

**Society of American Archivists
Council Meeting
August 3, 2020
Virtual Meeting**

**Recommended Revisions to
SAA Core Values Statement and Code of Ethics
(Prepared by Rosemary K. J. Davis, Committee on Ethics and Professional Conduct)**

BACKGROUND

The Committee on Ethics and Professional Conduct (CEPC) is charged to periodically conduct a complete review of SAA's *Core Values of Archivists* and *Code of Ethics for Archivists* to ensure that the documents continue to meet the needs of our profession and reflect our organization's thoughtful commitment to creating engaged communities of practice. Because the most recent round of review and revision occurred in 2012, the CEPC decided to commit a considerable amount of collaborative effort to bring these texts more clearly in line with SAA's expressed dedication to cultivating welcoming, supportive, and ethical environments for all individuals performing archival work.

The CEPC began a thorough review of these texts at the 2018 SAA conference, prefaced by an open call for SAA member feedback that took place in July 2018. The collected comments from this feedback round (Appendix 1) were taken into consideration during the CEPC's subsequent work. Multiple rounds of revisions were undertaken, both in person and remotely. In spring 2020, a final draft of both revised texts was approved by the CEPC and passed on to the SAA Council for consideration and approval.

DISCUSSION

While many small structural and grammatical edits were made throughout these texts, the most extensive revisions emerged in direct response to SAA member feedback, the evolution of other SAA policies, and current issues (mostly pertaining to equity, diversity, and inclusion) at play in the archives profession. As revised, the *Core Values of Archivists* and *Code of Ethics for Archivists* now:

- Clearly state that archivists and archival work are not neutral;
- Recognize the existence of complex power dynamics among creators, archivists, and organizations;
- Acknowledge the privilege and power held by those shaping the historical record through their archival decisions; and
- Note the vital role of "sustainability" in regard to the ongoing impact that archives and archival work have on the earth's environment.

These texts now more accurately reflect and center the human experience (and resulting impacts) of performing archival labor while also encouraging deeper professional engagement. What's more, they demonstrate to non-archivists that members of our field are conscious of the complications inherent in our work. Appendix 2 (page 7) reflects proposed revisions as tracked changes; Appendix 3 (page 18) provides a "clean" version of the revised texts.

RECOMMENDATION

THAT the SAA Council adopt the revised *Core Values of Archivists and Code of Ethics for Archivists* as submitted.

Support Statement: SAA's *Core Values of Archivists* and *Code of Ethics for Archivists* function as primers not only for those actively performing archival work and contributing to our profession's output, standards, and evolution, but also as a public resource for any individual interested in learning more about the purposeful guidelines that provide a foundation for our work as individuals and archival organizations. As revised, these texts explicitly support SAA's strategic priorities by providing aspirational yet attainable guidelines for engaging in archival work--they reflect the Society's commitments to equity, diversity, and inclusion, while also consciously acknowledging the complex moral dynamics at play within our profession.

Impact on Strategic Priorities: The Code of Ethics and Core Values Statement clearly support numerous SAA strategic priorities and organizational values, including:

- Goal 1 (especially 1.1, 1.2, and 1.4) and Goal 3 (especially 3.1 and 3.4) -- These revised texts publicly clarify the diverse goals of archival work and the ethical underpinnings that guide those performing this work. The CVS and COE can be used as a bolster for advocacy efforts within institutions and within contexts in which the impact of archival work needs to be clearly defined. Moreover, these texts push for more informed best practices, concepts of leadership, and professional participation.
- Goal 2 (especially 2.4) and Goal 4 (especially 4.1 and 4.2) -- These revised texts help codify and contemporize our common professional aims and motivations, contributing to a shared language that communicates across all levels of expertise. By actively laying a solid foundation for more equitable professional engagement, these guidelines can help make archives and archival work more accessible and inclusive, not only to those working in these environments, but for anyone seeking to use the materials we collect.

Fiscal Impact: Approval of these revised texts does not require SAA to expend any funds.

**SAA Member Feedback in Response to
CEPC Call for Comments
*Core Values of Archivists and
Code of Ethics for Archivists*
June 2018**

Submitted to SAA HQ Email

Thank you for allowing the SAA membership the opportunity to review the *Core Values Statement and Code of Ethics*.

It still appears to me as a perfectly good guidance document, but I would like to see added to the Core Values language that makes it clear that the concept of “archival neutrality” is a myth. Too many archivists still believe that our profession is “neutral” in its collecting and description processes, but this tradition invariably benefits the maintenance of the traditional rich, white and primarily male narrative to the disadvantage or exclusion of other narratives. The “neutrality” myth violates the core value of Diversity.

Thank you,

Jeremy Brett, C.A.

jwbrett@library.tamu.edu

Hello,

My main comment on the SAA Core Values Statement and Code of Ethics for Archivists primarily concerns the section on Social Responsibility which begins:

“Underlying all the professional activities of archivists is their responsibility to a variety of groups in society and to the public good. Most immediately, archivists serve the needs and interests of their employers and institutions. Yet the archival record is part of the cultural heritage of all members of society.”

