

**Society of American Archivists  
Council Meeting  
January 25 - 27, 2012  
Chicago, Illinois**

**Committee on Ethics and Professional Conduct:  
Recommended Revision of the Code of Ethics for Archivists  
(Prepared by: Tim Pyatt, Chair, and Members of the  
Committee on Ethics and Professional Conduct)**

The Committee on Ethics and Professional Conduct met on August 23, 2011, at the SAA Annual Meeting with the primary agenda item of discussing member comments received on the revised Code of Ethics and incorporating those as appropriate into a revision. Minutes from this meeting are included as **Attachment A**. The meeting was preceded by several conference calls and email discussions; several post-meeting email discussions also were conducted.

**BACKGROUND**

Since 2006, the Committee on Ethics and Professional Conduct (CEPC) has been engaged in analysis and review of the current Code of Ethics for Archivists and the possibility of developing additional guidelines regarding the professional responsibilities of archivists. At the 2007 Annual Meeting in Chicago, CEPC members reviewed and discussed comparisons between the 1992 and 2005 Codes, as well as comments (both published and conveyed orally) regarding deficiencies in the current (2005) Code. In 2007, CEPC compiled comments about ethical codes and discussed reports of complaints heard from other SAA members. In 2008, CEPC voted to examine options for revising the Code to address some of its perceived weaknesses.

CEPC members support an aspirational Code of Ethics, but one that more clearly reflects recent scholarship and professional discourse regarding archival ethics and the profession's goals and identity. A vocal minority of the SAA membership would like an enforceable Code, something that SAA lacks the resources and organizational will to pursue. Both Frank Boles (2008-2009 SAA President) and Peter Gottlieb (2009-2010 SAA President) strongly encouraged CEPC to propose a revision of the Code that would include more of the character of the 1992 Code while maintaining its aspirational – and legally neutral – character.

Following a review of the codes of ethics of related organizations (summarized in CEPC's February 2010 proposal to the Council), a revision was drafted and posted for member comment from February 1 to April 4, 2011. In addition to roughly 60 comments

from individuals, CEPC received comments from the Business Archives Section and the Intellectual Property Working Group. More than half of the comments received were positive; most of these were posted to the website. Most of the more critical comments or those suggesting changes were submitted via email. A summary of the comments requesting changes is included in the CEPC meeting minutes (**Attachment A**, item 4).

After discussing the comments received, Committee members reviewed the Code section-by-section and made recommendations for changes. Based on this discussion and significant follow-up via email, a second revision was completed (**Attachment B**). The Committee is now submitting this revision for Council adoption.

**Attachment C** is a marked-up version of Attachment B showing changes made to the January 2011 version of the Code that was published for public comment.

**Attachment D** reflects the changes made to the 2005 Code of Ethics to form the January 2011 version.

## **DISCUSSION**

Given that a Code of Ethics is central to the archives profession, and that the Council approved the related “Core Values of Archivists” (**Attachment E**) in May 2011, CEPC believes that it is critically important for the Society to have a Code that more accurately reflects the current archives workplace and that can be used in conjunction with the Values statement.

There is some confusion among SAA members about the distinction between the two documents. The Values statement is not a replacement for the Code, as some have suggested. “Core Values of Archivists” articulates principles that remind archivists why they engage in their professional responsibilities and informs others of the basis for archivists’ contributions to society. The Code outlines behaviors and characteristics that should serve as aspirational principles for archivists to consider as they strive to create trusted archival institutions. CEPC sees the Values statement as an important companion to the revised Code; together they make a powerful statement about the impact of archives and archivists on society.

In creating the second revision of the Code, CEPC spent significant time discussing the concerns raised by the Business Archives Section. The biggest issue raised involved the section of the Code now called “Access and Use,” particularly the opening sentence that seemed to conflict with the sometimes more restrictive rules for access to collections that corporate archivists must often enforce. To address these concerns, CEPC added the phrase “within the context of their institutional mission” to make that first sentence now read (emphasis on changed portion added):

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 institutional mission.**

Not all CEPC members agreed with the change. Some felt it weakened the statement on the importance of access, and one member was concerned that the phrase “within the context of their institutional mission” is not an adequate qualification of the subsequent phrases (“equitably enforced” and “impartial manner”) to protect archivists in private organizations from charges of unethical behavior as they strive to meet the needs of their institutions. The majority of Committee members felt that the addition mitigates these concerns, and we decided to go forward with the revision as included in this recommendation. Remarkably this was the only section of the proposed revision on which Committee members were not in full agreement.

