The Museum Assessment Program (MAP) is supported by a cooperative agreement between the Institute of Museum and Library Services and the American Alliance of Museums.
ABOUT THE MUSEUM ASSESSMENT PROGRAM

The Museum Assessment Program (MAP) is a national, voluntary program which helps museums strengthen operations, plan for the future and meet standards through self-study and a consultative site visit from an expert peer reviewer. The program offers several assessment types that focus on multiple aspects of museum operations, allowing participants to work on various methods of self-improvement. Since 1981 over 5,000 museums have participated in over 6,500 assessments. MAP is supported through a cooperative agreement between the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) and the American Alliance of Museums (AAM), and administered by AAM. For more information, visit www.aam-us.org and www.imls.gov.

ABOUT THIS REPORT

This report reflects the Peer Reviewer’s knowledge and perspective based on what was provided in the museum’s MAP Application, its Self-Study Workbook and what he/she saw or was told while on the site visit. The report is a snapshot in time—from when the reviewer was there and what he or she saw and heard. The museum may have already addressed some issues discussed with the Peer Reviewer or made progress on some items listed in the report. The Peer Reviewer conducted this assessment on an individual volunteer basis, not as a representative of their employer, and was selected by AAM in consultation with the museum.
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Executive Summary

I was extremely impressed with the Carter County Museum, especially because of the challenges due to their size and remote location. Their staff is very small but very dedicated, and their board is involved and supportive. The museum is incredibly active on a regional level and has global ties to other museums and programming initiatives with an impressive amount of collaborative projects. The museum staff process collections efficiently and faster than some larger museums I have worked with, which is impressive as the paleontological material can be painstaking to process due to the nature of the materials used in the initial excavation.

The biggest challenges facing the Carter County Museum in order to meet their capital campaign goals is the remoteness of their location and the small size of their staff. Fundraising is always a challenge, even in museums of larger scale, so the Carter County Museum faces obstacles that are not unique in this field, but will be challenging nonetheless. The museum will have to be creative in their solutions and need to engage in strategic planning as soon as possible. That said, the museum does have a 16-page expansion project document, *Keep Collections Local Expansion Project*, that breaks down the expansion by exhibitions, lab space, Medicine Rocks State Park Visitor Center, community space, collections storage, museum store, and costs associated with each area and the overall project. This document will be helpful in securing funding and using as discussion points for promotional material. I did not find anything about the museum’s expansion/capital campaign project on the museum’s website. I would recommend adding information about the project on the website and include the proposed layout, etc., so that is front and center for web traffic. The information about the capital campaign on the website should have a “donation” button that directs funds specifically to that project. Everyone visiting the museum, either online or in person, needs to be aware of the capital campaign project.

As the housing and short-term stay options are severely limited in Ekalaka, the museum does struggle to find housing for summer and seasonal staff, students, and volunteers. This is not something the museum can really change, although board members and other community members have offered short-term housing for seasonal staff. At some point, the City of Ekalaka may need to consider the economic impact of the Museum ($128,160 in 2017), which is significant for a community of fewer than 400 residents. There is definitely a need for more local accommodations, but that is beyond the scope of the museum’s purview, even though it directly impacts museum staffing during busier months.

The museum is making significant headway as a research destination and a community-centric institution. The museum is taking steps in the right direction, such as this MAP review, and indicated in their MAP application that they were considering a CAP assessment, AAM’s Core Documents Verification, and even AAM Accreditation to continue down a path of institutional best practices and betterment. I would agree that these are steps in the right direction for the museum. My biggest recommendation would be to create an institutional strategic plan to help guide the museum through the major milestones it hopes to achieve over the next 3-5 years, which includes a capital campaign. Other recommendations include expanding partnerships, fee schedules in curation agreements with Department of Interior agencies, a CAP assessment, expanding exhibit contextual elements, creating additional
policies/procedure documents that will strengthen the museum, as well as some other general recommendations.

Introduction

The Museum Assessment Program (MAP) offers small and medium-sized museums an opportunity for self-improvement through guided self-study and consultation with an experienced peer reviewer. Since 1981, more than 4,000 museums have participated in MAP. MAP is a confidential, consultative process, designed to help museums understand how their operations compare to standards and best practices in the field. MAP provides museums with tools and resources to recognize how other institutions deal with similar challenges while providing suggestions for improvement.

The Carter County Museum MAP process was the Organizational Assessment which reviews all areas of a museum’s operations. Upon completion of this assessment, a museum is better prepared to operate as a 21st-century museum with a strong understanding of core museum standards and good practices that support sustainability. This assessment places significant emphasis on strategic planning as well as ensuring operations and resources align with the museum’s mission.

The Carter County Museum site visit took place over two days, Thursday, April 5, 2018, and Friday, April 6, 2018. Day one consisted of lengthy discussions with the museum director, Sabre Moore, and extensive tours of the main museum building. General discussions took place with part-time staff as well as a board meeting and evening program for museum members and the general public. Day two consisted of discussions with three board members, a tour of the offsite storage facility, and an exit interview with the museum director.