Susan Lawrence in **Privacy and the Past: Research, Law, Archives, Ethics** is troubled by the placement of the archivists' responsibility to the interests of the institution that employs them over their responsibility to the public or scholarly communities. I too am troubled by this. As University Archivist I understand why this section is worded the way it is. I am very aware that I am in charge of an institutional archive design to preserve the history of that institution. At the same time, I am more aware of the social and political environment we are currently living in. As archivists we have a responsibility to safeguard history and as a branch of librarianship to provide access to information. Now, in the United States, our government actively opposes free access to reliable information. The federal government, along with powerful political entities and institutions, have also shown an interest in rewriting history for their own ends. On top of this, as a member of multiple marginalized communities, I am very aware of archivists and institutions ability to gatekeep historical narratives. This includes obscuring historical truths that are not in that institution's favor or may cause some level of community backlash. While I am not

advocating archivists to just go rogue, I do think we, as a field, need to be more critical about what our social responsibilities really are and reflect that in our Core Values and Code of Ethics. Because the reality is that many of us may be called to defend these values in real and tangible ways.

Sincerely

David Obermayer

University Archivist

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I would like to see something in the Code that addresses standing firm on a collecting policy (or best practices) – even when facing pressure to make compromises or even poor decisions in these areas.

I'm thinking of the Big Donor type of situation – someone wants to give us something that is better suited to another repository, but trying to force our hand into accepting it. Or the notion of “just because its old it should be in our collection.” Collecting policies are there to guide the institution, but also individual archivists and archives managers. When archives are within a larger organization that often may not have any concept of what archivists are or do, or routinely does fundraising activities or other types of things --- the values of archives/ists may be overrun or ignored.

ACRL used to have a line in their Code

(1992) <http://www.ala.org/Template.cfm?Section=speccollections&template=/ContentManagement/ContentDisplay.cfm&ContentID=8969> that said directly: “Special collections librarians should not reverse, alter, or suppress their professional judgement in order to conform to a management decision...” I like this because it gives me ground, and in fact encourages and demands that I take an Ethical Stand --- even if it conflicts with a management directive. Of course, management will likely still always win --- but at least this statement encourages me to speak up, if I see actions being taken which might endanger our collection or our mission. I like being charged with the responsibility to speak up for our collections/practices – because even if I am taking an unpopular stand – I can point to the Code and say, “See? I’m just doing my job.

Linda Barnickel, Librarian I

And to
a high
ethical

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standard.”

Good morning,

I would like to submit the following comments for consideration:

- It would be helpful to explicitly provide a link or some kind of direction to previous versions of the document.
- Under the core value of Diversity, I would like to see mention of sometimes involving the creating community more fully in the process and giving them input/ownership. For example, consulting with a Native American community on how their records are processed, described, and represented – that kind of consultation is not mentioned. Perhaps this is encompassed in “community-based archives,” but that’s not clear to me as the reader.
- Under the core value of Selection, I think part and parcel should be transparency about the selection process, letting users know that the historic record is in fact curated by archivists, and making scope/collecting policies publicly available.
- Under the introduction to the Code of Ethics is the statement “Archives are created by a wide array of groups and provide evidence of the full range of human experience.” I believe it would be more accurate to say something like they *seek* to provide evidence of the full range of human experience, as there are clearly gaps in the record.
- Under Professional Relationships, I would like to see mention of other collaborations and more marginal professional relationships, unless “colleagues” is intended to include others besides fellow archivists. For example, IT staff, facilities, outside consultants for interdisciplinary projects, etc.
- Under Judgment, I would consider including provision of access in the list: “Archivists exercise professional judgment in appraising, acquiring, and processing materials.” This may be my experience in digital preservation talking, but the competing values of preservation and access come up a lot and it takes professional judgment to make the call sometimes, even if restriction of access is based less on privacy/confidentiality issues and more on making sure we have the material properly preserved first.

Thank you for taking input from the archival community. I appreciate the well-crafted, thoughtful work that has gone into this document and its previous iterations.

Sincerely,

JAMIE PATRICK-BURNS

Digital Archivist

State Archives of North Carolina

Submitted on SAA Website

2 Comment(s) to the "[Call for Member Comment: Code of Ethics for Archivists and Core Values of Archivists](#)"

[Stuar2821](#) says:

[Advocacy clause](#)

My comment is in response to a discussion on the SAA Leadership list. In my opinion, the broadly-worded clause inserted under Core Value of Archivists/Advocacy in the 2012 revision, that archivists “advocate for the application of archival values in a variety of settings . . .including the political arena” gives rise to confusion over when and in what platform stating opinions on public policy is appropriate. SAA’s current [Criteria for Advocacy Statements](#) states that “SAA will take a position, make a statement, or take other action only on issues that are related directly to archives and archival

functions.” I think the clause in the Code of Ethics should be rewritten to align with the [Criteria for Advocacy Statements](#) and encourage archivists to take a **professional** stance on public policy issues when they are related directly to archives and archival functions. Thank you for the opportunity to comment and for considering this revision.

~Lorraine A. Stuart, CA

SUBMITTED BY [STUAR2821](#) ON JULY 11, 2018 - 12:41PM.

[pd3](#) says:

[Core Value Comment re: Preservation](#)

As a preservation professional, I am very pleased with the statement of preservation on pgs. 3-4 of the *Core Values of Archivists*, except for the last sentence. For reasons of authenticity, "the concerns of the past" can be taken to mean physical elements of an original that were used within an historical era, for example, which can be extremely important independently of the content. Yes, we preserve for the future, but "more than the concerns of the past" could be misconstrued and taken to mean that certain physical attributes of an original are not important and, thus, could be too easily dismissed which strikes me as dangerous.