Other changes included rearranging the Code in a more thematic structure and ending with “Trust,” as suggested by one set of comments. Another suggestion that we incorporated was to use the terms “ideals” or “principles” rather than “standards” wherever possible to maintain the aspirational nature of the document. In the “Trust” section, “benefit” was changed to “unfair advantage,” as we believe that we all benefit from working in archives.

Finally we removed the Roman numerals from the sections so that the Code does not have a “Ten Commandments” feel to it.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

**THAT the revised Code of Ethics for Archivists as submitted by the Committee on Ethics and Professional Conduct (Attachment B) be adopted;**

**THAT the Code of Ethics for Archivists and Core Values of Archivists documents be disseminated widely via the SAA website and *Archival Outlook* and at the 2012 Annual Meeting; and**

**THAT the Committee on Ethics and Professional Conduct be charged to develop online resources to accompany the Code of Ethics, including a collection of supporting case studies.**

**Support Statement:** A Code of Ethics is central to any profession. This revision is the result of a multi-year review process that included several opportunities for member comment and, in fact, incorporation of a significant number of member comments. The Code of Ethics for Archivists and SAA’s “Core Values of Archivists” statement (adopted in May 2011) are complementary: “Core Values of Archivists” articulates principles that remind archivists why they engage in their professional responsibilities and the Code of Ethics for Archivists outlines behaviors and characteristics to which archivists should aspire. Together, they make a powerful statement about the impact of archives and archivists on society.

**Impact on Strategic Priorities:** CEPC believes that the revised Code of Ethics strongly supports SAA’s Strategic Priorities, particularly those related to Diversity and Public Awareness/Advocacy. For example, in the section on “Judgment,” the Code states:

Archivists exercise professional judgment in appraising, acquiring, and processing materials to ensure the preservation, authenticity, diversity, and lasting cultural and historical value of their collections. Archivists should carefully document their collections-related decisions and activities to make their role in the selection, retention, or creation of the historical record transparent to their institutions, donors, and users. Archivists are encouraged to consult with colleagues, relevant professionals, and communities of interest to ensure that diverse perspectives inform their actions and decisions.

This statement directly supports the Diversity Priority, Desired Outcomes #2 and #3. We also think that the Code broadly supports the Public Awareness/Advocacy Priority, especially the sections of the Code on “Access and Use” and “Trust.”

**Fiscal Impact:** Promoting and disseminating the revised Code as recommended will incur minor cost. Printing the Code for distribution at the Annual Meeting and the printing costs for promotion in *Archival Outlook* would be the primary direct expenses.

**Committee on Ethics and Professional Conduct**

SAA Annual Meeting, Chicago  
August 23, 2011 1:00 – 5:00 p.m.  
Hyatt Regency, Skyway 269

**Agenda and Minutes**

1. Welcome and Introductions
  - a. New committee members (appointments start 8/27/11)
    - i. Paul Lasewicz, IBM
    - ii. Nancy Freeman, USDA
    - iii. Anne Graham (intern)
  - b. New Council Liaison
    - i. Bill Landis, UNC
  - c. Thanks to outgoing members
    - i. Robert Leopold
    - ii. Jean Green
    - iii. Benn Joseph (intern)
    - iv. Tom Hyry (Council Liaison)
  - d. CEPC Chair
    - i. Tim Pyatt re-appointed for another year

Note: Tim stated this would be his final year as chair and will request a new chair be appointed after the 2012 meeting. This will help with transition as Tim rotates off CEPC in 2013.

2. Approval of 2010 Minutes: Minutes were approved as submitted.
3. Update on the Code Revision: Council liaison Tom Hyry outlined process for the Committee. Once the second revision is completed, a final report will be submitted to SAA Council through new liaison Bill Landis. It would be useful to summarize comments received as this will allow Council to get a sense of input received from membership.
4. Discussion of comments received and updated revision  
CEPC received comments from one section and one working group, the Business Archives Section and the Intellectual Property Working Group, in addition to roughly 60 comments from individuals. Over half of the comments received were positive; most of these were posted to the website. Most of the more critical comments or comments suggesting changes tended to be submitted via email. The Intellectual Properties Working Group recommended merging the Privacy Section and the Access Section. CEPC felt these are two different things each deserving its own section. IPWG also recommended that the Code include a statement about intellectual property rights. There was some concern that this would not be in keeping with an aspirational code. The challenge with a non-aspirational code is how does it apply to members in the Society? SAA does not have a punishment process and does not want to add one. The decision (and charge from

Council) was to keep the Code aspirational to avoid the need for adjudication.

