



# American Alliance of Museums

November 1, 2016

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Nantucket, MA

Ms. Sarah Mundy  
Director  
Riverside Metropolitan Museum  
3580 Mission Inn Ave  
Riverside, CA 92501-3321

Dear Ms. Mundy:

After much consideration, the Accreditation Commission voted to table its decision on accreditation for the Riverside Metropolitan Museum. We discussed your museum at great length at our October 13-14, 2016 meeting, reviewing the Self-Study, supporting documents, and the Visiting Committee's report.

We commend the staff's dedication, its openness to change, and the trust it has earned from local government leaders. We are pleased with the progress that has been made since the last accreditation review in a number of areas. The museum's work in obtaining grants and funding for interpretive planning and activities for the Harada House (made visible, in part, through an excellent website about the Harada family's story) is exemplary.

Unfortunately, the unique assets that make this museum a potential regional, if not national, resource are not receiving the attention (and in the case of the Harada House, the care) that they deserve. Therefore, we tabled our decision so that the museum can address, through planning, some serious deficiencies in collections stewardship:

- The City of Riverside has allowed the Harada House to deteriorate despite the prominent place the Harada House has to the community and the nation's history, as noted on the City's cultural website. While a neighboring property has been acquired to help tell a more complete story of the importance of the Harada family, the Harada House itself has been allowed to crumble. City leadership made clear to the Visiting Committee that it has no intention of budgeting the funds required to keep the Harada House from deteriorating further. Unless outside funds are secured or new funds are allocated by the City, this unique and nationally-recognized resource may well disappear. By the end of the tabling period, we need to see measurable plans and evidence of concrete steps taken to address the urgent need to stabilize, then conserve, then open the Harada House.
- The storage conditions of collections in the basement of the main museum building remain substandard, despite this having been identified as an issue in the last accreditation review and with some progress made in the interim. The museum needs to determine whether more culling of its collections is necessary, whether more resources need to be devoted to rehousing, or both. While this may not be fully accomplished within the tabling period, we need to see a plan for, and initial steps taken, to improve basement storage conditions.

continued

Ms. Sarah Mundy  
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In addition to these two high-priority collections care issues, we also note that the basketry collection is one that makes the museum unique among museums of its size. However, two issues about it stand out:

- It provides an opportunity for exhibit and programming excellence that does not appear to have been fully exploited.
- The museum's planning does not adequately acknowledge the importance of this resource relative to other collections.

During the tabling period, we want to see some steps or plans to consider how to make better use of this important collection, whether through interpretation, research, exhibits, or other strategies.

On average, 30 percent of all museums are tabled at each Commission meeting. We find that museums often use their tabling decision as an opportunity to address issues they recognize as areas of concern and to leverage change. You will be reassured to know that in the majority of these kinds of decisions, tabling issues get resolved and accreditation is awarded.

A copy of the Visiting Committee's report is enclosed, along with more information about the tabling process. During the tabling period the museum must address the issues cited above. As part of the tabling process:

- ✓ The museum must submit a progress report with relevant supporting documentation to the Accreditation Program staff **on or before April 21, 2017** for review by the Accreditation Commission at our June 2017 meeting.
- ✓ We will review the museum's final report at our February 2018 meeting and make our decision regarding accreditation based on the progress the museum has made in addressing our concerns. A specific report due date will be assigned after we review your progress report.

I encourage you to contact Julie Hart, Senior Director, Museum Standards and Excellence, at (202) 218-7712 or [jhart@aam-us.org](mailto:jhart@aam-us.org) if you have questions about the tabling process or if you would like to arrange a phone call with a Commissioner to discuss the Commission's decision.

