departments—clearly everyone is focused on the same goals and the internal culture encourages collaboration and agency. MPM is a model for other museums, and we have no doubt it will be so for many years to come.