IPWG also suggested changing "standards" to "ideals" and/or "principles." CEPC agreed with this recommendation as it is more in keeping with Code's aspirational quality. Many of the individual comments received were from members looking for more granularity, which moves the Code away from being aspirational. Other comments received suggested adding more about relationships with donors and adding a diversity section. CEPC felt these comments could be addressed without adding separate sections. CEPC did like the suggestion to change the "Access" section to "Access and Use." Other suggestions were to merge Security and Authenticity and add a Value statement. CEPC felt that the sections should remain and that the reference to the Values statement as a related document was sufficient.

Comments received also indicated an interest in examples or explanatory text with the Code, which previously was identified as problematic by legal counsel with such examples removed as part of the last Code revision. As part of its recommendation to SAA Council, CEPC will recommend that its next project should be to create an electronic resource of Ethics Case Studies (similar to existing *Campus Case Studies* online publication).

After the discussion of comments received, CEPC reviewed the Code section by section and made recommendation for changes. The draft second revision is attached.

5. Schedule follow-up meeting before end on conference  
Enough progress was made during the meeting that a follow-up meeting during the conference was not necessary.

6. New Business:
- a. Proposed Guidelines for Reappraisal and Deaccessioning (draft attached)

CEPC found the references to the Code of Ethics not to be in conflict with the revised Code. Tim said he would respond to the working group.

7. Other business?  
It was suggested that SAA consider doing a printed version of the Values and Code together as a poster or handout for the 2012 meeting to raise awareness of the Code (assuming it is approved by Council prior to the next annual meeting).

Also assuming work with the Code revision is complete, the agenda for next year's CEPC meeting will be resources to accompany the Code, such as the development of case studies.

## Code of Ethics for Archivists

[Revision 2.1.b., October 10, 2011, submitted to the SAA Council for approval]

Archivists endeavor to ensure that the materials in their care will be available as evidence of human activity, and they support principles that bring transparency to their actions and that inspire confidence in the profession. Archives are created by a wide variety of groups in the legal, scientific, religious, corporate, educational, governmental, and individual spheres, among others. The topography of ethical practices navigates boundaries intersected by public and private concerns.

The Society of American Archivists is a membership organization comprising individuals and organizations dedicated to the selection, care, preservation, 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 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.

### Professional Relationships

Archivists cooperate and collaborate with other archivists, and respect them and their institutions' missions and collecting policies. In their professional relationships with donors, records creators, users, and colleagues, archivists are honest, fair, collegial, and equitable.

### Judgment

Archivists exercise professional judgment in appraising, acquiring, and processing materials to ensure the preservation, authenticity, diversity, and lasting cultural and historical value of their collections. Archivists should carefully document their collections-related decisions and activities to make their role in the selection, retention, or creation of the historical record transparent to their institutions, donors, and users. Archivists are encouraged to consult with colleagues, relevant professionals, and communities of interest to ensure that diverse perspectives inform their actions and decisions.

## **Authenticity**

Archivists ensure the authenticity and continuing usability of records in their care. They document and protect the unique archival characteristics of records and strive to protect the records' intellectual and physical integrity from tampering or corruption. Archivists may not willfully alter, manipulate, or destroy data or records to conceal facts or distort evidence. They thoroughly document any actions 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 take steps to minimize the natural physical deterioration of records and implement specific security policies to protect digital records. Archivists guard all records against accidental damage, vandalism, and theft and have well-formulated plans in place to respond to any disasters that may threaten records. Archivists cooperate actively with colleagues and law enforcement agencies to apprehend and prosecute vandals and thieves.

## **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. They 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 responsible use. They work with donors and originating agencies to ensure that any restrictions 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 seek practical solutions that balance competing principles and interests.