The museum’s initial objectives on their MAP application were:

1) Improve ability to manage renovation and expansion of a new facility
2) Increase staff and/or governing authority’s knowledge about resources available to help the museum
3) Improve ability to develop an institutional plan, review/revise policies and procedures

As well as:

1) Preparation for AAM accreditation and readiness to apply for grants and other funds for our capital campaign for expansion

The museum did finalize and approve their Collections Management Policy, a 42-page document, by the time the site visit occurred.
Brief Institutional History

The Carter County Museum was founded in 1936 by the Carter County Geological Society. The Geological Society owns the museum collections and pays the salary of the staff seasonal curator, but the County owns the building and pays the other staff salaries. The museum is in a remote location, in the community of Ekalaka which has a population of just over 300. The museum is significantly situated in close proximity to the Hell’s Creek Formation, a geological area known for significant dinosaur fossil excavations, including the T. rex, Sue, that resides at the Field Museum. The museum’s collections focus primarily on dinosaur fossils, but also include Paleo-Indian collections, a 19th-century general history collections, taxidermy collections, and military artifacts. It is a designated federal repository for state fossils. The museum is currently in a five-year capital campaign with the goal of opening the 12,000 sq. ft., 4.2 million dollar expansion in 2020.

Mission and Planning

The museum’s mission is to increase and diffuse knowledge and appreciation of history, art, and science; to discover, excavate and preserve fossils, fossil bones, and human artifacts; to advance the science of archaeology and paleontology; to collect and preserve objects of historic, artistic, and scientific interest; and to acquire and maintain a library to assist in the above purpose. The mission statement was last revised in 2013. It is a long mission statement, but it does cover all aspects of their collections, although there is not an accessible library. I think the library aspect could be removed and simply listed on the proposed institutional strategic plan as a goal. Once there is an accessible library the mission statement will have to be revised again to reflect that, and a mission statement is not something that should constantly be revised.

The museum staff and board members do seem to have a clear understanding of the museum’s mission and their part in fulfilling that mission. Staff appear to easily multi-task and focus on specific projects as needed to meet the museum’s many goals and obligations regarding collections management, programming, partnerships, and community relationships.

The museum is uniquely operated year-round in the area, while others in the region close during the winter months. The museum staff currently operates with one full-time staff member (director) and three part-time staff (assistant director and two receptionists). The assistant director also serves as a collections manager and manages the museum database and works eight hours a week. One of the receptionists serves as a collections database assistant as well as assisting with the gift shop and works twenty-four hours a week. The second receptionist focuses more on the gift shop but also assists with cataloging, especially the Ekalaka Eagle newspaper archive and works twenty hours a week. The museum relies heavily on these key staff members during the majority of the year, while seasonal employees, including the museum’s curator work during the peak summer season for the Dino Shindig and excavations, collections processing, and research. The staffing situation seems to work for the museum at the moment, but with its capital campaign and growing initiatives and partnerships, it would be a good idea to increase part-time staff or allow some part-time staff to become full-time staff if the budget allows for it. It is advised to grow the volunteer base to have more help year-round.
Resources seem to be allocated to fulfilling the museum’s mission, although the gift shop budget makes up almost half of the overall budget. Permanent staff are focused on processing collections, updating databases, updating exhibits, and digitizing collections. Temporary staff and seasonal staff carry out excavations and research that occurs during warmer summer months, which is also peak visitation time, which seems to balance the museum’s workload and resources.

The museum staff and board of directors are fully engaged in fulfilling the museum’s mission and support the current MAP process. They understand the need for engaging in best practices and museum standards in order to apply for grants and other sources of institutional advancement such as partnerships and collaborations.

The museum does need to create an institutional strategic plan to guide itself through the next 3-5 years since they have major goals, including a multi-million dollar capital campaign and the adding to its operating endowments. The plan is vital to the museum’s allocation of resources, goal setting, milestone management, and overall progress.

Interpretation and Education

The museum reached 1,876 students in 2017 and 12 schools hosted the MAIA: Mobile Science Lab trunks. Remoteness plays a significant role in serving the community, but through collaborative partnerships such as the Mobile Science Lab, the Dinosaur Trails, and the Kumamoto Montana Natural Science Museum Association, the museum is reaching wider audiences outside of physical visits to the museum. The annual Dino Shindig had visitation of 926 over a two day period in 2017, which is almost triple the size of the town.

The museum regularly posts articles in the local paper, the Ekalaka Eagle, and creates newsletters. The museum has social media accounts as well as hosts monthly Geological Society meetings and occasional workshops on a variety of topics, including taxidermy. These articles, programs, and workshops reinforce the mission of the museum and the museum’s goals for educating the community.

In the gallery spaces, I would recommend continuing to add additional signage and interpretive text. The Taxidermy Hall is currently undergoing a redesign to add additional specimens and signage. The redesign will incorporate subtle stylistic designs in honor of the Montanta’s sister state relationship with the Kumamoto Prefecture, which reinforces the museum’s global reach.