Sincerely yours,

  
Burt Logan  
Chair, Accreditation Commission  
Executive Director and CEO  
Ohio History Connection

Enclosures:

Site Visit Report  
What You Need to Know About: The Museum's Site Visit Report  
What You Need to Know About: The Tabling Decision and Process  
Guidelines for the Institution: Tabling Action Progress and Final Reports  
Standards Regarding Collections Stewardship

cc: Charles Wilson, Chairperson, Metropolitan Museum Board  
Dennis Kois, Visiting Committee  
Daniel Joyce, Visiting Committee

## Accreditation Site Visit Report Form

<b>Institution</b>	Riverside Metropolitan Museum Riverside, CA
<b>Visit Start Date</b>	2016-07-19
<b>Peer Reviewers</b>	Daniel Joyce Executive Director Kenosha Public Museums Kenosha, WI
	Dennis Kois President & CEO Milwaukee Public Museum Milwaukee, WI

## 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-M. Sharma, June 2016.

# 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	



<b>Core Standards (Characteristics of Excellence)</b>		
	<b>YES</b>	<b>NO</b>
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**

#### **Major Concerns:**

- As the museum staff are fully aware, the collections storage at the main museum building leaves much to be desired. The basement spaces lack any fine control of temperature and no humidity controls. There is no fire suppression and a lack of seismic protection. Both basement storage areas at the museum are over full; there are overhead pipes and hence a water damage risk. Additionally, there are pest problems of the sort typically seen in older structures present in the museum building. Hence the collections are being damaged in place, primarily due to swings in temperature and humidity caused by seasonal change, by weather patterns, and by occupancy of the space by staff during the day via respiration of humidity. The pests are a less likely source of damage, but nonetheless are not desirable in collections areas. The Archive and Natural History collections need to be moved offsite, out of these basement areas. Compactor storage was suggested in the same area to save space but this is a short term solution that does not mitigate the above dangers to the museum collections. Rumsey 1 and 2 are offsite storage areas and are very good facilities with adequate temperature and humidity control; the City of Riverside is to be commended for taking the initiative to provide these spaces and improve museum storage. However, the job should now be completed by ensuring proper storage of the Archives and Natural History collections offsite. Rumsey 2 is currently a shared space and is thus less secure. A new storage facility with extra space that can be rented to other museums as a revenue source is badly needed and is a part of the Capital Improvement Plan. It is imperative to get all storage out of the main building immediately and concentrate on education, exhibits and interpretation in general as well as revenue generation.
- The staff is also well aware that the lack of effective climate control in the 1891 Heritage House (which contains collections) is unacceptable. Turning on the air conditioning only when people are present is also unacceptable, and in fact the sudden swings in temperature and RH caused by the on/off cycling are more likely to cause damage to the collections and structure than were the AC left either entirely on, or off. The climate control situation needs to be addressed as soon as possible by funding and installing an HVAC system and establishing operating funds for the costs to maintain a museum-grade environment 24/7/365.
- As noted later in the report, RMM's single most important collections object—the Harada House—has been in a state of decay since being acquired over a decade ago. While some stabilization work is now underway, there are significant hurdles to preserving this National Historic Landmark (much less opening it to the public and interpreting it). RMM

staff are doing what they can to preserve this important site with limited resources; but the solution lies with political leadership.

