

**Society of American Archivists  
Council Meeting  
September 23, 2020  
Virtual Meeting**

**Standards Committee: Recommendation to Approve the  
*Guidelines on Access to Research Materials in Archives and  
Special Collections Libraries***

(Prepared by Co-Chairs Rebecca Wiederhold and Lindsay Wittwer)

**BACKGROUND**

In 2017, the SAA-ACRL/RBMS Joint Task Force to Revise the Statement on Access to Research Materials in Archives and Special Collections Libraries was convened to review, update, and expand the Statement on Access to Research Materials that had originally been created in 1973, with most recent revisions approved by the ACRL Board in July 2009 and by the SAA Council in August 2009. (For reference, see Appendix A of the submission packet.) The Task Force was co-chaired by Michelle Ganz from SAA and Elizabeth Call from RBMS, with two other members from each organization completing the roster of six Task Force members. The original charge gave an expected completion date of 2019; however, sending the final draft of the standard through RBMS, ACRL, and SAA approval channels proved to be a long process in and of itself. In February 2020, the Standards Committee received the submission packet and voted unanimously to recommend approval of the *Guidelines*.

**DISCUSSION**

The *Guidelines on Access to Research Materials in Archives and Special Collections Libraries* (see Appendix B of the submission packet) were developed in accordance with procedures for SAA-developed standards and benefitted from the joint nature of the task force for greater inclusion of professional perspectives. The Task Force had its first meeting in December 2017 and met regularly for online editing sessions, holding conference calls for discussion of complex issues.

Major considerations requested originally by the SAA Committee on Public Policy were to address digital and born-digital materials that had not been covered by the former version and to improve usability of the document. Changes to the document included removing ambiguous language, acknowledging the range of repository types and how the guidelines can be utilized, and removing redundant or outdated information.

Of significance was the decision to change the name from Statement to Guidelines, lending a more concrete purpose to the document.

The communication strategy for sharing the *Guidelines* revisions with the archival community was wide-ranging. The draft document was publicized via listserv announcements, Twitter conversation, a comment-enabled Google doc, and an open forum conference call in September 2018. The Task Force gave its interim report at the 2019 ALA Midwinter Meeting and the January 2019 SAA Council meeting. A draft of the document was given for review to the RBMS Executive Committee at ALA Annual in June 2019. Feedback from this meeting was incorporated into the draft. It was then sent out in an open call for feedback to SAA and RMBS lists in July 2019. The Task Force also hosted an open meeting at the annual conference of each organization (SAA 2018 and ALA Midwinter 2019). Substantive comments were addressed through revision of the draft. For example, a comment was received via the web suggesting that the statement “Accommodate users who request access to digital materials in alternative formats” should be revised to cover all material types, instead of just digital materials. This change was considered and implemented in the final document.

As has been done with other joint task forces, RBMS and ACRL approval was sought prior to SAA Standards and Council approval. RBMS and ACRL procedures allow for substantive edits to be made by those governing bodies as a standard progresses through the approval process. Thus, the SAA Standards Committee recommended waiting until after ACRL approval to mitigate the risk of a mid-stream change to the standard.

The Task Force submitted its final draft to the RBMS Executive Committee in September 2019, which tendered its approval in October 2019. The document was then submitted to the ACRL Standards Committee and received approval in January 2020, with final approval by the ACRL Board of Directors on January 24, 2020. (The ACRL Transmittal Sheet for Draft Standards and Guidelines is included in the submission packet as Appendix C.) SAA Co-Chair Michelle Ganz provided the submission packet to the SAA Standards Committee in February and it was approved that month. SAA Council approval is the last step in the development of this joint standard.

It should be noted that the Task Force recommends that the *Guidelines* be reviewed every three years, as accessibility tools become more available and knowledge about disability evolves (see Appendix D, Final report, III.B.4). As with the other three standards developed by joint task forces in recent years, no formal process has been made with RBMS/ACRL for ongoing maintenance. The Standards Committee will document the *Guidelines* as having a 3-year revision cycle in order to prompt those discussions in the future if they do not happen sooner.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

**That the SAA Council approve the *Guidelines on Access to Research Materials in Archives and Special Collections Libraries* (Appendix A).**

**Support Statement:** The *Guidelines* were developed collaboratively with representatives from both SAA and ACRL/RBMS. Circulating the Task Force’s proposed changes to this long-maintained document through both library and archives communication channels has allowed for a well-rounded and thoroughly vetted tool. Although the approval process through both organizations was more prolonged than expected, the resulting guidelines clarify how archivists

can advocate for and facilitate equitable access to resources and services, including digital collections.

