



# SOCIETY FOR AMERICAN ARCHAEOLOGY

## **Our Ethical Principles, Our Actions: Member Responsibilities in a Time of Change**

Members of the Society for American Archaeology subscribe to the Society’s Principles of Archaeological Ethics, which are intended to guide our actions as professionals. In times of change, uncertainty, and challenges to our values, we can turn to this foundational document to develop responses congruent with these principles. Some of our principles pertain primarily to our responsibilities within the archaeological community, while others pertain to our conduct within and outside the archaeological community, with stakeholders, and with the general public. Based on these latter principles, the Board of the Society for American Archaeology has unanimously approved the following short guide for its members.

**Principle No. 1, Stewardship**, calls upon all members of the Society for American Archaeology to be “both caretakers of and advocates for the archaeological record for the benefit of all people,” and “to use the specialized knowledge they gain to promote public understanding and support for its long-term preservation.”

*As members, we will therefore oppose any initiatives to weaken the present legal protections of archaeological sites and materials, be these through legislative process, rewriting of agency regulations, or other means. Moreover, our stewardship responsibilities require that we support and defend initiatives aimed at mitigating the impacts on cultural heritage of accelerating climate disruptions.*

**Principle No. 3, Commercialization**, states “that the buying and selling of objects out of archaeological context is contributing to the destruction of the archaeological record on the American continents and around the world.” It also reminds members that they “should discourage, and should themselves avoid, activities that enhance the commercial value of archaeological objects, especially objects that are not curated in public institutions or readily available for scientific study, public interpretation, and display.”

*As members, we will therefore strenuously resist any efforts to reduce the current effectiveness of federal enforcement of curbs on imports of illicitly obtained antiquities and advocate for creation and renewal of bilateral agreements banning such trade and other forms of trafficking in archaeological materials. Moreover, we will campaign for increased vigilance and enforcement in this area.*

**Principle No. 2, Accountability**, requires “an acknowledgment of public accountability and a commitment to make every reasonable effort, in good faith, to consult actively with affected group(s), with the goal of establishing a working relationship that can be beneficial to all parties involved.” **Principle No. 4, Public Education and Outreach**, enjoins members to “reach out to, and participate in cooperative efforts with others interested in the archaeological record with the aim of improving the preservation, protection, and interpretation of the record.” As part of this, we are urged to “enlist public support for the stewardship of the archaeological record.” Principle 4 identifies many publics for outreach, including “students and teachers; Native Americans and other ethnic, religious, and cultural groups who find in the archaeological record important aspects of their cultural heritage; lawmakers and government officials; reporters, journalists, and others involved in the media; and the general public.”

Over the three decades since these principles were drafted, and especially since the passage in the United States of the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act of 1990, archaeologists working in the Americas have deepened their commitments to Principles 2 and 4 in communicating and working collaboratively with local, descendant, Indigenous, and other communities, and for recruiting members of these communities into archaeology.

*As members, we will therefore continue, and even intensify, our public outreach and education to all communities. We are especially mindful of the power of common cause in stewardship we have found with indigenous and other descendant communities, and we will continue to nurture mutually respectful relationships to accomplish our common goals. Moreover, we will find ways that we as individuals or groups can communicate with legislators, media representatives, or the general public concerning the value of our archaeological heritage and the workability of historic properties protection in all forms of development.*

**Principle No. 9, Safe Educational and Workplace Environments**, urges members to “act to maintain safe and respectful work and learning environments” and to be aware of laws “that pertain to harassment and assault based upon sex, gender identity, sexual orientation, ethnicity, disability, national origin, religion, or marital status.”

*As members, we will therefore continue to bear these legal protections in mind and support them. We will also bear in mind that, in our increasingly diverse profession and society, some members of our educational and professional communities and some of our collaborating partners may be more subject to incidents of hostility or violence. We will therefore seek ways to support and ensure the safety of all our colleagues in our educational and workplace settings.*