

## Chicago History Museum Code of Ethics Guiding Principles

The *Chicago History Museum Code of Ethics* defines the ethical standards and principles, based on honesty, transparency, and accountability, that will guide our institutional activities as we seek a balance between our current priorities and vision and goals for tomorrow.

**Upholding Our Individual Responsibilities:** Our commitment to public service begins with ourselves. Our individual decisions, actions, and interactions will be carried out in accordance with our duty to the Museum and our dedication to the public. As museum professionals, we will take care to put the Museum's interests ahead of our own.

**Building a Sustainable Institution:** Our success in public service depends on good governance and operating in a manner that ensures the viability and growth of the Museum. Our institutional leaders must legally and transparently manage the human, financial, material, intellectual, and technological resources necessary to fulfill our mission and purpose, balancing current priorities and setting the course for sustainability through long-range planning.

**Building and Preserving the Collection:** Our collection is at the heart of the Museum and provides a foundation for engaging the public through exhibitions, educational programs, historical research, and other related activities. Our public trust responsibilities require that we develop and maintain the significance and integrity of the collection for present and future generations.

**Engaging Our Public:** We are committed to our audience. Our exhibitions, educational programs, publications, and opportunities for research must provide an accessible environment that promotes learning and inspires personal connections to history.

It is the responsibility of the trustees, staff, and volunteers of the Chicago History Museum to understand, enact, and promote the ethical standards and principles defined in the *Chicago History Museum Code of Ethics*.

## Chicago History Museum Code of Ethics

### INTRODUCTION

**Our Mission:** *We share Chicago's stories, serving as a hub of scholarship and learning, inspiration and civic engagement*

**Our Purpose:** *To help people make meaningful and personal connections to history*

We the trustees, staff, and volunteers of the Chicago History Museum (the Museum) are proud to work for Chicago's oldest cultural institution, which has been rooted in public service for more than 150 years. The Chicago Historical Society, the Museum's governing body, was incorporated as a not-for-profit corporation under the laws of the State of Illinois on February 7, 1857, and was granted a state charter by the General Assembly to promote the public good through the collection and preservation of historical materials for the instruction and benefit of future generations. Today, the Chicago History Museum is a different institution in its staffing, collections, programming, and audience, but its mission and purpose remain true to the public-oriented spirit established at its founding. The Museum collects, preserves, exhibits, and interprets documents, images, and artifacts related to the history of Chicago and the United States for the benefit of the communities it serves.

The Museum's responsibility to the public requires an active commitment to remain relevant and improve the quality of our services. We may find that our long-term plans occasionally compete with immediate needs, yet we must manage the Museum in a sustainable manner, which builds and preserves the collection and enhances how we engage and serve our audience. In pursuit of these objectives, the *Chicago History Museum Code of Ethics* defines the ethical standards and principles, based on honesty, transparency, and accountability, that will guide our institutional activities as we seek a balance between our current priorities and our vision and goals for tomorrow.

**Upholding Our Individual Responsibilities:** Our commitment to public service begins with ourselves. Our individual decisions, actions, and interactions will be carried out in accordance with our duty to the Museum and our dedication to the public. As museum professionals, we will take care to put the Museum’s interests ahead of our own.

- **PROFESSIONALISM:** We will carry out our work with the highest level of professionalism, reflecting good judgment and the best possible practices respective to our individual roles. We will commit ourselves to ongoing professional development, sharing our knowledge with colleagues and the public and continually striving to raise our standards of practice.
- **RESPECT:** We will approach our colleagues with respect and empathy for one another’s work, time, safety, and dignity. We will foster a collaborative workplace by actively sharing professional responsibilities while acknowledging our colleagues’ individual areas of expertise.
- **PRIVATE LIFE:** As individuals, we have a right to our personal, political, spiritual, and creative lives. While we recognize the value that multiple perspectives and diverse experiences bring to Museum activities, we will respect the separation between our private lives and our professional duties. When acting in a professional capacity, we will not represent our personal beliefs and opinions as those of the Museum, and we will ensure that our personal beliefs do not compromise our work-related decisions and professional judgment.
- **CONFLICTS OF INTEREST:** We will not abuse our positions, associations, and privileges with the Museum, nor our access to Museum resources, to benefit ourselves, our families, or other associates financially or personally. Trustees, staff, volunteers, and associates will not compete with the Museum on any level and will avoid conflicts of interest, and the appearance thereof, by operating with full disclosure and transparency.

