

GETTING YOUR BEARINGS

An Introduction to NASM

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOLS OF MUSIC

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WELCOME

NASM welcomes you, your expertise, and your interests to its work of supporting music study and the people engaged in it. NASM was founded in 1924 by 24 schools meeting in Cincinnati, Ohio. Since then, it has developed into an extensive effort involving hundreds of institutions. By way of introduction, this document provides information about three topics: NASM's purposes, its organizational structure, and its basic services.

BASIC PURPOSES

The mission statement of the National Association of Schools of Music contains only three basic purposes:

- To advance the cause of music in American life, and especially in higher education;
- To establish and maintain threshold standards for the education of musicians, while encouraging diversity and excellence;
- To provide a national forum for the discussion of issues related to these purposes.

NASM builds its day-to-day work around four major program areas that support its mission.

Accreditation

At the core of NASM's activities is **accreditation**. Currently, approximately **637** institutions in **49** states, the District of Columbia, and unincorporated territories of the United States are accredited by NASM.

NASM accredits an institution when it demonstrates compliance with standards and guidelines related to the quality of the programs of study it offers, when its activities match published descriptions, and when it follows its own stated procedures.

NASM's accreditation procedures involve orientation and training sessions, institutional self-study, on-site evaluation, and review by accrediting Commissions.

Professional Development

Regarding the **professional development** of music executives, NASM has a triple focus. NASM assists executives to address the key education and training issues in the development of professional musicians; the broader philosophical issues surrounding music and music study; and the daily management issues faced by executives working in schools of music.

Institutional Research

NASM's third major program area is **institutional research**. NASM compiles data, interprets it, then publishes and disseminates it to member and non-member institutions and the public. Dissemination happens in three ways: through (1) the NASM Annual Meeting; (2) NASM publications and projects, and (3) the annual reports of member institutions, and NASM's participation in the Higher Education Arts Data Services (HEADS) system.

Policy

In the area of **policy**, NASM works primarily in an analytical mode. Music study in free-standing music schools, colleges, and universities is connected to a web of broader questions—free expression in a democracy, education funding, academic politics, arts policy, and many others. NASM helps its members to navigate these issues by making the link between analysis and local action. NASM policy reports often work their way into legislative testimony, reports of governmental task forces, the priorities of philanthropic boards, and the ongoing work of other arts and educational organizations. The primary purpose, however, is to help members think through issues deeply on the way to institutional decisions.

ORGANIZATIONAL FUNCTIONS

To understand how NASM accomplishes its mission and gets its work done, it is helpful to understand the organization's operational functions.

There are five basic functions. The first two are legislative; the next two, judicial; and the last, administrative.

All **policies and programs** of NASM, as well as the standards and guidelines for accreditation, are the work of the membership, the Executive Committee, and the Board of Directors. Members of the Board are elected by the membership. Three public members appointed by the President, along with the Executive Director, *ex officio* and non-voting, complete the roster of the Board. The Executive Committee is comprised of the President, Vice President, Treasurer, Secretary, Chair and Associate Chair of the Commission on Accreditation, and the Executive Director.

Nominations and elections are the responsibility of the Nominating Committee, which consults with the membership as a whole and prepares a slate of officers for each Annual Meeting. Each year, two Committee members are elected at-large, and two members, plus the Chair, are appointed by the Board.

The **accreditation of institutions** is the responsibility of two Commissions. All Commission members, including the Chairs and Associate Chair, are elected by the membership as a whole. Each Commission also has voting public members, who are appointed by the President of NASM with the advice of the Executive Committee.

Ethics reviews are the responsibility of the Committee on Ethics, which considers any case properly brought before it under NASM's review procedures. All of its members are elected at-large.

The President has an **oversight** role, ensuring that the work of NASM follows the published policies, procedures, and protocols. The President also makes **appointments** and consults regularly with the Executive Director.

The **day-to-day business** of the Association is conducted from the National Office in Reston, Virginia, by the Executive Director, who is selected by the Executive Committee. The Executive Director hires all other staff members.

The National Office staff carries out a broad range of functions including administrative management of the accreditation process, financial management of the organization, meeting planning, and record-keeping. The staff also carries out projects, and maintains extensive telephone, electronic, and written correspondence with members, the public, and other agencies.

MANAGEMENT PRINCIPLES

NASM is guided by a set of basic and well-tested management principles.

The first is **autonomy**, which means that NASM is legally and organizationally independent.

At the same time, however, NASM strives to maintain **collegial and collaborative relationships** with other bodies and associations in the arts, education, and accreditation.