I would leave that sentence out and let the previous sentence beginning, "Within prescribed law..."—which is well-stated—end the paragraph. That would leave the decision in neutral territory.

Best regards,
Paula De Stefano

Proposed Revisions to *Core Values of Archivists and Code of Ethics for Archivists* (With Tracked Changes)

(Approved by the SAA Council in May 2011; revised, August 2020)

Introduction

Statements of ethics emerge from the core values of a profession. The Core Values of Archivists Overview

The Core Values of Archivists and the Code of Ethics for Archivists Code of Ethics for Archivists are intended to be used together to guide archivists, as well as to inform these individuals who perform archival labor or who work with archivists, in shaping in archival environments. These aspirational values and ethical principles help shape SAA's expectations for professional actions and engagement. The former is a statement of what

In summary, archivists believe; the latter is a framework should strive to:

- expand access and usage opportunities for archivists' behavior, users, and potential users, of archival records

In addition, case studies drawn from real life that address one or more of the areas covered by the Code of Ethics for Archivists have been published by SAA's Committee on Ethics and Professional Conduct (CEPC):

* * *

- actively contribute ideas and resources to our field's body of theoretical and practical scholarship
- cultivate collaborative opportunities not only with creators, users, and colleagues, but with any interested parties who wish to engage with archival records
- develop and follow professional standards that promote transparency and mitigate harm
- respect the diversity found in humanity and advocate for archival collections to reflect that rich complexity
- recognize the importance of professional education and development by supporting lifelong learning for themselves and others
- devise environmentally sustainable techniques for preserving collections and serving communities
- create mentorship opportunities for library school students, new professionals, and any individual in the archives field who seeks to enrich their work experience

~~—mentor and support individuals entering the archives profession~~

- ~~• actively share their knowledge and expertise with creators, users, and colleagues~~

~~While many archivists are committed to incorporating these ethical and core values into their work, we acknowledge that both historically and currently, not all members of the profession abide by these beliefs or guidelines. We also acknowledge that archivists and archival practices are never neutral. The goal of this document is to move the profession towards a more inclusive, ethical, and accountable community of archival practice.~~

Core Values of Archivists

(Approved by the SAA Council in May 2011, revised May 2020)

Archivists ~~select, preserve, and make available primary sources~~ conduct vital work including:

- ~~▪ identifying and preserving essential records that document the activities of institutions, communities, and individuals. These archival sources can be used for many purposes, including providing legal and administrative evidence, protecting the rights of individuals and organizations, and forming part of the cultural heritage of society.~~
- ~~▪ organizing and maintaining the documentary record of institutions, groups, communities, and individuals~~
- ~~▪ assisting in the process of interpreting documentation of past events through the use of primary source materials~~
- ~~▪ serving a broad range of people who seek to locate and use the information found in evidentiary records~~

The modern archives profession ~~bases~~endeavors to ground its theoretical foundations and functions ~~on~~in a set of core values that ~~define and guides~~all the practices and activities of archivists, both individually and collectively. ~~Values~~These core values embody what our field stands for and should ~~form the basis for~~inform the ~~behavior of its members~~professional actions of SAA's membership. But it should be noted that the historical records held within archives often afford the most power to those who create and control the archive itself. In a democratic society such power should benefit each individual equally. Hence, archivists

should ensure that their professional guidelines empower them to equitably provide labor and resources in service of all members of society.

Accordingly, this statement of core archival values articulates these central a set of principles that serve both to remind as a reminder of how archivists why they should strive to engage in their professional responsibilities and to inform others of the basis for archivists' contributions to society professionally and as a primer for contextualizing archivists' role in a greater societal sense. Archivists are often subjected to competing claims and imperatives, and in certain situations particular values that may pull in conflicting directions. This statement intends to provide guidance by identifying the These core values that can guide archivists in when making such professional decisions and choices. Core values provide part of the context in, serving as a lens through which to they can examine complex ethical concerns that may arise during their work.

Access and Use: Archivists Access to records is essential in all personal, community, academic, business, and government settings. Archivists should promote and provide the widest possible accessibility of materials, consistent with any mandatory while respecting legal and ethical access restrictions, such as including public statutes statutes, cultural protections, donor contract, business/institutional contracts, and privacy, or personal privacy. Although requirements. While access may be justifiably limited in some instances, archivists still seek to promote foster open access and unrestricted use when as broadly as possible. Access to records is essential in personal, academic, business, and government settings, and use of records when appropriate.

The goal of use should be both welcomed and actively promoted considered during every phase of acquisition, description, and access. Even individuals who do not directly use archival materials still benefit indirectly from research, public programs, and other forms of archival use, work including the symbolic value of knowing: an increased awareness that such records exist, are being cared for, and can be accessed when needed. Accordingly, use of documentary records should be actively promoted and protected by archivists.

