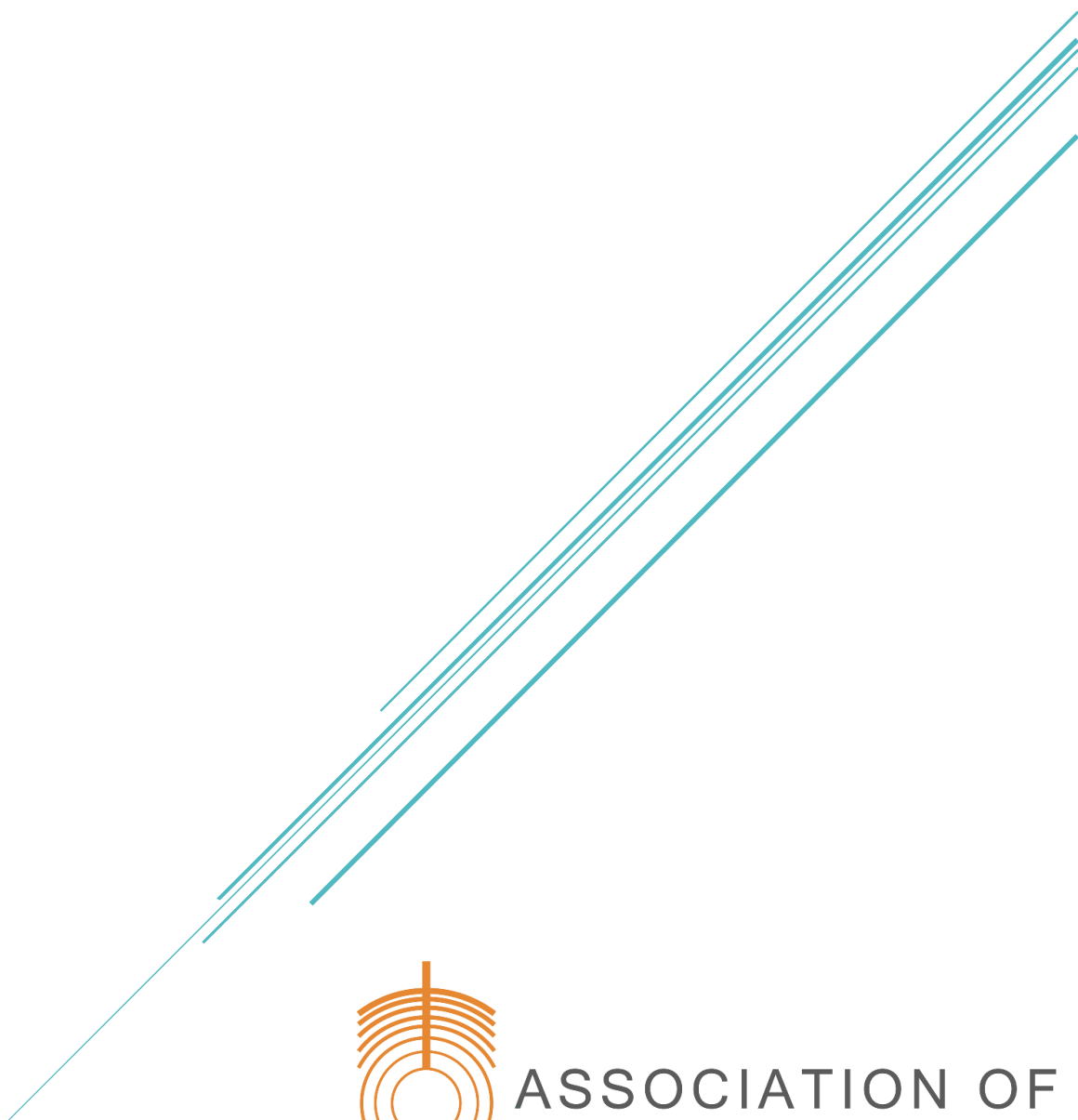


# TRENDS REPORT

Museum Evaluation Program

**2016-2018**



ASSOCIATION OF  
NOVA SCOTIA  
MUSEUMS

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# Executive Summary

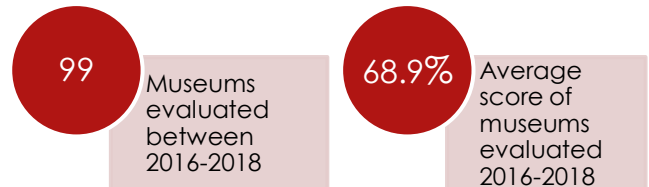
The Association of Nova Scotia Museums (ANSM) is a non-profit organization which supports museums in Nova Scotia. Part of its mandate is “to encourage the development of best practices in Nova Scotia’s museums”. In complement to its commitment to this, ANSM undertook the delivery of a revised evaluation program in 2016. ANSM is a partner of the Government of Nova Scotia in the development, delivery and reporting of the Museum Evaluation Program (MEP). The Halifax Regional Municipality likewise became a partner in 2018. ANSM has established a Museum Evaluation Program Working Group (MEPWG) of museum professionals who provide guidance on the program’s development and delivery. There are currently 102 museums registered in the program, although several of these have not yet been evaluated.

The Museum Evaluation Program includes:

- MEP Working Group
- Evaluation orientation sessions
- Guidance 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

The MEP has its foundation in the Community Museums Assistance Program’s (CMAP) evaluation. As the Government of Nova Scotia reviewed and planned changes to CMAP, including having the evaluation impact a museum’s funding allocation, ANSM recognized that the only fair and equitable way to launch the MEP was to evaluate all CMAP recipient sites in one year. In 2015 ANSM piloted the evaluation process with four museums of various sizes, operating structures, and community realities. Participant feedback and evaluator experiences provided insights that allowed the MEPWG to further refine the MEP process and program and confidently launch the MEP in 2016.

With CMAP under review and the promise of a new funding formula on the horizon, ANSM evaluated all CMAP sites in 2016. When the implementation of changes was delayed, ANSM



