



Historians Striving for Excellence

Association of Public Historians of New York State

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The Association of Public Historians of New York State

APHNYS Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct

Preamble

The Code of Ethics sets forth **guidelines** of professional conduct expected of all members of the Association of Public Historians of New York State. It introduces new members of the association to those standards, reminds experienced members of their professional responsibilities, and serves as a model for institutional policies. It also is intended to inspire public confidence in the association and profession.

This Code provides an **ethical framework** to guide members of the association. It does not provide the solution to specific problems.

The primary goal of public historian-professionals is to preserve, protect, promote and present the history and heritage of their communities and in doing so, provide a valuable connection of this local historical experience to the greater context of the history of New York State. Public historians also advise on the care, control, preservation, and administration of historical artifacts and documents.

The Association of Public Historians of New York State promotes ongoing discussion of ethics and professional conduct at conferences, workshops, meetings, and in our publications as a best practice of the profession as a whole.

Public Historians' Responsibility to Local Government and the Public

Public Historians have a responsibility to perform work competently, diligently, creatively, and independently in pursuit of their local government's interest, and a corollary responsibility to assure that such performance is consistent with their service to the public interest.

This code recognizes that "the public" may be defined in multiple and sometimes competing ways and that "public interest" is a fluid concept often formulated within the context of particular situations and subject to continuous debate. Nonetheless, ethical practice implies a responsibility to serve the public interest, as conscientiously determined in any given situation, and requires certain basic principles of professional conduct.

Public Historians...

1. Serve as advocates for the preservation, care, and accessibility of historical resources, artifacts and records of all kinds, including intangible cultural resources.
2. Respect the decisions of an employing government concerning objectives and nature of professional service to be performed unless such performance involves conduct which is illegal, immoral, or unethical.

Working to promote the heritage and history of New York State

Responsibility to Local Government and the Public (continued)

3. Exercise independent professional judgment on behalf of an employing government.
4. Stay current regarding historical research and investigations within their jurisdiction.
5. While in office, should not personally acquire historical manuscripts or unique artifacts that relate to the history of their jurisdiction. Such acquisitions can cause a conflict of interest. Accordingly, a Public Historian's obligation is first to his/her appointing jurisdiction.
6. Acknowledge that all collections, documents, objects, files, artifacts, equipment, and any other assets of any type or kind entrusted to a local historian, or under their care are the property of the local government.
7. Refrain from collecting three-dimensional artifacts or museum pieces but will instead refer the donor of such items to a chartered or incorporated historical society, museum, public library, or other appropriate institution within the community.
8. Do not keep or store public collections in their homes but rather, to secure government ownership, ensure security and preservation, and allow public access, will utilize an appropriate government office or arrange (or contract for) space in a public or semi-public location within the community, such as a chartered or incorporated historical society, museum, public library, or higher education institution.
9. Cooperate with chartered or incorporated historical societies and museums in carrying out programs of local, regional, and statewide significance for the public.
10. May serve as officers or trustees of chartered or incorporated historical societies and museums, with or without vote as determined by the organization, but not serve as President, except in temporary or emergency situations. Public Historians may also serve as an advisor to such groups.
11. Do not solicit prospective employment or clients through the use of false or misleading claims, harassment, or duress.
12. Do not accept or continue to perform work that is beyond his or her professional competence.
13. Do not offer professional services by stating or implying an ability to influence decisions by improper means.
14. Do not perform work if there is an actual, apparent, or reasonably foreseeable conflict of interest, or an appearance of impropriety, without full written disclosure to the affected employing government or client.
15. Are obligated not to disclose information gained in a professional relationship when the employing government or client has requested such information to be held confidential.
16. Do not use the power of any office or professional relationship to seek or obtain a special advantage that is not in the public interest.

Public Historians' Responsibility to the Profession and Colleagues

Public Historians should contribute to the development of the historical profession by advancing knowledge. More broadly, members should respect the professional views of their colleagues and peers in all professional fields. Public Historians should strive to increase the diversity of the profession to more closely reflect the demographics of society. Equally important, Public Historians should strive to increase public understanding of the role, responsibilities and practices of the profession.

Public Historians...

1. Carry out historical research and present historical evidence with integrity.
2. Have a working knowledge of the methods, principles and standards of the historical profession as appropriate to projects undertaken for employing governments and clients.
3. Approach each research problem as unique, examine which techniques serve best for the application, and use methods appropriate for each situation.
4. Analyze each research problem within the appropriate body of scholarship, recognizing that research-based decisions and actions may have long-term consequences.

Public Historians' Responsibility to the Profession and Colleagues (continued)

5. Share the results of experience and research that contribute to the body of public historical knowledge.
6. Review the work of other professionals in a fair, considerate, and respectful manner.
7. Contribute time and information to the professional development and knowledge of students, interns, volunteers, beginning professionals, and other colleagues.
8. Welcome opportunities to represent cultural diversity in his or her work and to enfold members of underrepresented groups into the profession or local heritage efforts.

The Public Historian's Self-Responsibility

High standards of professional integrity, knowledge, and proficiency are the hallmarks of excellence in public history.

Public Historians...

1. Represent professional qualifications and education accurately and fully.
2. Incorporate continuing education and learning into his or her professional development.
3. Respect the rights of others.
4. Do not discriminate against others.
5. Do not commit a wrongful act which adversely affects his or her professional fitness.