Accountability: Archivists help maintain documentary evidence of actions by individuals, groups, and organizations. By documenting institutional preserving records of societal experiences, functions, activities, and decision-making, archivists provide an important means

~~of ensuring resources for contemporary and future entities seeking accountability. In a republic such accountability and transparency constitute an essential hallmark of democracy. Public~~

~~In the public sphere, leaders must be held accountable both to the judgment of history and future generations, as well as to citizens in the ongoing governance of society. Access to the records of public officials and agencies provides a means of holding them accountable both to public citizens and to the judgment of future generations. In the private sector, accountability through archival documentation assists in protecting the rights and interests of consumers, shareholders, employees, and citizens. individuals, and communities. Preserving evidentiary records for both public and private entities creates a mechanism to cultivate transparency within organizations and can help make power imbalances visible.~~

~~**Advocacy:** Archivists in collecting repositories may not in all cases share the same level of responsibility for accountability, but they, too, maintain evidence of the actions of individuals, groups, and organizations which may be required to provide accountability for contemporary and future interests.~~

~~**Advocacy:** Archivists promote the use and understanding of the historical record. They serve, while also serving as advocates for their own archival programs and institutional organization's needs. They also advocate for the application of archival values in a variety of settings, including, to the extent consistent with their institutional responsibilities, the political arena. Archivists seek to contribute Advocacy for archivists and archival work can take many forms including: contributing to the formation of public policy related to archival and recordkeeping concerns and to ensure issues, ensuring that their archivists' expertise is used in the public interest. public's interest, and making the utility and value of archival work understood locally and beyond. Building support and understanding for all forms of archival labor is necessary to secure the vital resources required to continue our work and to ensure continued access to materials held within archives.~~

~~**Diversity:-** Archivists collectively seek to document and preserve the record of the broadest possible range of individuals, socio-economic groups, governance, and corporate entities in society. Archivists communities, governance, and organizations. Archivists respectfully work to build and promote archival collections that document a multiplicity of viewpoints on social, political, and intellectual issues.~~

Within our organizations: archivists must embrace the importance of identifying, preserving, and working with communities to actively document those whose voices have been overlooked, underrepresented or marginalized. They seek it is critical to build/forge connections with under-documented communities to and individuals, support acquisition and preservation of sources/records relating to these/those communities' activities, encouragement of community members' encourage use of archival research sources, and/or support the formation of community-based archives. Archivists accept and encourage a Building collections that reflect the diversity of viewpoints on social, political, and intellectual issues, as represented both humanity is key to preserving a historical record that encompasses the stories of all peoples, instead of just those who wield enough power and influence in archival records and among members of the profession. They work actively to achieve a diversified and representative membership in the profession order to ensure their lives are documented.

Within our field at large: archival education programs, professional organizations, and hiring institutions must work to develop practices and policies that center the recruitment, retention, and ongoing support of a-inclusive communities of practicediversified and representative membership. It is not enough to collect the history of diverse peoples—the archival profession must constantly work towards creating an-anti-oppressive environments that encourage participation from people across the spectrum of experience.

The SAA Statement on Diversity and Inclusion provides further guidance in this area.

History and Memory: Archivists recognize that primary sources enable people to examine the past and thereby gain insights into the human experience. Archival materials provide digital and physical surrogates for human memory, both individually and collectively and, when properly maintained, they, and serve as evidence against which individual and social memory can be tested. Archivists preserve such primary sources to enable us to better comprehend the past, understand/compared. While the present, and prepare for the future/historical record cannot be defined by a single document, collection, or memory, archivists recognize that primary sources allow people to examine past events and gain insight into human experiences.

Preservation: Archivists preserve a wide variety of serve as stewards for primary sources for the benefit of/in all formats, striving to identify sustainable preservation strategies so materials can be accessible for continued future generations/use. Preserving materials is a means to this

end, not an end in itself. Within prescribed law and best-practice standards, archivists ~~may~~must determine ~~that the~~how original documents themselves ~~must~~materials can be best preserved, ~~while at other times copying the information they contain to alternate media may be sufficient.~~ Archivists thus preserve materials for the benefit through a combination of the future more than for the concerns activities including condition monitoring, creation of the past physical and digital surrogates, and environmental controls in areas where materials are processed, used, and stored.

Responsible Stewardship: As responsible stewards, archivists commit to making ethical and transparent decisions about how to provide care for the documents, records, and materials entrusted to them. Archivists should develop stewardship models that account for internal and external needs, creating best practices that not only reflect archival expertise, but which can also adapt in response to stakeholders' needs and suggestions.

Responsible stewardship also means considering a repository's realistic capacity for care when deciding to acquire or deaccession materials. In order to maintain trustworthy relationships with creators and support the institutional mission of an archival organization, ethical distribution of available resources should be a part of every strategic conversation throughout the lifecycle of all materials in a repository's holdings.

Selection:- Archivists make choices about which materials to ~~select for preservation~~steward based on a wide range of criteria, ~~including the needs of potential users. Understanding that because of the cost of long-term retention and the challenges of accessibility most of the documents and records created in modern society cannot be kept, archivists recognize the wisdom of seeking advice of other stakeholders in making such selections. They acknowledge and.~~ They accept the responsibility of serving as active agents in shaping and interpreting the documentation of the past. The cost of long-term preservation and ongoing challenges of accessibility prevent most of the documents and records created in modern society from being kept in perpetuity. Understanding this, archivists recognize the wisdom of seeking advice from other stakeholders during all processes that result in the selection of materials for an archive's holdings. They also acknowledge that the power wielded to select materials does not diminish or usurp the authority held by the creators or sources of these materials.

