

Publications

Principles and Standards for Federal Historical Programs

This statement, drafted by a subcommittee of the Federal Historical Programs Committee, has been unanimously adopted by the Executive Council of the Society for History in the Federal Government.

The Society urges all persons serving as historians in the federal government and all government officials administering historical programs to use this statement as a guide in their historical activities.

General Principles

1. Federal historians with professional training and experience have a right to expect that they will be treated as professionals in their work.
2. Federal historians have a responsibility to serve their scholarly profession and the public as well as the federal agencies for which they work. They should not be expected to bias their historical interpretations to accommodate current policy considerations.
3. Historians also have a responsibility as federal employees to accept limitations on their right to publish material or to make public statements when such information has not been reviewed for classified content or for data exempt from disclosure under the Freedom of Information Act.

These principles have specific application as follows:

A. In Collecting Historical Records

1. A primary function of federal historians is to collect historical evidence relating to the history of their agencies. Historical evidence includes documentary materials, oral history, artifacts, and historical sites.
2. Federal historians should assist personnel in the National Archives and Records Service to identify records of historical significance for eventual deposit in the National Archives. Until the National Archives can accept such materials, agency historians, archivists, and records managers should have the authority and resources to maintain control of these records as agency archives.
3. Federal historians should cooperate with their agency's records management personnel in drafting retention schedules that will assure permanent preservation of historical records.
4. Federal historians who retain records of archival quality in agency files have an obligation to make such records available to the public in accordance with the access standards of the National Archives.

B. In Conducting Historical Research

1. Federal historians should have access to all pertinent records relating to their research for official purposes, and they should make every effort within time limits and other constraints to consult all available records. Primary sources should be used whenever possible. When, for legitimate reasons of security or policy, access to pertinent records is limited, the historians' supervisor should accordingly limit the declared scope of the study. Federal historians should then be free to evaluate for historical purposes all available evidence related to the study. This right does not extend to public release of such conclusions.
2. Federal historians should be encouraged to bring to the attention of their superiors any historical facts or conclusions which they believe may be pertinent -to' policies being formulated in the agency. The disposition of this information, however, remains within the discretion of the agency.

3. Federal records in the public domain or clearly eligible for public access should be available on an equal basis to all persons seeking access for reasonable purposes. Federal historians should enjoy no special privileges in access to such records. Federal historians should neither be required nor permitted to withhold such records or information about their existence from the public; the historians should use accepted procedures for announcing the availability of such record to the scholarly community.

C. In Writing Historical Studies

Federal historians will be held accountable for the quality of their work by their professional colleagues as well as by agency officials. Accordingly, completed studies should bear the names of the authors.

When federal historians have been assigned the task of writing official histories to be published for public use, they have the right to expect that:

1. They will have access to all records, including classified and privileged documents, pertinent to their assignment.
2. They will be free to draw their own conclusions and interpretations reasonably supported by the evidence.
3. They will be free to determine the scope, organization, format, and contents of the study.
4. Their work will be reviewed by the agency for classified information and by the agency historians and technical experts to assure historical accuracy. When appropriate, independent historians should be invited to judge the quality of the work. The agency historian may also wish to invite managers of current programs to review the work.

Agency officials and administrators of historical programs should so define the scope and time period to be covered by published histories so that the freedom of action defined above will not be impaired.

The historians, for their part, will be expected to perform their research and writing in accordance with the highest standards of their profession. The standards include: balanced and fair interpretation of all the evidence available, careful analysis of the evidence, honest and forthright conclusions based on the evidence, clear and concise writing, accurate and clearly attributed quotations, and proper citation of all sources.

When federal historians have been assigned to prepare internal policy studies or reports:

1. They have a right to clarify with their superiors whether the assignment is to be treated as historical work or as a staff study which merely uses historical material for a non-historical purpose (e.g., a speech, press release, congressional testimony, or policy paper).
2. If the assignment is to prepare a historical study, the discretion allowed for published historical work should apply, except that the agency shall have the right to control the dissemination and use of the study.
3. If the assignment is for a purpose other than preparing a historical study, the historian is subject to the same directions and restrictions that may appropriately be established by the agency for any other employee.

D. In Using Oral Evidence

1. The collection of oral evidence from persons who participated in events of interest to the historian is the oldest form of historical research, and it is a source that should not be neglected.
2. Federal historians should be provided reasonable opportunities to conduct oral history interviews with departing or retired senior executives and program managers of the agency, either to enhance the

historical records of the agency or to fill in gaps in research for official histories.

3. Interviews should be recorded on tape but only after the person to be interviewed has been informed of the mutual rights and responsibilities involved in oral history, such as editing, confidentiality, disposition, and dissemination of all forms of the record.
4. Such agreements with the interviewee should be documented.
5. To the extent practicable, oral interviews should encompass the potential interest of other researchers and not just the immediate needs of the interviewer.

E. In Advising Policy Makers

1. Agency officials should recognize that staff historian, , as the most reliable and available source of - institutional memory, can be valuable advisors on policy issues.
2. The senior staff historian should -have access to current policy records in order to identify issues on which research may be illuminating.
3. Agency officials should recognize that the staff historian has a responsibility to call attention to opportunities for historical research on current policy issues.
4. Staff historians should be encouraged to write accurate- and candid histories of policy issues for their superiors independent of staff or program review.
5. Staff historians should recognize that their professional responsibilities extend only to preparing historical studies and not to advocating courses of action.

F. In Preserving Non-verbal Historical Materials

1. Federal historians have a responsibility to preserve all types of historical evidence, not just documentary records. Non-verbal sources include archeological and other historic sites, historic structures, artifacts, works of art, and photographic records. This responsibility extends not only to materials related to the history of the agency but also to those significant in local, state, and national history.
2. In historic preservation, federal historians should apply ethical and professional standards equal to those expected in documentary research and writing. Federal historians should act only within their area of competence and call upon specialists for advice when needed.
3. Agency historians should review an proposals for disposing of federal land, buildings, and equipment of possible historical value. Historical significance should be a factor in determining the course of action.
4. Federal historians should recommend practical ways of preserving artifacts and other non-verbal materials either in museums or storage.
5. Federal historians should maintain inventories of historic sites, buildings, and artifacts in their agency's custody and when appropriate prepare interpretative materials explaining their significance.

G. In Negotiating and Administering Contracts

1. Federal historians should follow procurement and contracting procedures established by federal law and regulation.
2. Statement of work should set forth clearly the scope and requirements of the contract, the specifications of the work product, and well defined bench- marks for completing each phase of the work.
3. Selection criteria for contractors should not be defined so rigidly as to exclude all but a few candidates.
4. Contract opportunities should be advertised as widely as feasible.
5. Federal historians administering contracts should monitor the work of the contractor to provide adequate guidance to the contractor and to assure timely completion of a high-quality product.

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