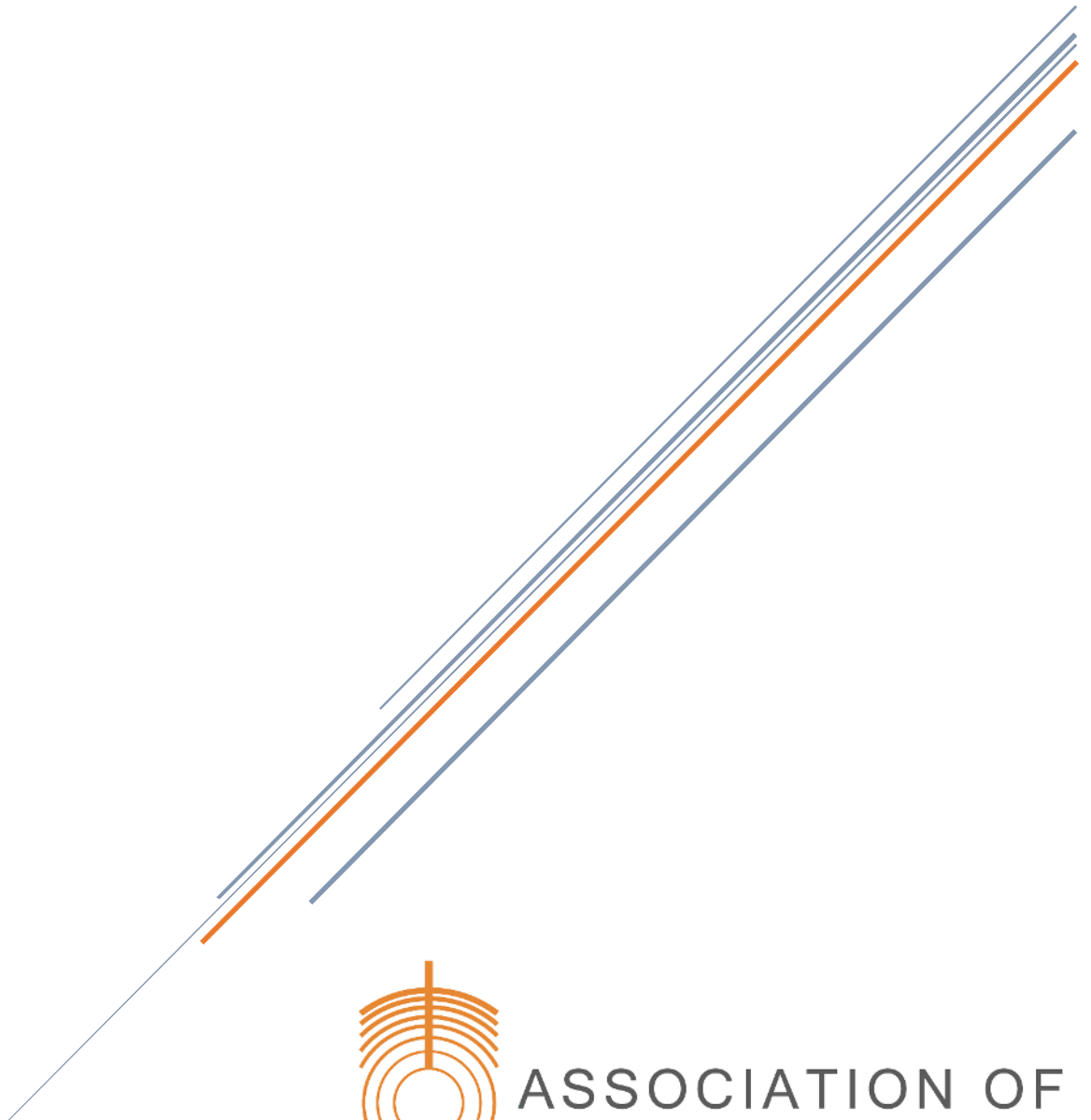


ANNUAL REPORT

Museum Evaluation Program

2021



ASSOCIATION OF
NOVA SCOTIA
MUSEUMS

Table of Contents

I. Executive Summary	2
II. Preparation Work.....	3
Museum Evaluation Program Working Group	3
Evaluation Timeline	4
Evaluation Orientation Sessions	4
Evaluator Recruitment, Selection and Training.....	4
Site Evaluation Scheduling.....	5
COVID-19 Considerations	5
III. Supports for Museums	5
Communications.....	5
Q&A Email Group.....	6
Deep Dives	6
Documentation Review Dispatches	6
IV. Evaluation Process.....	7
Documentation Review	7
Site Evaluation	7
Evaluation Report.....	8
V. Scoring Trends & Analysis	9
Comparing 2016 and 2021 Results.....	9
Results by Section.....	9
Scoring Influences.....	14
VI. Feedback.....	16
Evaluator Debrief.....	16
Evaluation Report Responses	16
VII. Moving Forward	17
VIII. Appendix – Museum Evaluation Scores	20

I. Executive Summary

The Association of Nova Scotia Museums (ANSM) is a non-profit organization which supports museums in Nova Scotia. Since 2016, this support has included the management and delivery of the Museum Evaluation Program (MEP). The MEP aims to encourage the development and capacity of Nova Scotia's museums in both museological practices and community services. 101 museums participate in the program.