NASM's management philosophy is the same one that holds the United States together: the idea of **separation of powers within a democracy**. That means making a clear distinction between policy and operations so as to avoid conflicts of interest.

To put it in the simplest terms:

- The legislative and policy functions are the responsibility of the members, the Board, and the Executive Committee they elect to represent them.
- The administrative functions are primarily the responsibility of staff. In the accrediting arena, the work of NASM evaluators is facilitated and managed according to Association protocols by the National Office staff.
- The judicial function is carried out by the accreditation Commissions and the Committee on Ethics.

In summary, those making accreditation decisions base their judgments on policies and standards decided by the membership; the staff carries out the policies of the Association, but does not evaluate institutions or programs.

NASM also focuses on its **service orientation** as an organization that meets the needs of its members. Typical of NASM's services are its publications programs and consultation with institutions preparing for accreditation visits.

Always, however, NASM's programs and organizational efforts are focused through the lens of its mission, which places **advancing the cause of music** at the top of the agenda. NASM strives to temper its efforts with a sense of humor that says: "We take our work more seriously than we take ourselves."

NATIONAL OFFICE

For most with inquiries, the first points of contact and chief sources of information are the NASM [website](#) and the [National Office](#) staff.

The NASM National Office is open 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. weekdays, closed on major holidays and during the period between Christmas and the New Year.

NASM is fortunate to own its own office unit in a small office park, located just a few minutes by car from both the Dulles Airport and the Washington Beltway.

The staff also manages the affairs of several other national arts and education organizations with missions similar to NASM's:

- [The National Association of Schools of Art and Design](#),

- [The National Association of Schools of Dance](#), and
- [The National Association of Schools of Theatre](#), as well as
- [The Council of Arts Accrediting Associations](#),
- [The Accrediting Commission for Community and Precollegiate Arts Schools](#), and the
- [Higher Education Arts Data Services](#) system.

Each staff member serves the same function for each organization.

FINANCES

NASM operates on a balanced budget. The Association maintains a reserve distributed among real estate, securities, equities, and cash. In order to remain independent and to avoid competing with member institutions, NASM does not normally seek outside funding for its activities; it simply lives within its means.

ACCREDITATION PROCESS

Although successful completion of an accreditation review is necessary for gaining and maintaining membership in NASM, the Association has always viewed the process more as a helpful activity rather than a test.

Accreditation is a useful way for institutions to:

- Plan for the future;
- Judge themselves against national standards and their own aspirations;
- Take stock of their achievements and needs;
- Gain evaluative assistance from peer experts.

Since a thorough review of the accreditation process is presented during the Self-Study workshop at each Annual Meeting, only the highlights are provided here.

Every newly accredited institution must review its program on a five-year cycle. All others are reviewed every ten years. These reviews always include a full self-study, an on-site evaluation by a team of at least two evaluators, and a Commission review. The institutional self-study is the centerpiece of the accreditation process. If new programmatic offerings are adopted between reviews, an institution must submit the offerings for review and approval prior to implementation. Circumstances may determine that an on-site visit is necessary.

NASM encourages those seeking and renewing accreditation to make extensive use of three fundamental resources available on the NASM website:

- The [Handbook](#) contains the Standards for Accreditation and the Rules of Practice and Procedure;
- The [Membership Procedures](#) documents contain the procedures institutions must follow, the Self-Study formats, and the procedures for on-site visits; and
- The [Policies and Procedures for Reviews of New Curricula](#) are to be used when adding, changing, and/or modifying curricula.

These resources are only the beginning. There are additional ways to find out about how the accreditation process works:

- Sessions providing a thorough overview of procedures and self-study are held during the Annual Meeting.
- Dialogue sessions with a Commission chair, scheduled for Sunday and Monday at the Annual Meeting.
- The Association's website at <http://nasm.arts-accredit.org>, or [National Office](#) staff by phone at 703-437-0700 or by e-mail at info@arts-accredit.org.
- Obtain a list of names of individuals who might serve as an on-site [consultant](#). An institution does not have to be seeking accreditation to host a consultant. Consultants will be glad to assist you in solving specific institutional problems. Although NASM can provide a list of consultants, NASM does not guarantee that hosting a consultant will ensure Commission approval. Consultants are not hired by NASM, but by institutions.

