

Annotated Accreditation Criteria

Last updated 2005

The International Coalition of Historic Site Museums of Conscience defines Sites of Conscience as museums that:

- Interpret history through a historic site;
- Engage in programs that stimulate dialogue on pressing social issues and promote humanitarian and democratic values as a primary function;
- Share opportunities for public involvement in issues raised at its site.

Below please find a guide to the standards the Coalition uses to evaluate the effectiveness of Sites of Conscience, and to assess applications for accreditation.

1. Interpret history through a historic site.

The Coalition supports initiatives that use the power of places as catalysts for citizens to confront the contemporary legacies of what happened at those places. We believe that when visitors explore the architecture and landscapes that shaped or bore witness to the development of human rights and democracy, they may better recognize where similar struggles are occurring today. Further, we believe that places of memory have special power to inspire human connection to larger issues, and therefore to move people to participate in addressing these issues. The Coalition expects that:

- Historic Site Museums of Conscience and their programs/activities meeting the criteria below should be fully open to the public and operational, not in the planning stages.
- All visitors to the Historic Site Museum of Conscience visit the site itself, rather than learning about the site in another location.
- The “site” can include a single structure or multiple locations.
- Interpretation and activities of the Historic Site Museum of Conscience should be rooted in the site itself.

Good	Better	Best
The museum’s history exhibit or program is located at a site where some aspect of that history happened. The museum uses the site as a backdrop for its exhibits/programming, but this site is not the central feature of the experience for visitors.	The museum begins with the story of the site itself, and helps visitors understand the role that site played in the larger history the site wants to tell. The site is interpreted for its symbolic importance, because an important event took place there – the museum describes how the site “bore witness” to an event, but not how the site shaped or was shaped by this event. Visitors do not learn anything about social or human rights issues by looking at the site.	The museum uses the site – its location, structure, features, feeling – to help visitors “read” the issues the site represents. The museum explores the social or political forces that define how the site came to look as it does, and uses the physical shape of the site as a starting point for education and discussion of social or human rights issues.

2. Engage in programs that stimulate dialogue on pressing social issues and promote humanitarian and democratic values as a primary function.

The Coalition supports initiatives to transform historic sites from places of passive learning to places of active civic engagement. We believe it is the obligation of historic sites to assist the public in drawing connections between the history of a site and its contemporary implications, and to inspire citizens to be more aware and involved in the most pressing issues affecting them. To that end, Historic Site Museums of Conscience should provide a forum for open discussion of pressing contemporary issues among diverse publics. The Coalition expects Historic Site Museums of Conscience to regularly offer programs for a majority of visitors to the site that:

- Draw explicit connections to contemporary issues, either by providing information on the shape of these issues today, or by asking visitors questions about where they see these issues manifested today;
- Raise multiple perspectives on an issue, rather than promoting a single solution to a problem; and
- Inspire and facilitate dialogue among diverse publics at the site – a process of sharing ideas, information, experiences, and assumptions about difficult issues for the purposes of collective learning.

Good	Better	Best
<p>Programs draw explicit connections between the history of the site and related contemporary issues, either by providing information or by posing questions about those issues. Visitors are not asked to actively respond to the questions (for instance, questions appear on a text panel visitors may read).</p> <p>These programs are provided on a regular basis, but not every day (for instance, monthly). They are experienced by a majority of at least one of the museum’s audiences (e.g., school children).</p>	<p>Programs provide multiple perspectives on issues past and present, without questioning the historical facts of human rights struggles. Programs encourage visitors to consider their own perspectives, without promoting a single solution to any problem.</p> <p>Programs engage visitors in dialogue with one another while they are at the site, inspiring them to exchange experiences and perspectives on larger contemporary issues.</p> <p>These programs are provided at all times for a majority of visitors from diverse museum audiences (e.g., school children and local adults and tourists).</p>	<p>The museum offers a wide variety of different opportunities for visitors from different backgrounds and learning styles to engage in dialogue with one another in different ways (e.g., through comment cards or bulletin boards, large public forums, small groups).</p> <p>Dialogues involve people involved in the issues the sites raises on many different levels: for instance, victims, policy-makers, grass-roots groups, international visitors, educators, students.</p> <p>Stimulating dialogue on pressing social issues and promoting humanitarian and democratic values is part of the museum’s mission statement or other institutional mandate. The museum defines and evaluates its own success on how well it stimulates dialogue on pressing social issues.</p> <p>These programs are provided at all times to every visitor to the museum.</p>

3. Share opportunities for public involvement in issues raised at its site.

The Coalition supports efforts to move visitors to Sites of Conscience from talking about an issue, to getting actively involved in shaping it in their own way. The Coalition also believes that to protect their effectiveness as open forums, Sites of Conscience should not prescribe a specific course of action to its visitors. To that end, Sites of Conscience should provide information to visitors on where visitors can go to learn more or become more involved in shaping the issue in a variety of ways.

Good	Better	Best
Information on how visitors can become involved in shaping issues raised at the site is available to visitors upon request.	Information on how visitors can become involved in shaping issues raised at the site is displayed in a prominent place and available for visitors to take with them.	The site provides every visitor with extensive resources from a wide variety of perspectives on how they can become involved in shaping the issues raised at the site in many different ways.