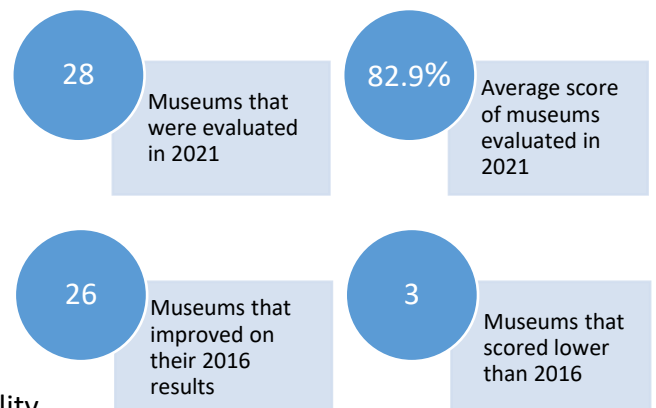
The Museum Evaluation Program includes:

- MEP Working Group
- Evaluation orientation sessions
- Guidance, training, and support for participating museums
- Documentation Review
- Site Evaluation
- Evaluation reports for participating museums
- Application and review process for selecting evaluators
- Evaluator training and resources
- Accreditation

As noted in the 2020 Annual Report, the ANSM board of directors decided in March 2020 to postpone the year's evaluations and instructed ANSM staff to develop and implement new support initiatives for all museums in the MEP. These training opportunities and capacity building exercises were offered from April 2020 through June 2021.

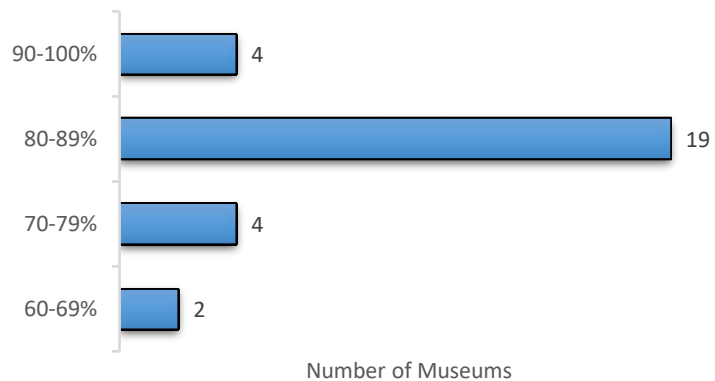
28 museums and one collection storage facility were evaluated. The average score of 82.9% is the highest ever seen in the program, and almost every museum improved on its previous evaluation results. Of the three that did not, each experienced unique circumstances that explain the differences. One additional museum was unable to participate in the site evaluation due to their federally-owned facilities being closed.

Detailed reports were provided to each museum, and continue to provide guidance to museums as they carry out strategic and community service planning exercises. Museums noted the helpfulness of their previous evaluation reports and cited them as a key resource in preparing for this year's evaluation.



This report outlines the MEP's activities over the course of the year, as a continuation of the work begun in 2019 and 2020. It also analyzes trends in scoring and results and offers some suggestions of actions that can be taken to address feedback and findings. Supporting documents are provided as appendices.

Museum Scoring Ranges - 2021



II. Preparation Work

Museum Evaluation Program Working Group

The Museum Evaluation Program Working Group (MEPWG) guides the program. Representatives come from provincial and municipal governments that fund the program, as well as museums from across the province, both as employees and volunteers. Due to the evaluation postponement, the group met less frequently than usual in 2021, holding only three meetings.

2021 MEPWG members:

- Susan Marchand-Terrio (Chair), Isle Madame Historical Society
- Lyne Allain, Mahone Bay Museum
- Joe Ballard, ANSM Board Member/Little White Schoolhouse Museum
- Cathy Blackbourn, MEP Evaluator
- Lynette de Montreuil, DesBrisay Museum/Wile Carding Mill
- Matthew Hughson, Fisherman's Life Museum
- Karin Kierstead, ANSM
- Amber Laurie, Nova Scotia Museum
- Ian Mullan, Culture & Heritage Division, (Communities, Culture, Tourism & Heritage)
- Kellie McIvor, Halifax Regional Municipality
- Anita Price, ANSM

Lyne Allain and Joe Ballard completed their terms this year and are thanked for their many contributions. Incoming members of the MEPWG include Rodney Chaisson

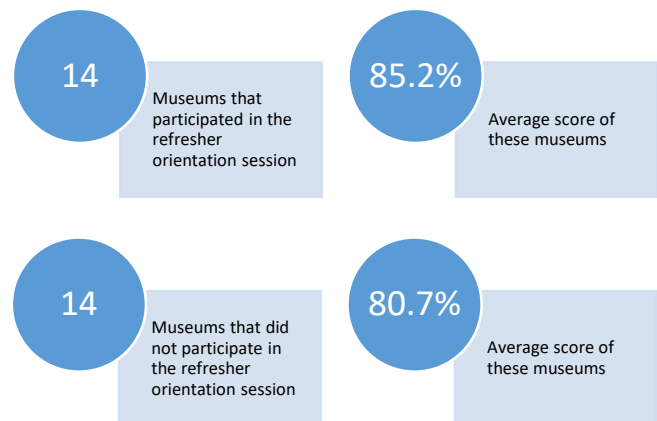
(Highland Village Museum), Nicole Dalrymple (Canadian Museum of Immigration at Pier 21 & ANSM board member). Salina Kemp is also working with the group as an indigenous consultant.