**Minor Concerns:**

- Slight infestations in the natural history collections, typical for a building of this construction and age, have been handled in a reactive manner as was a past infestation in the exhibit gallery. The collections policy calls for an Integrated Pest Management program; however no IPM has not been implemented. The museum needs to budget for and implement this program at the Museum, Heritage House and Rumsey 1 and 2 (at minimum). This is an immediate priority and will require City funding. In the meantime staff will need to be proactive in monitoring and controlling pest activity.
- RMM's Board and collections committee is not rigorous enough in adhering to the existing collections policies for acquisitions. The museum is regularly accepting materials into the collection from cultures far outside the Riverside area, which clearly are not germane to RMM's mission. For example, the museum has accepted contemporary Native American art from the Haida, Oglalla/Lakota, and Eastern Band Cherokee and Mohawk. While it may be difficult politically or personally for the museum or committee members to decline such gifts, it is much more difficult to care for them in perpetuity at public expense, or to dispose of them later through deaccessioning. The current policy only allows such acquisitions for "justifiable" exceptions—however, it appears that such acquisitions have become the norm, not the exception.
- Conversely, the scope of the Riverside history collections is not inclusive enough. The museum is not actively collecting recent and current Hispanic/Latino materials that reflect the shifting demographics of the United States and Riverside region. This is particularly important given RMM's ownership of Harada House. RMM has a unique opportunity to tell a compelling, nationally important story of the shifting perceptions in America of the "other"—ideally by weaving together the common threads in the stories of local Native American tribes, the Haradas, and now the story of Riverside's growing Latino communities. At present the collections policy emphasis is on acquisitions that reflect important Riverside residents, historic development of the city, community development with an eye toward population diversity, citrus, commercial and industrial enterprises, universities and colleges. This is a largely traditional model that will not result in collections that capture the stories of the majority of the present-day Riverside population and risks RMM ultimately making itself less relevant to what Riverside's populace needs. This need to broaden collecting scope is well understood by the museum staff and needs only to be implemented. The Archives staff realizes that they too need to actively expand their collections in these ethnic areas for the post-WWII era. Leadership is required to prioritize, resource, and advance these efforts.
- The Team is concerned that not all flammable film is stored in cold storage or at least in vented flammable cabinets. Pharmaceuticals in the collection must also be properly stored and secured.
- The City accepted the civil rights landmark Harada House in 2004. It is a National Historic Landmark and could, if restored and made a centerpiece of the RMM's future program, be a signature driver of Riverside's tourism, self-identity, and community pride in diversity. Very few museums in the U.S. have the opportunity to undertake projects of national importance; Harada House is a rare exception. However, the house is in need of extensive work in order to be utilized by the museum and be accessible to the public; work which has only recently begun. Since 2004 there has been some progress has been made: 2005 Getty grant – long range conservation plan/historic structure report; 2005 FEMA disaster money; 2006 CA Cultural Historic Endowment, 2014 Robinson House purchase; 2015 City funds for foundation stabilization and site drainage; garage disassembly and anoxic treatment. At the museum the extensive Harada Family artifact and archival collection has largely been cataloged. Although the City took on ownership and is helping the museum stabilize the structure, it would appear in the current political

climate the City will not fund its restoration. This house is a national treasure and could be RMM's, and Riverside's, national claim to fame. Board leadership in prioritizing the fundraising for and completion of Harada House—now part of RMM for 13 years without being open to the public—must be the centerpiece of much of the Board's effort and leadership over the coming years. This may require RMM prioritizing Harada House over other projects and even other parts of its mission; actions that should be led by, and taken by, the Board.

- Rumsey 1 and 2 are off-site storage facilities where the majority of objects are stored. The storage facility is on a floodplain but within NPS guidelines and the staff has installed flood alarms and have also raised all items 18" off the floor. Leadership will need to ensure these precautionary measures are made a part of standing organizational procedures and that the risk of flooding remains a part of RMM's emergency planning.
- In all storage areas, unfiltered fluorescent lighting, which exposes collections to UV radiation, is an issue which the staff is aware of and are in the process of remedying.
- Staff need to ensure that any materials used for collections storage construction (such as decking, shelving, etc.) are evaluated for suitability against information published by one of the many AAM conservation communities of practice.

#### **Exemplary Practices:**

- The general care of collections evidenced at the various facilities is very good, and exceeds those typically found in museums of RMM's size. Staff are well versed in collections care, know the shortcomings of current practices and procedures, and are addressing them as they have funding and staffing. Temperature and humidity are monitored using HOBO dataloggers.
- Excepting the Harada House, the basket collection is by far the most important and valuable RMM collection and is of national significance. The basketry collection should be a source of pride for the museum as well as a centerpiece of the exhibits.
- Staff is appropriately narrowing the focus of the Natural History collections to "only collect those specimens that can be used in programs and exhibits...zoology collections for systematic and research purposes."
- The Collections Management Policy and Conservation, Collections Plans and Live Animal Policy are all very comprehensive and appropriate.
- The archives are collecting oral histories from the Harada neighborhood, to complement the Harada archives and collection..
- Staff are to be commended for their attempts to preserve and safeguard the Harada House, utilizing whatever resources have been available. Acquisition of the adjacent Robinson house is an important part of the Harada story.
- 1891 Heritage House is lovingly restored jewel. The Museum, City and Associates are to be commended for their efforts. The property has had very good city support in terms of capital improvements (2012 city and Riverside Museum Associates funded re-roofing, painting and a perimeter block wall; 2014 the gazebo was removed due to a termite infestation; and 2015 city funded rebuilding front porch); Interpretation of Mrs. Bettner's life is spot on.