returned to evaluate the lowest scoring museums in 2018 in order to give them an opportunity to improve on their evaluation results, again with an eye on CMAP. In 2017, the Nova Scotia Museum sites were evaluated, including storage facilities.

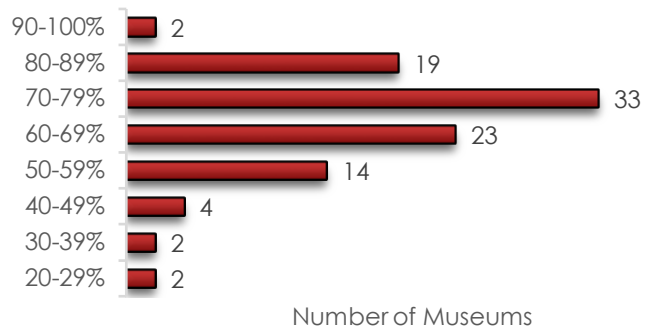
Comprehensive reports were provided to each museum, outlining the evaluation process, their Documentation Review submissions, and Site Evaluation findings. Reports also included suggestions for

improvements and links to helpful resources. Several of the museums that were re-evaluated in 2018 used their 2016 report as the roadmap for 2018 preparations, and saw marked improvements as a result.

In addition to individual reports, an overarching annual report was written each year, which again reviewed the evaluation experience of the year, analyzed trends in the results, and provided suggestions on how to address issues and move forward. These can be found [on the ANSM website](#).

This Trends Report provides a more overarching review of the program's first three years, an analysis of trends in results, and shares thoughts on moving forward as the MEP settles into its four-year cycle existence.

## Museum Scoring Ranges 2016-2018



## Preparation Work

### Museum Evaluation Program Working Group

The Museum Evaluation Program Working Group (MEPWG - terms of reference [available here](#)) has proven to be an integral element of the MEP, both in terms of accountability and in evolving the program. As mentioned in annual reports and orientation, this group is deeply committed to the MEP and museums of Nova Scotia. They are all very invested and interested in seeing museums thrive.

The first three years of MEP consisted of regular review and revision of evaluation questions as well as tweaking the evaluation process. Feedback from museums and evaluators was solicited at the end of each evaluation year (August-September) and the MEPWG worked hard to implement changes before the next year's evaluation documents and information was released (October).