**Impact on Strategic Priorities:** Approval of this standard would have direct, positive impact on SAA Strategic Goal #3 (*Advancing the Field*, 3.3), given that this standard was developed in collaboration with allied library professionals and will have national reach. The standard will contribute to Goal #1 (*Advocating for Archives and Archivists*, especially 1.3) by strengthening the ability of those who manage archival collections to protect the accessibility of the historical record.

**Fiscal Impact:** None.

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# ALA-SAA Joint Statement of Access: Guidelines for Access to Original Research Materials (August 1994)

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*August, 1994 > Revised August, 2009*

1. A repository<sup>[1]</sup> preserves collections<sup>[2]</sup> for use by researchers. It is the responsibility of a repository to make available original research materials in its possession on equal terms of access. Access should be provided in accordance with statutory authority, institutional mandate, the Code of Ethics for Archivists<sup>[3]</sup>, the Standards for Ethical Conduct for Rare Book, Manuscript, and Special Collections Librarians<sup>4</sup>, and this Joint Statement. A repository should not deny access to materials to any researcher, nor grant privileged or exclusive use of materials to any researcher, nor conceal the existence of any body of material from any researcher, unless required to do so by statutory authority, institutional mandate, or donor or purchase stipulation.

2. A repository is committed to preserving manuscript and archival materials and to making them available for research as soon as possible. At the same time, it is recognized that a repository may have legal and institutional obligations to protect confidentiality in its collections, and that private donors have the right to impose reasonable restrictions upon their papers to protect privacy or confidentiality for a reasonable period of time.

a. It is the responsibility of the repository to inform researchers of the restrictions which apply to collections.

b. The repository should discourage donors from imposing unreasonable restrictions and should encourage a specific time limitation on restrictions that are imposed.

c. The repository should periodically evaluate restricted material and work toward the removal of restrictions when they are no longer required.

3. As the accessibility of material depends on knowing of its existence, it is the repository's responsibility to inform researchers of the collections in its custody. This may be accomplished through local, regional, or national catalogs; inventories and other internal finding aids; published guides; and the assistance of staff members.

4. To protect and insure the continued accessibility of the material in its custody, all materials must be used in accordance with the rules of the repository. Each repository should publish or otherwise make known to potential researchers its rules governing access and use. Such rules must be applied and enforced equally.

a. The repository may limit use of fragile or unusually valuable materials, but should try to provide suitable reproductions to researchers in lieu of the originals.

b. The repository may limit access to unprocessed materials, so long as the limitations are applied and enforced equally.

c. The repository may, under special circumstances, loan or place on deposit with another repository part or all of a collection.

d. The repository may refuse access to an individual researcher who has demonstrated such carelessness or deliberate destructiveness as to endanger the safety of the material, or to a researcher who has violated the policies and regulations of the repository.

e. To protect its collections, a repository may, in accordance with statutory authority and institutional mandate, require acceptable identification of any individual wishing to use its materials, as well as a signature verifying the individual has read a statement defining the policies and regulations of the repository.

5. A repository should not charge fees for making available the materials in its holdings, except when required by statutory authority or institutional mandate. A repository should facilitate access to collections by providing reproduction services. These services can include electronic, paper, or photographic copies; microfilm; or other means of reproduction. All reproductions should be made in accordance with statutory authority, including copyright law, institutional mandate, and repository regulations. Reasonable fees may be charged for these copying or research services. A repository is not obligated to conduct copying or research services beyond those required by statutory authority or institutional mandate.

6. Each repository should publish or otherwise make available to researchers a suggested form of citation crediting the repository and identifying items within its holdings for later reference. Citations to copies of materials in other repositories should include the location of the originals, if known.

7. It is the researcher's obligation to satisfy copyright regulations when copying or using materials found in collections<sup>6</sup> Whenever possible a repository should inform a researcher about known copyrighted material, the owner or owners of the copyrights, and the researcher's obligations with regard to such material.

