

CODE OF ETHICS



Museum of Natural and Cultural History
University of Oregon
Eugene, Oregon

Todd Braje, Executive Director

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

- I. INTRODUCTION
- II. GOVERNANCE AND MUSEUM ADVISORY COUNCIL
- III. PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL CONDUCT
 - A. Conflict of Interest, Including Outside Employment, Consulting, and Creative Activities
 - B. Confidentiality
 - C. Communications and Media
 - D. Financial Arrangements and Claims
 - E. Personal Relationships and Harassment
 - F. Gifts, Favors, Discounts, and Dispensation
 - G. Extracurricular Activities
 - H. Volunteers and Members of Support Groups
 - I. Responsibility to Museum Property, Real and Intangible
- IV. ADMINISTRATION AND MANAGEMENT
- V. COLLECTIONS
 - A. Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act
 - B. Commercial Use
 - C. Private Collections
 - D. Authentication, Valuation, and Dealing
 - E. Field Work and Collecting
- VI. RESEARCH
- VII. EARNED INCOME AND DEVELOPMENT
 - A. Corporate Support
 - B. Museum Store
 - C. Fundraising
- VIII. PUBLIC PROGRAMS
- IX. INTERPRETATION OF THIS CODE OF ETHICS

SOURCES

APPENDICES

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July 25, 2014 (Revised: October 31, 2014, January 2025)

I. INTRODUCTION

Although it traces its origins to the founding of the university in 1876, the University of Oregon Museum of Natural & Cultural History (MNCH) was officially established as the Oregon State Museum of Anthropology by act of the Oregon Legislature in 1935. In 1936, the Oregon State Board of Higher Education voted to approve the creation of a Museum of Natural History at the University of Oregon. This Code of Ethics reflects the Museum's statewide mandate, and its regional, national, and international significance. At the same time, the Code of Ethics recognizes the Museum's vital role as a center for research and education within the University of Oregon and the State of Oregon.

The Museum's vision and mission are grounded in scholarship, stewardship, and interpretation of collections that are held in trust for the public.

Vision: The Museum is a leader among university museums of natural and cultural history, a catalyst for intellectual discovery, a contributor to the University's mission, and a connection to our research and collections for diverse constituents.

Mission: The Museum enhances knowledge of Earth's environments and cultures, inspiring stewardship of our collective past, present, and future.

The MNCH is committed to adhering to the highest standards and practices of the museum and research professions. This Code of Ethics includes responsibilities and guidelines to be followed by all who are associated with the Museum, and facilitates resolution of ethical issues and concerns.

This Code of Ethics focuses on broad ethical issues, rather than on specifics of the Museum's management of collections, programs, services, and personnel. In all their activities, Museum personnel should act with integrity, following the ethical principles outlined in this code. As part of the University of Oregon, a public nonprofit educational institution, the MNCH complies with all applicable local, state, and federal laws; international conventions; and other mandated responsibilities.

By clarifying ethical responsibilities, the MNCH strives to foster a better understanding of the respective roles and collective mission of everyone who works at the Museum or is affiliated with it, including staff, volunteers, governing authorities, University faculty, affiliates, advisors, and associates. Hereafter, "Personnel" refers to all such individuals.

As University of Oregon employees, the Museum's personnel, and others in a position to represent the Museum in an official capacity, are required to review, understand, and consistently practice ethical standards, and comply with Oregon Government Ethics Law, as outlined in ORS Chapter 244. All personnel should be familiar with the International Council of Museums (ICOM) Code of Professional Ethics and the American Alliance of Museums (AAM) Code of Ethics for Museums (see Appendices).

II. GOVERNANCE AND MUSEUM ADVISORY COUNCILS

The Museum's collections are held in trust for the people of the State of Oregon. Because the MNCH is an integral member of the University of Oregon, the Museum's governing authority is the University of Oregon Board of Trustees. The Board of Trustees delegates authority to the University President, who in turn assigns direct supervision of the MNCH to the Executive Vice-Provost for Academic Administration. Responsibility for institutional management, from long-range planning to day-to-day operations, is delegated to the Museum's Executive Director. Members of the Museum Advisory Council (MAC) provide advice and support to the Executive Director on matters of collections, public programs, long-range planning, and development, in alignment with the Museum's mission.