HEADS ANNUAL REPORT

Every NASM member must file a [HEADS](#) Data Survey (Annual Report) every year. This information is submitted online and compiled by the staff. Compiled data in the form of *Data Summaries* are made available annually to NASM members participating in the Data Survey to assist in their decision-making. A special feature of the HEADS system, entitled *Special Reports*, enables institutions to compare themselves against ten or more other institutions of similar size and type.

Because HEADS Annual Reports provide a composite, quantitative picture of each institution, the reports from each of the past three years are required as an appendix to the Self-Study in the renewal of Membership process. Specific sections of all institutional HEADS reports remain confidential. Only National Office staff members hold access to this information.

Informational sessions regarding HEADS are held during the Annual Meeting.

ACCREDITATION AUDIT

In order to keep an accurate public record of each institution's descriptive information, NASM requests that every member institution update its accreditation audit every year. This information, as well as programmatic offerings, is published in a membership listing. The searchable online Directory of [Accredited Institutional Members](#) serves as an updated mailing list and provides current information about degrees and programs offered at each institution.

PUBLICATIONS PROGRAM

Like many associations, NASM serves its members' needs through a variety of publications, primarily accessed from the NASM [website](#). You already know about the *Handbook* and the *Directory*. In addition to these, NASM publishes:

- [Current Notices](#), including official announcements concerning proposed *Handbook* revisions and Commission actions; Annual Meeting information; and other items of interest.

- [Executive Advisories](#) on breaking issues are published as needed, while [Briefing Papers](#) bring members up-to-date on issues, trends, and new policy initiatives.
- A [Sourcebook for Futures Planning and its Supplements](#) provide an extensive menu of techniques, approaches, and analyses for looking at a broad range of concerns.
- Selected general interest [papers](#) presented at annual meetings are collected and published on the website, as well as the annual *Proceedings*.

The Association also publishes reports of special projects and studies in which NASM is involved. Examples include NASM-PAMA Advisories on Hearing Health; Resources for Local Considerations of Music and Music Education Degrees; a policy brief on Creation, Performance, and Research: Multiple Relationships and Possibilities; Assessment on our Own Terms; Creating a Positive Future for Music Advocacy; Development and Assessment of Undergraduate Programs Combining Studies in Music, Business, Music Industry; Music Industry Futures Issues; special focus reports on Minority Access to Arts Education; Advising, Counseling, and Mentoring the Arts Student; *Sourcebook Supplement IV: Creating Your Self-Study*; Giftedness, Arts Study, and Work; Tough Questions and Straight Answers About Arts Accreditation; Distance Education and the Arts Disciplines; and Children and Youth, the Arts, and Public Policy: Present Urgencies for Higher Education. The comments and participation of members is actively solicited for the publications program. Ideas are also welcome, especially comments on issues and proposed changes in Association documents.

NASM, in conjunction with the other accrediting organizations that make up the Council on Arts Accrediting Associations (CAAA), developed a website section devoted to [Achievement and Quality: Higher Education in the Arts](#) to assist individuals and institutions. This website is rich with information and resources that reflect a basic consensus by the representatives of over 1,200 accredited institutions and programs across the disciplines of music, art and design, dance, and theatre who seek broader public understanding of the nature of what they do and how they evaluate it as experienced professionals. A link to the website may also be found on the <http://www.arts-accredit.org> home page.

MEETINGS

NASM meets every year during the Saturday-through-Tuesday before Thanksgiving. Each of the nine regions holds a business meeting and presents a programmatic session. All NASM meetings focus on professional development, while some also address larger issues of policy.

You are encouraged to attend the national and regional meetings, not just as a professional obligation, and not only because NASM benefits from your participation, but because of what you can take home with you in the form of useful information, new contacts, and renewed friendships.

CONCLUSION

In the end, NASM is like every other organization. You get out what you put in. But there are some simple steps you can take. To benefit immediately and often from NASM's services:

- I. First, stay familiar with the NASM website and NASM publications, especially those related to the accreditation process. These documents may be able to address a question before it turns into a problem. Become familiar with the NASM standards and accreditation philosophy.

2. Second, if you do have a question or concern, [contact the National Office](#). The National Office staff will do its best to answer your questions or direct you to additional sources of information.
3. Third, if you are an institutional representative to NASM, you are a conduit for information. Make sure you keep your faculty and administration informed about the things they need to know, and about how NASM may be able to help them.
4. Finally, we ask you to work with NASM to anticipate your needs. It is relatively easy for NASM to deal with institutional concerns in advance, but only when the staff, the appropriate Commission, or the right Committee has been made aware of them.

Please feel free to take full advantage of the information and opportunities offered by NASM. The Association exists to serve.