## **Privacy**

Archivists recognize that privacy is sanctioned by law. They establish procedures and policies to protect the interests of the donors, individuals, groups, and institutions whose public and private lives and activities are recorded in their holdings. As appropriate, archivists place access restrictions on collections to ensure that privacy and confidentiality are maintained, particularly for individuals and groups who have no voice or role in collections' creation, retention, or public use. Archivists promote the respectful use of culturally sensitive materials in their care by encouraging researchers to consult with communities of origin, 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. They execute their work knowing that they must ensure proper custody for the documents and records entrusted to them. Archivists should demonstrate professional integrity and avoid potential conflicts of interest. They strive to balance the sometimes-competing interests of all stakeholders.

## Code of Ethics for Archivists

[Marked-up version of Revision 2.1b-10 October 2011 (Attachment B), submitted by CEPC to the Council at its January 25-27, 2012 meeting]

[Note: January 2011 text that has been eliminated appears as ~~strikethroughs~~. Revised text appears as italics.]

### I. Introduction

~~Archivists support standards that bring fairness and transparency to their professional responsibilities and that inspire public confidence in the profession. Because archival holdings make possible alternative narratives toward the path of truth seeking, archivists seek to ensure that the power of archives will be open equally and fully to all members of society.~~

*Archivists endeavor to ensure that the materials in their care will be available as evidence of human activity, and they support principles that bring transparency to their actions and that inspire confidence in the profession. Archives are created by a wide variety of groups in the legal, scientific, religious, corporate, educational, governmental, and individual spheres, among others. The topography of ethical practices navigates boundaries intersected by public and private concerns.*

~~The Society of American Archivists is a membership organization comprising individuals and organizations dedicated to the engagements that arise between researchers and documents past, present, and future. Archivists are defined here as those individuals who are concerned with the selection, control, care, preservation, and administration of historical and documentary records of enduring value for the benefit of current users and future generations. Archivists endeavor to ensure that the materials in their care will be available and reliable as evidence of human activity.~~

~~The Society endorses this Code of Ethics as ~~standards~~ *principles* for the profession. This Code is ~~linked~~ *should be read in conjunction* with the “Core Values for Archivists.” ~~within the context of providing~~ *Together they provide* guidance to archivists, and ~~of serving as an introductory overview of the archival enterprise to the rest of society.~~~~

~~This Code exists to increase awareness of ethical issues *concerns* among archivists, their colleagues, and ~~users~~ *the rest of society*. It also ~~validates~~ *guidelines that members may consult for reflection on actions and decisions that occur within the profession and that influence the authenticity of the archival evidence that belongs to every community, state, and nation*. As advocates for documentary collections and cultural objects under our care, archivists aspire to carry out ~~our~~ *their* professional activities with ~~justice and equity~~ *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.*

## **~~II. Professional Relationships~~**

~~Archivists cooperate, with and collaborate, and respect with other archivists, and other archivists' respect them and their institutions' missions and collecting policies. In their professional relationships with donors, records creators, users, and colleagues and users, archivists are honest, fair, unbiased, respectful, honest, and courteous collegial, and equitable.~~

## **~~III. Judgment~~**

~~Archivists exercise professional judgment in appraising, acquiring, appraising, and processing collections materials in order to ensure their the preservation, authenticity, diversity, and enduring lasting cultural and historical value of their collections. Archivists should carefully record document their collections-related decisions and activities to make their role in the selection, retention, or creation of the historical record transparent to researchers their institutions, donors, and users. Archivists should are encouraged to consult with colleagues, relevant professionals, and communities of interest to ensure that multiple diverse perspectives inform their actions and decisions.~~

## **~~IV. Trust~~**

~~Archivists should not profit or otherwise benefit from their privileged access to and control of historical records and documentary materials. They execute their work knowing that they must ensure proper custody for the documents and records entrusted to them. Archivists should demonstrate professional integrity and avoid potential conflicts of interest with their institutions. They strive to balance the sometimes competing interests of various archival stakeholders.~~

## **~~V. Authenticity~~**

~~Archivists ensure the authenticity and continuing usability of records in their holdings care. by They documenting and protecting the identities of records and guaranteeing that the unique archival characteristics of records and strive to protect their intellectual and physical integrity of records is not compromised by from tampering or corruption. Archivists may not willfully alter, manipulate, or destroy data or records to conceal facts or distort evidence. They thoroughly document any actions that may cause changes to the records in their holdings care or raise questions about the records' authenticity.~~