### End Notes:

[1] A *repository* is defined as an archives, manuscripts library, research center, or any other institution responsible for keeping primary research materials.

[2] *Collections* are defined as individual manuscripts, archival or manuscript collections, fonds, or record groups found in repositories in any format.

[3] *Code of Ethics for Archivists and Commentary* (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 1992).

[4] "Standards for Ethical Conduct for Rare Book, Manuscript, and Special Collection Librarians, with Guidelines for Institutional Practice in Support of the Standards," *College & Research Libraries News* 54 (April 1993): 207-215.

[5] Repositories wishing to participate in the interlibrary loan of materials may consult as a model the "Additional Guidelines for Access to Archives, Manuscripts, and Special Collections," Chapter 8 of the Research Libraries Group *Shared Resources Manual* (3rd ed., Stanford, CA: Research Libraries Group, 1987). The chapter is reprinted in *Rare Books & Manuscripts Librarianship* 3 (Fall 1988): 126-130. Repositories wishing to loan original materials for research or exhibitions may consult the RBMS "Guidelines for the Loan of Rare and Unique Manuscript Materials," *College & Research Libraries News* 54 (May 1993): 267-269, or the "Guidelines for Borrowing Special Collections Materials for Exhibition," *College & Research Libraries News* 51 (May 1990): 430-434.

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UPDATED: 2011-02-01

# ACRL-RBMS/SAA Guidelines on Access to Research Materials in Archives and Special Collections Libraries

*Revision approved by the ACRL Board of Directors, January 24, 2020, and pending approval by SAA Council.*

*Originally approved by the ACRL Board during the ALA Annual Conference, July 2009.*

## Introduction

Both the Society of American Archivists' Core Values (<https://www2.archivists.org/statements/saa-core-values-statement-and-code-of-ethics>) and Rare Books and Manuscripts Section's Statement on Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (<https://rbms.info/about/#diversity>) emphasize the importance of providing access to materials. This document is intended to be applied in conjunction with the SAA Code of Ethics for Archivists (<https://www2.archivists.org/statements/saa-core-values-statement-and-code-of-ethics>), the RBMS Code of Ethics for Special Collections Librarians ([http://rbms.info/standards/code\\_of\\_ethics/](http://rbms.info/standards/code_of_ethics/)), and other related professional statements and standards. Within the context of repository types, audiences, collections, or other factors, these Guidelines can serve as an advocacy tool and foundation for policies and procedures to facilitate equitable access to resources and services.

## Discoverability

- Establish a minimum baseline for intellectual access to holdings, even in the case of unprocessed and/or restricted materials.
- Enable the discoverability of collections with finding aids, catalog records, blogs, web pages, databases, and other means.
- Assess discovery tools regularly and update as needed.

## Physical and Digital Materials

- Make available all materials intended for public access, regardless of format.
- Implement policies, procedures, and programs to ensure the authenticity, reliability, completeness, and preservation of materials from one user to the next.

## Laws, Regulations, and Restrictions

- Restrictions on access may be imposed to protect national security, by law, by institutional mandate, tribal laws, cultural stewardship practices, by donor agreement, or to preserve materials. If restricted due to preservation concerns, provide materials in an alternative format.
- Fulfill legal and institutional obligations to protect privacy or confidentiality as outlined by the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA), the Privacy Act, and other applicable laws or regulations.
- Make information on restricted materials accessible.
- Advocate for limited or no restrictions when negotiating with donors of materials.

- Periodically review and reevaluate restricted material. Remove restrictions when they are no longer required.
- Implement security measures to safeguard staff and collections.

## Copyright

- Communicate the copyright status of materials.
- Ensure researchers understand that they are responsible for adhering to copyright law<sup>1</sup> when copying, using, or publishing from materials.

## Accessibility

- Factor accessibility into all areas of access including the reading room, collections, exhibits, services, and events.
- Address and advocate for policy and workflow changes to remove barriers.
- Comply with state and federal guidelines for accessibility of collections, venues, and services according to the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)<sup>2</sup>, Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG), respective SAA and ALA accessibility guidelines, and other related parameters.<sup>3</sup>
- Provide alternative format options to accommodate users.

