

Questions and Answers Regarding the SI Statement of Values and Code of Ethics

What is the purpose of the Statement of Values and Code of Ethics?

This Statement was developed by the Smithsonian to reaffirm its longstanding commitments to the public trust, to act in the public interest, and to maintain the highest standards of professional conduct. It is intended to provide guidance for ethical practices expected of the Institution collectively and of individuals acting on its behalf. Adoption of a written statement of core values and ethics is considered a best practice for museums and other nonprofit educational organizations as reflected in museum accreditation standards. While approved by the Board of Regents, this Statement should not be viewed as a definitive or final statement but rather as a “living document” that will evolve and be refined over time through conversation across the Smithsonian community.

To whom does the Statement of Values and Code of Ethics apply?

As indicated in the section on Applicability, the Statement applies to the Institution collectively and to all members of the Smithsonian community, which includes Regents, staff, volunteers, advisory board members, fellows, interns, research associates, affiliated individuals, and others who have been entrusted to act on behalf of or in the name of the Smithsonian Institution.

How is the Statement of Values and Code of Ethics different from the Smithsonian Standards of Conduct (SD 103)?

The Standards of Conduct apply only to Smithsonian employees and are specific rules for individual conduct largely designed to avoid potential conflicts of interest in the carrying out of one’s employment. Much of the Standards of Conduct is based on compliance with existing statutes and laws. The new Statement of Values and Code of Ethics is much broader, providing guidance for all Smithsonian activities and focusing on principles rather than rules. As such, it provides a broad context for the Standards of Conduct as well as for other related policies, such as the Institution’s Collections Management Policy (SD 600).

Why is the Ethics Advisory Board being established?

The idea of an advisory board grew out of discussions within the Institution over the past year about the need for a more open and accessible vehicle for discussion of professional ethics issues across the Smithsonian community. It does not replace existing authority or responsibilities, such as the role of the General Counsel as the Smithsonian Ethics Officer for purposes of the Standards of Conduct.

What is the role of the Ethics Advisory Board?

The Board’s main role is to advise the Secretary and the Board of Regents. More specifically, its mandate is:

- To assist with the dissemination of the Statement of Values and Code of Ethics by establishing a process of dialogue throughout the Smithsonian and to recommend other forms of dissemination to other constituencies, including volunteers, advisory boards, and the public.
- To examine existing SI policies and directives related to the Statement of Values and Code of Ethics to determine if these are current and adequate, and to make recommendations for either updating current policies and directives or developing new policies, guidelines, and directives.
- To examine and interpret policies and guidelines in the sciences, arts, humanities, and education as well as the museum field, to see if there are necessary revisions to the current Statement of Values and Code of Ethics that should be recommended to the Secretary and the Board of Regents.

What authority does the Ethics Advisory Board have?

As its name indicates, the Board will be advisory only—it will not hear or investigate charges of misconduct or issue rulings on specific actions or situations. Instead, the Ethics Advisory Board will focus on assessing current policies and directives and fostering ongoing, open discussion of issues and concerns across the Smithsonian community. Issues relating to compliance with the Statement of Values and Code of Ethics or with the Standards of Conduct will be referred to appropriate channels of authority.

Who will be on the Ethics Advisory Board?

The composition of the Ethics Advisory Board will reflect the diversity of disciplines, professions, and responsibilities within the Smithsonian community, as well as representatives from certain key offices such as the Office of General Counsel. The Secretary will make the appointments to the Advisory Board based on recommendations from the Smithsonian community.