## **~~VI. Access~~**

~~Recognizing that use is the fundamental purpose of keeping archives, archivists promote open and equitable access to the records in their care by minimizing restrictions and~~

~~obstacles and maximizing access tools. Archivists work with donors and originating agencies to ensure that any restrictions are appropriate, well documented, and equitably enforced, and that they contain an end date. Archivists minimize psychological barriers to access by providing timely and helpful reference service. Archivists know their own holdings well enough to formulate and disseminate institutional access policies and strategies that maximize responsible use.~~

## **~~VII. Privacy~~**

~~Archivists recognize that privacy is sanctioned by law, but protected in practice by their own actions. Archivists review records carefully to protect the interests of the donors, individuals, and groups whose public and private lives are recorded in them. As appropriate, archivists place access restrictions on collections to ensure that privacy and confidentiality are maintained, particularly for individuals and groups who have no voice or role in their creation, retention, or public use. Archivists promote the respectful use of culturally sensitive materials in their care by encouraging researchers to consult with communities of origin, 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 them in accordance with their institutions' policies.~~

## **~~VIII. Security and Protection~~**

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

## ***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 institutional mission. They 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 responsible use. They work with donors and originating agencies to ensure that any restrictions 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 seek practical solutions that balance competing principles and interests.*

## **Privacy**

*Archivists recognize that privacy is sanctioned by law. They establish procedures and policies to protect the interests of the donors, individuals, groups, and institutions whose public and private lives and activities are recorded in their holdings. As appropriate, archivists place access restrictions on collections to ensure that privacy and confidentiality are maintained, particularly for individuals and groups who have no voice or role in their creation, retention, or public use. Archivists promote the respectful use of culturally sensitive materials in their care by encouraging researchers to consult with communities of origin, 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 them 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. They execute their work knowing that they must ensure proper custody for the documents and records entrusted to them. Archivists should demonstrate professional integrity and avoid potential conflicts of interest. They strive to balance the sometimes-competing interests of all stakeholders.*

# Code of Ethics for Archivists

Draft Revision 12/20/2010

[Revision submitted to the Council January 27-30, 2011, and posted for February 1 - April 4, 2011, public comment period.<sup>1</sup>]

[Note: 2005 text that has been eliminated appears as ~~strikethroughs~~. Revised text appears as *italics*.]

## ~~Preamble~~

~~The Code of Ethics for Archivists establishes standards for the archival profession. It introduces new members of the profession to those standards, reminds experienced archivists of their professional responsibilities, and serves as a model for institutional policies. It also is intended to inspire public confidence in the profession. This code provides an ethical framework to guide members of the profession. It does not provide the solution to specific problems.~~

~~The term “archivist” as used in this code encompasses all those concerned with the selection, control, care, preservation, and administration of historical and documentary records of enduring value.~~

## ~~I. Purpose~~

~~The Society of American Archivists recognizes the importance of educating the profession and general public about archival ethics by codifying ethical principles to guide the work of archivists. This code provides a set of principles to which archivists aspire.~~

## *I. Introduction*

*Archivists support standards that bring fairness and transparency to their professional responsibilities and that inspire public confidence in the profession. Because archival holdings make possible alternative narratives toward the path of truth seeking, archivists seek to ensure that the power of archives will be open equally and fully to all members of society.*

*The Society of American Archivists is a membership organization comprising individuals and organizations dedicated to the engagements that arise between researchers and documents past, present, and future. Archivists are defined here as those individuals who are concerned with the selection, control, care, preservation, and administration of historical and documentary records of enduring value for the benefit of current users and*

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<sup>1</sup> See <http://www2.archivists.org/news/2011/saa-seeks-member-comment-on-draft-code-of-ethics-for-archivists>, accessed 12-19-2011.

*future generations. Archivists endeavor to ensure that the materials in their care will be available and reliable as evidence of human activity.*

*The Society endorses this Code of Ethics as standards for the profession. This Code is linked with the “Core Values for Archivists” within the context of providing guidance to archivists, and of serving as an introductory overview of the archival enterprise to the rest of society.*

*This Code exists to increase awareness of ethical issues among archivists, their colleagues, and users. It also validates guidelines that members may consult for reflection on actions and decisions that occur within the profession and that influence the authenticity of the archival evidence that belongs to every community, state, and nation. As advocates for documentary collections and cultural objects under our care, archivists aspire to carry out our professional activities with justice and equity.*