Service:- Archivists serve numerous constituencies and stakeholders. Within the mandates and missions of their ~~institutions~~organizations, archivists provide ~~effective and efficient~~

connections to ~~(and mediation for)~~ primary sources so that (any) users, whoever they may be, can discover and benefit from the archival record of society, its institutions, and individuals. ~~Archivists serve numerous constituencies and stakeholders, which may include institutional administrators, creators and donors of documentary materials, rights holders, un/documented peoples, researchers using the archives for many distinct purposes, corporate and governmental interests, and/or citizens concerned with the information and evidence held in archival sources. Archivists seek to meet the needs of users as quickly, effectively, and efficiently as possible.~~

Social Responsibility: ~~Underlying all~~ Undergirding the professional activities of all archivists ~~is~~are their ~~responsibility~~ responsibilities to a variety of groups in society and to the greater public good. ~~Most immediately, archivists serve the needs and interests of Archivists, in their employers and institutions. Yet the~~ various roles and duties, contribute to preserving individual and community memory for their specific constituencies, and in so doing, help increase the overall social awareness and understanding of past events. The archival record is part of the cultural heritage of all members of society. ~~Archivists with a~~ As such, archivists strive to uphold their social responsibilities through equitable, clearly defined ~~societal mission~~ strive to meet these broader social responsibilities in their policies and procedures for selection, preservation, access, and use of the archival record.

Sustainability: ~~Archivists with a narrower mandate still contribute to individual and community memory for their specific constituencies, and in so doing improve the overall knowledge and appreciation~~ should root their work in an ethics of care that prioritizes sustainable practices and policies. Caring for collections and serving communities—along with developing acquisition, processing, storage, and service models--must necessarily involve an ongoing awareness of archival work's impact on the environment. As stewards of the historical record, archivists should be mindful of the past within society, ways in which their professional work can function both as harmful force and reparative resource.

Code of Ethics for Archivists

(Approved by ~~the~~ SAA Council ~~in~~, February 2005; revised, January 2012-); revised, May 2020)

Archives are created by a wide array of individuals and groups, providing and ~~provide~~ protecting evidence of ~~the full range of human experience~~ activity and social organization. Archivists endeavor to ensure that ~~these~~ materials entrusted to their care will be

accessible over time ~~as evidence of human activity and social organization.~~ Archivists ~~—they~~ should embrace principles that foster the transparency of their actions and that inspire confidence in the profession. A distinct body of ethical norms helps archivists navigate ~~the~~ complex situations and issues that can arise induring the course of their work. -

The Society of American Archivists is a membership organization comprising individuals and organizations dedicated to the selection, care, preservation, access to, and administration of historical and documentary records of enduring value for the benefit of current and future generations.

The Society endorses this "Code of Ethics for Archivists" as principles of the profession. This Code should be read in conjunction with SAA's "Core Values of Archivists." Together they provide guidance to archivists and address and increase awareness of ethical concerns among archivists, their colleagues, and the rest of society. As advocates for documentary collections ~~and cultural objects~~ under their care, archivists aspire to carry out their professional activities with the highest standard of professional conduct. The behaviors and characteristics outlined in this Code of Ethics should serve as aspirational principles for archivists to consider as they strive to create trusted archival ~~institutions~~organizations.

Additionally, case studies drawn from real life, and that address one or more of the areas covered by the Code of Ethics for Archivists, have been published by SAA's Committee on Ethics and Professional Conduct (CEPC).

Professional Relationships

Archivists strive to cooperate and collaborate with other archivists, ~~and respect them and their institutions' missions and collecting policies.~~ in the profession, as well as with all individuals, communities, and organizations performing archival work.

In their professional relationships with donors, records creators, users, communities, and colleagues, archivists ~~are~~ should be as respectful, honest, ~~fair,~~ collegial transparent, empathetic, and equitable. ~~as possible.~~

Judgment-

~~Archivists~~ While no element of archival work is unbiased or neutral, archivists still strive to exercise their ethical, professional judgment in appraising, acquiring, the appraisal, acquisition, and processing of materials. Decisions should always be made mindfully, aiming to ensure the preservation, ~~authenticity,~~ diversity, and lasting cultural and historical value of ~~their collections.~~ materials. Archivists should ~~carefully document their collections-related decisions and activities to make~~ be transparent about their role in the selection, retention, ~~or~~ and creation of the historical record ~~transparent to their institutions, donors, and users.~~ by carefully documenting all collections-related policy decisions, including preservation treatments, descriptive work, processing activities, and access guidelines. Archivists are encouraged to consult with colleagues, relevant professionals, creators, and constituent communities ~~of interest~~ to ensure that diverse perspectives inform their actions and decisions throughout the stewardship process.

Authenticity

Archivists ~~ensure~~ use appraisal and evidentiary provenance documentation to provide transparent information about the authenticity and ~~continuing usability~~ origin of ~~records in their care.~~ They archival materials. Using archival description, they document ~~and protect~~ the unique archival characteristics of records ~~and strive to protect the records',~~ including their intellectual, digital, and physical integrity ~~from tampering or corruption.~~ Archivists ~~may~~ should not willfully alter, manipulate, or destroy data or records to conceal facts or distort evidence.