The new gallery configuration through the capital campaign will also allow the museum to better exhibit and interpret their different collection types (Native American, general history, military, natural history, etc.) into different gallery spaces. The current layout has multiple collections in shared spaces with no transition between them due to spatial constraints that are unavoidable.
Audience and Visitors

The museum defines its audience as 29% local, 38% in-state, and 33% out of state. The region is predominantly Caucasian with at least three Native American tribes present with an equal split of male and female residents. The area residents are educated, with at least 93.3% having high school degrees or higher and 15% of the community having 2-4 year college degrees or higher. The museum’s attendance has at least doubled since the highway south was paved and the Dino Shindig event was added. The museum did indicate that the southern portion of the County does seem more detached from the museum, and they were considering methods to address growing visitors/memberships from that area. The museum also serves as the official visitor center for the Medicine Rock State Park, so there should be some specific visitor numbers due to that relationship.

Currently, the museum uses its guestbook, donation data, store sales data, program registration, ticket sales data, and observation by front-line staff to collect information on visitors. I would also recommend adding contact information (address and email) to the visitor log to add individuals to mailing lists, surveys, etc. and collect other visitor statistics. Including a newsletter signup button, the museum’s website or a physical signup sheet near the guestbook would be something to consider for more marketing/PR opportunities.

Community

The museum plays a core role in the community of Ekalaka, especially since it is such a small community. The County Extension Office Master Gardener Program also participated in creating a Native Species Garden at the museum. The museum partners with local businesses and eateries for their events, which directly impacts the City financially, especially during the peak summer season. They also partner extensively with the local Carter County High School and Ekalaka Elementary.

The community seems to be incredibly supportive of the museum. The museum hosts monthly programming events in the evenings that support the museum’s mission and are well attended given the size of the community. The capital campaign will allow for more space for programming in the museum, as there is very limited space for them currently indoors.

Public Programs

The Carter County Museum’s educational goals and programming are appropriate to its mission, audiences, and current resources. The museum is part of the Montana Dinosaur Trail and a sister museum of the Museum of the Rockies in Bozeman, Montana and a member of the Kumamoto Montana Natural Science Museum Association. The museum partners with Humanities Montana to bring in guest speakers on various aspects of the state’s history. The annual Dino Shindig brings visitors from around the world to participate in lectures by leading paleontologists and participate in active dig sites. The museum’s new addition will allow for an expansion of programming and a greater accommodation for visitors during peak seasons.
Exhibitions

While the exhibits reflect the museum’s mission, there needs to be more contextual information. As already mentioned, some areas such as the Taxidermy Hall, are being addressed to add more information on an interpretive level. The museum has made great strides since the hiring of director Sabre Moore in advancing the level of overall collections care and exhibit displays.

There is no dedicated temporary/rotating exhibition space, as all the galleries are permanent galleries. The new addition may allow for some smaller traveling exhibitions or temporary exhibits to be set up to spur attendance so that repeat visitors see new things when they visit. This will also encourage repeat classroom visits during a single academic school year.

The new addition will also change the flow of the current galleries and will be an excellent opportunity to address labels, text panels, and general layout of galleries. Grants for new casework would be beneficial as some of the current casework is repurposed mercantile display cabinetry, mismatched, and does not allow for the use of vertical space, didactic elements, graphics, or pedestals/risers or object mounts.

Marketing and Public Relations

The museum should update their website to include information about the capital campaign on the main page of the website. The information should include conceptual graphics and a donation tab for the capital campaign. The existing donation page under the “Get Involved” tab should be updated to include designating funds for the capital campaign and the operating endowment.

I would recommend expanding articles and ads in regional arts publications in the Bozeman and Billings, MT and Rapid City, SD areas. It might even be prudent to consider running an ad or printing advertisements to be included in swag bags during the Sundance Film Festival, as it draws a large number of tourists in the region. However, I would consult with a PR/Marketing firm to determine the best course of action for regional/state/national and targeted ads, especially considering the needs of the capital campaign and creating/expanding an operating endowment. There are ways to cast digital “nets” to target audiences in specific regions and/or when they pass within a certain distance from the museum. These PR/marketing trends should be utilized in the most effective way possible, but in a financially responsible manner.

The museum does employ a seasonal marketing and communications coordinator, but it would be prudent to have an official marketing plan in place and even utilize or consult with a PR firm since the capital campaign is both a major endeavor and on a specific timeline that exists outside of a seasonal position. There needs to a marketing plan that addresses the promotional steps the museum will make over the next 3-5 years in relation to the capital campaign and state marketing budget allocations. FY15 included a tourism grant that greatly increased the
advertising potential of the museum. If the museum can apply for similar grants, or even the same grant after some time has passed, it is encouraged to do so.

**Collections Stewardship**

The museum instituted a Collections Management Policy post self-study workbook. It was approved by the board of directors on February 1, 2018, and is 42 pages in length. The document covers all appropriate areas. It is recommended that the museum consider a fee schedule for Rights & Reproduction requests since the staff is very small. I would also recommend creating a 1-2 page Collections Plan to discuss the breadth of the collections and determine what areas need focus for future focus and acquisition. This ensures healthy collecting practices that directly reflect the museum’s current needs and should be reevaluated at least every five years.

