



**AMERICAN ITALIAN HERITAGE ASSOCIATION AND
MUSEUM**

1227 Central Avenue, Albany NY 12205

518-435-1979

CODE OF ETHICS

PREFACE

The American Italian Heritage Museum was founded to broaden awareness of the contributions of Italian immigrants and their descendants to the culture and history of the United States of America. It seeks to achieve these goals by preserving and displaying artifacts that represent unique facets of the Italian-American experience; providing a venue for scholarly study; offering programs that appeal to the membership and the general public; facilitating outreach to other ethnic organizations and working with entities, such as the Chamber of Commerce, to deliver its message to the community at large.

Strict adherence to our Code of Ethics underlies the achievement of the aforementioned goals. In subscribing to this Code, the Museum assumes the responsibility for the members of its governing authority, volunteers and employees in the performance of Museum related duties by affirming its chartered purpose, ensuring prudent application of its resources and maintaining public confidence.

The great majority of this document is excerpted from the Code of Ethics for Museums adopted by the Board of Directors of the American Association of Museums. It has been adapted to meet the specific demands of the American Italian Heritage Museum.

The law provides the basic framework for Museum operations. As a nonprofit institution, the Museum complies with applicable local, state, and federal laws and international conventions, as well as with the specific legal standards governing trust responsibilities. This Code of Ethics

takes that compliance as given but legal standards are a minimum and the Museum takes affirmative steps to maintain integrity so as to warrant public confidence.

Loyalty to the mission of the Museum and to the public it serves is the essence of this Museum's work, whether volunteer or paid. Where conflicts of interest arise – actual, potential, or perceived – the duty of loyalty must never be compromised. No individual may use his or her position in this Museum for personal gain or to benefit another at the expense of the Museum, its mission, its reputation, and the society it serves.

II. MUSEUM GOVERNANCE

Trustee Responsibilities

General

The Board of Trustees of the Italian American Heritage Museum is the governing body of the institution. As such, it serves the public interest as it relates to the Museum, and is accountable to the public as well as to the institution. In most cases, the Board acts as the ultimate legal entity for the Museum, and is responsible for making and maintaining its general policies, standards, condition, and operational continuity. Trustees must be loyal to the purpose of the Museum, and must understand and respect the basic documents that provide for its establishment, character and governance.

Each Trustee should devote time and attention to the affairs of the Museum and ensure that the Museum and its governing board act in accordance with the basic documents and with applicable state and federal laws. Trustees must ensure that no policies or activities jeopardize the basic nonprofit status of the Museum, or reflect unfavorably upon it as an institution devoted to public service.

Trustees should not attempt to act in their individual capacities. All actions should be taken as a board, committee, or subcommittee, or otherwise in conformance with the bylaws or applicable resolutions. Trustees with special areas of interest within the Museum should understand that

advocacy for those interests should be advanced only within the framework of the Museum's interests as a whole.

Trustees should maintain Museum information in confidence when it concerns the administration or activities of the Museum and when it is not generally available to the public. This does not preclude public disclosure of information that is properly in the public domain, or information that should be released in fulfilling the Museum's accountability to the public.

Trustees hold the ultimate fiduciary responsibility for the Museum and for the protection and nurturing of its various assets: the collections and related documentation, the plant, financial assets, and the staff. They must develop and define the purposes and related policies of the institution, and ensure that all of the Museum's assets are properly and effectively used for public purposes.

The Board has strong obligations to provide the proper environment for the physical security and preservation of the collections, and to monitor and develop the financial structure of the Museum so that it continues to exist as an institution of vitality and quality. In keeping with their primary responsibility for the protection of the Museum's collection, Trustees should not jeopardize the collection by using it as collateral for a loan or by otherwise selling or mortgaging the collection in order to secure funds for operations, buildings, or expansion of the facility.

The Board should provide adequate financial protection for all Museum officials including themselves, staff, and volunteers so that no one will incur inequitable financial sacrifice or legal liabilities when performing duties for the Museum.

