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VIRGINIA  
ASSOCIATION  
of MUSEUMS

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## Code of Ethics for Museums

Museums preserve and transmit knowledge, culture and history for past, present and future generations. This places museums in an important position of trust in relation to their audiences, local communities, donors, partner organizations, sponsors and funders. Museums must make sound ethical judgements in all areas of work in order to maintain this trust.

Museums and those who work in and with them agree to uphold the following principles throughout their work:

### Public Engagement & Benefit

- Actively engage and work in partnership with existing audiences and reach out to new and diverse audiences.
- Treat everyone equally, with honesty and respect.
- Provide and generate accurate information for and with the public.
- Support freedom of speech and debate.
- Use collections for public benefit – for learning, inspiration and enjoyment.

### Stewardship of Collections

*For those museums that maintain a permanent collection.*

- Maintain and develop collections for current and future generations.
- Acquire, care for, exhibit and loan collections with transparency and competency in order to generate knowledge and engage the public with collections.
- Treat museum collections as cultural, scientific or historic assets, not financial assets.
- Accept or acquire an item only if the museum can provide adequate, continuing long-term care for the item and public access to it, without compromising standards of care and access relating to the existing collections.
- Reject any item for purchase, loan or donation if there is any suspicion that it was wrongfully taken during a time of conflict, stolen, illicitly exported or illicitly traded.

This Code of Ethics is based on the Code of Ethics of the Museums Association of the UK, and is used with permission. To view the full Museums Association Code of Ethics and other resources, go to their website at <https://www.museumsassociation.org/ethics>.

## **Individual & Institutional Integrity**

- Act in the public interest in all areas of work.
- Uphold the highest level of institutional integrity and personal conduct at all times.
- Build respectful and transparent relationships with partner organizations, governing bodies, staff and volunteers to ensure public trust in the museum's activities.
- Abide by a fair, consistent and transparent workforce policy for all those working in the museum, including those in unpaid positions.