The museum staff and volunteers have worked hard to organize the existing collecting storage spaces, both onsite and offsite. The onsite space consists of large wooden shelving to house the heavy paleontological specimens. There are some smaller metal shelves, and the BLM repository collections are segregated from the rest of the collection. I would recommend adding a label designation that specifies their BLM repository status on each of the specimen tags, and on the overall shelving unit so it is easily identifiable. There are work tables and a shelving unit for collections in process. I did make the recommendation while on site to label shelving units with a unit number and a shelf number and integrate that into the collection database. This will make inventories and artifact location changes much easier to identify and maintain in the long-term. NAGPRA material was already segregated in collections storage away from the rest of the artifacts, in an appropriate manner for the current time. I recommended consulting with National NAGPRA and affiliated tribal groups on specifics of the storage and generally moving forward with the NAGPRA process.

As previously mentioned a Collections Assessment for Preservation (CAP) through AIC is a good idea to pursue, and I would also suggest applying for NEH and IMLS grants for enclosed metal storage cabinets for smaller and light weight collections. Cabinets such as Spacesaver® high-density storage can be used to maximize space.

At the time of the Self-Study, 90% of the museum’s collections were accessioned. This is a positive percentage for such a small institution, and I give credit to the hardworking staff that multitask projects on a daily basis. Onsite collections storage was very organized. The old card catalog system contains material that is being integrated into collection storage.

Offsite storage needs considerable organization. I can see the gains that have already been made there, but there is a lot still to be done. Offsite storage houses the unprocessed paleontological material and their prep space, oversized general storage for furniture and old exhibit fixtures, and gift shop storage. I would recommend continuing to organize these spaces and clearly labeling sections with what they contain (i.e., “gift shop inventory,” etc.). Extreme climate conditions in the winter prohibit much work there due to the lack of a heating system.

The collections all appear to be appropriate to the museum’s mission, except possibly the plethora of furniture. I would recommend accessing its relationship to the museum’s mission,
and then deaccessioning what does not fit to free up valuable storage space. The paleontological material is a strong research collection with significant potential.

The museum applies for appropriate permits through the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) for excavations on BLM property. The museum acquires permissions from private landowners for excavations on private property. At least one staff member has a United States Fish & Wildlife Services (USFWS) Migratory Bird permit. The museum has also taken steps to comply with the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA), and has isolated specific material and started the NAGPRA process.

**Administration and Finance**

The number of staff and volunteers do need to be increased, and the museum is trying to recruit more local volunteers. In a community that is as remote and small as Ekalaka, it is difficult to find volunteers. The museum might consider a high school level volunteer program. This engages youth and provides resources and tools for them to use if they decide to pursue an academic interest in museums, paleontology, etc. in a higher education setting.

The current staff all multitask their daily responsibilities, with most covering collections management, gift shop sales, and tours for the public. Since the museum is operated year-round the summer months are more active months for volunteers, and that is when the seasonal employees start. I do think that with the capital campaign to expand the existing structure the museum will need additional staff to assist with the collections move, exhibit deinstallations, exhibit reinstallation, and opening the building back up. This could take nine months to a year to complete the move and reinstallation of exhibits. I would look into grants for hiring temporary staff for collections move, hire contract collections staff for short periods of time, and increase hours of part-time staff when feasible.

I would recommend all staff, full time, part time, seasonal, volunteers, and board members participate in as many professional development opportunities as possible, and there are several free opportunities available. If the staff can afford to participate in regional, state, and nationwide museum conferences, they are encouraged to do so. This fuels networking, shared experiences, growth in the profession, and provides fresh outlooks from peers. Some meetings and conferences to consider are the Mountain-Plains Museum Association, the American Alliance of Museums, the Museum Store Association, and the Museums Association of Montana, the Society for the Preservation of Natural History Collections, the Society of Vertebrate Paleontology, and the American Society of Mammalogists. Online webinars can be found on sites such as Connecting to Collections, iDigbio, National NAGPRA, and courses can be taken through online portals such as MuseumStudy.com

**Membership and Affiliate Organizations**

The museum is effectively leveraging partnerships and affiliations. I would recommend continuing to expand partnerships and affiliations as much as is sustainable for current staff. Additional staff would help in this area.
The museum’s membership appears to be mostly local, especially the active participants for obvious reasons such as distance. Membership is approximately 80 people with dues of $10 a year. I would recommend a minimal museum store discount of at least 10% for members. This can spur purchases during monthly museum events and encourage other community members to join the membership program for the discount. This would be a good promotion, especially before the holidays when shopping trends increase.

**Finance**

The museum appeared to be in good financial health and submitted a balanced budget for FY14-16 in the Self-Study Workbook. 100% of the board of directors gives financially, which will be important for the museum to include on grants, and it’s important for the board to continue that trend. The expansion of an operating endowment is a wise decision and needs to be a priority along with the fundraising and completion of the capital campaign. Careful planning and prudent financial management will help the museum meet its current and future needs. This is again why a strategic plan is so important.

The museum gift shop in FY16 accounts for 45% of earned revenue, while contributions accounted for 35%. However, in the same year, the gift shop contributed to 45% of total expenses. The museum staff are already considering new ways for improved gift store purchasing and thus sales. The museum also operates an online store through Redbubble (https://www.redbubble.com/people/CCMuseum) and is a member of the AmazonSmile and Friends of Reynolds programs. The museum should explore trends in purchasing to see what sells best and discount items that do not sell at all. A new point of sale system, possibly through an inexpensive vendor like Squarespace, should help the museum’s bookkeeping to streamline and become simpler, as there is an issue with having to match up sales weekly. The Museum Store Association should be a good resource for improving the gift shop overall.