A vital responsibility of the Board concerns the Museum's chief executive, the President and Director. The selection of that executive and the continuing monitoring of his or her activities are primary Board responsibilities that cannot be delegated and must be diligently and thoughtfully fulfilled.

Trustees must maintain and update, as needed, the Collections Management Policy which governs use of the collections, including acquisitions, loans, and disposal of objects. In formulating policies covering the acceptance of objects or other materials as gifts and loans, the

Trustees must ensure that the Museum understands and respects the restrictions, conditions, and all other circumstances associated with gifts and loans.

Conflict of Interest

Individuals who are knowledgeable in fields related to Museum activities can be of great assistance to the Museum, but conflicts of interest or the appearance of such conflicts may arise because of these interests or activities.

A Museum Trustee should conduct all of his or her activities, including those relating to persons or businesses with whom the Trustee is closely associated, in such a way that no conflict will arise between the other interests and the policies, operations or interests of the Museum. The appearance of such conflict should also be avoided.

Staff members should not serve as Trustees. No Trustee should take personal advantage of information available to him or her because of his or her Board membership, and that should conflict develop between the needs of the individual and the Museum, those of the Museum will prevail.

No Trustee, person close to him or her, or individual who might act for him or her may acquire objects from the collections of the Museum.

When Trustees seek staff assistance for personal needs they should not expect that such help will be rendered to an extent greater than that available to a member of the general public in similar circumstances or with similar needs.

Whenever a matter arises for action by the Board, or the Museum engages in an activity where there is a possible conflict or the appearance of conflict between the interests of the Museum and an outside or personal interest of a Trustee or that of a person close to him or her, the outside interest of the Trustee should be made a matter of record. If the Trustee is present when a vote is taken in connection with such a question, the Trustee should abstain. In some circumstances, the Trustee should avoid discussing any planned actions, formally or informally, where there might appear to be personal benefit. If a case arises in which neither disclosure nor abstention appears to be sufficient, the only appropriate solution may be resignation.

A Museum Trustee should not take advantage of information he or she receives during service to the institution if personal use of such information could be financially detrimental to the Museum. Any such actions that might impair the reputation of the Museum also must be avoided. When a Trustee obtains information that could be of personal benefit, he or she should refrain from action until all issues have been reviewed by an appropriate representative of the Museum.

Trustees serve the Museum and its public. They should not attempt to derive any personal material advantages from their connection with the Museum. Trustees should use Museum property only for official purposes. While loans of objects by Trustees can be of great benefit to the Museum, it should be recognized that exhibition can enhance the value of the exhibited object.

The Trustee-President and Director Relationship

Trustees have an obligation to define the rights, powers, and duties of the President and Director of the Museum. They should work with the President and Director, who is their Chief Executive Officer, in all administrative matters, and deal with him or her openly and with candor. They should avoid giving directions to, acting on behalf of, communicating directly with, or soliciting administrative information from staff personnel, unless such actions are in accord with established procedure. Staff members should communicate with Trustees through the President and Director or with the President and Director's knowledge.

The Trustees must act as a full Board in appointing or dismissing a President and Director and the relationship between President and Director and Board must reflect the primacy of institutional goals over all personal or interpersonal considerations. The President and Director should attend all Board meetings and important committee meetings except executive sessions unless invited by the Chair.

The President and Director have an obligation to provide the Trustees with current and complete financial information in comprehensible form, to bring before the Board any matters involving policy questions not already determined, and to keep them informed on a timely basis of all other significant or substantial matters or intended actions affecting the institution.

The President and Director must carry out the policies established by the Trustees, and adhere to the budget approved by the Board.

Whenever it is necessary to deviate from established policies or to alter or exceed budget guidelines, the President and Director should notify the Board in advance and request appropriate approval.

III. THE STAFF

Staff Responsibilities

General

The Museum Board, staff and volunteers embrace fairness, inclusiveness, diversity, innovation and integrity and work to advance the mission of the Museum. Staff members include those who are employed by the Museum on a full-time, part-time, regular, and temporary.