Individuals with governing and advisory responsibilities, including the Museum Advisory Council, should:

- Understand and support the Museum's mission;
- Comply with applicable local, state, and federal laws and international conventions;
- Endeavor to serve the best interests of the Museum and the public without regard to ideological preference;
- Use discretion when sharing information provided to them, their discussions, and the advice given to the Executive Director;
- Not use or attempt to use their position to obtain financial gain or avoid financial expenses. This also applies to a relative or member of the individual's household, or any business with which the individual, relative, or member of the household is associated, if the financial gain or avoidance of financial detriment would not otherwise be available except for the individual's position with respect to the Museum;
- Neither solicit nor accept personal gifts from individuals or corporations where a conflict of interest exists or might appear to exist;
- Avoid actual and potential conflicts of interest and the appearance of conflicts of interest. In the event that an actual, potential, or apparent conflict of interest arises, the individual shall (a) disclose it in writing to the Executive Director; and (b) abstain from deliberations and voting on the matter, to the extent appropriate to avoid an apparent conflict or as otherwise required by law in the event of an actual conflict.

Members of the Museum Advisory Councils shall never speak or hold themselves out as speaking on behalf of the Museum or the University, unless specifically called upon to do so by the Executive Director, or designee.

III. PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL CONDUCT

The MNCH is a visible and highly reputable institution, whose personnel hold a position of public esteem. Personnel are entitled to a measure of personal independence and academic freedom, consistent with professional and personal responsibilities. To the public, Museum personnel are never wholly separable from the MNCH. Any Museum-related action by an individual may reflect on the image of the Museum or be attributed to it. The following ethical issues pertain specifically to Museum work; personnel should keep them in mind at all times.

A. Conflict of Interest, including Outside Employment, Consulting, and Creative Activities:

Personnel shall not use or attempt to use their positions to obtain financial gain or avoid financial expenses. This also applies to a relative or member of the individual's household, or any business with which the individual, relative, or member of the household is associated, if the financial gain or avoidance of financial detriment would not otherwise be available except for the individual's position with respect to the Museum. Personnel should also familiarize themselves with University of Oregon policy on:

- Potential conflicts of interest: <https://policies.uoregon.edu/vol-1-governance/ch-2-legal-affairs/conflict-interest-conflict-commitment-and-outside-activities>

Staff has an obligation to share knowledge and professional expertise, and to render professional services. Any outside consulting work must strictly follow current University policy including approval from the Museum's Executive Director, or designee. Any materials written, designed, or produced for the Museum on official Museum time, while the creator is paid by the Museum, are the property of the Museum. However, the creator may make use of these materials and assign copyright to outside parties for the purpose of scholarly publications or public education purposes.

B. Confidentiality: All records created or maintained by the Museum, including records that contain information about collections, security, finances, research site locations or sensitive cultural properties, and additional areas of the Museum are subject to the Oregon Public Records Law, although some records may be exempt from disclosure. Personnel shall use discretion when sharing information provided to them in the course of their work at the Museum.

C. Communications and Media: Interviews, meetings, electronic, and telephone conversations should always be straightforward, professional, and courteous. In general, media contacts about collections, exhibits, and events are handled by designated marketing/communications staff. Other personnel should always report unsolicited media contacts to marketing/communications staff.

D. Financial Arrangements and Claims: Museum personnel who are authorized to spend Museum funds must do so with impartiality and honesty, within the regulations and guidelines of the Museum and the University. Claims such as travel reimbursements, hours of work/non-work, and accomplishments shall be reported accurately, and documented according to University regulations.

- E. **Personal Relationships and Harassment:** The Museum expects all personnel to exercise good judgment in forming close personal relationships with other Museum personnel. It is the policy of the MNCH to treat all personnel with respect and integrity. Personnel may refer to University documents for policies regarding harassment and discrimination: the Online Handbook for Managerial, Administrative, and Clerical Employees; and other applicable University of Oregon policies:
- Workplace Harassment and Discrimination Prevention: <https://policies.uoregon.edu/vol-5-human-resources/ch-11-human-resources-other/prohibited-discrimination-and-retaliation>
 - Conflicts of Interest and Abuses of Power: Sexual, Physically Intimate, or Romantic Relationships with Students: <https://policies.uoregon.edu/vol-5-human-resources/ch-4-workplace/conflicts-interest-and-abuses-power-sexual-physically-intimate>
- F. **Gifts, Favors, Discounts, and Dispensations:** Museum personnel shall not solicit or accept personal gifts, loans, or favors from individuals or corporations where a conflict of interest, or appearance of a conflict of interest, might exist. However, Museum personnel may accept reimbursement for expenses and honoraria in compliance with University policy. Gifts of equipment, property, or services donated directly to the Museum shall be reported to the University of Oregon Property Control Department.
- G. **Extracurricular Activities:** Personnel are encouraged to participate in voluntary outside activities with community groups and public service organizations. However, while they may note their title or affiliation in such activities, they shall not represent the Museum without the consent of the Executive Director, or designee.
- H. **Volunteers and Members of Support Groups:** Volunteers (including members of the Museum Advisory Councils) are privileged to share the mission and responsibilities of the Museum, and should adhere to the same standards that apply to paid personnel.
- I. **Responsibility to Museum Property, Real and Intangible:** The Museum's name and reputation are valuable assets and should not be exploited either for personal advantage or for the advantage of any other person, group, or organization. There will be no unauthorized use of the Museum's logos, ligature, or other representation, or misuse of any object that is part of the Museum's collection, or abuse of property such as equipment, vehicles, landscaping or grounds, supplies, or other resources.