The MEPWG established an Accreditation sub-group that worked diligently to develop the Accreditation process for the MEP. This involved researching and reviewing comparable programs, speaking with program officers, and having many discussions about implementing this new aspect of the MEP in a Nova Scotian context. 2019 will be the first year in which evaluated museums can apply to be accredited.

Individuals who have served as MEPWG members:

- Oralee O’Byrne (Chair), Age of Sail Heritage Centre/ANSM Board of Directors (2015-2018)
- Lyne Allain, Mahone Bay Museum (2018)
- Cathy Blackbourn, MEP Evaluator (2016-)
- Lisette Bourgeois-Aucoin, Les Trois Pignons Centre Culturel (2015-2017)
- Peter Crowell, Argyle Township Courthouse & Gaol (2015-017)
- Michelle Davey, McCulloch Genealogy Centre & McCulloch House (2015-2017)
- Karin Kierstead, ANSM (2015-)
- Janice Kirkbright, Cole Harbour Heritage Farm Museum (2015-2018)
- Valerie Lenethen, MEP Evaluator (2016-)
- Maggie MacIntyre, Nova Scotia Museum (2018-)
- Susan Marchand-Terrio, Isle Madame Historical Society (2018-)
- Kellie McIvor, Halifax Regional Municipality (2018-)
- Anita Price, ANSM (2015-)
- Stephanie Smith, Nova Scotia Museum (2015-2018)

## **Evaluation Timeline**

ANSM developed a strong and detailed evaluation timeline that not only helped with the program’s management but enabled museums to plan years in advance for their evaluation. While the timeline was updated annually and included specific dates, museums can now see the program’s pattern, ie. Documentation Review submissions are due the first Friday in May, Site Evaluations take place the 2<sup>nd</sup> through 4<sup>th</sup> weeks in July, reports are circulated in early September, and the deadline to apply for Accreditation is the 3<sup>rd</sup> Friday in December. This pattern can be incorporated into museums long-range plans and ease the burden of evaluation preparation.

In terms of the Site Evaluation part of the timeline, museums were consulted on this three-week schedule; invited to share July dates that they could not accommodate their site evaluation. Reasons varied for this, but most often included staff vacations, local festivals, or major events or fundraisers. This information was received by mid-March to facilitate the release of the schedule in early April. While this may seem far in advance of Site Evaluations, the travel arrangements and other logistical details take a good deal of time to organize.

## Evaluation Orientation Sessions

Each evaluation year launched with orientation sessions. Announcements were made in the ANSM Beacon e-newsletter, Facebook page, and sent directly by email to each museum slated for evaluation. Orientation also served as an opportunity for museums to learn more about the MEP before opting to participate in the program.



ORIENTATION LOCATIONS  
2016-2018

Results consistently demonstrate that when museums send multiple representatives to orientation, they are better prepared, more organized, and achieve better results on their evaluation. Those that send only one representative or do not participate in orientation often report being confused or frustrated by the evaluation process and their evaluation scores tend to be approximately 20% less than their more engaged peers. Of the four museums that were evaluated in 2016 and chose not to attend orientation in 2018, all saw decreases in their evaluation scores.

## Support for Museums

In 2016 clarification questions submitted by museums were handled individually, meaning that the more proactive a museum was in their evaluation preparations, the more support they received. This inequity was remedied in 2017 with the establishment of a Q&A email list, developed using the orientation session sign-in sheets. Questions submitted to the MEP Manager were gathered and responses circulated to all museums being evaluated, ensuring that questions and responses were anonymous and would not reveal any museum's query or circumstances. Museums have expressed that this was very helpful to them, both in terms of collective learning and keeping evaluation deadlines and information top-of-mind.

Additional updates and information was shared via ANSM's Facebook page, Beacon e-newsletter, on-site visits, and regional heritage group meetings. As noted previously, there is a correlation between engagement and evaluation results, and those museums that attended regional heritage group meetings scored approximately 20% above those that did not.