~~They~~ Archivists thoroughly document any actions they take that may cause changes to the records in their care or raise questions about the records' authenticity.

Security and Protection

Archivists protect all ~~documentary~~ materials for which they are responsible. They guard all records against accidental damage, vandalism, and theft. They take steps to minimize the ~~natural physical~~ deterioration of records and implement ~~specific~~ security policies to protect ~~digital~~ all records in every format. Archivists ~~guard all records against accidental damage, vandalism, and theft and~~ have well-~~formulated~~ considered plans in place to respond to any ~~disasters~~ situation that ~~may~~ might threaten records. ~~Archivists cooperate actively with colleagues and law enforcement agencies to apprehend and prosecute vandals and thieves.~~ the safety of their holdings, their patrons, and their staff.

Access and Use

Recognizing that use is the fundamental reason for keeping archives, archivists actively promote open and equitable access to the records in their care within the context of their institutions' missions and their intended user groups. They as much as possible. They strive to minimize restrictions and maximize ease of access. They facilitate the continuing accessibility and intelligibility of archival materials in all formats. Archivists formulate and disseminate institutional access policies along with strategies that encourage ethical and responsible use. They work with creators, donors, organizations, and originating agencies communities to ensure that any restrictions applied are appropriate, well-documented, and equitably enforced. When repositories require restrictions to protect confidential and proprietary information, such restrictions should be implemented in an impartial manner. In all questions of access, archivists applied consistently. Archivists should seek practical solutions that to balance competing the principles of stewardship, access, and interests respect.

Privacy

Archivists recognize that privacy is an inherent fundamental right and sanctioned by law. They establish procedures and policies to protect the interests of the donors, individuals, groups, and institutions organizations whose public and private lives and activities are recorded documented in their archival holdings. As appropriate and mandated by law, archivists place access restrictions on collections to ensure that privacy and confidentiality are maintained, particularly for individuals and groups who have had no voice or role in collections' creation, retention, or public use. The archivists should maintain transparency when placing these restrictions, documenting why and for how long they will be enacted. Archivists promote the respectful use of culturally sensitive materials in their care by encouraging researchers to consult with communities of origin those represented by records, recognizing that privacy has both legal and cultural dimensions. Archivists respect all users' rights to privacy by maintaining the confidentiality of their research and protecting any personal information collected about the users in accordance with their institutions' policies.

Trust

Archivists should not take ~~unfair~~ advantage of their privileged access to and control of ~~historical~~ records and ~~documentary materials collections~~. They ~~execute~~ their work knowing that they must ensure proper custody for the ~~documents and records materials~~ entrusted to them. Archivists should demonstrate professional integrity and avoid potential conflicts of interest. They ~~strive seek~~ to balance the ~~sometimes competing rights~~, interests, ~~needs, and suggestions~~ of all ~~stakeholders~~.

* * *

Case Studies in Archival Ethics

~~Case studies drawn from real life that address one or more of the areas covered by the "Code of Ethics for Archivists" have been published by SAA's Committee on Ethics people and Professional Conduct (CEPC).~~
groups affected by archival decisions.

Proposed Revisions to *Core Values of Archivists and Code of Ethics for Archivists* ("Clean" Version)

Overview

The *Core Values of Archivists* and the *Code of Ethics for Archivists* are intended to be used together to guide individuals who perform archival labor or who work in archival environments. These aspirational values and ethical principles help shape SAA's expectations for professional actions and engagement.

In summary, archivists should strive to:

- Expand access and usage opportunities for users, and potential users, of archival records.
- Actively contribute ideas and resources to our field's body of theoretical and practical scholarship.
- Cultivate collaborative opportunities not only with creators, users, and colleagues, but with any interested parties who wish to engage with archival records.
- Develop and follow professional standards that promote transparency and mitigate harm.
- Respect the diversity found in humanity and advocate for archival collections to reflect that rich complexity.
- Recognize the importance of professional education and development by supporting lifelong learning for themselves and others.
- Devise environmentally sustainable techniques for preserving collections and serving communities.
- Create mentorship opportunities for library school students, new professionals, and any individual in the archives field who seeks to enrich their work experience.
- Actively share their knowledge and expertise with creators, users, and colleagues.

While many archivists are committed to incorporating these ethical and core values into their work, we acknowledge that, both historically and currently, not all members of the profession abide by these beliefs or guidelines. We also acknowledge that archivists and archival practices are never neutral. The goal of this document is to move the profession toward a more inclusive, ethical, and accountable community of archival practice.

Core Values of Archivists

Archivists conduct vital work, including:

- Identifying and preserving essential records that document the cultural heritage of society.
- Organizing and maintaining the documentary record of institutions, groups, communities, and individuals.
- Assisting in the process of interpreting documentation of past events through the use of primary source materials.
- Serving a broad range of people who seek to locate and use the information found in evidentiary records.

The modern archives profession endeavors to ground its theoretical foundations and functions in a set of core values that guides all the practices and activities of archivists, both individually and collectively. These core values embody what our field stands for and should inform the professional actions of SAA's membership. But it should be noted that the historical records held within archives often afford the most power to those who create and control the archive itself. In a democratic society, such power should benefit each individual equally. Hence, archivists should ensure that their professional guidelines empower them to equitably provide labor and resources in service of all members of society.

