

2026 AAM Annual Meeting & MuseumExpo

The Museum
Odyssey

Philadelphia
May 20-23



Simply copy and complete the template below

Date

Dear (supervisor's name),

I am requesting approval to attend the **2026 American Alliance of Museums Annual Meeting & MuseumExpo (AAM 2026)**, taking place **May 20-23 in Philadelphia, PA**. The AAM Annual Meeting is known as the largest museum conference in the world and one of the most enriching professional development experiences a museum professional can have. Through access to emerging strategies, peer networks, and solutions directly applicable to [YOUR CURRENT PROJECTS/CHALLENGES], I expect to bring back immediate learnings to implement.

Why AAM 2026?

AAM 2026 is the museum field's premier professional development event, bringing together **4,000+ museum professionals** from around the world to collaborate across disciplines. Unlike other conferences, AAM offers:

- **Nearly 200 educational sessions** covering critical topics from [insert topic of interest] to [insert second topic of interest]
- **Hands-on workshops** with immediately actionable takeaways
- **Direct access to industry leaders** and innovative peers solving similar challenges
- **The MuseumExpo** featuring 350+ vendors showcasing cost-saving solutions and technologies
- **Targeted networking** with professionals in [YOUR SPECIFIC ROLE/DEPARTMENT]

This year's theme, **The Museum Odyssey**, explores the evolving roles museums play in society—particularly relevant as America marks its 250th anniversary and museums navigate unprecedented change.

Direct Benefits to [YOUR ORGANIZATION]

Attending AAM 2026 will enable me to:

Immediate Application:

- Bring back proven strategies for [SPECIFIC PROJECT/INITIATIVE YOU'RE WORKING ON]
- Learn cost-saving approaches to [SPECIFIC CHALLENGE YOUR MUSEUM FACES]
- Identify potential partnerships and funding opportunities
- Discover technologies and vendors that can improve [SPECIFIC OPERATION]

Knowledge Transfer:

- Share insights with [NUMBER] colleagues through post-conference presentation
- Implement best practices in [YOUR DEPARTMENT/AREA]
- Apply new frameworks to [CURRENT STRATEGIC PRIORITY]

Network Development:

- Build relationships with peers with similar roles and responsibilities
- Connect with experts in [YOUR SPECIALTY AREA]
- Join [RELEVANT COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE]
 - *NOTE: in 2026, AAM is piloting several communities of practice. The tentative list is:*
 - *Education*
 - *Collections*
 - *LGBTQ+*
 - *Mid-career*
 - *Independent Museum Professionals*
 - *DEI/Chief Diversity Officers*
 - *Small Museums*
 - *Exhibitions*

Relevant Programming for My Role

AAM 2026 offers comprehensive programming across key functional areas. I will focus on sessions most relevant to my responsibilities and [YOUR ORGANIZATION]'s priorities:

[Select and customize the most relevant area(s) from the AAM 2026 session tracks:]

1. **Collections Stewardship & Conservation**
Evolving approaches to preserving physical and digital collections that reflect ethical stewardship, public values, and inclusive, sustainable access.
2. **Storytelling & Engagement**
Using narrative, interpretation, and engagement to build lasting inter- and intragenerational connections that foster creative aging, lifelong learning, social cohesion, and cultural continuity.
3. **Mission, Leadership & Institutional Evolution**
Aligning mission and leadership with enduring values while evolving institutional identity for resilience across time.
4. **Infrastructure, Security & Continuity Planning**
Designing facilities, systems, and risk management strategies that ensure institutional longevity and adaptive capacity.
5. **Evaluation for Legacy & Generational Impact**
Using research, evaluation, and longitudinal data to understand, demonstrate and sustain institutional relevance across generations.
6. **Sustaining Institutional Capacity & Fundraising**
Developing inclusive, forward-looking financial and operational models to secure museums' long-term stability and public trust.

