



THE CHARLOTTESVILLE CENTER FOR HISTORY AND CULTURE

**Home of the Albemarle Charlottesville Historical Society
Founded 1940**

Code of Ethics

Updated October 2018

Codes of Ethics have been written by both the American Association of Museums (AAM) and the American Association for State and Local History (AASLH), and written codes exist for many professions to which trustees and staff members of this Society belong. While these codes are thoughtful and complete, no single code can cover all of the issues facing a complex institution like the Charlottesville Center for History and Culture: Home of the Albemarle Charlottesville Historical Society, with its educational, collection and large number of ancillary interests. It is appropriate, therefore, to tailor a code to the particular needs of this institution. The great majority of this document is excerpted from the 1978 edition of MUSEUM ETHICS published by the American Association of Museums, and has been adapted from a policy adopted by the Virginia Historical Society as it exists today. This policy was ratified and approved by the Board of Directors of the Albemarle Charlottesville Historical Society at their regular meeting on October 17, 2018.

A code of ethics must be broad enough to permit interpretation and flexible enough to evolve or change as the structure of the Society changes over time.

RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS

General Responsibility

The Board of Directors of the Charlottesville Center for History and Culture: Home of the Albemarle Charlottesville Historical Society is the governing body of the organization. As such, it serves the public interest as it relates to the Center and is accountable to the public as well as to the institution. In most cases the Board acts as the ultimate legal entity for the Society and is responsible for making and maintaining its general policies, standards, condition, and operational continuity. The Board of Directors must be loyal to the purpose of the Center and must understand and respect the basic documents that provide for its establishment, character, and governance.

Each Director should devote time and attention to the affairs of the organization and ensure that it and its governing Board act in accordance with the basic documents and with applicable state and federal laws. Directors must ensure that no policies or activities jeopardize the basic nonprofit status of the organization, or reflect unfavorably upon it as an institution devoted to public service.

Directors should not attempt to act in their individual capacities. All actions should be taken as a board, committee or otherwise in conformance with the bylaws or applicable resolutions. Directors with special areas of interest within the organization should understand that advocacy for those interests should be advanced only within the framework of the organization's interests as a whole.

Directors should maintain information in confidence when it concerns the administration or activities of the Center and the Society and when it is not generally available to the public. This does not preclude public disclosure of information that is properly in the public domain, or information that should be released in fulfilling the organization's accountability to the public. Professional transparency is among our core values as an institution.

Directors hold the ultimate fiduciary responsibility for the organization and for the protection and nurturing of its various assets: the collections and related documentation, the plant, financial assets, and the staff. They must develop and define the purposes and related policies of the institution and ensure that all of the Society's assets are properly and effectively used for public purposes.

The Board has strong obligations to provide the proper environment for the physical security and preservation of the collections, and to monitor and develop the financial structure of the Center so that it continues to exist as an institution of vitality and quality. In keeping with their primary responsibility for the protection of the Society's collection, Directors should not jeopardize the collection by using it as collateral for a loan or by otherwise selling or mortgaging the collection in order to secure funds for operations, buildings, or expansion of the facility.

A vital responsibility of the governing Board derives from its relationship to the Executive Director, the Society's Chief Executive Officer. The selection of that executive and the

continuing monitoring of his or her activities are primary Board responsibilities, which cannot be delegated and must be diligently and thoughtfully fulfilled.

Conflict of Interest

Individuals who are knowledgeable in fields related to our activities can be of great assistance, but conflicts of interest or the appearance of such conflicts may arise because of these interests or activities. A Director should conduct all of his or her activities, including those relating to persons or businesses with whom the Director is closely associated, in such a way that no conflict will arise between the other interests and the policies, operations, or interests of the institution. The appearance of such conflict should also be avoided.

Directors should file with the Board a statement disclosing their personal, business, or organizational interests and affiliations and those of persons close to them whenever those interests or affiliations could be construed as being related to the work of the Charlottesville Center for History and Culture. These statements should be updated whenever significant changes occur.

Staff members should not serve as members of the Board of Directors. Conflict of interest is the guiding principle, since Directors create and vote on policy affecting staff interests as a whole. Charges of self-interest at the expense of the institution and charges of personal use of privileged information arises whenever a Directors, a member of his or her family, or a close associate personally collects objects of a type collected by the Historical Society. The Society governing Board must clearly state its policy regarding such personal collections to ensure that no Director competes with the organization for objects; that no Director takes personal advantage of information available to him or her because of his or her Board membership; and that should conflict develop between the needs of the individual and the institution, those of the institution will prevail.

