

# **Stonewall National Museum & Archives**

## **Mission, Vision, Values and Code of Ethics**

Adopted by Board of Directors: October 6, 2020

### **Mission**

Stonewall National Museum & Archives is a safe, welcoming place that inspires and promotes understanding through collecting, preserving and sharing the proud culture of lesbian, gay, bisexual transgender and queer people of all stories, and their significant role in American society.

### **Vision**

We will build and sustain a viable, solvent organization that is inspirational, educational, relevant, and accessible to future generations; recognized nationally as a leading, influential authority. We will be a leader in the collection, preservation, and accessibility of American LGBTQ culture and history.

### **Values**

**Freedom/creativity/collaboration** – Recognizing that every person has the intrinsic ability to create, we seek to build community among LGBTQ people and organizations and their allies, working together in a cooperative and supportive environment.

**Equity** – Understanding how aspects of one’s social and political identities (e.g., gender, race, class, sexuality, disability, etc.) might combine to create unique modes of discrimination, we work to create policies and practices that foster an embracing and inclusive environment, welcoming to everyone, treating them with respect, care and empathy. While preserving the history of past generations, we seek to engage future generations.

**Professionalism** – We collect, preserve, exhibit and teach within the highest of academic standards. We perform our work ethically, honestly and with integrity. We acknowledge our temporal relationship to SNMA’s assets and obligation to manage and preserve the organization for future generations.

**Service** – Rooted in scholarship, our programs are offered in service to the general public, visible and accessible to the widest group possible.

### **Code of Ethics**

(Sources – American Association of Museums’ proposed Code of Ethics for museums, adopted 1993 by the AAM Board of Directors and amended in 2000; American Library Association proposed Code of Ethics for libraries, adopted in 1939, and amended in 1981,1995 and 2008; Society of American Archivists proposed Code of Ethics for archives adopted in 2005 and 2012.)

### **Introduction**

Stonewall National Museum & Archives (SNMA) recognizes that libraries, archives and museums make their unique contribution by collecting, preserving, exhibiting and interpreting things of this world. In our case, we are particularly interested in items and objects that relate to LGBTQ culture. While we collect books, papers,

ephemera and objects, we collect works of fine art only if the work or artist is significant to LGBTQ history and culture.

We seek to have our collections available for research, exhibition and programs that invite public participation, educate the public and preserve the past and present for the future.

As stewards of our collections, we seek to advance an understanding of the LGBTQ experience in the United States, especially in the last quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century up to the present day. It is incumbent on us to be a resource for the general population and we seek to foster an informed appreciation of the rich and diverse LGBTQ world we have inherited; preserving that inheritance for posterity.

SNMA is grounded in the tradition of public service. We are organized as a public trust, holding our collections and information as a benefit for those we were established to serve.

Members of SNMA's Board of Directors, National Advisory Council, employees and volunteers are committed to the interests of these beneficiaries. As a nonprofit institution, we comply with applicable local, state, and federal laws and international conventions, as well as with the specific legal standards governing trust responsibilities. This statement is to be provided to all board members, staff, volunteers and members of the National Advisory Council and shall be available on SNMA's website.

But legal standards are only a minimum. We actively take affirmative steps to maintain integrity so as to warrant public confidence. We act not only legally, but also ethically.

Loyalty to SNMA's mission and to the public is the essence of our 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 their position at SNMA for personal gain or to benefit another at the expense of SNMA, its mission, its reputation and the society it serves.

For us, public service is paramount; we assume responsibility for the actions of members of Board of Directors, National Advisory Council, employees and volunteers in the performance of SNMA activities. Our collective endeavor strengthens SNMA's work and the contributions to society—present and future.

### **Governance**

SNMA's Board of Directors protects and enhances our collections and programs and its physical, human and financial resources. It ensures that all these resources support our mission, respond to the pluralism of society and respects the diversity of humanity.

Specifically, we ensure:

- all of those who work (paid or volunteer) for or on behalf of SNMA understand and support our mission and public trust responsibilities;
- our board members understand and fulfill their trusteeship and act corporately, not as individuals;
- SNMA's collections and programs and its physical, human and financial resources are protected, maintained and developed in support of its mission;
- SNMA is responsive to and represents the interests of society;
- we maintain the relationship with staff in which shared roles are recognized and separate responsibilities respected;
- working relationships among directors, employees and volunteers are based on equity and mutual respect;
- professional standards and practices inform and guide SNMA's operations, policies are clearly articulated, followed and prudent oversight is practiced, and
- our governance promotes the public good rather than individual financial gain.

### **Collections**

The distinctive character of SNMA derives from the ownership, care and use of our library, archives, and objects. This stewardship entails the highest public trust and carries with it the presumption of rightful ownership, permanence, care, documentation, accessibility and responsible disposal.