All staff members are responsible for understanding the duties of their positions and executing those duties to the best of their abilities. The Museum promotes a working environment that values respect, fairness, and integrity. Its human resource policies are fair, establish clear expectations, and provide for meaningful and effective performance evaluation. Open communication among staff is highly valued.

To help all staff meet their potential and to sustain the Museum and encourage its growth, the senior staff model professional conduct and provide leadership, clarity, and respect for individuals and for diverse points of view.

Conflict of Interest

Museum staff should never abuse their official positions or their contacts within the museum community, compete with the Museum, or bring discredit or embarrassment to the Museum or to their profession in any activity, Museum-related or not. They should be prepared to accept the restrictions that are necessary to maintain public confidence in museums and in the museum profession. The terms and restrictions listed here, as well as the reporting procedures and

conditions of enforcement, should be read and clearly understood by all staff, interns and volunteers working with the Museum.

Gifts, Favors, Discounts, Dispensations

The Museum is committed to the highest ethical principles in all relationships with business suppliers. Any Museum staff member who is authorized to spend Museum funds should do so with impartiality, honesty, and with regard only to the best interests of the Museum.

Museum staff and others in a close relationship to them must not accept gifts, favors, loans, or other dispensations or things of more than minimal value that are available to them in connection with their duties for the Museum. Gifts of minimal value are deemed to be those novelty items with advertising identification affixed to them and a value of less than \$50. Gifts include discounts on personal purchases from suppliers who sell items or furnish services to the Museum, except where such discounts are regularly offered to the general public. Gifts can also include offers of outside employment or other advantageous arrangements. Gifts in questionable taste, such as lottery tickets or alcoholic beverages, should be declined in all instances, regardless of cost or value.

Museum staff should not accept meals, accommodations and travel services while on official business, except when it is clear that acceptance of such services will not compromise the professional judgment of the staff member or the reputation of the Museum.

Responsibility to Museum Property, Real and Intangible

No staff member should use, outside Museum premises or, for personal gain, any object or item that is a part of the Museum's collection or under the guardianship of the Museum, or use any other property, supplies or resources of the Museum, except for the official business of the Museum. The name and reputation of this Museum are valuable assets and should not be exploited either for personal advantage or the advantage of any other person or entity.

Information about the administrative or non-scholarly activities of the Museum that staff may acquire in the course of their duties which is not generally known or available to the public, must be treated as information proprietary to the Museum. Such information should not be used for personal advantage or other purposes. Staff members are responsible for maintaining the security

of confidential records and information, and the privacy of individuals or groups who support the Museum.

Staff members should be circumspect in referring members of the public to outside suppliers to the Museum. Whenever possible, more than a single qualified source should be named in order to avoid the appearance of personal favoritism in referrals.

Outside Volunteer Activities

Staff members are encouraged to participate in voluntary outside activities with community groups or public service organizations. If a staff member volunteers for an organization or museum and s/he could appear to be acting in an official capacity as a member of the Museum staff, disclosure is recommended to avoid possible misrepresentation. Museum professionals should conduct themselves so that their activities on behalf of community or public service organizations do not reflect adversely on the reputation or integrity of the Museum.

When a member of the Museum staff speaks out on a public issue, s/he should make sure to do so as an

individual. It is important to avoid the appearance of speaking or acting in an official capacity or on the

Museum's behalf.

Responsibility to the Collection

Members of the Museum staff cannot acquire objects from the collections owned by or on loan to the Museum.

IV. THE VOLUNTEERS

General

The Museum's many volunteers are in direct contact with visitors on a daily basis and may be seen as "the face" of the Museum, to their peers and the public. When acting on behalf of the Museum, volunteers understand their duties and execute them to the best of their abilities. They convey the mission and goals of the Museum, and as its representatives, refrain from promoting their own institutions or businesses.

It is incumbent upon the paid staff to be supportive of volunteers, receive them as fellow workers, and willingly provide them with appropriate training and opportunity for their intellectual enrichment.