In the new building space after the capital campaign, and even in the schoolhouse and cabin exterior museum buildings, the museum could consider a rental plan to increase earned revenue. Rentals could include birthdays, anniversaries, and weddings. While it may not be something the museum wants to pursue, perhaps a feasibility study or income projections could be done to assess the income potential for those spaces. Many museums with historical outbuildings have rental opportunities in the spring through fall seasons. Some museums pay salaries for multiple positions based on revenue generated from rental events alone. However, this is something that would likely require additional staffing or adjustment of current staff schedules to accommodate.

**Facilities**

Currently, the museum does not have adequate facilities to support and fulfill its mission as a growing institution with an active community. The museum realizes this and is in a capital campaign project to rectify this situation through the addition of more prep and lab space, a larger exhibition space, and larger collections storage spaces. These updates will allow the museum staff to operate more efficiently and safely, especially with the addition of adequate lab space for taxidermy, etc. Programming space will still be incorporated into gallery spaces, but there will be a much-improved area with the new addition.
For the most part, the museum uses its facilities in ways that are in keeping with its mission. The only caveat I would add is that the museum does store firearms that are not on loan, nor intended to be used for displays, exhibits, etc. The museum stores the firearms for the American Legion, who picks them up (with no paperwork filled out) for events. The firearms are stored in collections storage, and near an exterior overhead door. The storage of these firearms is a liability issue for the museum, especially without paperwork in place, not to mention a conflict of interest. Museums and their collection storage spaces should not be used as storage spaces for staff, board members, volunteers, or members of the public, as that space is used for items held in public trust. Items in collections storage should be museum collections or loans, not 3rd party owned material unintended for museum use. The board of directors is liable for the safety and security of the staff and collections, and I would recommend the American Legion make alternative arrangements for the storage of their property at another location other than the museum at their earliest convenience.

Safety and Security

The museum has a lengthy Disaster Preparedness Plan based off of the dPlan. It is a comprehensive document. I would recommend that the staff require all volunteers, students, interns, and seasonal staff read this document so that there can be an appropriate response when/if needed in an emergency situation.

The museum utilizes existing spaces in a multipurpose way, including workspaces that double as taxidermy preparation. The new addition from the capital campaign will address that overlap and include new lab space. At the current time, the museum should take steps to store chemicals, especially taxidermy chemicals in fireproof cabinets and have SDS sheets located nearby. This should be in place for both the current museum prep spaces and the off-site storage spaces as well as new spaces. The new building lab space should include a vent hood in the lab space for adequate venting of chemicals. Currently, the museum disposes of biological waste in normal trash receptacles, although I would recommend bagging it separately. It is removed on a daily basis. Proper safety gear, such as nitrile gloves and eye protection should be utilized at all times.

The museum collections are located both onsite and offsite, with mostly larger pieces and unprocessed paleontological material offsite. Onsite collections storage access is by key, and there is exterior access via a large overhead door that is kept locked. Offsite storage is kept locked, but it is not alarmed. There is a smaller offsite building that serves multiple purposes that is not locked, but there does not appear to be any collections related material stored inside.

Governance

The Carter County Geological Society board is comprised of five members as of April 5, 2018. Llane Carroll, Marlene Waterland, Jerry Cline, Branson Rogers and Brice Lambert. As of the time of my visit the board was seeking one additional board member. The board mentioned this need to the attendants of the Carter County Geological Society Meeting on April 5, 2018.
The board meets to provide oversight for the organization. Since they are a small community, the board members also provide volunteer support for the museum in areas such as collections processing and summer excavation work. The museum has an approved Code of Ethics that does address board responsibility. The board demonstrates a genuine desire to help the museum progress.

There does seem to be a slight difference between timeline expectations from the board and staff regarding fundraising for the capital expansion. Generally speaking, the board sees four years may be more realistic to raise the necessary funds, while the staff plans for two years. This is not necessarily a negative issue, but more one that needs to be discussed in more detail to plan appropriately over the next 3-5 years. An operating endowment, increased earned income, and a capital campaign over the next 3-5 years necessitates the need for very careful planning and goals. This is one reason a strategic plan needs to be implemented for the next 3-5 years as a priority. This ensures all invested parties have realistic expectations and are all on the same page and can move forward on the same timeline.

The board members appear to be incredibly passionate about the museum and truly want it to succeed. They are professionals in the community and provide needed expertise in areas such as banking. They are also key to helping navigate political issues that divide the county into northern and southern sections. The board also realizes the importance of strengthening connections in the immediate community that may have been strained under previous museum administrators in the past decades.

The board appears to function effectively, consistent with their displayed dedication to the institution. The board members also dedicate their time to the museum, as some process collections and assist with paleontological digs and provide support for high visitation times during busy summer months. Housing and short-term accommodations are in short supply in Ekalaka, so several board members provide short-term housing for students and temporary museum staff during summer months.