No Director, person close to him or her, or individual who might act for him or her may acquire objects from the collections of the Society, except when the object and its source have been advertised, its full history made available, and it is sold at public auction or otherwise clearly offered for sale in the public marketplace.

When a Director seeks staff assistance for personal needs, they should not expect that such help will be rendered to an extent greater than that available to a member of the general public in similar circumstances or with similar needs.

Whenever a matter arises for action by the Board, or the Historical Society engages in an activity where there is a possible conflict or the appearance of conflict between the interests of the Society and an outside or personal interest of a Director or that of a person close to him or her, the outside interest of the Director should be made a matter of record. If the Director is present when a vote is taken in connection with such a question, the Director should abstain. In some circumstances, the Director should avoid discussing any planned actions, formally or informally, where there might appear to be personal benefit. If a case arises in which neither disclosure nor abstention appears to be sufficient, the only appropriate solution may be resignation.

A member of the Board of Directors should not take advantage of information he or she receives during service to the institution if personal use of such information could be financially detrimental to the Society. Any such actions that might impair the reputation of the organization also must be avoided. When a Director obtains information that could be of personal benefit, he or she should refrain from action until all issues have been reviewed by an appropriate representative of the organization.

Directors serve the institution and the public. They should not attempt to derive any personal material advantages from their connection with the organization. Directors should use Society property only for official purposes and make no personal use of the collection, property, or services in a manner not available to a comparable member of the general public. While loans of objects by Directors can be of great benefit to the organization, it should be recognized that exhibition can enhance the value of the exhibited object.

The Relationship Between the Board of Directors and the Executive Director

Directors have an obligation to define the rights, powers, and duties of the Executive Director (ED). They should work with the ED, who is their chief executive officer, in all administrative matters, and deal with him or her openly and with candor. A procedure shall be provided to allow staff personnel to bring grievances directly to the Board.

The Directors must act as a full board in appointing or dismissing an ED, and the relationship between ED and the Board must reflect the primacy of institutional goals over all personal or interpersonal considerations. The ED should attend all board meetings and important committee meetings, except executive sessions concerning him or her.

The ED has an obligation to bring before the board any matters involving policy questions not already determined; and to keep them informed on a timely basis about all other significant or substantial matters, or intended actions affecting the institution.

The ED must carry out the policies established by the Directors, and adhere to the budget approved by the board. Whenever it is necessary to deviate from established policies or to alter or exceed budget guidelines, the ED should notify the board in advance and request appropriate approval.

STAFF AND VOLUNTEERS

Ethics is a subject often in the news these days, generally as a result of behavior or actions in violation of a code or standard of commonly accepted behavior. The codes were not created as a response to a problem, but rather as a reflection of this institution's concern for its role as a leader in our community, not only in the area of history education but as a model for ethical behavior as well.

General Responsibilities

Employment by the Albemarle Charlottesville Historical Society is a public trust involving great responsibility. This public trust is reflected in the government's perception of the institution as an educational resource worthy of tax-exempt status; it is reflected in our donors' belief that their financial support is wisely spent in the furtherance of our stated mission; and in our Directors, Staffs', and Volunteers' belief that their efforts for the Historical Society are well-spent.

The Society itself holds the public trust of the community in its role as preserver of humankind's culture and heritage and its presentation of its materials with accuracy, honesty and sensitivity. This very important issue of public trust demands that in all activities Society staff must act with integrity and in accordance with the most stringent ethical principles as well as the highest standards of objectivity. The Albemarle Charlottesville Historical Society enjoys high public visibility and its staff a generous measure of public esteem. To the public the Society staff is never wholly separable from its institution. Any Society-related action by the individual may reflect on the institution or be attributed to it. Staff members must be concerned not only with the true personal motivations as they see them, but also the way in which such actions might be construed by the casual observer.

We hope that you will read through this policy, ask for an explanation of any area or subject which you do not understand, subscribe to its principles and incorporate them into all aspects of your professional and personal lives.