Evaluation Timeline

The consistency of the MEP allows all museums to incorporate evaluation preparations into their long-term work plans. The postponement of 2020 evaluations saw revisions to this timeline, mostly through the addition of training opportunities and feedback exercises. The updated timeline was shared during the orientation refresher, was broadcast through ANSM's communication channels, and reminders about key dates were circulated throughout the year. It remains [available on the website](#).

Evaluation Orientation Sessions

Due to the pandemic and 2019 orientation sessions being delivered to this group of museums already, an online orientation refresher session was delivered on November 5th, with representatives from 25 museums in attendance. 14 museums were evaluated in 2021 and the other 11 museums are slated for other years. Questions were invited in advance in order to make the session more beneficial. As noted in the 2020 report, the free, online delivery expanded participation from the usual curators and board chairs to a much more varied group of staff, volunteers, and board members. Half of attendees had never participated in an evaluation orientation session before. Even though almost every museum attended the original orientation sessions of Fall 2019, there were again correlations between refresher attendance and evaluation results.



Evaluator Recruitment, Selection and Training

Applications were invited from volunteer evaluations in January, and the MEPWG reviewed 14 applications in February. ANSM was encouraged by the number of new applicants from both mid-career professionals and recent retirees. Ten applications were approved and an additional two were designated as spares, in the event of availability changes.

The skillsets of evaluators were mapped out and teams developed that ensured well-rounded knowledge and experiences that could support all areas of the evaluation and needs of diverse museums. ANSM's Executive Director and MEP Manager served as

team leaders, and two other long-standing evaluators also agreed to fill this role. The MEP Manager worked with evaluators to develop [brief biographies](#) for sharing with museums, which were released with the [site evaluation schedule](#) in early April. Evaluator orientation was held virtually on June 30th. Additional discussions took place on an individual basis for new evaluators. Each team was given a Google Drive folder of resources – including their schedule and travel logistics, briefing notes on each museum, and the museums’ previous evaluation report.

Site Evaluation Scheduling

Museums were again asked to share their blackout dates for July site evaluations by mid-March. ANSM shared the draft schedule with museums in the spring, and the evaluation team leaders confirmed dates with each museum again in early July prior to embarking on site evaluations.

COVID-19 Considerations

Some concerns were expressed about contingency plans in the event of another wave or lockdown, but most museums were optimistic about the summer. Thankfully, adjustments to the schedule were not required. Evaluators and museums were both reminded about following public health procedures, including masking and social distancing. All preparatory supports shifted to online delivery in March 2020.

III. Supports for Museums

I want to thank the ANSM team for all your support throughout the past year (and especially the past few months) as we prepare for the 2021 evaluation. Today, we were reflecting on the exceptional quality and standards of service that the ANSM team offers to the museum community, for which we are so grateful!

~Museum Worker

Communications

ANSM’s Executive Director and Manager of the MEP continued their regular communications with members regarding the program and its delivery. Updates, reminders, and other key information was provide via the [ANSM website](#), [Facebook page](#), and [blog](#). Regional Heritage Group meetings, held virtually since the beginning of the pandemic, also provided opportunities for ANSM staff to share updates on the program.

Q&A Email Group

A longstanding favourite of MEP participants, museums continued to submit questions to the program manager, and after individual responses were given, questions were shared anonymously with all subscribers to the Q&A emails. This subscription list was also used to share other reminders and important information.

33

Q&A emails
circulated

86

Subscribers
to Q&A
emails

MEP Deep Dives

115 individuals subscribed to the email list regarding Deep Dives, the virtual learning sessions that included in-depth analysis of each section and/or element of the MEP along with discussion time. All ANSM members were invited to participate. Each session was recorded, and many museums took advantage of this to either share the sessions with others in their organization, or revisit the session at their own convenience. As such, it was common for ANSM staff to receive between three and ten requests for recordings following each Deep Dive.

297

Deep Dive
registrations

22

Average Deep
Dive session
attendance

Let me compliment ANSM on the entire process of the evaluation. The support from staff was extremely helpful; particularly the deep-dive sessions. We were very pleased with our results, while realizing we do have more work to do.

~Museum Worker

Documentation Review Dispatches

The other new support element was giving museums the opportunity to submit files early and receive feedback on them. The majority of museums took advantage of this support. As has been seen in every evaluation year, those museums that engaged in the process and took advantage of supports that were offered experienced stronger evaluation results than those that did not.

50

Dispatches
circulated

22

Museums that
took advantage
of this support

84.1%

Average score
of museums
that received
dispatches

78.3%

Average score
of museums
that did not use
this support

IV. Evaluation Process

Documentation Review

Most museums submitted their completed [questionnaire](#) and supporting files gradually over the course of 2020-21. Individual instructions on how to submit files to the ftp website were circulated to each museum, and the April Deep Dive provided a tutorial on how to use the site. 10 individuals participated in this session. While almost all museums had finished submitting their files by May, an extension of one week was granted (May 14th) due to a province-wide lockdown.