Accordingly, this statement of core archival values articulates a set of principles that serve both as a reminder of how archivists should strive to engage professionally and as a primer for contextualizing archivists' role in a greater societal sense. Archivists are often subjected to competing claims and imperatives that may pull in conflicting directions. These core values can guide archivists when making professional decisions, serving as a lens through which they can examine complex ethical concerns that may arise during their work.

Access and Use: Access to records is essential in all personal, community, academic, business, and government settings. Archivists should promote and provide the widest possible accessibility of materials, while respecting legal and ethical access restrictions including public statutes, cultural protections, donor contracts, and privacy requirements. While access may be justifiably limited in some instances, archivists still seek to foster open access and unrestricted use as broadly as possible when appropriate.

The goal of use should be considered during every phase of acquisition, description, and access. Even individuals who do not directly use archival materials still benefit indirectly from research, public programs, and other forms of archival work, including an increased awareness that records exist, are being cared for, and can be accessed when needed. Accordingly, use of documentary records should be actively promoted and protected by archivists.

Accountability: Archivists help maintain documentary evidence of actions by individuals, groups, and organizations. By preserving records of societal experiences, functions, activities, and decision-making, archivists provide important resources for contemporary and future entities seeking accountability.

In the public sphere, leaders must be held accountable both to the judgment of history and future generations, as well as to citizens in the ongoing governance of society. In the private sector, archival documentation assists in protecting the rights and interests of consumers, shareholders, employees, individuals, and communities. Preserving evidentiary records for both public and private entities creates a mechanism to cultivate transparency within organizations and can help make power imbalances visible.

Advocacy: Archivists promote the use and understanding of the historical record, while also serving as advocates for their own archival programs and organization's needs. Advocacy for archivists and archival work can take many forms, including: contributing to the formation of public policy related to archival and recordkeeping issues, ensuring that archivists' expertise is used in the public's interest, and making the utility and value of archival work understood locally and beyond. Building support and understanding for all forms of archival labor is necessary to secure the vital resources required to continue our work and to ensure continued access to materials held within archives.

Diversity: Archivists collectively seek to document and preserve the record of the broadest possible range of individuals, communities, governance, and organizations. Archivists respectfully work to build and promote archival collections that document a multiplicity of viewpoints on social, political, and intellectual issues.

Within our organizations: Archivists must embrace the importance of identifying, preserving, and working with communities to actively document those whose voices have been underrepresented or marginalized. It is critical to forge connections with under-documented communities and individuals, support preservation of records relating to those communities' activities, encourage use of archival research sources, and support the formation of community-based archives. Building collections that reflect the diversity of humanity is key to preserving a historical record that encompasses the stories of all peoples, instead of just those who wield enough power and influence to ensure their lives are documented.

Within our field at large: Archival education programs, professional organizations, and hiring institutions must work to develop practices and policies that center the recruitment, retention, and ongoing support of inclusive communities of practice. It is not enough to collect the history of diverse peoples—the archives profession must constantly work toward creating anti-oppressive environments that encourage participation from people across the spectrum of experience.

The *SAA Statement on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion* provides further guidance in this area.

History and Memory: Archival materials provide digital and physical surrogates for human memory, both individually and collectively, and serve as evidence against which individual and social memory can be compared. While the historical record cannot be defined by a single document, collection, or memory, archivists recognize that primary sources allow people to examine past events and gain insight into human experiences.

Preservation: Archivists serve as stewards for primary sources in all formats, striving to identify sustainable preservation strategies so that materials can be accessible for continued future use.

Preserving materials is a means to this end, not an end in itself. Within prescribed law and best-practice standards, archivists must determine how original materials can best be preserved through a combination of activities including condition monitoring, creation of physical and digital surrogates, and environmental controls in areas where materials are processed, used, and stored.

Responsible Stewardship: As responsible stewards, archivists commit to making ethical and transparent decisions about how to provide care for the documents, records, and materials entrusted to them. Archivists should develop stewardship models that account for internal and external needs, creating best practices that not only reflect archival expertise, but that can also adapt in response to stakeholders' needs and suggestions.

Responsible stewardship also means considering a repository's realistic capacity for care when deciding to acquire or deaccession materials. To maintain trustworthy relationships with creators and support the institutional mission of an archival organization, ethical distribution of available resources should be a part of every strategic conversation throughout the lifecycle of all materials in a repository's holdings.

Selection: Archivists make choices about which materials to steward based on a wide range of criteria. They accept the responsibility of serving as active agents in shaping and interpreting the documentation of the past. The cost of long-term preservation and ongoing challenges of accessibility prevent most of the documents and records created in modern society from being kept in perpetuity. Understanding this, archivists recognize the wisdom of seeking advice from other stakeholders during all processes that result in the selection of materials for an archive's holdings. They also acknowledge that the power wielded to select materials does not diminish or usurp the authority held by the creators or sources of these materials.

Service: Archivists serve numerous constituencies and stakeholders. Within the mandates and missions of their organizations, archivists provide connections to primary sources so that (any) users, whoever they may be, can discover and benefit from the archival record of society, its institutions, and individuals.