**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.**

Positive change is the watchword for the museum and its staff in recent years. With the coming of a new Director and a new and generally supportive City Administration, the museum has potential to advance its mission and position in the community.

The current leadership team of the RMM is motivated, committed, and thoughtful. The current museum Director expressed concern about her lack of traditional museum training or background; however it was clear during the reaccreditation visit that she is highly effective and



has the trust of the staff as well as City leadership. She has quickly developed a sophisticated understanding of the strategic and operational issues faced by museums, and has adapted her political skills to the service of the museum with aplomb. “The right person at the right time” is the phrase that comes to mind. The City should ensure that she has the support and resources required to advance the institution.

As has been noted elsewhere, what is needed to leverage the strong professional leadership, generally supportive City Administration, and opportunity that the Harada House represents is stronger leadership and a resolve to focus on strategic choices by the Board of Directors. As the saying goes, the toughest part of being strategic is not deciding what to do—it’s deciding what not to do. The Board has to prioritize the efforts of the RMM toward the greatest opportunity for the museum to fulfill its mission, and do meaningful work for the community. And that, clearly, is in Harada House. City support will be needed for the effort at Harada.

While some game efforts have been made to fundraise and friendraise in the community, the Board seems generally uncomfortable with fundraising.

# 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	

Core Standards (Characteristics of Excellence)		
	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**

### **Major Concerns:**

- Funding for the museum is almost entirely supplied by the City. There is no diversification via earned or contributed revenues. The museum staff and Director know that this was a problem during the Great Recession when 40% of their funding was cut. Nearly 100% city support is not a good long-term financial model. The Director and Board are aware and working on alternatives in their institutional plan.
- Under a previous City Administration and Director, the City directed the museum to take on an expensive, high-risk traveling exhibit. When the exhibit failed financially, the City made the museum use its trust fund (an endowment that was the result of private individual giving) to pay off the debt. This was a dangerous precedent, as well as a wildly inappropriate level of direct City involvement in the museum, to which the Board of Directors at that time should have pushed back. It has also eroded donor confidence in the community, and thus made it more difficult for RMM to raise money. The present City administration is much more supportive of the museum and uses a more hands-off approach; however the boundaries around this type of city interference in the running of the museum should be codified in a way that ensures such an incident does not occur again.
- By Municipal Code, the City Council has operational control over the museum in areas that should be in the hands of the Director. Hence there is a lack of appropriate delegation of authority to the museum director. In addition, the Council redundantly approves what they have appointed the Board to do (Riverside Municipal Code - Chapter 2.12). This is not an efficient model.

### **Minor Concerns:**

- The acquisitions for the anthropology collection are too frequently outside the bounds of the mission. This started with the very first Native American collection

which founded the museum and contained Native American objects from outside of the region. The 2015 Mission states: “As a center for learning, the Riverside Metropolitan Museum interacts with the community to collect, preserve, explore, and interpret the cultural and natural history of *Riverside and its region.*” (emphasis ours) The Riverside Municipal Code - Chapter 2.12 states that the “All collections and exhibits of the museum shall generally reflect but shall not necessarily be limited to the specific interpretations of the history, natural history and anthropology of *the City and County of Riverside and the immediate environs of Southern California* (emphasis ours.) “Region” and “not necessarily” are terms that open Pandora's box as to their meaning making many potential accessions “justifiable”. Collections from the Plains, Southwest Pueblo, Chippewa, Northwest Coast or contemporary Native American art from far outside of the region do not belong. The staff and Board know the mission and know the need to rigorously follow it as well. In the case of the founding collection and some other early collections, these materials may not be able to be deaccessioned but new acquisitions should strictly adhere to the mission.