The gradual submissions and offer of feedback made the review process much slower than usual, as files were reviewed multiple times rather than once. 29 museums submitted well over 2,000 files. These were reviewed throughout the course of 2020 and 2021, feedback given on early submissions, and distillations of the information used to develop briefing notes for evaluation teams. These notes were of critical importance to the evaluation teams to give them a better sense of each museum's operations.

Association of Nova Scotia Museums Evaluation Program Submission Form

Welcome Spectacle Group (acoredadmin):
Please ensure your submitted documents are titled to match the list below.
Do not submit additional documents unless they are in support of specific questions requiring examples or extra information. Make note of this on your form so the connections are clear.
For any clarification, please refer to the full [Documentation Review Form](#).
You can submit multiple files by dragging and dropping them or by using the browse feature and selecting the appropriate files. You will receive a confirmation email outlining which files were successfully submitted.
Files do not need to be submitted in one session.
If you wish to review previously submitted files, [click here](#).
It is the responsibility of the museum to ensure that all files are submitted prior to the submission deadline.

2019 DOCUMENT SUBMISSION

File 1 of 1: No file chosen

[Add another file?](#)

Additional Notes:

Let us know if you have a comment:

[File Uploader](#) - [Files](#) - [Admin](#) - [Logout](#) - ANSMM - © 2019

Figure 1: FTP Website Submission Page

83

Average
number of files
submitted by
each museum

2,278

Unique files
submitted

Site Evaluation

The team made us feel comfortable and we felt we could be very open and honest about the museum and its operations. The tension leading up to the visit was eased almost immediately. The team was professional but supportive. And friendly!!!
~Museum Worker

The on-site evaluations took place from July 6-22nd, with four teams of three museum professionals visited this year's group of museums. The length of visit depended on the size and complexity of the site, but averaged approximately three hours. Evaluators noted that almost every museum was well prepared for the visit, which made it much

easier and more efficient to complete the [site evaluation form](#) and make additional notes about the museum's operations.

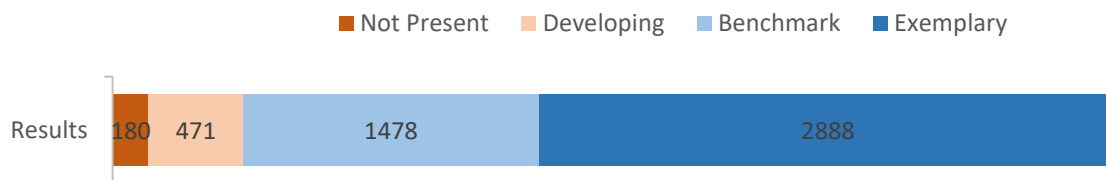
The site evaluation schedule provides museums with 30 minutes to orient the evaluators, sharing highlights and elements that may not be obvious or visible. This year museums were encouraged to include a brief tour and/or program during this time. Evaluators noted that this was very useful to them but that museums continued to treat this time very differently from each other. They also noted that museums were able to clearly demonstrate many improvements in their operations and community service since their last evaluation.

Evaluation Report

I want to commend you on the evaluation reports and the quality of feedback they contain. The report contains targeted and reasoned critiques and shows us exactly how we may continue to make improvements. It is also filled with recognition of our achievements and identifies areas of excellence which was so rewarding to read.
~Museum Worker

While evaluators did not report that museums had their 2016 evaluation reports in hand for their site evaluations this year, numerous museums shared that their 2016 evaluation report was an integral element of preparing for their evaluation. The report structure and format has been gradually shifting since 2016, and the 2021 reports provided information on the following areas: evaluation methodology, how to use the report, detailed information on each section's results, and the museum's scoresheet.

The following graph is part of ANSM's shift away from numerical scoring. As can be seen, the great majority of museum practices align with or are exemplary examples of good standards of practice and community service.

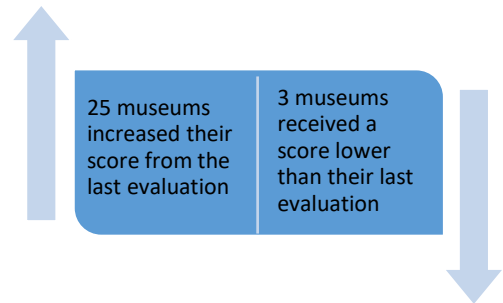


The impressive results of this year suggest that these museums have strong examples of policies, procedures, and partnerships that could be shared with other museums.

