

1 **AASLH STATEMENT OF STANDARDS AND ETHICS (2025 revision; last revised 2018)**

2 **Introduction**

3 The American Association for State and Local History (AASLH) is a membership
4 organization comprised of individual history practitioners, agencies, and history
5 organizations acting in the public trust, engaged in the practice of history, and
6 representing many disciplines and professions. AASLH, its members, employees, and
7 Council and committee members to abide by the ethical and performance standards
8 adopted by discipline-based and professional organizations relevant to their work.

9 The Association and its members will be aware of all laws, regulations, and international
10 conventions relevant to their work. The Association and its members are expected to
11 take affirmative steps to maintain their integrity so as to warrant public confidence. The
12 following ethical statements and related professional standards are provided for the
13 guidance of all AASLH members, other history organizations, and history practitioners.

14 **History belongs to everyone, and everyone makes history**

15 *Everyone* means every individual, regardless of background, and their contributions to
16 the fabric of our collective history.

17 History organizations have a responsibility to demonstrate this idea through their
18 staffing, training, collecting, programming, and marketing activities. History
19 organizations must be attuned to issues and ideas reflective of the breadth of experience
20 in their local communities and in the United States, and must include these varied
21 perspectives in documentation, collections, preservation, and interpretation.

22 **Intellectual freedom**

23 Historical scholarship and interpretation depend upon free and open exploration and
24 interpretation of human experience. Acknowledging one's debts to the work of others is
25 essential, as is documenting one's sources with transparency.

26 History organizations must respect all legal, ethical, and cultural norms and
27 international conventions regarding:

- 28 • individual privacy
- 29 • research involving living people, being mindful of descendants in the community
- 30 • and access to and use of sensitive cultural materials, including human remains

31 **Confidence and trust**

32 History organizations exist to serve the public interest and must always act in such a way
33 as to maintain public confidence and trust.

34 No governing authority member, employee, or volunteer should use their position, or the
35 information and access acquired as a result of their position, for personal gain or solely

36 for the benefit of other organizations. All proprietary information should remain
37 confidential.

38 **Governance**

39 Each history organization's governing authority has primary responsibility for governance,
40 institutional policies, financial stability, legal accountability, and safety.

41 A. The governing authority must safeguard the organization's assets, including, but
42 not limited to: the reputation of the organization, its mission, its human and
43 financial resources, collections, facilities, property, members and donors.

44 B. The governing authority should ensure that the institution achieves and maintains
45 financial sustainability, as well as operational sustainability. The governing
46 authority's oversight should include:

47 a. Determining that accurate financial records are being kept.

48 b. Verifying that the organization is managed in a fiscally sound manner.

49 c. Verifying that the organization has the financial and human resources
50 necessary to fulfill its mission and to operate according to appropriate
51 standards and practices.

52 C. The governing authority should ensure proper delegation of responsibility,
53 including development of succession plans for appropriate staff.

54 D. The governing authority should establish policies that reflect current legal,
55 ethical, and professional standards and practices. These policies should be
56 regularly reviewed and their application confirmed by the governing authority.

57 E. History organizations may engage with government and the public about policy
58 issues, provided care is taken to remain nonpartisan.

59 **Access for people with disabilities**

60 AASLH and its members acknowledge that more than 25% of the U.S. population have
61 some form of disability¹ and therefore (1) advocate adhering to the minimum
62 requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act,² and (2) encourages organizations
63 to implement standards and practices beyond the minimum, when possible.

64 A. Interpretation must use appropriate methods of delivery (historic marker, exhibit,
65 book, program, etc.) and be accessible to people with varied abilities.

¹ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Disability and Health. [updated 2022; cited 2025 April 5].
<https://www.cdc.gov/disability-and-health/articles-documents/disabilities-health-care-access.html>

² See the Americans with Disabilities Act Guidance and Resource Materials at
<https://www.ada.gov/resources/>

66 B. History organizations should do their best to create digital products that conform
67 to Web Content Access Guidelines (WCAG).³

68 **Stewardship of historical resources**

69 History organizations frequently have complex and varied collections. These historical
70 resources—including collections of objects, documents, and other records; built
71 environments, cultural landscapes, historical viewsheds, archaeological sites, and other
72 evidence of the past—are the tools through which history practitioners provide meaning
73 to the past and are the bedrock upon which the practice of history rests.

74 A. In fulfillment of their public trust, history organizations must be responsible
75 stewards, giving priority to the protection and management of the historical
76 resources within their care and preserving the physical and intellectual integrity of
77 these resources. The physical condition of historical resources, including a record
78 of their past treatment, should be maintained and appropriate steps taken to
79 mitigate potential hazards to people and property.

80 B. History organizations should manage their historical resources in accord with
81 comprehensive and regularly reviewed policies officially adopted by their
82 governing authorities.

83 C. History organizations should detail the criteria and process for deaccessioning
84 objects⁴ from their collections in their collections management policy. Under no
85 circumstances should the decision to deaccession an object be made solely
86 based on monetary value. Funds from the sale of deaccessioned collections
87 should be restricted to the acquisition of new collections, or to the direct care and
88 preservation of existing collections. Each organization that stewards cultural
89 heritage materials independently determines how direct care⁵ is defined for their
90 organization and how funds derived from the sale of deaccessioned materials are
91 used in accordance with that definition.⁶

92 D. Historical resources should not be capitalized or treated as financial assets.⁷

93 E. History organization staff, volunteers, and board members must not use their
94 access to objects or object information for personal purposes, including providing

³The WCAG is an international technical standard that provides guidance about how to make web content more accessible to people with disabilities. <https://www.w3.org/WAI/standards-guidelines/>.