- The Director of the Museum is also the Director of Cultural Affairs for the City.
- The relationship with the Riverside Museum Association appears healthy, and RMM is lucky to have this enthusiastic group of volunteers. Care should be taken both by leadership of RMA and RMM leadership, however, to ensure the partisan interests of the museum associates does not influence RMM strategic policy or actions. Specifically, the RMA's focus on the Heritage House should not have undue influence on RMM leadership decision-making, even when such decisions may adversely impact RMA's interest (for example, if a budgetary decision were made to direct more resources to Harada House, rather than Heritage House) . Additionally, RMA's by-laws are very thorough but lack a dissolution clause.
- In the past few years the museum has taken on, in collaboration with the Parks Department, a new Nature Center through grant programs. Those grants will soon expire and the museum is aware and being proactive in developing a plan to continue support of the facility. In addition they have the Harada House to restore and the Robinson house to develop as an interpretive center. We see probable support by the City in terms of the Nature Center, but do not see it for the Harada or Robinson House. Going forward RMM needs to focus fundraising efforts and staffing resources on completing the projects it currently has, rather than expanding to do more.
- The Code of Ethics is a good document but lacks a section on personal collecting.
- The museum does not have a coherent brand strategy. The name was recently changed from “Municipal” to “Metropolitan” to better align with the mission, but what is RMM to the public? On the web site, there is only a presence on the City web page as a generic “museum.” Facebook is similar. Even with the very limited resources RMM has, much more could be done in this arena.
- The museum has 15 full-time and 6 part-time staff. It is a very small and very devoted staff. Their dedication and teamwork are obvious in their culture and in their output. However, they are in danger of burnout.
- That being said, the current organizational structure seems heavily aligned to RMM's past than with the challenges in its immediate future. Staffing is weighted toward curatorial and collections, while areas such as fundraising, marketing and programming are unstaffed or understaffed. Some difficult decisions will need to be made to better align staffing with what RMM needs to develop and become sustainable.

### **Exemplary Practices:**

- The new Director is committed to and understands the needs of the museum and making it into a more valued resource for the community. As a native of Riverside, she is especially passionate about her and her staff's role as keeper of Riverside's past. It is evident that after a time of stagnation during the Great Recession, that she is moving the museum forward with focus and verve.
- The staff is very dedicated to what they do and go above and beyond the scope of and the time allocated for their job. They are well trained and express their enthusiasm for every aspect of the museum and its role in the community.
- The museum building exterior and interior public spaces are very well cared for by the City and museum staff. The building itself is well maintained and has benefited from City investment. Inside, the public spaces were very well maintained and even a construction area near the door was clean and well segregated from the public for their safety.
- After the turmoil of recent years, the Director has attracted new as well as retained the best of the existing staff. It can be seen that the uncertainty of the past is lifting and the Director is instilling confidence and ambition in the staff.
- RMM relationships and cooperative programming, such as the Insect Rave with local universities, bio-ID app, and other efforts are commendable and can be strengthened in the future. Utilizing partner faculty expertise to attract the public through programming and exhibits is an effective way to do more with less.

**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.**

## 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 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. Does the staff member or volunteer conducting the program appear informed and trained? Is the content appropriate to the museum's mission?
  
3. Examine all the interpretive materials or equipment in the exhibition spaces (e.g., gallery guides, wall text, labels, videos, audio guides, interactives, etc.).

<b>Questions</b>		
	<b>YES</b>	<b>NO</b>
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	

<b>Core Standards (Characteristics of Excellence)</b>		
	<b>YES</b>	<b>NO</b>
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**

### **Major Concerns:**

- None

### **Minor Concerns:**

- Possible Nature Lab infestation; integrated pest management is needed.
- There is no exhibit staff. No one on staff has the knowledge to create modern exhibits nor is there a budget for them.
- Currently all educational programs are free and many must remain so to better serve the public. Although a laudable goal, not all programs can be free.
- Lack of cohesive historical/natural history message in the main exhibit.
- The use of a temporary exhibit gallery for programs has the potential to damage the objects or cause infestation due to a lack of classroom space in the main building.
- The education staff is very small and, like many education staff, do too much.
- Evaluation of the community's needs and the effectiveness of programming is in its infancy. The staff is committed to better serve the realizes that evaluation tools need to be consistently applied.