Conflict of Interest

Society staff should never abuse their official positions or their contacts within the museum community, compete with the Historical Society, or bring discredit or embarrassment to the institution or to their profession in any activity, work related or not. They should be prepared to accept the restrictions that are necessary to maintain public confidence in the Society and in their respective profession.

Gifts, Favors, Discounts, Dispensations

The Historical Society is committed to the highest ethical principles in all relationships with business suppliers. Any staff member who is authorized to spend Society funds should do so with impartiality, honesty, and with regard only to the best interests of the Society.

Unless fully disclosed and permitted, Society employees and others in a close relationship to them must not accept gifts, favors, loans, or other dispensations or things of more than trifling value that are available to them in connection with their duties for the Historical Society.

Gifts of trifling value are deemed to be those novelty items with advertising identification affixed to them and a value of less than \$10. Gifts include discounts on personal purchases from suppliers who sell items or furnish services to the Historical Society, except where such discounts are regularly offered to the general public.

Meals, accommodations and travel services while on official business should not be accepted except when it is clear that acceptance of such services will not compromise the professional judgment of the staff member or the reputation of the Society.

Fund-raising Practices

Fund-raising is a vital component of the financial health of any nonprofit. Staff and volunteers involved in raising moneys or soliciting other contributions or gifts-in-kind on behalf of the Society must do so with honesty as to the need for such contributions and must use donations only for the donor's intended purposes. Gifts should be solicited without the promise of opportunities or advantages not offered to all donors by previously defined guidelines. Staff and volunteers should hold confidential and leave intact all lists, records and documents acquired in connection with their fund-raising efforts on behalf of the organization.

Interinstitutional Cooperation

If museums intend to contribute to the preservation of humanity's cultural and scientific heritage as well as to its increase of knowledge, each institution should respond positively to appropriate opportunities for cooperative action with similar organizations to further these goals. The Charlottesville Center for History and Culture should welcome cooperative action and collaboration with other institutions even if the short-term advantages are few and it will not significantly increase its own holdings or enhance its image.

Museum Shop and Commercial Activities

The Museum Shop and other commercial activities in the Society, as well as publicity relating to them, should be in keeping with the Society's mission, should be relevant to the collections and basic educational purposes of the organization, and must not compromise the quality of those collections. In arranging for the manufacture and sale of replicas, reproductions or other commercial items adapted from an object in the Society's Historic Collection, all aspects of the commercial venture must be carried out in a manner that will not discredit either the integrity of the Society or the intrinsic value of the original object. Great care must be taken to identify permanently such objects for what they are, and to ensure the accuracy and high quality of the manufacture. They should represent good value for money and comply with all relevant national legislation.

THE MUSEUM AND ARCHIVAL COLLECTIONS

Management, Maintenance and Conservation

Historical societies generally derive their mission from their collections, and these holdings constitute the primary difference between them and other kinds of institutions. A historical society's obligation to its collection is paramount. Each object is an integral part of a cultural composite.

That context also includes a body of information about the object, which establishes its proper place and importance and without which the value of the object is diminished. The maintenance of this information in orderly and retrievable form is critical to the collection and is a central obligation of those charged with collection management.

An ethical duty of historical societies is to transfer to their successors, when possible in enhanced form, the material record of human culture and the natural world. They must be in control of their collections and know the location and the condition of the objects that they hold.

Procedures must be maintained for the periodic evaluation of the condition of the collections and for their general and special maintenance. The physical care of the collection and its accessibility must be in keeping with professionally accepted standards. Failing this, Directors and management are ethically obliged either to effect correction of the deficiency or to dispose of the collection, preferably to another comparable institution.

Acquisition and Disposal

No collection exists in isolation. Its course generally will be influenced by changes in cultural, scholarly, or educational trends and specializations developing in other institutions, policy, and law regarding the traffic in various kinds of objects and the desire to improve the collection.

In the delicate area of acquisition and disposal of objects, the Society must weigh carefully the interests of the public for which it holds the collection in trust, the donor's intent in the broadest sense, the interests of the scholarly and the cultural community, and the institution's own financial well-being.