⁴ For the purposes of this statement, the word object is used broadly to refer to all items in an organization's accessioned or permanent collections.

⁵ Direct Care is defined by the American Alliance of Museums as an investment in existing collections that enhances their life, usefulness or quality and thereby ensuring they will continue to benefit the public (2019).

⁶ Financial Standards Accounting Board (2019). Topic 360.

⁷ Financial Standards Accounting Board (1993). Statements 116 and 117.

95 financial appraisals,⁸ nor should they compete with the organization for
96 acquisitions or act as dealers for similar materials.

97 F. Organizations will, whenever possible, acquire, care for, and interpret cultural
98 heritage materials in concert with representatives of the materials' community of
99 origin and will strive for transparency regarding the provenance of all such
100 materials.

101 G. In stewarding cultural materials, including research about, cataloging, storage
102 and use of those materials, history organizations will aim to consult with advisors
103 holding relevant lived or academic experience.

104 **Availability of historic resources**

105 History organizations endeavor to provide the greatest level of access to historic
106 resources. Access restrictions are governed by institutional policies available to the
107 public and by applicable rights of privacy, ownership, cultural standards, and intellectual
108 freedom.

109 **Environmental resource stewardship**

110 The Association and its members acknowledge that choices we make today impact
111 those that come after us; therefore, we strive to be good ancestors. In carrying out
112 mission-related activities, AASLH and its members work to ensure that we are meeting
113 the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet
114 their own needs.⁹

115 AASLH and its members consider the climate resilience of all projects and programs and
116 make efforts to support healthy climate actions in our communities.

117 **Interpretation**

118 Historical interpretation may be presented in a variety of formats.

119 A. All interpretation must be grounded in rigorous, research-based scholarship.
120 Such scholarship should recognize multiple perspectives, including community-
121 based and descendant knowledge.

122 B. History organizations should demonstrate respect for all cultures and peoples
123 and work to be socially responsible and inclusive in their programming and
124 interpretation. Content for or about specific groups of people will be developed in
125 concert with advisors holding lived or academic experience.

⁸ The word appraisal has distinct definitions within the history profession. Financial appraisals described here refer to the market value of items. Within the archives discipline, appraisal refers specifically to assessing the historical value and relevance of manuscripts, as defined by the Society of American Appraisers <https://dictionary.archivists.org/entry/appraisal.html>.

⁹ United Nations (1987). Brundtland Commission.

126 C. History organizations recognize that artificial intelligence (AI) may be a useful tool
127 and will always clearly state when AI is used in research or other aspects of
128 history work.¹⁰

129 **Human resources**

130 Responsibility for the operation of a history organization rests with the staff and the
131 governing authority, whether they are paid or volunteer.

132 A. In accordance with relevant laws, history organizations will not discriminate
133 against or harass anyone on the basis of race, color, creed, age, sex, religion,
134 nationality, sexual orientation, disability, or gender identity.

135 B. Institutions have the responsibility to engage personnel, including volunteers,
136 who have appropriate training and expertise and to provide additional training
137 necessary for them to continue to meet their responsibilities.

138 C. Individuals employed in the practice of history deserve pay and benefits
139 commensurate with their training, performance, and contribution to the
140 organization. History organizations should endeavor to provide equitable
141 compensation to fairly pay staff and interns in a manner that reflects the value of
142 history work.

143 D. Staff, interns, and volunteers should be held to the organization's code of ethics
144 and clearly articulated performance objectives.

145 E. Institutions should maintain personnel policies, adopted by the governing
146 authority and distributed to all staff, documenting the terms of employment.

147 F. An employee or volunteer is never wholly separable from the history organization,
148 and their actions may reflect upon the organization or be attributed to it. As such,
149 personnel should use care in relationships and interactions with others that could
150 compromise professional judgment or their reputation.

151 **Revenue-producing activities**

152 Activities that involve the marketing and sale of products, programs, services, and
153 facilities are acceptable ways to produce revenue and increase public awareness of, and
154 participation in, historical activities.

155 A. No revenue-producing activities should violate or compromise the integrity of a
156 history organization's mission. These activities should not hamper the ability of a
157 history organization or history practitioner to meet professional standards or
158 endanger a history organization's nonprofit status.

¹⁰ Smithsonian institution (2022) AI Values Statement.

159 B. Control of the intellectual content of products (e.g., exhibitions, publications,
160 collections, programs) should not be delegated to outside parties for the purpose
161 of obtaining financial support.

162 **Adoption and review**

163 This Statement was revised by the Standards and Ethics Committee in 2024 with
164 feedback from members and was adopted by AASLH Council in 2025. It will be reviewed
165 by those bodies for revision not less than every five years.

166 **About the American Association for State and Local History**

167 The American Association for State and Local History (AASLH) is a national association
168 that provides leadership and support for its members who preserve and interpret state
169 and local history in order to make the past more meaningful. Visit www.AASLH.org for
170 more information about membership, continuing education, the Association's resource
171 center, and other programs and services.