

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

Introduction

The SAA-ACRL/RBMS Statement on Access to Research Materials in Archives and Special Collections Libraries¹ is intended to represent shared values between the archives and library professions for equitable access to collections. These Guidelines, in conjunction with the SAA Code of Ethics for Archivists, and the RBMS Code of Ethics for Special Collections Librarians, can serve as a foundation for policies and procedures applied within the context of repository types, audiences, collections, or other factors.

Policies

- Provide equitable and nondiscriminatory access within the parameters of institutional policies.
- Remove as many barriers to access as is allowable under institutional policy.
- Make publicly available policies governing access and use.

Discoverability

- Establish a minimum baseline of intellectual access to holdings, even if they are unprocessed or contain restrictions.
- Enable the discoverability of their collections through means including but not limited to finding aids, catalog records, blogs, web pages, and/or databases.
- Discovery tools should be assessed on a regular basis and updated as needed.

Formats

- Strive to make available all materials intended for public access, regardless of format.
- Implement policies, procedures, and programs to ensure the authenticity, reliability, and completeness of digital materials from one user to the next.
- Whenever possible, utilize the affordances of digital materials to make content available to users beyond the physical repository, while following intellectual property and copyright laws, respecting privacy and confidentiality concerns, and adhering to institutional policies and donor agreements.
- Accommodate users who request access to digital materials in alternative formats.

¹ The ACRL-RBMS/SAA Joint Statement on Access to Research Materials in Archives and Special Collections Libraries was first drafted by the Joint Committee on Library-Archives Relationships as “Standards for Access to Research Materials in Archival and Manuscript Repositories” endorsed in 1973.

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Laws, Regulations, and Restrictions

- Balance access with preservation and security. Restrictions on access may be imposed to protect national security, by law, by institutional mandate, by donor request, 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, within reasonable² parameters as dictated by Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA), and other applicable laws or regulations.
- Inform users of restrictions that apply to collections, make this information generally available and apply it consistently.
- Discourage donors from imposing unreasonable restrictions, encourage a specific time limitation on restrictions that are imposed, and make the duration of the restriction known to users.
- Periodically review and reevaluate restricted material and remove restrictions when they are no longer required.

Accessibility for people with disabilities

- Comply with state and federal guidelines for accessibility of collections according to the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG), respective SAA and ALA accessibility guidelines, and other related parameters.³

Copyright

- Users are responsible for adhering to copyright law⁴ when copying, using, or publishing materials found in collections.
- Clarify when a repository does and does not hold copyright to materials.

Reproductions and Use

- Strive to provide access to collections at no direct cost to users. In situations where this is not possible, make publicly available the reasons for charging fees and rates.
- Offer reproduction services administered in accordance with copyright law, institutional access policies, and repository regulations.

² Professional Society Guidelines, Ethics, and Best Practices dictate how and when materials should be restricted. These should be followed whenever possible.

³ American Library Association, Library Services for People with Disabilities Policy: <http://www.ala.org/asgcla/resources/libraryservices>. Society of American Archivists, Guidelines for Accessible Archives for People with Disabilities [forthcoming].

⁴ 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>.

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- Repositories may charge fees for reasons such as labor costs, conservation needs, accessibility of materials, or other considerations.
- Fees and licenses for use might be imposed for publication, exhibit, loan, or other uses as dictated by institutional policies.

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