V. Scoring Trends & Analysis

Comparing 2016 and 2021 Results

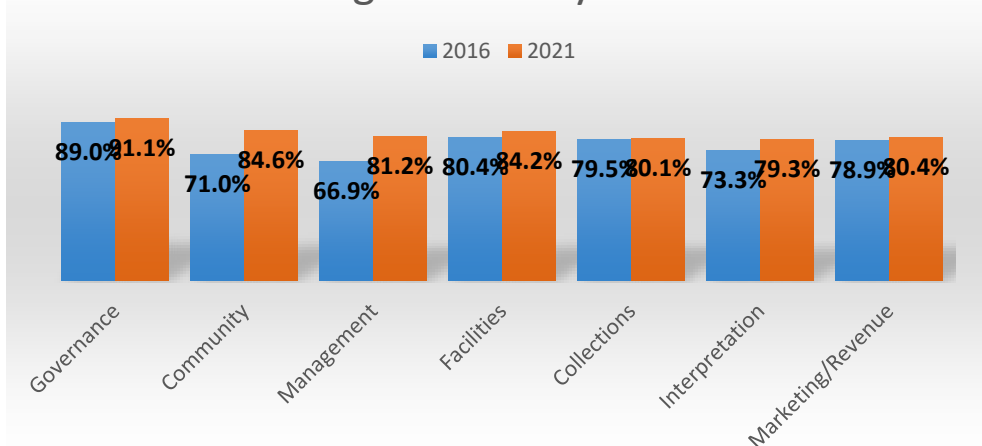
Since the MEP began revisiting museums for subsequent evaluations, results have consistently demonstrated that knowledge and capacity is being built in these museums, that relationships and partnerships are being strengthened in communities, and that Nova Scotians are reaping the rewards. 2021 was no exception. Only three museums saw decreases in their overall evaluation scores, and each can easily be explained based on the unique situations of these organizations. They should not be seen as a poor reflection on the boards, staff, or volunteers.



Results by Section

The most noticeable improved when looking section by section are Community and Management. ANSM is very encouraged by these results because this seems to

Average Scores by Section



demonstrate that the multi-pronged approach to building capacity in these areas is working. These sections have been the sections that the majority of museums struggle with ever since 2016, and so these results will be very informative to ANSM's future training plans. Indeed, improvements are seen across the board this year. Reasons for this likely include the additional time to prepare for evaluation, as well as the diversification of training and supports – ie review of policies and procedures and monthly webinars. Following is a section-by-section breakdown of trends; areas of excellence and opportunities for improvements.

Governance

Governance practices have slightly improved since 2016. The most marked difference is in nominations work; many museums are now mapping board skills in order to do more targeted recruitment of new members.

Another interesting trend this year is the number of museums that have implemented Google Drive, OneDrive, or other online sharing platform for board, staff, and volunteer orientation materials, greatly improving accessibility and transparency.

While all museums have mission statements, many are still definition statements that do not provide adequate guidance. The current evaluation does not allow for this to be properly addressed.

Governance struggles continue to relate predominantly to more action-oriented management elements of governance. Policies are well in hand, but practices such as performance reviews of the lead staff person, strategic plans, and board self-assessments

are still lacking. In some of these issues, the responsibility lies with the board, while in other areas the responsibility may be shared with key staff members or volunteers.

Community

Museums' understanding of community engagement has greatly expanded; with partnerships being strengthened and/or newly formed. Museums are increasingly becoming active members of their communities that champion important issues and positive growth. This group of museums is also very active in regional heritage groups, enabling them to compare notes and share information with their peers on a regular basis. The pandemic shifted these meetings online, which may have contributed to the increase in participation.

Interestingly, while partnerships and growth

Governance Excellence:

- Ethics guidelines adopted
- Governing documents acknowledging operation on behalf of society
- Clear responsibility outlined for policy and financial decisions
- Nominations committee and/or processes
- Regular board meetings

Governance Struggles:

- Board self-assessments that relate to strategic plan objectives
- Communication of mission or statement of purpose
- Performance reviews for lead worker
- Strategic plans
- Committee terms of reference

Community Excellence:

- Familiarizing local businesses with museum activities
- Hosting or partnering on community events without an expectation of financial gain
- Participating in regional heritage group meetings
- Advocating for positive change and/or championing causes important to the community
- Undertaking partnership-based marketing/fundraising initiatives

are occurring in communities, many museums do not partner with museums on joint exhibits or borrowing/lending artifacts. There is also much work to be done in terms of long-term planning and identifying tools to help partnerships succeed. Several museums commented on informal partnerships being the preferred type in their communities, and expressed concerns that attempts to formalize these could deter potential partners from working with them. Additional information about communication and partnerships would likely be beneficial.

Community Struggles:

- Joint exhibits and/or borrowing or lending artifacts
- Participation in long-term planning meetings/exercises with the community
- Diverse communications with community and/or stakeholders
- Diverse acknowledgement of support and/or assistance
- Establishing organizational tools for partnerships

Management

In 2016 the Management section was the lowest scoring section by far, but so much work has been put into this area by boards and lead workers over the past years that it is now the second strongest result in the evaluation. One of the most marked changes is job descriptions for employees, as well as broadening of performance reviews. It seems that ANSM's messages about the delineation of board and lead worker responsibilities have been received and addressed in many museums, as there is now far more clarity around roles.

Management struggles remain largely unchanged from previous years and are intrinsically linked to organizational culture. ANSM continues to hear that museums

prefer a relaxed approach to volunteerism, even though volunteer recruitment is a high priority and major issue at most community museums. Similarly, education is needed on the importance of security checks for workers, and contracts for employees. Rural communities are especially tightknit and connected, but in the event of a relationship breakdown, being able to demonstrate due diligence and documentation is critical. The final area that boards and lead workers need to address is in professional development. With such a rapidly changing social and professional landscape, museums need to embrace broad-based continuous learning.