Volunteers have a responsibility to the Museum as well, especially those with access to the Museum's collections, programs, and privileged information. Access to the Museum's inner activities is a privilege and the lack of material compensation for effort expended on behalf of the Museum in no way frees the volunteer from adherence to the standards that apply to paid staff. Volunteers must work toward the betterment of the institution and not for personal gain other than the natural gratification and enrichment inherent in museum participation.

Although the Museum provides special privileges and benefits to its volunteers, they should not accept gifts, favors, discounts, loans or other dispensations, or things of value that accrue to them from other parties in connection with carrying out duties for the Museum. Conflict of interest restrictions and gift policies placed upon the paid staff of the Museum must be explained to volunteers and observed by them. Volunteers must respect the confidentiality of any inside information to which their volunteer activities give them access.

V. MUSEUM MANAGEMENT POLICY

Personnel Practices and Equal Opportunity

In all matters related to staffing practices, the standard should be ability in the relevant profession. In these matters, as well as Trustee selection, management practices, volunteer opportunity, collection usage, and relationship with the public at large, decisions cannot be made on the basis of discriminatory factors such as race, creed, sex, age, disability, gender or sexual orientation.

The Museum recognizes that diversity is a significant force within its own social fabric and in the community and encourages employment opportunities and accessibility at the Museum for all people. The Museum promotes inclusiveness, and its staff, board and volunteers strive to ensure that diversity is reflected in its programs and committees. The Museum promotes diversity in its hiring, retention, promotion and board recruitment efforts and in the programs it develops for its constituencies.

Ownership of Scholarly Material

The objects in the Museum's collection, their documentation, and all additional documentation developed subsequent to their acquisition, are the property of the Museum.

Any and all materials or items developed, written, designed, drawn, painted, constructed, or installed by staff while carrying out their responsibilities as employees of the Museum, are considered to be the property of the Museum, with the Museum having the rights to all said property.

The Museum has the right to copyright or patent any and all such materials produced by its staff while carrying out their job responsibilities as employees of the Museum, when it deems it appropriate to do so. The Museum is entitled to receive any and all fees, royalties or honoraria earned in conjunction with any and all materials or items produced by staff, while carrying out their job responsibilities as employees of the Museum.

Individual staff should not accept any fees, royalties, honoraria or other payments for any materials or items that s/he developed, wrote, designed, drew, painted, constructed, or installed, either alone or with other staff, while carrying out his/her job responsibilities as a Museum employee.

Museum staff may not duplicate materials developed at the Museum, by them, or by any other staff or contractor to the Museum, for the purpose of resale or personal profit, including the use of artwork, written materials, graphics, three-dimensional design, electronic and mechanical design, audiovisuals, and computer software.

The Museum's ownership of such intellectual property, which was created while an individual was an employee of the Museum, continues after s/he leaves the Museum for any reason, including retirement.

Fundraising Practices

Fundraising is a vital component of the financial health of this museum. Staff and volunteers involved in raising monies or soliciting other contributions or gifts-in-kind on behalf of the Museum, must do so with honesty as to the need for such contributions and must use donations only for the donor's intended purposes. Gifts should be solicited without the promise of opportunities or advantages not offered to all donors by previously defined guidelines. Staff and volunteers should hold confidential and leave intact, all lists, records, and documents acquired in connection with their fundraising efforts on behalf of the Museum.

VI. THE COLLECTIONS

Management, Maintenance and Conservation

Museums generally derive their mission from their collections, and these holdings constitute the primary difference between museums and other kinds of institutions. A museum's obligation to its collection is paramount. Each object is an integral part of a cultural or scientific composite. That context also includes a body of information about the object that establishes its proper place and importance and without which the value of the object is diminished. The maintenance of this

information, in orderly and retrievable form, is critical to the collection and is a central obligation of those charged with collection management.