## Evaluation Teams

The response rate to ANSM's first call for volunteer evaluators in 2016 was heartening if not overwhelming. Individuals from across the province stepped up and offered to help. Their credentials were impressive to say the least, and their enthusiasm for heritage overflowed. Since 2016, ANSM has cultivated a core group of evaluators and continuously encouraged others to become evaluators. While many are retirees who are interested in giving back to the museum community, it is also important to have evaluators who are mid-career professionals and can speak to current working

conditions and realities. Recruiting mid-career professionals will be a priority moving forward.

Evaluators play a critical role in the integrity of evaluation results. As such, teams of three were developed in order to triangulate responses. Evaluator skillsets were mapped out and strong teams with diverse experiences are developed. This provided team members with the opportunity to share specialized knowledge that covered the entire scope of the evaluation.

An orientation day for evaluators provided them with training on the program and process, a chance for teams to discuss logistics in person, and the opportunity to gather evaluation forms, briefing notes, and other crucial information. Briefing notes were developed on each museum, using information distilled from their Documentation Review submission, and evaluators expressed numerous times how incredibly helpful these were to them, especially if they had never visited a museum that they were evaluating.

## Evaluation Process

### Documentation Review

The first part of the evaluation process consists of museums submitting a completed questionnaire and supporting documents for review, due the first Friday in May. Files were submitted via a secure ftp (file transfer protocol) website, which was updated each year with refreshed instructions and information, including the submission deadline. Confirmation messages were automatically sent to both the museum and ANSM staff when an upload was completed. This notification system worked very well, providing museums with reassurance and ANSM staff with the opportunity to track uploads in real-time. The latter also enabled ANSM to proactively reach out and offer additional support to any museums which had not uploaded close to the submission deadline.

### Association of Nova Scotia Museums Evaluation Program Submission Form

Welcome Spectacle Group (accredadmin).  
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.

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2019 DOCUMENT SUBMISSION

File 1 of 1:  No file chosen

[Add another file?](#)

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Additional Notes:

Let us know if you have a comment:

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### FTP WEBSITE HOMEPAGE

On average, museums submitted 70 files each; nearly 7,000 in total over the three years. Every file was reviewed, scored, and then the information was distilled into Briefing Notes for the evaluation team. Reviewing all of these submissions between May and July creates a very tight timeline for ANSM staff, but the resulting Briefing Notes make this heavy task worthwhile.



## Site Evaluation

The second part of the evaluation is the Site Evaluation, when teams of three museum professionals volunteer their time to assess museums' operations on-site. The importance of the three-person team structure cannot be understated. This allowed teams to be diverse in their knowledge, skills and experiences, which facilitated more credible assessments of and helpful feedback to the museums. It also allowed for a triangulation of perspectives and analysis, which is a core standard of evaluation. As a result, it instilled confidence in museums of the entire evaluation program and process.

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I have been an evaluator with ANSM for the last three summers and have come away with a great appreciation of the challenges facing community and branch museums through-out Nova Scotia. Shrinking budgets, aging buildings, reduced staffing and visitation, as well as board issues can complicate a museum's attempt to operate as professionally as desired. I feel that the evaluation process is a proactive way to help these museums in a practical way by focusing on strengths and weaknesses.

*~MEP Evaluator*

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Site Evaluations take approximately three hours, but in 2017 evaluators began tracking their time on-site so that ANSM can prepare a more customized schedule in the future. Larger and more complex sites were scheduled for a full-day evaluation, but even in these cases the tracking of actual time on-site will facilitate a more realistic schedule. In some cases, evaluators discovered while on-site that the museum had off-site storage or program facilities which were not known at the time of scheduling and so could not be adequately accommodated during the site evaluation. In the future, museums will be asked to disclose the addresses of all buildings owned and operated by the museum so their evaluation will be a more encompassing view of their operation.

The first thirty minutes of the site evaluation was dedicated to the museum, giving workers the opportunity to orient the evaluation team, share successes and struggles, and share the visitor experience. Evaluators then completed the Site Evaluation form on



their own, conferring when necessary. Evaluators made notes and took photographs to support their findings, and upon completion of the process they reviewed and discussed their experience to ensure that their impressions were in alignment. If discrepancies existed, they were dealt with prior to leaving the museum, and in assigning low scores, evaluators were instructed to leave clear remarks explaining their reasons. It is unfortunate that the first evaluation year focused more on deficiencies than proficiencies, and ANSM has been working ever since to make the evaluation experience more positive in nature. Evaluators are now encouraged to highlight programs and elements that impress them, and to comment when they see a museum being on the right track to positive growth and development.