Thus, we ensure:

- collections in our custody support our mission and public trust responsibilities;
- collections in our custody are lawfully held, protected, secure, unencumbered, cared for and preserved;
- collections in our custody are accounted for and documented;
- access to the collections and related information is permitted and regulated;
- acquisition, disposal, and loan activities are conducted in a manner that respects the protection and preservation of objects within our control; we reject illicit trade in such materials;
- acquisition, disposal, and loan activities conform to our mission and public trust responsibilities;
- disposal of collections through sale, trade or research activities is solely for the advancement of SNMA's mission. Proceeds from the sale of collections are to be used consistent with the established standards of SNMA's discipline, but in no event shall be used for anything other than acquisition or direct care of collections;
- SNMA's activities promote the public good rather than individual financial gain; and

- competing claims of ownership that may be asserted in connection with objects in our custody should be handled openly, seriously, responsively and with respect for the dignity of all parties involved.

### **Programs and Exhibitions**

SNMA serves society by advancing an understanding and appreciation of LGBTQ culture through collection, preservation, exhibition, research, scholarship, publication and educational activities. These programs further our mission and are responsive to the concerns, interests and needs of society.

Thus, as a member of the American Alliance of Museums, SNMA ensures:

- programs and exhibitions support our mission and public trust responsibilities;
- programs and exhibitions are founded on scholarship and marked by intellectual integrity;
- programs and exhibitions are accessible and encourage participation of the widest possible audience consistent with our mission and resources;
- programs and exhibitions respect pluralistic values, traditions and concerns;
- revenue-producing activities and activities that involve relationships with external entities are compatible with our mission and support our public trust responsibilities, and
- programs and exhibitions promote the public good, rather than individual financial gain.

### **Library**

As members of the American Library Association, we recognize the importance of codifying and making known to the profession and the general public the ethical principles that guide our work. We have an obligation to ensure the free flow of information and ideas to present and future generations.

In making professional decisions, SNMA strives to:

- provide the highest level of service to all library users through appropriate and usefully organized resources; equitable service policies; equitable access; and accurate, unbiased, and courteous responses to all requests;
- uphold the principles of intellectual freedom and resist all efforts to censor library resources;
- protect each library user's right to privacy and confidentiality with respect to information sought or received and resources consulted, borrowed, acquired or transmitted;
- respect intellectual property rights and advocate balance between the interests of information users and rights holders.
- treat co-workers and other colleagues with respect, fairness, and good faith, and advocate for conditions of employment that safeguard the rights and welfare of all employees and volunteers;

- avoid furthering private interests at the expense of library users;
- distinguish between our personal convictions and professional duties and not allow our personal beliefs to interfere with fair representation of the aims of SNMA or the provision of access to our information and resources.
- achieve excellence in the profession by maintaining and enhancing our own knowledge and skills, by encouraging the professional development of coworkers, and by fostering the aspirations of potential members of the profession.

### **Archives**

Recognizing that use is the fundamental reason for keeping archives, SNMA actively promotes open and equitable access to the records in our care within the context of our mission and the intended user groups. We minimize restrictions and maximize ease of access. We facilitate the continuing accessibility and intelligibility of archival materials in all formats.

SNMA staff formulates and disseminates access policies along with strategies that encourage responsible use. We work with donors and originating agencies to ensure that any restrictions are appropriate, well-documented, and equitably enforced. Restrictions to protect confidential and proprietary information are implemented in an impartial manner. SNMA seeks practical solutions that balance competing principles and interests.

Paid staff and volunteers who work in our archives cooperate and collaborate with other archivists and respect them and their institutions' missions and collecting policies. In our professional relationships with donors, records creators, users, and colleagues, we are honest, fair, collegial, and equitable.

As a member of the Society of American Archivists, SNMA strives to:

- exercise professional judgment in appraising, acquiring, and processing materials to ensure the preservation, authenticity, diversity, and lasting cultural and historical value;
- carefully document our collections-related decisions and activities to make our role in the selection, retention, or creation of the historical record transparent;
- consult with colleagues, relevant professionals, and communities of interest to ensure that diverse perspectives inform our actions and decisions.
- ensure the authenticity and continuing usability of records in our care;
- document and protect the unique archival characteristics of records and strive to protect the records' intellectual and physical integrity from tampering or corruption;
- avoid alter, manipulate, or destroy data or records to conceal facts or distort evidence. We thoroughly document any actions that may cause changes to the records in our care or raise questions about the records' authenticity;

- protect all documentary materials for which we responsible;
- take steps to minimize the natural physical deterioration of records and implement specific security policies to protect digital records;
- guard all records against accidental damage, vandalism, and theft and have well-formulated plans in place to respond to any disasters that may threaten SNMA's archives,
- cooperate actively with colleagues and law enforcement agencies to apprehend and prosecute vandals and thieves.

SNMA seeks to protect the interests of the donors, individuals, groups, and institutions whose public and private lives and activities are recorded in our holdings. As appropriate, we place access restrictions on collections to ensure that privacy and confidentiality are maintained, particularly for individuals and groups who have no voice or role in collections' creation, retention, or public use.

We promote the respectful use of materials in our care by encouraging researchers to consult with communities of origin, recognizing that privacy has both legal and cultural dimensions. We respect all users' rights to privacy by maintaining the confidentiality of research and protecting any personal information collected about the users in accordance with SNMA's policies.

SNMA executes its work knowing that we must ensure proper custody for the documents and records entrusted to us. We strive to demonstrate professional integrity and avoid potential conflicts of interest, balancing the sometimes-competing interests of all stakeholders.

(END-September 10, 2020HOH/PL/JC)