Summary

Overall the Carter County Museum is in a good position to continue planning, create a strategic plan, and take steps to achieve its goals for a successful capital campaign, an increased operating endowment, and furthering its professional standards and best practices. Realistic expectations, adequate staff and resources, and minor changes to existing routines will allow the museum to move forward with their goals. Below is an itemized list of recommendations that were mentioned in the above narrative.
Recommendations

1. Create a strategic plan for museum goals over the next 3-5 years. This will enable the museum to focus on priorities to achieve fundraising, increase earned income, and build an operating endowment. This will also codify a timeline that can be reevaluated throughout the next 3-5 years based on actual results. The implementation of this plan was stressed during the site visit.

2. Removal of firearms owned by the American Legion. This is a liability issue. The firearms are not owned by the museum or used in museum displays on loan. They are used for American Legion purposes outside of the museum at certain times of the year. The firearms are stored near an exterior freight entrance that is not alarmed.

3. Invest in a chemical cabinet for all chemicals used in the museum, especially those used in taxidermy. Chemical cabinets are easily found online from suppliers such as Grainger or Uline. Post SDS (Safety Data Sheets) in an accessible binder for all chemicals used in the museum.

4. Negotiate a Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Curation fee schedule. Some institutions that receive repository collections from Department of Interior agencies have curation agreements in place that stipulate a curation fee schedule. I would recommend that the next time the agreement comes up for renewal, the museum negotiate a fee schedule to cover operating expenses relating to staff time, collection processing, acid-free materials, and HVAC operating costs related to the square feet/cubic feet of material being processed, housed, and curated by the museum.

5. Apply for grants and explore potential funding sources for capital campaign project.

6. Look into PR companies that work with museums and other non-profits for the promotion of the capital campaign to achieve more significant fundraising impact. Also, targeted ad campaigns and signage near the higher trafficked areas of the county/state/region.

7. Add capital campaign information and graphics to the museum’s website. Consider adding designations for the capital campaign and an operating endowment on the donation section.

8. Start conversations with a Customs broker/freight forwarder that specializes in museums, such as Masterpiece International, for potential shipping of artifacts and specimens to/from Japan with the museum’s Japanese sister city, Kumamoto.

9. Recommend a CAP to deal with specific collections related needs.

10. New lab space should include a sink, bio-waste trash bins, vent hood for chemicals, eye wash stations, chemical spill kits, stainless steel prepping space, freezers.

11. Expand the best practice guide for taxidermy. Potential reference sources would be the Society for the Preservation of Natural History Collections (SPNCH) and conservators through the American Institute for the Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works (AIC) and the American Society of Mammalogists. This guide should include handling, disposal of chemical and biological waste, legal/ethical issues, etc.

12. Continue to expand partnerships. The museum already does an outstanding job with partnerships, but there is the potential for other areas of expansion, such as tribal
partnerships. The museum has the opportunity to use the NAGPRA process to build rapport with tribes. These connections should be maintained. The museum should also reach out to other tribes not associated with the NAGPRA process but are located in the area currently, were from the area historically, or of which the museum has material associated with. Partnerships can include programming, exhibits, loans, lectures, cross-promotion, cultural stewardship, etc.

13. Find grants or other funding sources to update exhibit spaces with exhibit cases that take advantage of vertical height to break up spaces in the museum and allow for the inclusion of labels, risers/pedestals, and desiccant trays, etc. Cases should include gaskets, UV plexiglass, and inert fabrics. Exhibit panels, labels, and other interpretive signage is needed. An audio tour could also be used to supplement this information as space is an issue.

14. Continue storage cabinet retrofit, and apply for grants for metal storage cabinets that seal and lock. Current cabinets are open shelving.

15. Supplies such as industrial suction cups will help with removing some of the larger plexiglass panels in the museum.

16. Look into possible funding for botanical gardens or public gardens through the American Public Gardens Association.

17. Examine membership program to consider offering a small discount to the museum store. Consider rotating merchandise, so that repeat visitors see different things. Consider updating point of sale system to something like Squarespace. We did discuss how some of the transactions currently don’t sync. A more integrated system should help that. The museum’s website features a “store” tab, but there is no content. Consider removing the tab or offer a mix of branded merchandise and more high-end items. Look at what other museum stores offer online and ask them what works best for them. Join the Museum Store Association for more ideas and/or consult with a museum store consultant, especially if an increase in store revenue is a goal.
Resources

American Institute for Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works, AIC, http://www.conservation-us.org/home, is the national membership organization supporting conservation professionals in preserving cultural heritage by establishing and upholding professional standards, promoting research and publications, providing educational opportunities, and fostering the exchange of knowledge among conservators, allied professionals, and the public. Listserv Conservation Online (CoOL) signup: http://cool.conservation-us.org/byform/mailing-lists/cdl/ this is also where you can find out more about the Collections Assessment for Preservation (CAP).

Canadian Conservation Institute, CCI, https://www.canada.ca/en/conservation-institute.html, advances and promotes the conservation of Canada's heritage collections through its expertise in conservation science, treatment, and preventive conservation. They have useful technical bulletins.