### **Evaluation Report**

As noted above, the first evaluation reports that were compiled tended to focus on deficiencies and so provided museums with resources and information on what/how to address these issues. Since that initial year the report template has been gradually updated to improve its usefulness and focus more evenly on celebrating the positive and giving suggestions on improvements. This will always be a work in progress as the needs and realities of museums change, along with the evaluation program itself.

2018 gave the first opportunity to see if and how museums had used their previous evaluation reports. While some did not seem to use their 2016 report to prepare for their 2018 evaluation, others demonstrated that their report had been used as their roadmap for improvements. Recommendations were incorporated into strategic plans, annual work plans, and grant applications. The result was not only improved evaluation scores, but more importantly, stronger and healthier museums.

## **Feedback**

### **Evaluator Debrief**

As site evaluations wrapped up in 2016, several evaluators requested a follow-up discussion to review their experience and identify opportunities for improvement. This has become an important part of the MEP's internal evaluation process. From unclear questions to travel logistics to trends in the results, evaluators have provided very helpful feedback during debriefs. Notes were taken and information shared with the MEPWG for further review, discussion, and in many cases, implementation of changes.

### **Evaluation Report Responses**

Evaluation reports are considered to be in draft mode when they are circulated in early September, and museums have four weeks to seek clarifications or ask questions of

ANSM before they are finalized. Upon finalization, museums are invited to request a pdf version of their report so it can be easily shared with board members, staff, volunteers, etc., as the museum sees fit. Consistently, between 70-80% of participants took advantage of the opportunity to give feedback. Messages fell into one of three categories:

1. Thank you messages that were paired with a request for the pdf report,
2. Ideas about how to improve the evaluation process, and
3. Questions about report content or scoring that required review and confirmation or adjustments.

Given the useful information that was garnered both from evaluators and the participating museums, it would be beneficial to provide more formal opportunities for feedback, such as surveys, and actively solicit responses.

## Scoring Trends & Analysis

### Results of Organizations that were Re-evaluated

In reviewing results of museums that were evaluated in both 2016 and 2018, some remarks from the 2018 annual report bear repeating:

“Scoring increases ranged from 0.5% to

an impressive 29%. In almost all of these cases, museum representatives said that they took a multi-year approach to preparing for the evaluation, delegating various tasks to the board, committees/teams, staff and/or volunteers.” As noted above, improved evaluation results signify stronger and healthier museums. It is anticipated that as more museums embrace the supportive purpose of the MEP, it will become increasingly normal to see improvements in results from year to year. Having said that, the burden of preparation work cannot be overlooked. Considering the high turnover and burnout rates in museums, not all museums will experience an ease in this burden as evaluation cycles continue. Knowledge and information will be lost, and strong hands-on support will always be needed.



## Results by Section

The first three evaluation years saw remarkable similarity in results in the seven sections of the evaluation. Governance results were incredibly strong but dropped off sharply in the Management section.

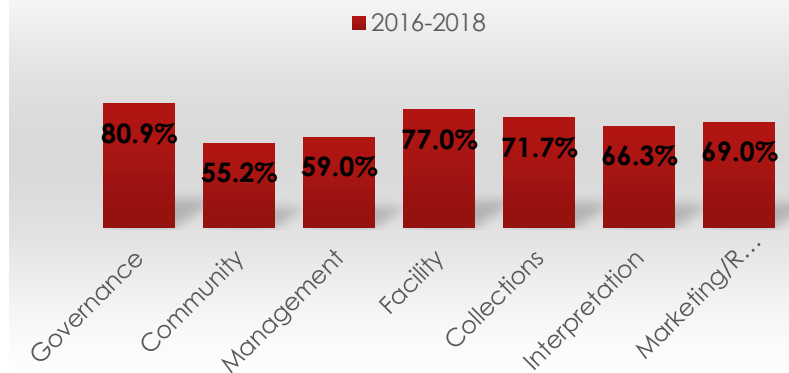
Community was consistently the lowest

scoring section and revealed confusion between audience development and community engagement. Because of the consistency of these results, orientation sessions in 2018 included primers on good standards of practice for management and how to incorporate community engagement in all areas of the museum's operations.

