

## **Beltrami County Historical Society Code of Ethics**

### **Introduction**

This code of ethics is a fluid document designed to guide those involved of this organization in such a manner that instills confidence, promotes public trust and inherent value of this organization. The statement guides the institution and associated trustees, staff, and volunteers, who legally, ethically, and effectively carry out their responsibilities.

It is understood that all practices and procedures employed in fulfilling the vision, mission, strategic direction, strategic plan, and annual plans of the Museum are consonant with but exceed all legal and regulatory requirements as established by international, federal, state, county, and municipal authority. Institutional policy and practice are established through the articles of incorporation, bylaws, agreements with the city of Bemidji and Beltrami County, and descriptions of staff, volunteers, and trustees.

### **Foundational Resources**

Beltrami County Historical Society recognizes and adheres to the codes of ethics of the American Alliance of Museums (AAM) and the American Association for State and Local History (AASLH).

### **Mission and Values**

The mission of Beltrami County Historical Society is to collect, preserve, and share the history of the people, land, and stories of Beltrami County to honor our past, to understand our present, and to build our future.

Although the operating environment of this organization will change over the years, the basic premise of its foundation and function, to serve the people, and preserve the historical value of Beltrami County are paramount. To ensure consistency and gain the public trust, the following code of ethics has been adopted by the Board of Directors of this organization and applies to all Directors, staff, members, and volunteers.

### **Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion**

Ethics and Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion are inextricably linked. Beltrami County Historical Society is resolutely committed to the values of diversity, equity, and inclusion. We believe the Society has an ethical and moral obligation to examine the history of all people, including those who have previously been socially, politically, and economically excluded.

Our work is grounded on a belief in the worth and dignity of every human being. We respect people, communities, and cultures. We value discovery, creativity, integrity, and diversity. We believe in the potential for history to enrich our lives, to create stronger relationships and to inspire more vibrant communities. We approach our work with integrity and transparency. We are committed to uncovering and reexamining past beliefs and principles that no longer reflect the Society's core values. We recognize the central importance of analyzing the past to enlighten the present and foster an inclusive history for future generations.

We define diversity as including, but not limited to, individual and group differences based on race, ethnicity, nationality, age, gender, sexual orientation, class, religious or personal belief, and physical

ability. Creating a genuinely inclusive environment and ensuring that diverse voices are present and active in all aspects of our institutional life will enhance our organization's effectiveness. In pursuing our mission of collecting, preserving, and sharing the history of our community, we are committed to informing, inspiring, and bringing together all people, creating opportunities for new relationships and new understandings. We seek to manage our programs and an organizational culture in a manner that embraces diversity and inclusion. We strive to maintain the highest standards of ethics, transparency, and accountability, and are committed to:

- Recruiting a diverse Board of Directors and staff.
- Fostering open and effective cooperation among the board, staff, and members.
- Engaging with diverse constituencies.
- Working with community partners to achieve our shared diversity goals.
- Identifying and working with diverse vendors, contractors, and consultants.
- Advocating public policy that advances social inclusion.
- Promoting intercultural understanding.

### **Land Acknowledgment**

We acknowledge that Beltrami County Historical Society is located on land that is the current and ancestral homeland of the Ojibwe and Dakota. We acknowledge the painful history of genocide, forced assimilation, and efforts to alienate the Indigenous inhabitants from their territory here. We honor and respect the many diverse Indigenous peoples who still connect to this land and retain tribal sovereignty, treaty rights, and cultural resilience. Indigenous people are spiritual and physical caretakers of this land to which we all belong. Beltrami County Historical Society respects these sacred lands, stands with the community members from these Nations, and will fight injustice in all its forms.

### **NAGPRA Statement**

As a caretaker of Native American art and artifacts, Beltrami County Historical Society is committed to both the legal and ethical principles of the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA), the federal law that allows tribes to reclaim human remains and cultural items from museums and other institutions.