Collections Stewardship Professional Network (formerly the Registrars’ Committee of the American Alliance of Museums RC-AAM), https://www.collectionsstewardship.org/, a community of practice focused on the stewardship of collections, archives, and exhibitions, including direct care, handling, documentation, shipping, housing, information management, and all activities related to collections of various types and sizes. Listserv signup: http://si-listserv.si.edu/cgi-bin/wa?A0=CSAAM

Connecting to Collections Care Online Community, https://www.connectingtocollections.org/, resources, and assistance for small and mid-sized cultural institutions provided free of charge by the Foundation of the American Institute for Conservation with funding from the Institute of Museum and Library Services.

Conserve O Grams, https://www.nps.gov/museum/publications/conserveogram/cons_toc.html, are short, focused leaflets about caring for museum objects.

Flammable Liquid Storage and Safety, https://www.grainger.com/content/qt-safety-flammables-combustibles-179, The museum should utilize a chemical cabinet to store all chemicals in, especially those used in taxidermy. These cabinets are easily located at national distributors and are commonly bright yellow.

iDigBio, Integrated Digitized Biocollections, www.idigbio.org, is the national resource for digitized information about vouchered natural history collections. As such, iDigBio serves as the coordinating center for the national digitization effort; fosters partnerships and innovations; facilitates the determination and dissemination of digitization practices and workflows; establishes integration and interconnectivity among the data generated by collection digitization projects; and promotes the uses of biological/paleontological collections data by the scientific community and stakeholders including government agencies, educational institutions, non-
governmental organizations (NGOs), and other national and international entities to benefit science and society through enhanced research and outreach activities.

Masterpiece International, [https://masterpieceintl.com/](https://masterpieceintl.com/), Customs brokers and freight forwarders that have experience in museum shipments and needs. The closest office is located in Denver, but it does not have a “fine art” agent stationed there. Contact Atlanta site-supervisor Leah Perez, lperez@masterpieceintl.com for questions and guidance.

Mountain-Plains Museums Association, [www.mpma.org](http://www.mpma.org), The regional museum association that includes Montana. I recommended Sabre Moore visit with the vendors at the 2018 conference, as I am familiar with many of them. I would recommend Vann PR & Associates ([www.vannpr.com](http://www.vannpr.com)) as a public relations and marketing company that is small and has worked with many museums throughout the MPMA region.

Museum Store Association, [https://museumstoreassociation.org/](https://museumstoreassociation.org/), a resource for museum stores and gift shops.

National NAGPRA, [https://www.nps.gov/nagpra/](https://www.nps.gov/nagpra/), National Park Service site dedicated to NAGPRA support and technical assistance.


Nhcoll-l Natural History Collections Listserv, [https://mailman.yale.edu/mailman/listinfo/nhcoll-l](https://mailman.yale.edu/mailman/listinfo/nhcoll-l) The Natural History Collections listserv, NHCOLL-L, is a general purpose electronic forum for those with interest in the care, management, computerization, conservation and use of natural history collections.

Occupational Safety and Health Administration Safety (OSHA) Safety Data Sheets (SDS), [https://www.osha.gov/Publications/OSHA3514.html](https://www.osha.gov/Publications/OSHA3514.html), Per OSHA, employers must ensure that the SDSs are readily accessible to employees for all hazardous chemicals in their workplace.

SPNHC, The Society for the Preservation of Natural History Collections, [http://www.spnhc.org/](http://www.spnhc.org/) is an international society whose mission is to improve the preservation, conservation, and management of natural history collections to ensure their continuing value to society.

Suction Cups, [https://www.grainger.com/product/WOOD-S-POWR-GRIP-Suction-Cup-Lifter-6A985](https://www.grainger.com/product/WOOD-S-POWR-GRIP-Suction-Cup-Lifter-6A985), such as these allow for easier maneuvering of large plex/glass panels and exhibit case vitrines. While a little pricey, they are extremely beneficial. If the museum has glass vitrines or panels, Kevlar ® gloves and sleeves should be worn to protect from glass breakage: [https://www.grainger.com/product/MCR-SAFETY-Kevlar-Sleeve-48GM85](https://www.grainger.com/product/MCR-SAFETY-Kevlar-Sleeve-48GM85)
Appendices

1. MAP Site Visit Agenda
DRAFT

MAP Organizational Assessment
Site Visit Agenda

Carter County Museum

Thursday, April 5

830 a.m. - Peer Reviewer arrives at Museum
9 a.m. - Initial interview with museum director
10 a.m. - Museum tour with Director Moore
1130 a.m. - Meeting with Board member
1230 p.m. - Lunch with Director, Board members
2 p.m. - Meeting with Board Member
3-5 p.m. - Break
5 p.m. - Arrive at Museum, meet additional board members, short meeting
6 p.m. - CCGS Member Meeting featuring Humanities Montana Speaker Ruthann Knudson and “Paleoindians in Montana: 13,000 to 8,000 years ago”

Friday, April 6

830 a.m. - Peer reviewer arrives at museum
9 a.m. - Meeting with staff/board member
10 a.m. - Meeting with community member/stakeholder/staff member
11 a.m. - Tour of offsite collections facility
1230 p.m. - Lunch
2 p.m. - Meeting with staff/board member
3 p.m. - Exit Interview with museum director
Characteristics of Excellence for U.S. Museums

1. PUBLIC TRUST & ACCOUNTABILITY
1.1 The museum is a good steward of its resources held in the public trust.
1.2 The museum identifies the communities it serves, and makes appropriate decisions in how it serves them.
1.3 Regardless of its self-identified communities, the museum strives to be a good neighbor in its geographic area.
1.4 The museum strives to be inclusive and offers opportunities for diverse participation.
1.5 The museum asserts its public service role and places education at the center of that role.
1.6 The museum demonstrates a commitment to providing the public with physical and intellectual access to the museum and its resources.
1.7 The museum is committed to public accountability and is transparent in its mission and its operations.
1.8 The museum complies with local, state, and federal laws, codes, and regulations applicable to its facilities, operations, and administration.