### Governance

Museums expressed concerns about aging and burnt out board members and volunteers, but were actively documenting activities in meeting minutes and reports and seemed ready and willing to hand over the reins to new individuals. These anecdotal reports to evaluators may also explain why governance documents appeared not to be frequently reviewed, updated, or sometimes even implemented. Rather than being seen as living, guiding documents, they were drafted and left as-is. The same can be said for many mission statements, which as noted in previous annual reports, were often found to be definition statements rather than true missions. While some boards demonstrate strong leadership and support of their museum, others are obviously struggling. The evaluation has revealed a need for help.

## Average Scores by Section



### Governance Trends:

- Board self-assessments are not commonplace
- Boards of directors need to improve performance review practices for lead workers, both in frequency and formality
- Ethics guidelines have been adopted by almost all museums
- Mission statements are often definition statements and do not provide adequate guidance
- Museum activities are being captured in detail via meeting minutes and reports

## Community

The community section has consistently been the lowest scoring section, as it represents the steepest learning curve for museums. ANSM learned during the research phase that comparable programs were still struggling to assess community engagement and impact and had not yet found a satisfactory methodology. In orientation sessions and evaluation discussions with museums, it was clear that many museums were still making the shift from thinking about community engagement as audience development, ie questioning how the museum would ultimately benefit from the activities, to simply seeking to serve and meet the needs of their communities. One of the biggest barriers in this shift is the lack of conversation with local communities. Many museums stated that anyone from the community was welcome to give input at any time, but when pressed about how they actively solicited and encouraged this input, could not give any examples. Having said that, as ANSM increased educational efforts in community engagement, many examples of successful advocacy and creative methods of engaging with the local business community were shared. There has also been a marked increase in regional heritage group participation which seems to tie back to evaluation report recommendations. Museums that gather together to share their successes and struggles are incredibly open, both in their willingness to share and learn. There appears to be an increased understanding of museums' collective strength which will stand them in good stead in the years to come.

## Management

The other consistently lowest scoring section is Management. There is a direct link here to Governance, as some of the issues were actually board- or management-related rather than the responsibility of the lead worker. Staff and volunteers shared that they were interested in professional development opportunities but lacked financial or other

### Community Trends:

- Actively advocating for positive change and/or championing important community causes
- Confusion between audience development and community engagement
- Increased participation in regional heritage groups
- Lack of proactive seeking of input from communities
- Ongoing familiarization of local businesses with museum activities

### Management Trends:

- Professional development is not encouraged or supported as much as it should be
- Security checks are not a priority for many museums
- Staff performance reviews are being carried out with the majority of employees
- Workers are provided with necessary equipment and resources to do their jobs
- Volunteer management is usually very casual

support that would enable their participation. In many cases, individuals paid out of pocket to participate in training; a demonstration of the passion and dedication of the workers in Nova Scotia's museums. Another area that touched on board responsibility was in performance reviews. While lead workers have been conducting annual performance reviews of staff members, many of them said that the board was not consistent in their performance reviews. Human resource-related questions also highlighted a reluctance in some museums to formalize certain practices, such as conducting interviews and goal reviews with volunteers, and having security and vulnerable sector checks conducted on new workers. On the positive side, almost all museum workers shared that they had been provided with the necessary tools, equipment and other resources that they needed to do their jobs. They recognized that more resources would be very helpful, but demonstrated creative and productive solutions to stretch limited resources further.