7. **Scholarship & Theories of Time**
Drawing on historical, cultural, and museological scholarship to shape long-term perspectives and guide institutional practices.
8. **Immersive and Multisensory Experience Design**
Designing impactful visitor experiences using theatrical techniques, immersive technologies, and sensory storytelling.
9. **Interpretation and the Meaning of Time**
Exploring how museums help audiences experience and understand time through interpretive strategies that connect different moments and perspectives.
10. **Digital Storytelling and Technology**
Using digital platforms and tools to create inclusive, engaging narratives that resonate across time and identities.
11. **Ethics of Reconstruction and Representation**
Navigating ethical challenges in how museums reimagine, represent, or recreate knowledge, environments, and cultural expressions over time.
12. **Co-Created and Community-Centered Narratives**
Collaborating with communities to co-create narratives that reflect diverse experiences and evolving understandings of the past, present, and future.
13. **Contemporary Collecting & Documentation**
Developing responsive strategies to collect and preserve materials that reflect the present moment.
14. **Interpretation of Social, Cultural, Scientific, and Environmental Issues**
Creating exhibitions and programs that address the complex social, cultural, scientific, or environmental issues with research, insight, and inclusion.
15. **Media, Publications & Public Narrative**
Using communications, editorial platforms, and storytelling to shape public understanding of unfolding events in real time.
16. **Fundraising & Values Alignment**
Aligning fundraising strategies and donor relationships with evolving public values and institutional purpose.
17. **Participatory Archives & Shared Authority**
Partnering with communities to co-create archives, oral histories, and narratives rooted in shared experience.
18. **Scholarship & Real-Time Research**
Applying scholarly and community-based research to interpret the present within broader historical context.
19. **Strategic Foresight & Futures Planning**
Using tools like scenario planning and horizon scanning to anticipate change and shape future realities.
20. **Civic & Community Engagement**
Building inclusive platforms for dialogue, participation, and advocacy that help communities navigate change together.
21. **Institutional Resilience & Workforce Strategy**
Evolving leadership, staffing, and business models to strengthen museums for long-term adaptability.
22. **Innovation & Cross-Sector Collaboration**
Pursuing new ideas, technologies, and partnerships to drive cultural and organizational innovation.
23. **Responding to Forces of Change**
Addressing external drivers—such as climate, technology, and social transformation—with agility and vision.

24. **Leadership, Governance & Strategy**
Advancing ethical leadership, effective governance, and strategic planning aligned with mission and values.
25. **Human Resources & Organizational Culture**
Supporting workforce development, inclusive hiring practices, and positive, adaptive organizational culture.
26. **Collections & Registration**
Promoting best practices in collections care, documentation, access, and management.
27. **Curation & Exhibition Development**
Innovating curatorial methods and exhibition design for diverse, engaging experiences.
28. **Education, Engagement & Visitor Experience**
Enhancing interpretation, learning models, and visitor services and experiences that reflect community needs and interests.
29. **Marketing, Communications & Community Relations**
Building trust and visibility through storytelling, media, and strategic community engagement.
30. **Fundraising, Membership & Revenue Strategy**
Developing sustainable income strategies and meaningful donor and member relationships.
31. **Finance, Operations & Risk Management**
Ensuring financial health, operational excellence, and preparedness for risk and disruption.
32. **Technology & Digital Practice**
Integrating digital tools and infrastructure across museum functions for greater impact and reach.
33. **Evaluation, Research & Field Innovation**
Applying data, evaluation, and research to drive innovation and continuous improvement.

Total Conference Investment:

The numbers included below are estimates. Please research and update the cost for each row based on your specific requirements.

Expense Category	Cost	Budget-friendly considerations
Conference Registration	\$595-\$995	Early bird and member discounts can save up to \$400 off the on-site rate
Roundtrip transportation	\$600	Book 60+ days ahead for savings on travel
Hotel	\$800-900	Book in the AAM hotel block for discounted rates
Meals and Incidentals	\$200	All evening parties and the MuseumExpo Opening Reception include food.
Total investment		

Value Comparison:

If you/your employer are weighing alternative types of professional development, below is a cost comparison to common alternative types of professional development. These are estimates; you can customize this section to match the alternatives under consideration.

Professional Development Option	Typical Cost	What You Get
AAM 2026 Conference	\$700 - 2,500 (edit based on your travel expenses)	200 sessions, workshops, networking, MuseumExpo access, 4 days
Single university course	\$1,500-6,000	One topic, semester-long
Private consultant workshop	\$2,000-5,000	One topic, 1-2 days
Online certificate program	\$500-3,500	Self-paced, limited networking
Individual coaching sessions (6 sessions)	\$1,200-3,000	One-on-one but narrow focus