**Building a Sustainable Institution:** Our success in public service depends on good governance and operating in a manner that ensures the viability and growth of the Museum. Our institutional leaders must legally and transparently manage the human, financial, material, intellectual, and technological resources necessary to fulfill our mission and purpose, balancing current priorities and setting the course for sustainability through long-range planning.

- **STEWARDSHIP OF RESOURCES:** We will responsibly manage and protect our resources in a manner that ensures the long-term viability of the Museum and supports our continued professional development. In accordance with creative, copyright, and trademark laws, we will protect the intellectual and physical property of the Museum as well as that of partnering organizations and individuals, while also recognizing the rights of the public.
- **PLANNING AND COMMUNICATION:** We will plan and implement institutional projects in accordance with available resources, addressing immediate needs while not sacrificing long-term goals. Institutional priorities, decisions, and plans will be set through an open and swift process of communication between administrative and professional staff to capture the full potential of each project and foster a productive work environment.
- **WORKPLACE DIVERSITY:** We are committed to cultivating a more diverse and inclusive board of trustees, staff, and volunteer corps, reflective of the Museum’s constituencies.
- **FINANCIAL AND INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT:** We will raise funds in-line with institutional goals and projects and honestly communicate the intended use with our financial supporters. We will not accommodate special requests that compromise the integrity of the Museum.
- **MUSEUM REVENUE:** As a non profit institution, we will responsibly and truthfully carry out our promotional and revenue-generating activities. Our commercial associations will not conflict with the spirit or realization of the Museum’s preservation and educational goals.
- **FACILITIES:** We will provide a safe and positive experience for visitors and a high-quality environment for staff and collections through appropriate design, maintenance, and security of our buildings. Public and private use of the Museum’s facilities will follow established preservation and legal guidelines.
- **TECHNOLOGY:** As a future-driven institution, we will develop our technological resources and infrastructure to meet the changing needs and expectations of the staff and public. We will use technology to enhance the visitor experience and increase access, while also providing the necessary tools for staff to succeed.
- **CONFIDENTIALITY:** We will protect confidential information across all Museum activities as established in agreements and laws and will not allow access to or use of private or sensitive information by unauthorized persons.
- **ENVIRONMENT:** We will make efforts to reduce our negative impact on the urban and natural environments through energy-saving measures and the appropriate use, reuse, recycling, and disposal of materials and products.

**Building and Preserving the Collection:** Our collection is at the heart of the Museum and provides a foundation for engaging the public through exhibitions, educational programs, historical research, and other related activities. Our public trust responsibilities require that we develop and maintain the significance and integrity of the collection for present and future generations.

- **PRESERVATION:** Decisions relating to the management and use of documents, images, and artifacts will be made in the best interest of the collection's long-term preservation and historical integrity. In accordance with available professional, financial, and technological resources, we will continually seek to improve overall collection care.
- **ACQUISITIONS:** Collecting decisions will be based on an honest assessment of how materials contribute to the Museum's mission and purpose and the availability of resources to acquire, store, preserve, and process a collection. We will employ excellence in scholarship and documentation in evaluating acquisitions, complying with all applicable laws, and collaborating with the communities and sources from which we collect. We will seek to build a collection reflective of Chicago's diverse constituencies while respecting the sensitive nature of materials we may acquire.
- **DEACCESSIONS:** The removal of materials from the Museum's collection will be undertaken with the utmost consideration and transparency in order to maintain public confidence. We will not treat the collection as a financial asset nor as collateral. The decision to approve deaccession will be based solely on the standards of an item's relevance to the collection, its condition, and obligations set forth by applicable laws. Deaccession proceeds will be maintained exclusively for the benefit of the collection and may be used only to support the purpose of new acquisitions, to offset costs directly related to obtaining or processing new collections materials, or for conservation of collection objects.
- **LOANS:** We will guarantee the integrity of incoming and outgoing loan materials through appropriate documentation and conservation, treating incoming materials with the same level of care that we apply to our own collection. We will ensure that borrowers meet preservation and security standards and that both lenders' and borrowers' relationships to the Museum are free from potential conflicts of interest.

**Engaging Our Public:** We are committed to our audience. Our exhibitions, educational programs, publications, and opportunities for research must provide an accessible environment that promotes learning and inspires personal connections to history.