The Albemarle Charlottesville Historical Society must continue to develop policies that allow it to conduct its collections activities in accordance with the complexities of existing legislation and with the reasonable certainty that its approach is consistent with the spirit and intent of such legislation. Materials collected by the Society must be relevant to its purposes and activities, be accompanied by a valid legal title, preferably be unrestricted but with any limitations clearly described in an instrument of conveyance and be properly cataloged, conserved, stored or exhibited. The Society must remain free to improve its collection through selective disposal and acquisition. In general, materials should be kept as long as they retain their physical integrity, authenticity, and usefulness for the Society's purposes.

The Society maintains a process for considering the origin of materials it acquires that will allow it to acquire or accept an object only when it can determine with reasonable certainty that it has

not been immediately derived from illicit trade and that its acquisition does not contribute to the continuation of that trade.

When disposing of materials, the Society must determine that it has the legal right to do so. When mandatory restrictions accompany the acquisition, these must be observed unless it can be clearly shown that adherence to such restrictions is impossible or substantially detrimental to the institution. The Society can only be relieved from such restrictions by an appropriate legal procedure. When special requests or instructions accompany the acquisition, they must be carefully considered, and consultation with the donor or his/her heirs should be attempted.

The Society must not allow objects from its collections to be acquired privately by any Society staff member, officer, volunteer, member of its governing board or his/her representative, unless they are sold publicly and with the complete disclosure of their history. Objects, materials or supplies of trifling value that the Society cannot sell and that must be discarded may be given to anyone associated with the Society or to the public.

While the governing entity bears final responsibility for the collection, including both the acquisition and disposal process, the curatorial and administrative staff together with their technical associates are best qualified to assess the pertinence of an object to the collection or the Society's programs.

Appraisals

Donations are tax deductible to the extent of the law; however, the Society cannot appraise items for a private owner. Donors, therefore, are expected to get independent appraisals for the objects they are donating, whenever appropriate.

Availability of Collections

Although the public must have reasonable access to the collections on a nondiscriminatory basis, the Society assumes as a primary responsibility the safeguarding of its materials and therefore may regulate access to them. Some parts of the collections may be set aside for the active scholarly pursuits of staff members, but normally only for the duration of an active research effort.

The judgment and recommendation of professional staff members regarding the use of the collections must be given utmost consideration. In formulating their recommendations, staff must let their judgment be guided by two primary objectives: the continued physical integrity and safety of the object or collection, and high scholarly or educational purposes.

In keeping with the Society's responsibility to provide continuous curatorial and protective care for its collection, it must protect such collections from potential damage from the effects of smoke, beverage, or food service around exposed collections, or the dangers of inappropriate building environmental conditions.

Truth in Presentation

It is the responsibility of professional staff to use Society collections for the creation and dissemination of knowledge. Intellectual honesty and objectivity in the presentation of collections is the duty of every professional. The stated origin of the materials or attribution of work must reflect the thorough and honest investigation of the curator and must yield promptly to change with the advent of new facts or analysis.

Historical societies may address a wide variety of social, political, artistic or intellectual issues. Any can be appropriate, if approached objectively and without prejudice. Professionals must use their best efforts to ensure that exhibits, publications, and other public presentations are honest and objective expressions and do not perpetuate myths or stereotypes. All public presentations must provide with candor and tact an honest and meaningful view of the subject.

The research and preparation of a public presentation will often lead the professional to develop a point of view or interpretive sense of the material. That individual must clearly understand the point where sound professional judgment ends and personal bias begins. (S)He must be content that the resultant presentation is the product of objective judgment.

Human Remains and Sacred Objects

We have learned much about human development and cultural history from human burials and sacred objects. There is merit in continuing such investigations. But if we are to maintain an honorable position as humanists concerned with the worth of the individual, the study of skeletal material and sacred objects and their housing and care must be accomplished in a manner acceptable not only to fellow professionals but to those of various beliefs.

Although it is occasionally necessary to use skeletal and other sensitive material in interpretive exhibits, this must be done with tact and with respect for the feelings of human dignity held by all peoples. Such an exhibit exists to convey to the visitor an understanding of the lives of those who lived or now live under very different circumstances.

When the Society opts to deaccession items that are categorized as human remains or sacred objects, it should approach such deaccession with the utmost thoughtfulness and sensitivity. It should first attempt to return any such objects to the donor; if that is not possible, contact should be made with the most appropriate societal group for assistance and advice. If neither the donor nor an appropriate societal group can be found, the objects should be disposed of in keeping with accepted practices for the group or society represented by the objects.

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