### Facility

Generally speaking, Nova Scotia's museum infrastructure is fairly sound but showing signs of age, although as alluded to earlier, evaluation teams discovered that off-site buildings existed that were not included in the evaluation results. These may impact on the overall assessment when they are included in the next round of evaluations. During orientation sessions, the goal of "safe, secure, and well-kept" was given as a simple way to think about this section of the evaluation. For many museums, the concept of a comprehensive facility management plan was new. Plans submitted were on the right track, but will take some time to fully develop. Similarly, emergency preparedness plans were often very outdated, with many museums submitting a template of an old Nova Scotia

Museum plan that was not customized to meet their individual needs. Also concerning was the number of museums that do not own their buildings or property and are without an up-to-date lease. Some of the submitted leases dated back to the 1970s and had never been revisited, especially in the cases of provincially owned buildings. This was highlighted as an important issue to address, and museums are now actively negotiating with property owners to rectify the problem. In other positive news, museums have very strong health and safety measures in place and are willing and able to provide a variety of supports to visitors with unique needs.

### Facility Trends:

- Almost all museums that do not own their buildings are missing or have outdated leases or agreements with the property owners
- Emergency preparedness plans need to be updated
- Facility management plans are just beginning to be developed
- Occupational health & safety procedures are well established
- Supports are offered to visitors with unique needs on an ad hoc basis

### Collections and Access to Information

Almost every museum has been able to demonstrate longstanding use of a collections management policy. As with Governance and Management, there was a noticeable difference between the policy statements and procedural implementation. While collections information was very well organized, almost every museum evaluated had a backlog of artifacts to process and document, and digitization was still often considered an extra step rather than part of the cataloguing process. Addressing this backlog appears to be difficult partially because of the lack of space in museums, both for storage and collections work. Many storage areas were by necessity used for more than collections storage and few museums had a dedicated space for items awaiting processing. As mentioned in a previous annual report, those museums with a dedicated collections or acquisition committee not only have better management of their collections, but are stronger organizations in general.

### Interpretation

The most significant trend in the Interpretation section was the high number of museums that were in the process of evolving from static, exhibit-based operations to dynamic, interactive and hands-on operations. Museums that had not yet made this shift were also unlikely to offer school programs. Many of these museums were new to formal interpretive planning and were in the process of developing interpretive plans, or had an interpretive plan developed by a consultant which lacked buy-in and/or the resources to implement the plan. In more positive news, interpretive offerings were intrinsically linked to museums' missions and collections. And time and again, evaluators commented on the passion and knowledge of workers and how significant this can be for a positive visitor experience.

### Collections Trends:

- Almost all museums have a collections management policy
- Collection and research records are well organized
- Many facilities lack adequate storage capacity
- Museums often have processing and documentation backlogs
- Museums with an acquisition/collections committee are stronger organizations in general

### Interpretation Trends:

- Courteous, engaging and knowledgeable people are working and volunteering across the province
- Interpretive offerings reflect the mission and collection of museums
- Static, exhibit-based museums are slowly evolving to become more interactive and hands-on
- Exhibits addressing matters of importance to the community
- School programs are very limited

### Marketing & Revenue Generation

As noted in annual reports, almost all museums had some good, basic marketing practices in place; brochures and rack cards, a social media presence and website. Marketing strategies tended to be fairly simple, although some museums had done thorough analyses of community and target demographics and developed a detailed approach. An often untapped marketing resource was a museum's visitor statistics. The majority of museums were tracking visitation but not using this information to inform decision-making. On the financial side of things, many museums did not have detailed fundraising plans, nor were boards actively involved in fundraising. In terms of retail, most museums offered at least a few items for sale, and the vast majority of retail offerings were linked to the museum's mandate.

### Marketing Trends:

- Basic marketing practices in place in almost every museum
- Fundraising plans often lack detail and do not include board involvement
- Marketing strategies rarely include detailed, targeted approaches
- Retail offerings are linked to museums' mandates and are neat and easily accessible
- Visitor statistics could be used more effectively to focus marketing efforts

### Scoring Influences

To quote the 2018 report, "it is now understood that a variety of factors impact an organization's evaluation outcome, but that most can be traced back to organizational culture. Those museums that are inward-looking and/or attempting to maintain a status quo fare worse than those that are outward-looking and actively seeking to grow and evolve with their communities."

### SCORING INFLUENCES

1. Mission Statements
2. Community Engagement
3. Professional Development
4. Communications
5. Teamwork

Cultivating a positive organizational culture is very dependent on the individuals involved and very dependent on having a strong mission that provides good guidance for all initiatives. To quote Nina Simon, "institutions with clouded or contested missions are like ships full of mutinous factions. If [people] disagree about what the mission means or how it relates to community relevance, they'll never be clear about what's worth pursuing or letting go." Simply put, museums must move away from definition statements and rediscover their true and unique missions.