NAGPRA combines administrative law, property law, and criminal law to protect the civil rights and religious freedoms of Native American tribes. In the past, many Native American human remains were brought to museums with little or no regard for the concerns of the affiliated communities. NAGPRA allows affiliated tribes to reclaim these human remains and certain cultural items subject to the legislation.

Beltrami County Historical Society values open communication and respectful relationships during this process and aims to appropriately preserve Native American cultural items, assist tribes in their cultural heritage efforts, and promote collaborative research and public education.

### **The Historical Society in Society**

The Historical Society, as directed by its mission, is committed to collecting, preserving, and sharing the history of the people, land, and stories of Beltrami County to honor our past, to understand our present, and to build our future. As such, the Historical Society:

- Aligns its activities with its mission to promote the public good rather than individual gain.
- Is committed to human and planetary wellness and shall strive to avoid practices and products whose creation or disposal is unhealthy or otherwise detrimental.
- Acknowledges, values, and respects the social, cultural, and individual diversity of all people in both its programs and hiring practices. The Historical Society will use its best efforts to foster accessible exhibits, programs, organizational procedures, and operations.
- Recognizes the value of sharing decision making with diverse audiences, communities, donors, members, staff, trustees, and volunteers.
- Provides for the health and safety of its guests, volunteers, and employees through a continuing program designed to create the safest and healthiest environment possible in the fulfillment of the mission of the Museum.

### **Governance**

The Beltrami County Historical Society Board of Directors is the governing authority of the Society, serves the public interest as it relates to the Historical Society, and must consider itself accountable to the public as well as to the institution. In all cases, the Board acts as the ultimate legal authority for the Historical Society and stands responsible for the formulation and maintenance of its general overall policies and standards. The Board is responsible for the following:

- Protecting and Enhancing the Society's collections and programs and its physical, human, and financial resources.
- Empowering the Executive Director to fulfill and manage the day-to-day operations of the Historical Society.
- Ensuring that all initiatives and directives support the Society's mission and public trust responsibilities.
- Providing responsiveness to and representation of the interests of society.
- Disclosing situations that arise for action by the Board where there is a possible conflict or appearance of a conflict of interest. In those cases where the Board Director is present when a vote is taken in connection with such a question, he or she must abstain. In some circumstances Board Directors should avoid discussing any planned actions, formally or informally, from which they might appear to benefit.
- Ensuring sufficient funding for protection of the Museum's assets and delivery of its programs and services.
- Ensuring no policies or activities jeopardize the Museum's non-profit status.
- Articulating policies and practicing prudent oversight.
- Promoting the public good rather than individual financial gain.

### **Programs**

The Society serves our community by advancing an understanding and appreciation of the local history through exhibitions, research, scholarship, publications, and educational activities. These programs further the organization's mission and are responsive to the concerns, interests and needs of society. Thus, the organization ensures that:

- Programs support its mission and public trust responsibilities.

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

## **Collections**

The distinctive character of the Society ethics derives from the ownership, care and use of objects representing the local history. This stewardship of collections entails the highest public trust and carries with it the presumption of rightful ownership, permanence, care, documentation, accessibility, and responsible disposal. Thus, the Historical Society ensures that:

- Collections in its custody support its mission and public trust responsibilities.
- Collections in its custody are lawfully held, protected, secure, unencumbered, cared for, and preserved.
- The Museum shall not knowingly and willfully accept or acquire any object that was illegally imported or illegally collected or that was received under circumstances that would encourage irresponsible damage, destruction, or illegal trade of biota; historic, cultural, and natural sites; or human burial places.
- Decisions concerning human remains and sacred and funerary objects are treated with the respect and cultural sensitivity that emerges from the legal and governing practices of the culture of origin. The unique and special nature of human remains, and funerary and sacred objects is recognized as the basis of all decisions concerning these collections.
- Acquisition, disposal, and loan activities are conducted in a manner that respects the protection and preservation of natural and cultural resources and discourages illicit trade in such materials.
- Collections in its custody are accounted for and documented.
- Competing claims of ownership that may be asserted in connection with objects in its custody should be handled openly, seriously, responsively and with respect for the dignity of all parties involved.
- Access to the collections and related information is permitted and regulated.
- Archives and artifacts will be presented honestly and accurately in exhibits.
- The Historical Society retains decision making authority around exhibit content and presentation. Potential conflicts of interest with respect to an individual lender to an exhibit shall be examined.
- Collections shall not be used to promote or endorse external commercial activities.
- Acquisition, disposal, and loan activities conform to its mission and public trust responsibilities.
- Disposal of collections through sale, trade or research activities is solely for the advancement of the organization's mission. Proceeds from the sale of nonliving collections are to be used consistent with the established standards of the organization's discipline, but in no event shall they be used for anything other than acquisition or direct care of collections.
- Collections-related activities promote the public good rather than individual financial gain.