## Reproductions and Use

- Provide access to collections at no direct cost to users.
- Make policies governing access and use available.
- Offer reproduction services administered in accordance with the copyright laws, institutional access policies, and repository regulations.<sup>4</sup>

## Notes

[1] For more information on copyright and user rights please see the SAA pamphlet available here:

<https://www2.archivists.org/publications/brochures/copyright-and-unpublished-material>  
(<https://www2.archivists.org/publications/brochures/copyright-and-unpublished-material>).

[2] The ADA guidelines relate to gaining physical access to the building, room, or space.

[3] American Library Association, Library Services for People with Disabilities Policy:

<http://www.ala.org/asgcla/resources/libraryservices> (<http://www.ala.org/asgcla/resources/libraryservices>).

Society of American Archivists, Guidelines for Accessible Archives for People with Disabilities

<https://www2.archivists.org/standards/guidelines-for-accessible-archives-for-people-with-disabilities>  
(<https://www2.archivists.org/standards/guidelines-for-accessible-archives-for-people-with-disabilities>).

[4] ACRL/RBMS Guidelines Regarding Security and Theft in Special Collections:

[http://www.ala.org/acrl/standards/security\\_theft](http://www.ala.org/acrl/standards/security_theft) ([http://www.ala.org/acrl/standards/security\\_theft](http://www.ala.org/acrl/standards/security_theft)); ALA

Copyright information and resources: <http://www.ala.org/advocacy/copyright>

(<http://www.ala.org/advocacy/copyright>).

[ACRL Transmittal Sheet for Draft Standards and Guidelines](#)

**Title of Standard or Guideline:**

ACRL-RBMS/SAA Guidelines on Access to Research Materials in Archives and Special Collections Libraries

**Section or Committee Submitting:**

Rare Books and Manuscripts Section (RBMS)

**Submitting Section or Committee Chairperson:**

Verónica Reyes-Escudero (RBMS Chair, 2019/2020)

**Date of Previous Version:**

July 2009

**Means used to solicit comment on earlier drafts of the new/revised Standard or Guideline:**

Open commentary (posted to SAA and RBMS lists) in September 2018

- Twitter conversation
- Comment enabled Google doc
- Open forum conference call (town hall meeting style)

Interim report January 2019 ALA midwinter and SAA council meeting (also in Jan.)

Draft given for review to RBMS Executive Committee at ALA Annual in June 2019; feedback given and incorporated into draft

Draft sent out for open call to SAA and RBMS lists July 2019

**Date Approved by Section executive committee (if applicable):** September 24, 2019

**Date Approved by ACRL Standards Committee:**

**Date Approved by ACRL Board:** January 24, 2020

**Where and on whose responsibility should this (Standard or Guideline) be published or otherwise disseminated?**

C&RL News:

Other (please list):

SAA-ACRLRBMS Joint Task Force to Revise Statement on Access  
Submission of final draft of

**ACRL-RBMS/SAA Guidelines on Access to Research Materials in Archives and  
Special Collections Libraries**

**(Prepared by: Michelle Ganz and Elizabeth Call, Co-chairs)**

**Task Force Members:** Liz Call (RBMS) Co-Chair Michelle Ganz archivist for William McDonough (SAA) Co-Chair Lydia Tang (RBMS) Heather Oswald (SAA) Kathryn Kuntz (RBMS) Cheryl Oestreicher (SAA)

**III.B.1. Full text of the proposed standard.**

See attached document (Appendix A)

**III.B.2: Introductory narrative**

The SAA-ACRL/RBMS Joint Task Force to Revise the Statement on Access to Research Materials in Archives and Special Collections Libraries (hereafter “Task Force”) is responsible for reviewing and revising a [Joint Statement](#) that was last released by the two organizations in 2009. The Task Force should recommend any and all revisions that would bring the Statement up to date, and should consider two points raised by the SAA Committee on Public Policy:

Born-digital materials. The last revision of the Joint Statement (2009) was approved prior to the growth of the use of digital forensics software in cultural heritage institutions. (See, for example, *Digital Forensics and Born-Digital Content in Cultural Heritage Collections*, by Kirschenbaum, Ovenden, and Redwine, 2010, and the development of the revised OAIS reference model, 2012.) Software used by creators often collects additional information about the document without the creator being aware of its collection. This information can be retrieved by the use of digital forensics software. The Committee suggests that input on the Joint Statement be collected from individuals who are familiar with the capture of born-digital documents to ensure that the general tenets of the Joint Statement are revised to adapt to an increasingly digital world.