### **Exemplary Practices:**

- Despite the museum's sometimes wide ranging collections focus, interpretation (by default both education and exhibits), is focused in their programmed activities. Their stated goal is to "promote understanding of the unique forces that have created and continue to shape the City of Riverside and the immediate region. This includes investigation into Riverside's history, appreciation of the wide variety of cultural groups that have influenced Riverside, and understanding of the region's natural environment." Programs adhere to these parameters and meet the needs of the public and school educational standards. They use multiple forms of learning in the museum and design learning opportunities around educational models. The museum is looking more and more at the needs and input of the community, making the museum more relevant. It is reaching out to neighborhoods via events and pocket exhibits and is beginning to survey the community and visitor needs.
- Education is also incorporating the visitor voice in their program planning.
- The staff is moving the Native American time line forward to encompass contemporary cultures and does not do first person interpretation unless they are from that particular culture.
- The Cahuilla Continuum exhibit is a wonderful example of cooperative input from Cahuilla culture bearers, and the Cahuilla Community. The labels are also in English and Cahuilla—kudos.
- A program called Ticket to Ride took 100 middle school children to experience the great outdoors, many for the first time.
- The planned use of bilingual (English – Spanish) labels in the exhibits to better serve a community that is 49% Hispanic is necessary and at the same time very commendable.
- The museum's interpretation of natural history is unique and innovative: the Nature Lab, the Ameal Moore Nature Center, the Citizen Scientists program/ Environmental Education Initiatives, the Nature Spotter app and the highly successful Insect Rave.

**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.**

It is apparent that with new staff, new administration and new direction that the educational programming is soaring. The focus on the Riverside area in both history and natural history programming is just the focus that the museum needs. These changes in direction are commendable and in some ways incredible given the level of staffing and funding.

# 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 board 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?

<b>Questions</b>		
	<b>YES</b>	<b>NO</b>
Do the staff and board 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, board members and the community involved in strategic planning in some way?	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	

<b>Core Standards (Characteristics of Excellence)</b>		
	<b>YES</b>	<b>NO</b>
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**

### **Major Concerns:**

- As noted earlier, the Board of Directors at RMM will need to exert significantly greater strategic leadership and resource development to help RMM achieve its fullest potential. This statement is not meant to imply that the Board is currently failing to fulfill its duties in the work they do for RMM. The development of the 2016-2020 strategic plan was an important first step.

But the Board currently seems to be focused on “maintenance mode”—keeping RMM running smoothly—as opposed to setting a bar for high organizational performance and advancing efforts to grasp opportunities to secure greater funding, public support, national attention and future community relevance. If RMM is to reach its greatest potential as an institution (and as outsiders, we can assure you it has high potential to do work of national import given the ownership of Harada House), the Board is going to have to step up their game significantly over an extended period of time.

Ultimately RMM will only be as successful as its Board makes it.

### **Minor Concerns:**

- The museum has very little contributed revenue and even less earned revenue. The future emphasis seems to be on contributed revenues alone. The need is to develop secure external and internal funding.

### **Exemplary Practices:**

- With the arrival of the new Director and increasing economic and strategic stability, the museum has had time to develop a long range institutional plan 2016-2020 (adopted 2/9/16). Most impressive are the four institutional goals (Governance, Sustainability, Education and Stewardship) along with multiple tactical and strategic tasks. The plan reinforces the museum’s educational programming as defining the museum as an integral community resource. With this resource, it is evident that the Director, Board and staff are very aware of what their essential tasks are for the next five years. The next step is to implement the leadership and discipline to advance those tasks.

**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.**

# 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.
  
2. Using their programming and online presence as your guide, note your perception of the museum's self-identified communities.

### During the site visit:

1. If the museum has a visitor comment book, read what people have written.
  
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 drive for diversity evident in the composition of the staff, visitors and board?	X	
Is a commitment to physical accessibility apparent throughout all facilities and programming?	X	
Does the community demonstrate an awareness of and investment in the museum, its mission and its collections?	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 and cultural communities?	X	

Core Standards (Characteristics of Excellence)		
	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**

**Major Concerns:**

- RMM with full support from the City of Riverside acquired a National Historic Landmark site more than a decade ago. RMM holds this site in the public interest, however the site continues to degrade and RMM has not succeeded in opening it to the public in any meaningful way.