- To avoid conflicts of interest, real or perceived, deaccessioned Museum objects shall not be given, or sold publicly or privately, to members of the Museum community (current Museum employees, unpaid staff [emeritus curators, research, and department associates], volunteers, members of the Board of Trustees) or their representatives.
- In the event of public sale of deaccessioned Museum objects, members of the Museum community are prohibited from participating due to the appearance of a conflict of interest.
- Staff and volunteers may provide estimates of value of the Museum's collections for internal Museum purposes only. Neither staff nor volunteers will provide monetary appraisals of objects for external parties.

### **Collaborations and Fundraising**

The Historical Society adheres to the following precepts with respect to collaborations and fundraising:

- The Historical Society welcomes appropriate cooperation with similar organizations to further its preservation, research, and educational goals.
- The Historical Society is in ultimate control of educational content in exhibits and programs. The recognition of external donors or sponsors is secondary.
- The Historical Society will acknowledge corporate support but will not specifically endorse any corporation, its products, or services.
- The Historical Society's reputation is one of its most precious assets and in no way shall any sponsorship diminish that reputation. In the case of some breach of ethics, the sponsorship shall be dissolved.
- Those involved in fundraising must do so with honesty as to need and must use funds for a donor's intended purposes. Opportunities and advantages shall be promised to donors equally.
- All donor-related records and documents shall be confidential, except as required by law.
- The Historical Society shall keep standard account records.
- Those authorized to spend funds must do so with impartiality, honesty and in the Historical Society's best interest.

### **Staff**

- Staff members are expected to understand and to conform all professional activities to the Historical Society's mandate, as outlined in the Mission Statement.
- All programs, procedures, or goals outlined for the department, unit, or Historical Society as a whole must respect both the letter and spirit of the Mission while promoting conduct in full accordance with it.
- Activities that conflict with curatorial or other staff responsibilities or that could cause staff to favor personal or outside interests over those of the Museum must be avoided.
- All work created by any employee in the course of his or her employment at Beltrami County Historical Society constitutes works made for hire and is the physical and intellectual property of Beltrami County Historical Society unless otherwise governed by contract, publication agreement, employee agreement, or law.
- Staff should be permitted to retain gifts of trifling value (less than \$50) from associates, the public, and constituents, when acceptance does not impair their judgment or otherwise

influence decisions. Meals, accommodations, and travel services while on official business may be accepted and remunerated if clearly in the interest of the Historical Society.

- Historical Society employees have the right to accept and retain gifts that originate purely from personal or family relationships. It must be recognized that genuine personal gifts may originate from individuals who have a potentially beneficial relationship with the Historical Society. In such cases the staff members are obligated to protect both themselves and the Historical Society by fully disclosing the circumstances to the Executive Director, Board President, or designee.

### **Conflict of Interest**

Beltrami County Historical Society board members, staff, and volunteers shall:

- Never abuse their official positions or their contacts within the museum community for personal gain, private benefit, or in any way that may impair the performance of their official duties, compete with the Museum, or bring discredit or embarrassment to the Museum or to the profession.
- Maintain high moral standards of honesty, integrity, and loyalty to the Museum and shall refrain from any private or personal activity that might conflict, or appear to conflict with the Museum's goals, purposes and operations.