- **AUDIENCE:** We will continually reach out to and learn from the public in our efforts to better understand and address the needs of the communities we serve. We will utilize the latest audience research and appropriate knowledge within the museum field to improve our practices and promote change and growth so that we remain relevant.
- **INTERPRETATION:** Our interpretive efforts will be based upon the principles of intellectual freedom and integrity. We will employ excellence in scholarship and historical objectivity, selecting documents, images, and artifacts and presenting history in a manner free from self-interest and financial or political influences. Furthermore, we will use technology as an educational tool to expand our reach and ensure a rich visitor experience.
- **DIVERSE PERSPECTIVES:** We will combine the strengths of our collection and scholarship with the original voices of our constituencies to create meaningful exhibitions and educational programs, making our public offerings more inclusive of the diverse experiences and perspectives of the people of Chicago.
- **ACCESSIBILITY:** We will continually strive to improve physical and intellectual access to our facility, collection, and programs. We will provide non discriminatory access to our collection and public offerings and apply any necessary restrictions equitably. We will balance access to and use of the collection with our responsibility to preserve and protect the documents, images, and artifacts we hold in trust.

## IMPLEMENTATION

It is the responsibility of the trustees, staff, and volunteers of the Chicago History Museum to understand, enact, and promote the ethical standards and principles defined in the *Chicago History Museum Code of Ethics (the Code)*.

We will adhere to applicable laws and interpret the *Code* in a manner consistent with these laws. All current and future Museum policies should be written and implemented in a manner consistent with the *Code*. At the time of adoption of the *Code*, the following laws and Museum policies provide specific guidance for its interpretation and implementation.

- Illinois Special Charter Not For Profit Corporations Act
- Illinois Revenue Act
- Internal Revenue Code
- Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act
- Americans with Disabilities Act
- Occupational Safety and Health Act
- Whistleblower Protection Program, OSHA section 11c
- Bylaws of the Chicago Historical Society
- Policy and Procedures for Ethical and Financial Complaints
- Chicago Historical Society Employee Guide
- Harassment Policy
- Computer Use Policy
- Collecting Policy
- Deaccession Policy
- Loan Policy
- Volunteer Handbook
- *Claiming Chicago, Shaping Our Future: A Vision for the Chicago History Museum*

The Chicago History Museum and individual trustees, staff, and volunteers of the Museum, as applicable, are guided by codes of ethics promulgated by associated professional organizations. We recognize the following codes of ethics and professional principles to the extent that they do not conflict with the *Code*. The American Association of Museums (AAM) is our accrediting body and therefore the *Code* will be interpreted in a manner consistent with the AAM *Code of Ethics for Museums*.

- American Association for State and Local History – *AASLH Statement of Professional Ethics*
- International Council of Museums – *ICOM Code of Ethics for Museums*
- American Society for Public Administration – *ASPA Code of Ethics*
- Panel on the Nonprofit Sector – *Principles for Good Governance and Ethical Practice: A Guide for Charities and Foundations*
- American Library Association – *Code of Ethics of the American Library Association*
- American Library Association Rare Books and Manuscripts Section – *ACRL Code of Ethics for Special Collections Librarians*

- Society of American Archivists – *A Code of Ethics for Archivists*
- Curator’s Committee of the AAM – *A Code of Ethics for Curators*
- American Historical Association – *Statement on Standards of Professional Conduct*
- Oral History Association – *Oral History Evaluation Guidelines*
- Chicago History Museum – *Proposed Ethical Guidelines for Biohistorical Research*
- Registrar’s Committee of the AAM – *Code of Ethics for Registrars*
- American Institute of Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works – *AIC Code of Ethics and Guidelines for Practice*
- National Association for Museum Exhibition of the AAM – *NAME Code of Ethics*
- Committee on Education of the AAM – *Excellence and Equity: Education and the Public Dimension of Museums*
- Committee on Education of the AAM – *Excellence in Practice: Museum Education Principles and Standards*
- Committee on Audience Research and Evaluation of the AAM – *Professional Standards for the Practice of Audience Research and Evaluation in Museums*
- Public Relations Society of America – *Public Relations Society of America Code of Ethics*
- American Marketing Association – *AMA Code of Ethics*
- Association for Volunteer Administration – *Professional Ethics in Volunteer Administration*
- Museum Store Association – *Museum Store Association Code of Ethics*
- Illinois Supreme Court – *Illinois Rules of Professional Conduct*

**Approved by the Executive Committee, June 11, 2009**

**Approved by the Board of Trustees, July 22, 2009**

**Amended and approved by the Board of Trustees, January 22, 2014**