IV. ADMINISTRATION AND MANAGEMENT

Museum administrators and managers shall create a work environment that encourages and nurtures productivity, belonging, and inclusion by all personnel. They shall ensure that professional standards and practices inform and guide Museum operations, and that staff members comply with University regulations and with AAM codes of ethics and management procedures developed for specific

positions. They shall provide opportunities for continuing education and training for staff and volunteers, to encourage personal growth, fulfillment, and foster the Museum's mission. They shall also take measures to ensure the safety of all personnel. The Museum and its administration shall never require personnel to act in a way that could reasonably be judged to be unsafe or unethical.

Personnel who prepare reports and budgets shall represent the information accurately and completely and in compliance with University rules and regulations, in particular:

- Financial Irregularities: <https://policies.uoregon.edu/financial-irregularities>

The administration is responsible for obtaining and maintaining accreditation by appropriate professional organizations and governmental entities.

V. COLLECTIONS

The Museum's obligation to its collection is paramount. Maintenance of collection information in orderly, retrievable form is a central obligation of collections personnel. Physical care and accessibility of the collections must be in keeping with professionally accepted standards. Collections should be accessible and utilized for the creation and dissemination of knowledge, without placing the collection at risk.

The MNCH Collections Management Policy covers the acquisition and disposal of objects. All personnel should review and understand the Museum's collections policy.

All objects accepted by the Museum should be properly documented, housed, conserved, protected, and maintained. Personnel shall delegate important curatorial, conservation, and other professional collections responsibilities to persons who have appropriate knowledge, training, and skill, and who are adequately supervised.

All items accepted by the Museum shall be relevant to its mission. They should be documented regarding provenance, identification, condition, and treatment. Accepted objects should have been legally acquired, with any limitations approved by the Executive Director, or designee.

The Museum shall be free to improve its collection through selective disposal and acquisition, in compliance with University and state guidelines and the Museum's Collections Policy, and to sacrifice specimens intentionally for valid analytical, educational, or other purposes, in compliance with the Responsible Research Policy. In general, objects shall be kept as long as they retain their physical integrity, authenticity, and usefulness for the Museum's purposes. In the unlikely event that the Museum sells or otherwise disposes of a deaccessioned object, any proceeds shall only be used for the care and preservation of collections.

Negotiations concerning acquisition of objects from members of the general public shall be conducted with scrupulous honesty. No object shall be deliberately or misleadingly identified or

appraised, to the benefit of the Museum, in order to acquire it, and no object shall be taken or retained on loan with the deliberate intention of improperly procuring it for the collections.

All personnel should be aware of additional ethical issues concerning collections:

- A. **Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act:** The Museum remains in compliance with the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA), which mandates that museums inventory their collections and repatriate certain materials, including human remains, funerary objects, sacred objects, and objects of cultural patrimony, to Native American tribes upon request, and maintain positive, open relationships with appropriate representatives of Native American groups. Furthermore, the Museum's 2025-2030 strategic plan works toward alignment with the *Standards for Museums with Native American Collections*.
- B. **Commercial Use:** In arranging for the manufacture and sale of replicas, reproductions, or other commercial items adapted from an object in the Museum's collections, all aspects of the venture should be carried out so as not to discredit the Museum's integrity or alter the intrinsic value of the original object. Commercial use shall abide by MNCH and university policies regarding royalties, reproductions, and the Museum store.
- C. **Private Collections:** No personnel shall compete with the Museum for collections or individual objects, or use their Museum affiliation to promote their own or an associate's personal collecting activities.
- D. **Authentication, Valuation, and Dealing:** Written certificates of authenticity or valuation and opinions on the monetary value of objects shall not be given by any personnel. Personnel shall not recommend any particular dealer, auctioneer, or other such person to a member of the public; however, it is acceptable practice to keep and distribute a list of reputable experts. No personnel shall participate in dealing (buying or selling for profit) of objects similar to those held in the Museum's collections.
- E. **Field Work and Collecting:** Field exploration, collecting, and excavation should be done in a legal and responsible manner, with the highest professional standards, under official permit and/or in consultation with tribal governments wherever required, and with no toleration of unethical practices.