**Minor Concerns:**

- The community “in the know” appreciates what a gem they have in the museum. The Mayor, City Manager and Planner all acknowledged the importance of the museum as a vital part of a vibrant community, adding to the quality of life. And given the Administration, Board and staff enthusiasm, RMM’s future is looking brighter. Those in Riverside who know of the museum regard it highly and have positive comments, however, like all museums in any city, the institution is often underutilized by many citizens. The staff realize this and are reaching out to the community in several ways. Their current efforts to better assess the communities’ needs with regard to the museum are commendable and a good start toward better engagement of community stakeholders.
- Given the shifting demographics of Riverside (and the US as a whole) more attention must be paid to diversity of programming and board makeup.
- As noted elsewhere, RMM leadership needs to narrow their focus to what the institution can do uniquely and well in order to truly succeed. RMM is currently trying to do a little bit of everything—natural history, cultural history, historic house interpretation, citizen science, community archiving. Deciding what RMM should be—and executing that plan—will be critical to moving from a “nice to have” museum to a “must have” institution for the community (or even nation, should RMM play its cards right).

**Exemplary Practices:**

- Staff is often singled out as being friendly and helpful in online comments. The Visiting Committee observed the same while visiting. RMM is a community museum and it is evident in person and via social media and web reviews.
- The museum does not charge admission, school group fees, or programs making the museum truly accessible to all. This is highly commendable and often thought a must in a publicly financed institution. While commendable, the museum and city must take a long look at future revenue sources for the museum.
- Outreach to the community is through Pocket Exhibits, to neighborhoods and at city-wide events. Thoughts on mobile outreach are good but must be carefully thought through as to initial and operational costs.



- Even with some turmoil since the last accreditation review, the museum has made great strides in resolving most issues brought up in the last review.

**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.**

# Concluding Narrative

## Summary Comments

The RMM is an under-recognized community jewel in Riverside that has a highly unusual opportunity that 99% of American museums will never have: the potential to take on national significance. The National Historic Landmark Harada House would allow RMM to powerfully interpret America's past struggles as a nation of immigrants, and thereby shed light on our current and future struggles with these same issues. What Harada House, in conjunction with other RMM collections (a world-class native American basketry collection, the ability to collect current artifacts of Riverside's demographic shifts to a majority-minority city) allows the museum to deliver is a nationally-important mission of interpreting America's immigrant story—past, present and future. What could be more timely?

Given its location in the greater LA area, delivering effectively on that mission could bring significant economic and reputational benefit to the City of Riverside as well as the museum itself through visitation and tourism. The City is to be commended for investing the resources to stabilize the foundation of Harada House. That said, it has been well over a decade since the Museum, with full City support, acquired the house. Yet the National Landmark site is in critical condition, degrading with every year, and with no immediate prospects of real preservation, much less opening the house to the public in support of the museum's mission. This is a challenge for the Board, in partnership with the City, to address. It is unlikely RMM will be able to make progress with Harada House without the City leading the way with fundraising.

Since its last reaccreditation, RMM has done an admirable job in rectifying many of the issues that arose in the last review of the institution and making substantive progress. In particular, City partnership has led to a majority of the collections being moved offsite to museum-grade storage, leaving only a minority in unacceptable conditions. The world-class collection of Native American basketry is professionally stored and catalogued, awaiting the moment when it might be effectively used for research or display. RMM programs are community-appropriate and are generating significant visitation (particularly some of the special events), relative to what one would typically expect to see at an institution like RMM.

RMM staff are admirably dedicated, professionally capable, and effective in their leadership and duties. They far exceed what one would typically see in an institution of RMM's size, and are to be commended for all they've accomplished. Similarly, the volunteers and Board members are dedicated and are working to advance RMM toward sustainability.

Somewhat ironically, the biggest risk to sustainability for RMM is its reliance on nearly 100% City funding. This has, as noted elsewhere in this report, led to major swings in staffing with the vagaries of City budgets and leadership, as well as inappropriate involvement of City personnel in attempting to program a high-risk exhibit at RMM—the failure of which led the City to claw back funding donated by the public from the Museum's trust funds. While that took place under a prior administration (the current administration seems to place great value on supporting RMM), it is direct and recent evidence of the risks entailed by being reliant on changing administrations and single-source funding for success.

Hence the long-term sustainability of RMM rests squarely on its ability to do three things:

- a) Build fundraising capacity
- b) Build capacity for earned income
- c) Do a) and b) by focusing closely on opening Harada House, which will take RMM from a local community institution to one of regional, state-wide, and even national importance. This must be done even at the expense of other parts of RMM's current program, if necessary.