This rediscovery process will be best executed in consultation with the community. The museums that are thriving are those that are part of the community fabric. They are actively involved and engaged and always asking what the museum can do for the community rather than what the community can do for the museum.

Engagement requires time, effort, and knowledge. As noted previously, evaluators remarked time and again that the people working and volunteering in Nova Scotia's museums are one of the biggest assets of the heritage community. Yet the majority of these individuals do not possess formal training and have limited access to and support for professional development. Continuous learning is imperative to a museum's success and needs to be embraced as such.

Learning requires communication, and the most engaged museums fare better on their evaluation. Museums that are in contact with neighbouring organizations (museums and others), that participate in regional heritage group meetings, that ask questions as they prepare for evaluation, and subscribe to professional communications have a better understanding of professional standards of practice and how to grow and evolve their museum.

And finally, those museums that take a team-based approach to the evaluation almost always experience stronger results than those that rely on one or two individuals to do all the work. This teamwork not only facilitates an easing of the evaluation burden, but museums are sharing that it provides opportunities to bond and discuss other issues. People's skills and experiences are more broadly understood, and stronger interpersonal relationships are being cultivated.

## Moving Forward

The Museum Evaluation Program's first few years have been full of learning, growth, and a lot of hard work for all involved. From ANSM's perspective, theories and anecdotes were confirmed through the evaluation process, and an incredible amount of information about the needs of museums was gathered. Museums stepped back and assessed their operations, with board members, staff and volunteers all saying what an invaluable learning experience it was for them. There are early

### MOVING FORWARD

1. Integrate results into ANSM training plans
2. Remove barriers to participation
3. Increase stakeholder engagement
4. Stabilize the evaluation cycles
5. Launch Accreditation



signs that museums are beginning to feel a sense of ownership of the program, and embracing its potential to help them grow into stronger and more sustainable organizations. This raises the question, how do the MEP, ANSM, and Nova Scotia's museum community move forward? How does this information translate into action?

1. Integrate results into ANSM training plans

ANSM's new strategic plan includes the review and potential restructuring of the Education & Training Taskforce. This is an opportunity to incorporate evaluation trends into ANSM's planning process. Evaluation results and registration statistics show a need and desire for the Museum Studies Certificate program to continue, but there are obviously additional, specific training needs. The issues around mission statements are a prime case in point.

2. Remove barriers to participation

Orientation sessions and Q&A email messages are key opportunities for ANSM and museums to begin working together on evaluation preparations. In-person orientation is incredibly beneficial because it facilitates casual conversations and networking, but the scheduling does not always align with the availability of board members, staff and volunteers. Similarly, asking orientation attendees to share information with others in their organization is not always successful. Offering an online orientation option may result in broader participation.

3. Increase stakeholder engagement

For those museums that are part of the Community Museum Assistance Program, concerns are consistently raised about how their evaluation results will impact their funding. With the program review still underway, it is imperative that ANSM continue to offer support and assistance, and share these concerns with the Department of Communities, Culture & Heritage (CCH). It is also important to review the MEP with CCH, ensuring that expectations and needs are being met. In terms of museum engagement, as noted above, formalizing feedback mechanisms so that museums can share thoughts and suggestions and be more engaged in the entire program rather than be on the receiving end, will likely result in greater buy-in.

4. Stabilize the evaluation cycles

The first three years of the MEP saw regular updates and improvements, including changes to evaluation questions. In order to deliver a fair program, ANSM should cease this practice and focus improvement efforts so that changes are only introduced at the beginning of the evaluation cycle. Not only would this be easier to manage, but it would improve the program's predictability.

5. Launch Accreditation

As outlined in the 2018 annual report, ANSM is prepared to launch Accreditation, the public side of the MEP that will celebrate excellence in Nova Scotia's museums. This will likely help museums to see greater value in the MEP, and will enable ANSM to further its mandate to educate Nova Scotians about the value of museums and Nova Scotian stories.