2. MISSION & PLANNING
2.1 The museum has a clear understanding of its mission and communicates why it exists and who benefits as a result of its efforts.
2.2 All aspects of the museum’s operations are integrated and focused on meeting its mission.
2.3 The museum’s governing authority and staff think and act strategically to acquire, develop, and allocate resources to advance the mission of the museum.
2.4 The museum engages in ongoing and reflective institutional planning that includes involvement of its audiences and community.
2.5 The museum establishes measures of success and uses them to evaluate and adjust its activities.

3. LEADERSHIP & ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE
3.1 The governance, staff, and volunteer structures and processes effectively advance the museum’s mission.
3.2 The governing authority, staff, and volunteers have a clear and shared understanding of their roles and responsibilities.
3.3 The governing authority, staff, and volunteers legally, ethically, and effectively carry out their responsibilities.
3.4 The composition, qualifications, and diversity of the museum’s leadership, staff, and volunteers enable it to carry out the museum’s mission and goals.
3.5 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.

4. COLLECTIONS STEWARDSHIP
4.1 The museum owns, exhibits, or uses collections that are appropriate to its mission.
4.2 The museum legally, ethically, and effectively manages, documents, cares for, and uses the collections.
4.3 The museum’s collections-related research is conducted according to appropriate scholarly standards.
4.4 The museum strategically plans for the use and development of its collections.
4.5 Guided by its mission, the museum provides public access to its collections while ensuring their preservation.

5. EDUCATION & INTERPRETATION
5.1 The museum clearly states its overall educational goals, philosophy, and messages, and demonstrates that its activities are in alignment with them.
5.2 The museum understands the characteristics and needs of its existing and potential audiences and uses this understanding to inform its interpretation.
5.3 The museum’s interpretive content is based on appropriate research.
5.4 Museums conducting primary research do so according to scholarly standards.
5.5 The museum uses techniques, technologies, and methods appropriate to its educational goals, content, audiences, and resources.
5.6 The museum presents accurate and appropriate content for each of its audiences.
5.7 The museum demonstrates consistent high quality in its interpretive activities.
5.8 The museum assesses the effectiveness of its interpretive activities and uses those results to plan and improve its activities.

6. FINANCIAL STABILITY
6.1 The museum legally, ethically, and responsibly acquires, manages, and allocates its financial resources in a way that advances its mission.
6.2 The museum operates in a fiscally responsible manner that promotes its long-term sustainability.

7. FACILITIES & RISK MANAGEMENT
7.1 The museum allocates its space and uses its facilities to meet the needs of the collections, audience, and staff.
7.2 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.
7.3 The museum has an effective program for the care and long-term maintenance of its facilities.
7.4 The museum is clean and well-maintained, and provides for the visitors’ needs.
7.5 The museum takes appropriate measures to protect itself against potential risk and loss.
Characteristics of Excellence for U.S. Museums
In Plain English

Public Trust & Accountability
- Be good
- No really—not only be legal, but be ethical
- Show everyone how good and ethical you are
- (don’t wait for them to ask)
- Do good for people
- Know which people
- And to be on the safe side
- Be nice to everyone else, too
- Especially if they live next door
- Avoid cloning
- Look something like the people you are doing good for
- And maybe a bit like your neighbors
- Let other people help decide what games to play
- And what the rules are
- Share your toys

Mission and Planning
- Know what you want to do
- And why it makes a difference to anyone
- Then put it in writing
- Stick to it
- Decide what you want to do next
- When you are deciding what to do, ask lots of people
- for their opinion
- Put it in writing
- Then do it
- If it didn’t work, don’t do it again
- If it did work, do

Leadership and Organizational Structure
- Make sure everyone is clear about who is doing what
- The board knows it is governing
- The director knows she is directing (and the board
knows it too)
- The staff know they are doing everything else
- And have it in writing

Collections Stewardship
- Know what stuff you have
- Know what stuff you need
- Know where it is
- Take good care of it
- Make sure someone gets some good out of it
- Especially people you care about
- And your neighbors

Education and Interpretation
- Know who you are talking to
- Ask them what they want to know
- Know what you want to say
- (and what you are talking about)
- Use appropriate language (or images, or music)
- Make sure people understood you
- And ask them if they liked it
- If not, change it

Financial Stability
- Put your money where your mission is
- Is it enough money?
- Will it be there next year, too?
- Know when you will need more $
- Know where you are going to get it from
- Don’t fiddle the books

Facilities and Risk Management
- Don’t crowd people
- Or things
- Make it safe to visit your museum
- Or work there
- Keep it clean
- Keep the toilet paper stocked
- And if all else fails, know where the exit is
- (and make sure it is clearly marked)