Management Excellence:

- Regular insurance assessments
- Keeping sensitive records secure, with limited access
- Use of accounting software
- Job descriptions for employees
- Staff performance reviews

Management Struggles:

- Goal reviews for volunteers
- Job descriptions for key volunteer positions
- Security checks for workers
- Contracts for employees
- Professional development plan for workers

Facility

A number of museums shared that a benefit of being temporarily closed to the public due to the pandemic was that they were able to complete a variety of facility-related projects – painting, renovations, and repairs – that would have been difficult to do while open. Not only did these make visible improvements on-site, but they seem to have served as a morale boost to the organization. The most common areas of excellence demonstrate that good, basic practices are in place in most museums. Facility-related struggles continue to be major issues that either require significant effort and/or working with external parties. Some relate back to the need for professional development that was identified as a need in the Management section. The other issue that has remained problematic since 2016 is the number of museums without leases or agreements with property owners.

Facility Excellence:

- Up-to-date First Aid kits
- Copies of OH&S Act and Regulations on site
- Clearly identified exits
- Emergency phone numbers posted by telephones
- Materials and construction reflecting the building's period and/or intent of construction

Facility Struggles:

- First Aid training for workers
- Support for visitors with visual or hearing impairments
- Access for individuals with mobility issues or physical
- Leases or management agreements with property owner
- Facility management plans

Collections and Access to Information

This year's results in Collections demonstrate the strength of these museums in this area. On the whole, they are more likely to conduct condition and incident reports, use collections committees to make acquisition decision and carry out collections management work, and ensure that records are backed up regularly with copies kept off-site. This is the first year that several of those practices were seen across the board.

Collection-related struggles include some facility-related space restrictions and the widespread issue of limited storage space. Not only does this impact on proper storage standards, but it also impedes museums abilities to isolate incoming acquisitions. Other issues are longstanding, and resource and time-intensive. Every museum has legacy issues that relate to the collection – the fingerprints left behind by former workers. These can include gaps in documentation, untracked loans, backlogs of items to

Collections Excellence:

- Condition reporting
- Incident reporting
- Collections committees
- Backing up collection records off-site
- Restricting food to designated areas

accession and/or catalogue, and items of unknown origin or that do not relate to the museum's mandate. None of these issues can be resolved quickly, but with proper procedures in place can be addressed gradually. Similarly, regular inventories are not taking place in many museums. This standard practice has many benefits and would also help to address the legacy issues. It appears that some training on new inventory theory and techniques would be of benefit.

Collections Struggles:

- Terms of Reference for collections committee
- Procedures for addressing legacy collection issues
- Regular inventories
- Storage areas exclusive for collections
- Isolating incoming acquisitions

Interpretation

Evaluators and museums both commented on the number of hands-on and other interpretive offerings that had to be removed due to COVID-19 restrictions and/or concerns. This is greatly impacting the visitor experience. However, workers' knowledge and dedication was again highlighted as impressive and the personal interactions between visitors and workers very powerful. This group of museums has established strong exhibition policies and is ensuring that exhibits and programs are linked to the museum's mission and collection. Their focus is a clear strength. In terms of struggles, museums would benefit from some additional organization around interpretive, such as having clear documentation on how to develop and deliver specific programs. There are also numerous museums that are still struggling with making exhibits more active and engaging. Many museums are also still making the shift from focusing on on-site interpretation rather than embracing opportunities for off-site interpretation.

Outreach is often minimal, and many workers are still having difficulty adjusting traditional school programs to more flexible offerings that educators can access from any location or use for online learning. Some museums have abandoned school programs altogether.

Interpretation Excellence:

- Communication of key interpretive themes
- Exhibits addressing matters of importance to the community
- Interpretive offerings reflecting the mission statement
- Programming linked to the collection
- Exhibit policies

Interpretation Struggles:

- Temporary exhibits
- Engaging elements in exhibits
- School programs
- Outreach and off-site interpretive programs
- Outlines of interpretive offerings

Marketing and Revenue Generation

Results in the final section of the evaluation are very much in alignment with previous years, but museums have made some marked improvements in the area of financial management and reporting. While in previous years audits and financial reporting was often handled internally, many museums are now ensuring that multiple individuals are involved in financial management work and are welcoming outside experts to assist with year-end reports.

Marketing and Revenue Generation struggles remain predominantly the same. These are large undertakings that require board input and involvement, such as fundraising and marketing strategies. Evaluators also noted opportunities for improvements in wayfinding signage.

While many visitors may rely on their knowledge or GPS to find the museum, prominent signage can also be very helpful. In terms of retail, many museums shared that they either removed some or all of their retail space due to COVID-19, or that it was more difficult to source items for sale.

Marketing Excellence:

- Logos and branding
- Financial management practices
- Maintaining records of media activities
- Brochures and rack cards
- Engaging independent sources for year-end financial reports

Marketing Struggles:

- Fundraising plans
- Using visitor statistics to focus marketing efforts
- Marketing strategies
- Diverse retail offerings
- Way-finding signage

Scoring Influences

The first few years of the MEP demonstrated that a museum's size and resources had limited impact on its evaluation results. Rather, the museum's corporate or organizational culture was the greatest influence. This continues to be the case. This year, it is evident that those museums which saw COVID-19 as an opportunity for growth and development are those that

excelled in the evaluation. Aside from this, the same scoring influences are seen as in previous years. Museums that see themselves as active community service organizations, seek input and partnerships, embrace ongoing professional development tend to be the strongest museums in Nova Scotia.