Acquisition and Disposal

No collection exists in isolation. Its course generally will be influenced by changes in cultural, scholarly, or educational trends and specializations developing in other institutions, policy, and law regarding the traffic in various kinds of objects, the status of plant and animal populations, and the desire to improve the collection.

In the delicate area of acquisition and disposal of museum objects, the Museum must weigh carefully the interests of the public for which it holds the collection in trust, the donor's intent in the broadest sense, the interests of the scholarly and the cultural community, and the institution's own financial well-being.

The Museum must continue to develop policies that allow it to conduct its collection activities within the complexities of existing legislation and with the reasonable certainty that its approach is consistent with the spirit and intent of such legislation. It is incumbent upon appropriate Museum staff to review and understand the Museum's Collections Policy and procedures as adopted by the Board of Trustees, when carrying out their job responsibilities.

Objects collected by the Museum must be relevant to its purposes and activities, be accompanied by a valid legal title, preferably be unrestricted but with any limitations clearly described, and be properly cataloged, conserved, stored, or exhibited. In general, objects should be kept as long as they retain their physical integrity, authenticity, and usefulness for the Museum's purposes.

The Museum maintains a process for considering the origin of objects it acquires that will allow it to acquire or accept an object only when it can determine with reasonable certainty that it has not been immediately derived from illicit trade and that its acquisition does not contribute to the continuation of that trade.

When disposing of an object, the Museum must determine that it has the legal right to do so. When mandatory restrictions accompany the acquisition, these must be observed unless it can be clearly shown that adherence to such restrictions is impossible or substantially detrimental to the

institution. A museum can only be relieved from such restrictions by an appropriate legal procedure. When special requests or instructions accompany the acquisition, they must be carefully considered, and consultation with the donor or his/her heirs should be attempted.

Members of the Museum community (staff, volunteers, officers, board members) and their relatives may not acquire or otherwise benefit from the disposition of deaccessioned artifacts. Non-artifact materials or supplies of minimal value that the Museum cannot sell and that must be discarded may be given to anyone associated with the Museum or to the public.

While the governing entity bears final responsibility for the collections, including the acquisition and disposal process, the curatorial and administrative staffs, together with their technical associates, are best qualified to assess object's pertinence to the collections or the Museum's programs. Only for clear and compelling reasons, is an object to be disposed of against the advice of the Museum's professional staff.

Appraisals

Donations are tax deductible to the extent of the law; however, the Museum cannot appraise items for a private owner. Donors, therefore, are expected to get independent appraisals for the objects they are donating.

Availability of Collections

Although the public must have reasonable access to the collections on a nondiscriminatory basis, the Museum assumes as a primary responsibility the safeguarding of their materials and, therefore, may regulate access to them. Some parts of the collections may be set aside for the active scholarly pursuits of staff members, but normally only for the duration of an active research effort.

The judgment and recommendation of professional staff members, regarding the use of the collections, must be given utmost consideration. In formulating their recommendations, staff must let their judgment be guided by two primary objectives: The continued physical integrity and safety of the object or collections, and high scholarly or educational purposes.

In keeping with the Museum's responsibility to provide continuous curatorial and protective care for its collections, it must protect such collections from the potential damage of the effects of smoke, beverage, or food service around exposed collections, or the dangers of inappropriate building environmental conditions.

Truth in Presentation

It is the responsibility of the Museum's professionals to use Museum collections for the dissemination of knowledge. Intellectual honesty and objectivity in the presentation of objects are the duty of every Museum professional. The stated origin of the objects or attribution of work must reflect the thorough and honest investigation of the curator and must yield promptly to change with the advent of new facts or analysis. Museum professionals must use their best efforts to ensure that exhibits are honest and objective expressions and do not perpetuate myths or stereotypes. Exhibits must provide with candor and tact an honest and meaningful view of the subject. Sensitive areas such as ethnic and social history are of most critical concern.

The research and preparation of an exhibition will often lead the professional to develop a point of view or interpretive sense of the material. That individual must clearly understand the point where sound professional judgment ends and personal bias begins. S/he must be content that the resultant presentation is the product of objective judgment.