



## CODE OF ETHICS

[Adopted by the General Assembly in its XIII<sup>th</sup> session in Beijing (China) on 6 September 1996]

### INTRODUCTION

- A. A code of ethics for archivists should establish high standards of conduct for the archival profession.  
  
It should introduce new members of the profession to those standards, remind experienced archivists of their professional responsibilities and inspire public confidence in the profession.
- B. The term archivists as used in this code is intended to encompass all those concerned with the control, care, custody, preservation and administration of archives.
- C. Employing institutions and archive services should be encouraged to adopt policies and practices that facilitate the implementation of this code.
- D. This code is intended to provide an ethical framework for guidance of members of the profession, and not to provide specific solutions to particular problems.
- E. The principles are all accompanied by a commentary; principles and commentary taken together constitute the Code of Ethics.
- F. The code is dependent upon the willingness of archival institutions and professional associations to implement it. This may take the form of an educational effort and the establishment of machinery to provide guidance in cases of doubt, to investigate unethical conduct, and if considered appropriate, to apply sanctions.

### CODE

1. Archivists should protect the integrity of archival material and thus guarantee that it continues to be reliable evidence of the past.

The primary duty of archivists is to maintain the integrity of the records in their care and custody. In the accomplishment of this duty they must have regard to the legitimate, but sometimes conflicting, rights and interests of employers, owners, data subjects and users, past, present and future. The objectivity and impartiality of archivists is the measure of their professionalism. They should resist pressure from any source to manipulate evidence so as to conceal or distort facts.

2. Archivists should appraise, select and maintain archival material in its historical, legal and administrative context, thus retaining the principle of provenance, preserving and making evident the original relationships of documents.

Archivists must act in accordance with generally accepted principles and practice. Archivists must perform their duties and functions in accordance with archival principles, with regard to the creation, maintenance and disposition of current and semi-current records, including electronic and multimedia records, the selection and acquisition of records for archival custody, the safeguarding, preservation and conservation of archives in their care, and the arrangement, description, publication and making available for use of those documents. Archivists should appraise records impartially basing their judgment on a thorough knowledge of their institution's administrative requirements and acquisitions policies. They should arrange and describe records selected for



retention in accordance with archival principles (namely the principle of provenance and the principle of original order) and accepted standards, as rapidly as their resources permit. Archivists should acquire records in accordance with the purposes and resources of their institutions. They should not seek or accept acquisitions when this would endanger the integrity or security of records; they should cooperate to ensure the preservation of these records in the most appropriate repository. Archivists should cooperate in the repatriation of displaced archives.

3. Archivists should protect the authenticity of documents during archival processing, preservation and use.

Archivists should ensure that the archival value of records, including electronic or multimedia records is not impaired in the archival work of appraisal, arrangement and description, and of conservation and use. Any sampling should be carried out according to carefully established methods and criteria. Replacement of originals with other formats should be done in the light of the legal, intrinsic and information value of the records. Where restricted documents have been temporarily removed from a file, this fact should be made known to the user.

4. Archivists should ensure the continuing accessibility and intelligibility of archival materials.

Archivists should select documents to be kept or to be destroyed primarily to save essential testimony of the activity of the person or the institution which produced and accumulated the documents but also bearing in mind changing research needs. Archivists should be aware that acquiring documents of dubious origin, however interesting, could encourage an illegal commerce. They should cooperate with other archivists and law enforcement agencies engaged in apprehending and prosecuting persons suspected of theft of archival records.

5. Archivists should record, and be able to justify, their actions on archival material.

Archivists should advocate good recordkeeping practices throughout the life-cycle of documents and cooperate with record creators in addressing new formats and new information management practices. They should be concerned not only with acquiring existing records, but also ensure that current information and archival systems incorporate from the very beginning procedures appropriate to preserve valuable records. Archivists negotiating with transferring officials or owners of records should seek fair decisions based on full consideration – when applicable – the following factors: authority to transfer, donate, or sell; financial arrangements and benefits; plans for processing; copyright and conditions of access. Archivists should keep a permanent record documenting accessions, conservation and all archival work done.

6. Archivists should promote the widest possible access to archival material and provide an impartial service to all users.

Archivists should produce both general and particular finding aids as appropriate, for all of the records in their custody. They should offer impartial advice to all, and employ available resources to provide a balanced range of services. Archivists should answer courteously and with a spirit of helpfulness all reasonable inquiries about their holdings, and encourage the use of them to the greatest extent possible, consistent with institutional policies, the preservation of holdings, legal considerations, individual rights, and donor agreements. They should explain pertinent restrictions to potential users, and apply them equitably. Archivists should discourage unreasonable restrictions on access and use but may suggest or accept as a condition for acquisition clearly stated restrictions of limited duration. They should observe faithfully and apply impartially all agreements made at the time of acquisition, but, in the interest of liberalisation of access, should renegotiate conditions in accordance with changes of circumstance.



7. Archivists should respect both access and privacy, and act within the boundaries of relevant legislation.

Archivists should take care that corporate and personal privacy as well as national security are protected without destroying information, especially in the case of electronic records where updating and erasure are common practice. They must respect the privacy of individuals who created or are the subjects of records, especially those who had no voice in the use or disposition of the materials.

8. Archivists should use the special trust given to them in the general interest and avoid using their position to unfairly benefit themselves or others.

Archivists must refrain from activities which might prejudice their professional integrity, objectivity and impartiality. They should not benefit financially or otherwise personally to the detriment of institutions, users and colleagues. Archivists should not collect original documents or participate in any commerce of documents on their own behalf. They should avoid activities that could create in the public mind the appearance of a conflict of interest. Archivists may use their institutional holdings for personal research and publication, provided such work is done on the same terms as others using the same holdings. They should not reveal or use information gained through work with holdings to which access is restricted. They should not allow their private research and publication interests to interfere with the proper performance of the professional or administrative duties for which they are employed. When using the holdings of their institutions, archivists must not use their knowledge of the unpublished findings of researchers, without first notifying the researchers about the intended use by the archivist. They may review and comment on the work of others in their fields, including works based on documents of their own institutions. Archivists should not allow people outside the profession to interfere in their practice and obligations.

9. Archivists should pursue professional excellence by systematically and continuously updating their archival knowledge, and sharing the results of their research and experience.

Archivists should endeavour to develop their professional understanding and expertise, to contribute to the body of professional knowledge, and to ensure that those whose training or activities they supervise are equipped to carry out their tasks in a competent manner.

10. Archivists should promote the preservation and use of the world's documentary heritage, through working co-operatively with the members of their own and other professions.

Archivists should seek to enhance cooperation and avoid conflict with their professional colleagues and to resolve difficulties by encouraging adherence to archival standards and ethics. Archivists should cooperate with members of related professions on the basis of mutual respect and understanding.