SCORING INFLUENCES

1. Mission Statements
2. Response to COVID-19
3. Engagement
4. Communications
5. Teamwork

These scoring influences can be seen as calls to action for museums:

1. Mission Statements

Museum boards need to revisit their mission statements regularly and ensure that they are giving the organization the guidance that it needs. For those with definition statements (ie the museum exists to collect, preserve, interpret, etc.), the board should engage in a review and renewal process to develop a guiding statement.

2. Response to COVID-19

COVID-19 put an unprecedented stress on all organizations, including museums. Museums had to close to the public for extended periods of time in compliance of public health orders. How museums chose to respond to these closures was various. Some were able to use this as an opportunity to do behinds-the-scenes work. Others laid off staff and/or reduced volunteer opportunities. Evaluation scores were on average higher with museums that were able to pivot with changing realities. Although it is hoped COVID-19 pandemic will pass, it has brought to light how quickly things can change. Museums, with the help of ANSM and other support organizations, should examine lessons learned during the pandemic to see how museums can become more adaptive in the future. In particular, museums should examine how they can help meet community needs, especially in times of crisis.

3. Engagement

Engaged museums are thriving and responsive museums. Museums need to be regularly assessing the level of engagement with their professional and local communities. Museums that participate in professional organizations (e.g. regional heritage groups) and professional development (e.g. ANSM Deep Dives, conferences) are more effectively able to find information, assistance, and inspiration. Engagement with communities also needs to be regularly examined and prioritized. Museums need to expand their definition of community to not only include those who have historically been engaged with the museum to include those who underserved or historically excluded. Museums that are in regular conversation with community, proactively seek input and are open to new opportunities and partnerships are stronger organizations.

Thank you for all your support these past months. We were dropped onto an island in 2019, not knowing where to go next. Today I know we are moving in the right direction and do appreciate that we have more to travel to reach our goal. Without the support of the staff at ANSM, I believe we would not have gotten this far.

~Museum Board Member

4. Communications

Museums need to improve their internal communication mechanisms. The early days of

the pandemic and launch of Deep Dive and other webinars caught the attention and interest of board members, staff, and volunteers who did not have a relationship with ANSM. Many remarked on how much they learned and that they wished they had been briefed better on the MEP and available supports by those within their organization.

5. Teamwork

Similar to engagement, museums that operate by team-based approaches are stronger museums. Board members, staff and volunteers have been stretched thin personally and professionally since the pandemic began. It is important for museums to have open and honest conversations about priorities, plans and division of tasks; ensuring that each team member feels supported in their work. ANSM heard from a number of museum board members and workers about how much work was involved in the evaluation and the difficulty of carrying that load in addition to normal responsibilities. A number of museums submitted lengthy queries to their evaluation reports because of a lack of broad internal consultation in submitting responses for Documentation Review and/or responding to Site Evaluation questions. If not everyone agrees with the content, the usefulness of the museum's evaluation report can be limited. While teamwork is not a "quick fix" for these issue, ensuring that all workers are being supported and have a team that they can rely on for assistance will help.

VI. Feedback

Evaluator Debrief

Evaluators once again provided a broad range of feedback on their experience and the MEP in general. By and large they felt the experience was positive, that the program is strong and helping museums to improve themselves. They also noted that museums were very well-prepared, and that most museums were weathering the pandemic well. In some cases, evaluators also offered their impressions of the strongest museums that they visited, and when they felt that they were good candidates for Accreditation.

Evaluation Report Responses

Reports were mailed out on September 10th and museums were given a deadline of October 8th to respond with any questions or concerns. Throughout the 2020/21 preparations museums were reminded that reports were considered to be in draft form until after this deadline for response, in order to ensure that they were as accurate and helpful for the museums as possible. This message was definitely taken to heart. Fifteen museums submitted queries about their reports that required significant review.

Another interesting phenomenon was that for the first time, multiple museums revisited their submitted responses, both for Documentation Review and the Site Evaluation, and requested that changes be made. Various reasons were given for this,

but more often than not the reason was a lack of consultation or teamwork during evaluation preparations. When the evaluation report was reviewed by the entire board, staff, and/or volunteers, people felt that errors had been made in how the museum responded and did not want this reflected in their scores or reports. As noted above, this suggests that a team-based approach was lacking at these museums and this had a major influence on evaluation results.

The two major reasons museums mentioned for wanting to revisit their reports were CMAP funding and Accreditation. On August 18th, 2020, CMAP museums were invited to an engagement session with Culture & Heritage Development staff members that outlined a new tiered funding support system and included bonus funding for museums with an evaluation score above 80%. Museums seized on the opportunity to review their evaluation reports as a way to increase their funding, and for any that were close to the 80% mark, to secure additional bonus funding. Similarly, many museums made it clear throughout the preparation process that they were “chasing Accreditation”. They are eager to have their hard work recognized publicly by their professional peers and ANSM, and recognize how accreditation will benefit their organizations in terms of community support, sponsorships, and funding opportunities.