## **II. Professional Relationships**

~~Archivists select, preserve, and make available historical and documentary records of enduring value. Archivists cooperate, collaborate, and respect each institution and its mission and collecting policy. Respect and cooperation form the basis of all professional relationships with colleagues and users.~~

*Archivists cooperate, collaborate, and respect other archivists and other archivists' institutions' missions and collecting policies. In their professional relationships with colleagues and users, archivists are fair, unbiased, respectful, honest, and courteous.*

## **III. Judgment**

~~Archivists should exercise professional judgment in acquiring, appraising, and processing historical materials. They should not allow personal beliefs or perspectives to affect their decisions.~~

*Archivists exercise professional judgment in acquiring, appraising, and processing collections in order to ensure their preservation, authenticity, diversity, and enduring cultural and historical value. Archivists should carefully record their collections-related decisions and activities to make their role in the selection, retention, or creation of the historical record transparent to researchers. Archivists should consult with colleagues, relevant professionals, and communities of interest to ensure that multiple perspectives inform their actions and decisions.*

## **IV. Trust**

*Archivists should not profit or otherwise benefit from their privileged access to and control of historical records and documentary materials. They execute their work knowing that they must ensure proper custody for the documents and records entrusted to them. Archivists should demonstrate professional integrity and avoid potential conflicts*

*of interest with their institutions. They strive to balance the sometimes competing interests of various archival stakeholders.*

## **V. Authenticity and Integrity**

~~Archivists strive to preserve and protect the authenticity of records in their holdings by documenting their creation and use in hard copy and electronic formats. They have a fundamental obligation to preserve the intellectual and physical integrity of those records. Archivists may not alter, manipulate, or destroy data or records to conceal facts or distort evidence.~~

*Archivists ensure the authenticity of records in their holdings by documenting and protecting the identities of records and guaranteeing that the intellectual and physical integrity of records is not compromised by tampering or corruption. Archivists may not willfully alter, manipulate, or destroy data or records to conceal facts or distort evidence. They document any actions that may cause changes to the records in their holdings.*

## **VI. Access**

~~Archivists strive to promote open and equitable access to their services and the records in their care without discrimination or preferential treatment, and in accordance with legal requirements, cultural sensitivities, and institutional policies. Archivists recognize their responsibility to promote the use of records as a fundamental purpose of the keeping of archives. Archivists may place restrictions on access for the protection of privacy or confidentiality of information in the records.~~

*Recognizing that use is the fundamental purpose of keeping archives, archivists promote open and equitable access to the records in their care by minimizing restrictions and obstacles and maximizing access tools. Archivists work with donors and originating agencies to ensure that any restrictions are appropriate, well documented, and equitably enforced, and that they contain an end date. Archivists minimize psychological barriers to access by providing timely and helpful reference service. Archivists know their own holdings well enough to formulate and disseminate institutional access policies and strategies that maximize responsible use.*

## **VII. Privacy**

~~Archivists protect the privacy rights of donors and individuals or groups who are the subject of records. They respect all users' right to privacy by maintaining the confidentiality of their research and protecting any personal information collected about them in accordance with the institution's security procedures.~~

*Archivists recognize that privacy is sanctioned by law, but protected in practice by their own actions. Archivists review records carefully to protect the interests of the donors, individuals, and groups whose public and private lives are recorded in them. As appropriate, archivists place access restrictions on collections to ensure that privacy and*



*confidentiality are maintained, particularly for individuals and groups who have no voice or role in their creation, retention, or public use. Archivists promote the respectful use of culturally sensitive materials in their care by encouraging researchers to consult with communities of origin, 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 them in accordance with their institutions' policies.*

### **VIII. Security and Protection**

~~Archivists protect all documentary materials for which they are responsible and guard them against defacement, physical damage, deterioration, and theft. Archivists should cooperate with colleagues and law enforcement agencies to apprehend and prosecute thieves and vandals.~~

*Archivists protect all documentary materials for which they are responsible. They take steps to minimize the natural physical deterioration of records and guard them against accidental damage, vandalism, and theft. Archivists cooperate actively with colleagues and law enforcement agencies to apprehend and prosecute vandals and thieves.*

### **~~IX. Law~~**

~~Archivists must uphold all federal, state, and local laws.~~

## **Society of American Archivists Core Values of Archivists**

*Approved by the SAA Council May 25, 2011*

### **PURPOSE**

Archivists select, preserve, and make available primary sources 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. The modern archives profession bases its theoretical foundations and functions on a set of core values that define and guide the practices and activities of archivists, both individually and collectively. Values embody what a profession stands for and should form the basis for the behavior of its members.