Existence of research materials. Point 2, regarding Intellectual Accessibility, states that a repository “should inform researchers... of the collections in its custody.... The existence of original research materials should be reported, even if they are not fully accessible.” However, Point 1 on Responsibility states that a repository “should not... conceal the existence of any body of materials... unless required to do so by law, institutional access policy, or donor or purchase stipulation.” This last qualifying phrase established a seemingly contradictory standard wherein legal, institutional, or donor restrictions could eclipse a researcher’s right to basic knowledge about the existence of materials as stipulated in Point 2. The Committee suggests that the Joint Statement be revised to clarify this issue.

General Notes:

- Due to the cross-repository nature of the Task Force, the co-chairs wanted to make sure

everyone's voice was heard and addressed. Co-Chairs communicated regularly to make any decisions as a team.

- The Task Force met online for editing sessions and conference calls to discuss complex issues.
- The majority of the work was accomplished working collaboratively on an online document.
- There were a lot of discussions around the need for a standard like this. Ultimately, we decided that it is better to have more standards that may overlap slightly than to leave a gap in the approved documentation.
- Major changes were made to how the document was laid out and a lot of the concepts originally under their own headings were moved to a new, comprehensive introduction.
- Each task force member was assigned a section of the document to be in charge of. Revisions and questions were discussed and agreed upon as a group.

### **Assignment of sections**

- Lydia: Section 2: Intellectual Accessibility and conferring with Responsibilities re: overlap/inconsistency  
Liz: Policies and Citations
- Michelle: Restrictions and Copyright  
Kathryn: Responsibilities (and Introduction)
- Cheryl: Fees and Services Heather: Digital

### **Timeline:**

- First meeting: December 2017
- Materials Submitted:
  - Interim report January 2019 ALA midwinter and SAA mid-winter council meeting
  - Final draft submitted to RBMS Executive Committee: September 2019
  - Final draft voted and approved by RBMS Executive Committee: October 2019
  - Final draft submitted to ARCL Council: November 2019
    - Approved January 2020
  - Final draft submitted to ARCL Standards Committee: January 2020
  - Final draft submitted to SAA Standards Committee: February 2020
  - Final draft submitted to SAA Council: PENDING STANDARDS VOTE

### **III.B.3. Documentation of the consultation process.**

- Open calls for comment:
  - Call for Comment through the SAA 2018
  - Open meeting for SAA 2018

- Open call for comment through RBMS/ARCL 2019
- Open meeting at ALA midwinter 2019
- No comments were received from the open calls or meetings.

#### **III.B.4. Maintenance and review plan.**

- The Joint Task Force recommends that these Guidelines be reviewed every three years. As new accessibility tools become available and understandings of disability change it is important that the Guidelines reflect those developments. Future Task Forces should consider
  - Who the intended audience of the statement is for - archives/special collections professionals, researchers/public, administrators, all?
  - Whether this document is about policies, philosophies, and/or practical implementation
  - How this document enhances professional understanding and practice on access, or whether there are other resources which may be more helpful or that should be referenced

#### General administrative notes:

- Communications occur through the SAA email listserv system for both the SAA and non-SAA components
- SAA needs an annual status report for Task Forces with multi-year charges
- The updated document needs to go through the RBMS/ACRL and SAA approvals processes
- A tracked changes copy of the document will need to be submitted with the final packet to SAA

#### Timeline for submission:

- ACRL/RBMS approvals happen first then the SAA approvals
- Open calls for comment occur prior to the RBMS, SAA, and ALA annual meetings
- Updated document, with outside approvals, must be submitted to the SAA Standards Committee for approval through the online submission process
- If Standards has no change requests the document is then sent to Council with the Standards committee recommendations and the RBMS/ACRL recommendations
- If Council has no change requests the new document is approved and added to the Standards Portal

#### Issues:

- Having a single landing page for the Statement would be helpful. The statement was slightly different to begin with on both the SAA and RBMS sides. It would be ideal if one could be the “repository of record” for the Statement to work from.
- It would be great to consider migrating the working document to GitHub for version control, similar to DACS. It wasn’t clear how old this document is, why it was created, and how it has evolved over time.