VII. Moving Forward

Over the past five years of delivering the MEP, ANSM has grown and learned many valuable lessons about museum and evaluation standards and operations. The same can be said for museums, some of which have undergone significant growth and changes in their knowledge and capacity as they worked through the program. For all involved, navigating this growth and change has not always been smooth or easy, but it has been worthwhile.

Just as ANSM encourages museums to pursue continuous learning, ANSM pursues it as well. Over the past five years ANSM has been studying evaluation standards of practice. This learning journey has revealed numerous opportunities for revision and reworking of the MEP. While revisions were planned for integration with the next evaluation cycle (scheduled to launch in 2024), in September 2021 the Culture & Heritage Division of Communities, Culture, Tourism and Heritage contacted ANSM and requested that the

MOVING FORWARD

1. Redevelop the MEP
2. Recruit subject matter experts for participation
3. Improve communications
4. Strengthen partnerships

program be reviewed and revised for 2022. While a significant adjustment to plans, ANSM is excited to embark on the next evolution of the MEP.

Feedback from museums this year was incredibly positive, as demonstrated through the quotes shared throughout this report. It is clear that museums have embraced the MEP as a helpful and supportive program that has been helping them to grow and evolve in positive ways, both in terms of professionalism and community service. With such improvements to organizational health and capacity, the next obvious question is how to build on the success of the MEP.

1. Redevelop the MEP

The first step is to engage with the program funders, MEPWG, and participating museums to redevelop the program. These conversations are already taking place and plans being developed. ANSM needs to work with partners to build a new program from the ground up; identifying the format, process, and elements that will build even more capacity in Nova Scotia's museums. Accreditation will also need to be reviewed as part of this work. By following an evaluation program development process and addressing highlighted concerns and issues, the new program will build on the strengths of the existing MEP while reducing the burden on participating museums and ANSM.

It [evaluation] is an onerous, expensive task with unrealistic expectations of staff and volunteers. It should be scaled back in a big way.

~Museum Board Member

2. Recruit Subject Matter Experts for Participation

Preliminary conversations around redevelopment have revealed the need to engage with experts to address areas that are not currently included in the evaluation. As mentioned in the 2019 report, this may include partnering with experts on areas such as Governance to address the issues around mission statements. It will also include areas such as accessibility, climate change, EDI (equity, diversity and inclusion), and such important issues. Numerous museums have noted that they are interested in these issues and recognize a need to address them through their work, but that they need assistance in navigating this shift.

3. Improve Communications

As noted in this report, ANSM heard from new board members and workers that they were missing information about the MEP and ANSM's services. Confusion also

still remains around CMAP and its connection to ANSM and evaluation. ANSM needs to examine its current communication methods and determine if improved dissemination is possible. Conversations with funders revealed similar realities. As the new program is developed, it will be critically important for ANSM and its municipal and provincial funding partners to have a clear communications and reporting plan so that all parties understand not only how the program operates, but how ANSM uses this information to inform all of its training and other services.

4. Strengthen partnerships

This is an ongoing goal for ANSM, and has been highlighted in previous reports as a way to move forward. In 2020 a positive step in this direction was taken by having the CMAP program officer join the MEPWG. Building on this, the new program will include a collaborative approach to information gathering and sharing, rather than duplication of efforts. There are also opportunities to strengthen ANSM's relationship and partnership with member museums. ANSM has experienced multiple changes in staff since the pandemic began. Conversations around evaluation and museum realities are very helpful in understanding which supports and services are most beneficial. These conversations also allow new staff members to build trust and relationships with members.

VIII. Appendix – Museum Evaluation Scores

Museum Evaluation Scores Summary		
Organization	2016 Score	2021 Score
Age of Sail Heritage Centre	82.2%	88.4%
Antigonish Heritage Museum	74.6%	65.1%
Argyle Township Courthouse & Gaol	81.9%	82.3%
The Army Museum	76.9%	82.4%
Cape Breton Miners Museum	68.6%	81.7%
Chestico Museum	76.6%	81.3%
Colchester Historeum	83.0%	93.2%
Cole Harbour Heritage Farm	85.6%	93.8%
Dartmouth Heritage Museum - Evergreen House	76.1%	83.2%
Dartmouth Heritage Museum - Quaker House	76.1%	77.0%
Dartmouth Heritage Museum - Warehouse	76.1%	82.9%
Fort Point Museum	76.9%	84.3%
Fultz House	81.0%	86.8%
Kings County Museum	81.1%	83.5%
LaHave Islands Marine Museum	70.9%	82.3%
Mahone Bay Museum	83.1%	94.1%
Margaret Fawcett Norrie Heritage Centre	72.9%	83.8%
McCulloch Genealogy Centre	74.7%	80.7%
Memory Lane Heritage Village	81.5%	91.2%
Musée Acadiens des Pubnicos	76.2%	87.4%
North Highlands Community Museum	83.3%	75.6%
Old Sydney Society - St. Patrick's Church Museum	77.7%	77.0%
Old Sydney Society - Sydney Museum	77.7%	81.8%
Ottawa House-by-the-Sea Museum	75.9%	86.5%
Parkdale-Maplewood Community Museum	82.4%	86.9%
Shelburne County Museum	81.0%	83.4%
S&L Railway Museum	54.5%	67.8%
Les Trois Pignons Centre Culturel	72.6%	79.7%
Yarmouth County Museum	74.2%	80.3%