Social Responsibility: Undergirding the professional activities of all archivists are their responsibilities to society and the greater public good. Archivists, in their various roles and duties, contribute to preserving individual and community memory for their specific constituencies and, in so doing, help increase the overall social awareness and understanding of past events. The archival record is part of the cultural heritage of all members of society. As such, archivists strive to uphold their social responsibilities through equitable, clearly defined policies and procedures for selection, preservation, access, and use of the archival record.

Sustainability: Archivists should root their work in an ethics of care that prioritizes sustainable practices and policies. Caring for collections and serving communities—along with developing acquisition, processing, storage, and service models—must necessarily involve an ongoing awareness of the impact of archival work on the environment. As stewards of the historical record, archivists should be mindful of the ways in which their professional work can function both as harmful force and reparative resource.

(Approved by the SAA Council in May 2011, revised August 2020)

Code of Ethics for Archivists

Archives are created by a wide array of individuals and groups, providing and protecting evidence of human activity and social organization. Archivists endeavor to ensure that materials entrusted to their care will be accessible over time. They should embrace principles that foster the transparency of their actions and that inspire confidence in the profession. A distinct body of ethical norms helps archivists navigate complex situations and issues that can arise during the course of their work.

The Society of American Archivists is a membership organization comprising individuals and organizations dedicated to the selection, care, preservation, access to, and administration of historical and documentary records of enduring value for the benefit of current and future generations.

The Society endorses this *Code of Ethics for Archivists* as principles of the profession. This Code should be read in conjunction with SAA's *Core Values of Archivists*. Together they provide guidance to archivists and address and increase awareness of ethical concerns among archivists, their colleagues, and the rest of society. As advocates for collections under their care, archivists aspire to carry out their professional activities with the highest standard of professional conduct. The behaviors and characteristics outlined in this *Code of Ethics for Archivists* should serve as aspirational principles for archivists to consider as they strive to create trusted archival organizations.

Case studies that are drawn from real life and that address one or more of the areas covered by the *Code of Ethics for Archivists* have been published by SAA's Committee on Ethics and Professional Conduct (CEPC).

Professional Relationships: Archivists strive to cooperate and collaborate with other archivists in the profession, as well as with all individuals, communities, and organizations performing archival work. In their professional relationships with donors, records creators, users, communities, and colleagues, archivists should be as respectful, honest, transparent, empathetic, and equitable as possible.

Judgment: While no element of archival work is unbiased or neutral, archivists still strive to exercise their ethical, professional judgment in the appraisal, acquisition, and processing of materials. Decisions should always be made mindfully, aiming to ensure the preservation, authenticity, diversity, and lasting cultural and historical value of materials. Archivists should be transparent about their role in the selection, retention, and creation of the historical record by carefully documenting all collections-related policy decisions, including preservation treatments, descriptive work, processing activities, and access guidelines. Archivists are encouraged to consult with colleagues, relevant professionals, creators, and constituent communities to ensure that diverse perspectives inform their actions and decisions throughout the stewardship process.

Authenticity: Archivists use appraisal and evidentiary provenance documentation to provide transparent information about the authenticity and origin of archival materials. Using archival description, they document the unique archival characteristics of records, including their

intellectual, digital, and physical integrity. Archivists should not willfully alter, manipulate, or destroy data or records to conceal facts or distort evidence. Archivists thoroughly document any actions they take that may cause changes to the records in their care or raise questions about the records' authenticity.

Security and Protection: Archivists protect all materials for which they are responsible. They guard all records against accidental damage, vandalism, and theft. They take steps to minimize the deterioration of records and implement security policies to protect all records in every format. Archivists have well-considered plans in place to respond to any situation that might threaten the safety of their holdings, their patrons, and their staff.

Access and Use: Archivists actively promote open and equitable access to records in their care as much as possible. They strive to minimize restrictions and maximize ease of access. They facilitate the continuing accessibility of archival materials in all formats. Archivists formulate and disseminate access policies that encourage ethical and responsible use. They work with creators, donors, organizations, and communities to ensure that any restrictions applied are appropriate, well-documented, and equitably enforced. When repositories require restrictions to protect confidential and proprietary information, such restrictions should be applied consistently. Archivists should seek to balance the principles of stewardship, access, and respect.

Privacy: Archivists recognize that privacy is an inherent fundamental right and sanctioned by law. They establish procedures and policies to protect the interests of the donors, individuals, groups, and organizations whose public and private lives and activities are documented in archival holdings. As appropriate and mandated by law, archivists place access restrictions on collections to ensure that privacy and confidentiality are maintained, particularly for individuals and groups who have had no voice or role in collections' creation, retention, or public use. Archivists should maintain transparency when placing these restrictions, documenting why and for how long they will be enacted. Archivists promote the respectful use of culturally sensitive materials in their care by encouraging researchers to consult with those represented by records, recognizing that privacy has both legal and cultural dimensions. Archivists respect all users' rights to privacy by maintaining the confidentiality of their research and protecting any personal information collected about the users in accordance with their institutions' policies.

Trust: Archivists should not take advantage of their privileged access to and control of records and collections. They execute their work knowing that they must ensure proper custody for the materials entrusted to them. Archivists should demonstrate professional integrity and avoid potential conflicts of interest. They seek to balance the rights, interests, needs, and suggestions of all people and groups affected by archival decisions.

(Approved by the SAA Council, February 2005; revised, January 2012 and August 2020)