VI. RESEARCH

Museum personnel should be familiar with and adhere to codes of ethics in their own fields of specialization. Also, Museum personnel should refer to University of Oregon ethics policies related to research:

- Financial Conflict of Interest in Research: <https://policies.uoregon.edu/vol-2-academics-instruction-research/ch-6-research-general/research-financial-conflict-interest>

- Allegations of Research Misconduct: <https://policies.uoregon.edu/vol-2-academics-instruction-research/ch-6-research-general/allegations-research-misconduct>
- Classified Research: <https://policies.uoregon.edu/vol-2-academics-instruction-research/ch-6-research-general/research-classified-research>

All research conducted on MNCH collections shall adhere to MNCH collections access and research policies: <https://mnch.uoregon.edu/collections-access>

Notes and associated materials from collections-based research by Museum personnel are the property of the Museum. Copies shall be made available to Museum researchers on their request should they leave the Museum's employment.

VII. EARNED INCOME AND DEVELOPMENT

MNCH programs should promote the public good rather than individual private gain. Revenue-producing activities that support and maintain high-quality Museum programs should be compatible with the Museum's mission.

- A. **Corporate Support:** The Museum may seek support from sources such as commercial firms and corporations. Personnel should ensure that the Museum's standards and objectives are not compromised by such relationships.
- B. **Museum Store:** The Museum store shall be a member of the AAM Museum Store Association, and shall adopt the Museum Store Association Code of Ethics. The Museum store shall not sell archaeological or paleontological specimens. Replicas shall be clearly and indelibly marked as such. The store shall not sell craft items, especially related to Indigenous heritage, of misleading or dubious origin.

Museum store activities and any other commercial activities of the Museum, and related publicity, should enhance the Museum's integrity. Sales items should be relevant to the Museum's mission, collections, and educational purpose, and should not compromise the quality of the collections.

- C. **Fundraising:** Personnel involved in fundraising and other development activities should do so with honesty as to the Museum's need. Fundraisers should vigorously pursue needed resources to support priority programs. Opportunities or advantages cannot be offered to prospective donors unless they are offered to all donors. Personnel shall ensure proper stewardship of charitable contributions, including timely reporting on the use and management of funds, and explicit consent of the donor before altering the conditions of a gift.
 - a. **University of Oregon Foundation Gift Acceptance Policy:** see policy document for details.

MNCH personnel shall follow confidentiality guidelines provided by the UO Foundation.

Personnel shall hold confidential and leave intact all lists, records, and documents acquired in

connection with their fundraising efforts on behalf of the MNCH. Subject to the Oregon Public Records law, the Museum seeks to maintain the confidentiality of donor information and prohibits its personnel from disclosing such confidential information, including but not limited to exchange or transfer of gift histories, refined or coded lists, and donor profiles. Personnel involved in fundraising shall work closely with the Executive Director and Development Officer; and shall follow appropriate cash and reporting procedures.

VII. PUBLIC PROGRAMS

The Museum's exhibits, education programs, and other interpretive and educational offerings are dedicated to equity in education and positive social impact and should encompass a variety of cultural, scientific, and intellectual themes and perspectives that will help visitors understand and appreciate natural and cultural history. Programs exemplify intellectual integrity, are founded on solid scholarship, include cultural consultations where appropriate, and are consistent with current knowledge and the mission and guiding principles of the Museum. Programs respect cultural diversity and pluralistic values, traditions, and concerns. The MNCH should actively seek to expand and diversify its audiences, and to collaborate with other UO departments, local and regional museums, and a range of organizations.

Personnel who implement public programs interact more frequently and directly with Museum audiences than any other Museum personnel. They should practice cultural humility and empathy and be courteous, respectful, and sensitive at all times and in all circumstances when engaging with members of the public.

IX. INTERPRETATION OF THIS CODE OF ETHICS

Problems of compliance and interpretation of this code of ethics shall in all cases be addressed to the Executive Director. Actual or perceived non-compliance by the Executive Director shall be referred to the Executive Director's superior or other appropriate University administrators tasked with implementing or enforcing the policy or policies implicated. The Executive Director shall form a temporary committee as needed to periodically review and revise this code of ethics.

SOURCES

Code of Ethics, Oklahoma Museum of Natural History, The University of Oklahoma, 1998

Jordan Schnitzer Museum of Art Code of Ethics, University of Oregon, n.d.

Code of Ethics, Thomas Burke Memorial Washington State Museum, 2025

Code of Ethics, Logan Museum of Anthropology, Beloit College, 2005

Code of Ethics, Florida Museum of Natural History, 2006

Code of Ethics, The College of Eastern Utah Prehistoric Museum, 2009

Strategic Plan and Cultural Responsibility, Michael C. Carlos Museum, 2025

Code of Ethics, The Florida Museum of Natural History

APPENDICES

ICOM Code of Professional Ethics

AAM Code of Ethics for Museums