Archivists provide important benefits and services such as: identifying and preserving essential parts of the cultural heritage of society; organizing and maintaining the documentary record of institutions, groups, and individuals; assisting in the process of remembering the past through authentic and reliable primary sources; and serving a broad range of people who seek to locate and use valuable evidence and information. Since ancient times, archives have afforded a fundamental power to those who control them. In a democratic society such power should benefit all members of the community. The values shared and embraced by archivists enable them to meet these obligations and to provide vital services on behalf of all groups and individuals in society.

This statement of core archival values articulates these central principles both to remind archivists why they engage in their professional responsibilities and to inform others of the basis for archivists' contributions to society. Archivists are often subjected to competing claims and imperatives, and in certain situations particular values may pull in opposite directions. This statement intends to provide guidance by identifying the core values that guide archivists in making such decisions and choices. Core values provide part of the context in which to examine ethical concerns.

### **CORE VALUES OF ARCHIVISTS**

**Access and Use:** Archivists promote and provide the widest possible accessibility of materials, consistent with any mandatory access restrictions, such as public statute, donor contract, business/institutional privacy, or personal privacy. Although access may be limited in some instances, archivists seek to promote open access and use when possible. Access to records is essential in personal, academic, business, and government settings, and use of records should be both welcomed and actively promoted. Even individuals who do not directly use archival materials benefit indirectly from research, public programs, and other forms of archival use, including the symbolic value of knowing that

such records exist and can be accessed when needed.

**Accountability:** By documenting institutional functions, activities, and decision-making, archivists provide an important means of ensuring accountability. In a republic such accountability and transparency constitute an essential hallmark of democracy. Public 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. 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 as advocates for their own archival programs and institutional 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 to the formation of public policy related to archival and recordkeeping concerns and to ensure that their expertise is used in the public interest.

**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 embrace the importance of identifying, preserving, and working with communities to actively document those whose voices have been overlooked or marginalized. They seek to build connections to under-documented communities to support: acquisition and preservation of sources relating to these communities' activities, encouragement of community members' use of archival research sources, and/or formation of community-based archives. Archivists accept and encourage a diversity of viewpoints on social, political, and intellectual issues, as represented both in archival records and among members of the profession. They actively work to achieve a diversified and representative membership in the profession.

**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 surrogates for human memory, both individually and collectively, and when properly maintained, they 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 the present, and prepare for the future.

**Preservation:** Archivists preserve a wide variety of primary sources for the benefit of future generations. Preserving materials is a means to this end not an end in itself. Within prescribed law and best practice standards, archivists may determine that the original documents themselves must be preserved, while at other times copying the information they contain to alternate media may be sufficient. Archivists thus preserve materials for

the benefit of the future more than for the concerns of the past.

**Professionalism:** Archivists adhere to a common set of missions, values, and ethics. They accept an evolving theoretical base of knowledge, collaborate with colleagues in related professions, develop and follow professional standards, strive for excellence in their daily practice, and recognize the importance of professional education, including lifelong learning. They encourage professional development among their co-workers, foster the aspirations of those entering the archival profession, and actively share their knowledge and expertise. Archivists seek to expand opportunities to cooperate with other information professionals, with records creators, and with users and potential users of the archival record.

**Responsible Custody:** Archivists ensure proper custody for the documents and records entrusted to them. As responsible stewards, archivists are committed to making reasonable and defensible choices for the holdings of their institutions. They strive to balance the sometimes competing interests of various stakeholders. Archivists are judicious stewards who manage records by following best practices in developing facilities service standards, collection development policies, user service benchmarks, and other performance metrics. They collaborate with external partners for the benefit of users and public needs. In certain situations, archivists recognize the need to deaccession materials so that resources can be strategically applied to the most essential or useful materials.

**Selection:** Archivists make choices about which materials to select for preservation 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 accept the responsibility of serving as active agents in shaping and interpreting the documentation of the past.

**Service:** Within the mandates and missions of their institutions, archivists provide effective and efficient connections to (and mediation for) primary sources so that 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 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. Archivists with a 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. 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 of the past within society.