BACKGROUND:

Created by the SAA Council in February 2009, the Task Force on Developing a Statement of Core Values for Archivists is charged to develop a “Core Values” statement with full consultation and participation by SAA members and other archives associations. Mark Greene, 2007-2008 SAA president, began the conversation about the value(s) of archives and archivists in his presidential address, “The Power of Archives: Archivists’ Values and Value in the Post-Modern Age.” He discussed ten “core values” of the profession (in no particular order):

- Professionalism
- Collectivity
- Activism
- Selection
- Preservation
- Democracy
- Service
- Diversity
- Use and Access
- History

Prior to distributing a draft statement for members’ and others’ feedback, the task force would welcome Council members’ reactions to the draft that follows.

DRAFT STATEMENT OF CORE VALUES FOR ARCHIVISTS
(May 2010)

PURPOSE

Archivists engage in the essential functions of selecting, preserving, and making available the primary sources that document the activities of institutions, communities and individuals, either for legal and administrative evidence or as 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.

In contributing to the public good, archivists identify and preserve essential parts of the cultural heritage of society; organize and maintain the documentary record of institutions, groups, and individuals; assist in the process of remembering the past through authentic and reliable primary sources; and serve a broad range of people who seek to locate and use vital 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 espoused 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 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. This statement of core values held by archivists acknowledges that archivists are often subjected to competing claims and imperatives, and that in certain situations particular values may pull in opposite directions. This statement may provide some guidance by identifying, both for archivists and for others concerned about archives, 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 acknowledge that the principal purpose of documentary preservation is its use by anyone who can thereby benefit from the archival record. Archivists promote and provide the widest possible accessibility of materials, consistent with any mandatory access restrictions imposed by public statute, donor contract, or corporate competitive advantage. Although access may be limited in order to protect legitimate rights and interests related to legal, security, intellectual property, cultural norms, and privacy considerations, archivists promote the widest possible accessibility of materials consistent with these concerns. 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 and to citizens in the ongoing governance of society. Access to the records of public officials and agencies
provides a vital part of accountability. In the private sector accountability through archival documentation also protects the rights and interests of consumers, shareholders, and citizens. Archivists in collecting repositories may not share the same level of responsibility for accountability, but do maintain evidence of the actions of individuals, groups, and organizations, which may be required to provide accountability before the judgment of contemporary and future interests.

**Advocacy:** Archivists promote the use and understanding of the historical record. They serve as advocates for their own programs and institutional needs. They also advocate the application of archival issues and values in a variety of settings including, to the extent consistent with their institutional responsibilities, the political arena. Archivists engage in discussions of the formation of public policy related to archives and recordkeeping concerns and help to ensure that their expertise can be used in the public interest.

**Diversity:** Although specific archival institutions may serve a limited number of constituencies, 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 deliberately acting to identify (even create) materials documenting those whose voices have been overlooked or marginalized. They seek to build connections to under-documented communities. Such connections support acquisition and preservation of sources relating to the communities’ activities, encouragement of community members’ use of archival research sources, and/or assist these groups in forming their own community archives. Archivists actively work to achieve a diversified and representative membership in the profession.

**History and Memory:** Archivists recognize that primary sources enable people to understand past events and tell stories of our ancestors, thereby gaining insights into the human condition. Documents provide surrogates for human memory, both individually and collectively, and when properly maintained, they serve as authentic and reliable evidence against which individual and social memory can be tested. Archivists preserve such primary sources in order to enable us to better comprehend the past, understand the present, and prepare for the future. Understanding history requires knowledge and appreciation of context, which is thus a central principle (provenance) in archival theory and practice relating to organizing and interpreting primary sources.

**Preservation:** Archivists preserve a wide variety of primary sources in order to enable future generations to know the past and to use these essential legal, evidentiary, and cultural resources. Preserving materials is a means to an 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 the information they contain or their symbolic value may be sufficient. Archivists thus preserve materials for the benefit of the future more than for the concerns of the past.
**Professionalism:** As members of an important profession, archivists adhere to a common mission, accept an evolving theoretical base of knowledge, 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 and with users and potential users of the archival record.

**Selection:** The vast quantities of documents and records created in modern society, in both analog and digital forms, are far too costly to preserve in their entirety and much too unwieldy to search successfully for specific information or knowledge. This quantity makes it necessary to select which deserve and require long-term preservation and which may not. Archival records include a wide array of media—including textual, visual, sound, electronic, born digital, and others—needed for documentation. In collaborating with other stakeholders to determine which primary sources should be selected for archival preservation, archivists recognize the necessity of choosing wisely which materials will be available for future use. They acknowledge and accept the responsibility they thus assume as active agents in shaping and interpreting the documentation of the past. Archivists make choices about which materials to select for preservation based on multiple potential users and interpretations.

**Service:** Archivists serve numerous constituencies, which may include institutional administrators, donors of documentary materials, 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. Within the mandate and mission of their institution, 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.

**Social Responsibility:** Underlying all of the responsibilities 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. Even within a potentially narrowly defined institutional mission, archivists thereby contribute to the public interest. Archivists strive to meet these broader social responsibilities in their policies and procedures for selection, preservation, access, and use of the archival record. In doing so, archivists provide essential services to society.