



AMERICAN ANTHROPOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION

FOUNDED 1902

GUIDELINES FOR EVALUATING SCHOLARSHIP IN THE REALM OF PRACTICING, APPLIED, AND  
PUBLIC INTEREST ANTHROPOLOGY FOR ACADEMIC PROMOTION AND TENURE

AAA STATEMENT

Produced by the

Committee on Practicing, Applied and Public Interest Anthropology<sup>1</sup>

Adopted by the AAA Executive Board May 28, 2011

The American Anthropological Association (AAA) recognizes the growing number of anthropologists who identify as practicing, applied, public interest, or engaged anthropologists. This recognition is evidenced by the 2004 creation of a Practicing Advisory Work Group (PAWG), the 2007 establishment of the Committee on Practicing, Applied, and Public Interest Anthropology (CoPAPIA), and the 2009 addition of the Reviews in Public Anthropology section within the *American Anthropologist*.

Many universities have adopted community-based projects as a critical component of their institutional missions and faculty are encouraged to pursue engaged research in the public realm. Moreover, engaged research provides a critical aspect of undergraduate and graduate education as a preponderance of anthropology alumni enter positions beyond the academy. Departments of anthropology and their home colleges are thus challenged with documenting and evaluating the scholarly nature of this type of work in faculty promotion and tenure decisions. Accordingly, the AAA offers the following guidelines for the evaluation of scholarship in the realm of practicing, applied, public interest, and engaged anthropology. These guidelines were developed for departmental and college T&P committees in concert with leaders from a

---

<sup>1</sup>In July 2004, the Executive Board of the American Anthropological Association appointed a Practicing Advisory Work Group (PAWG) to advise the Executive Board on how the Association might better serve the needs of anthropologists working outside the academy and organizations that employ them. The Group was appointed with a term to end in July 2007. Based upon the findings of PAWG and its recommendations submitted to the Executive Board in November 2006, the Executive Board established the Committee for Applied, Practicing, and Public Interest Anthropology (CoPAPIA), a standing committee to address the relationship of the AAA and the discipline to practicing and applied anthropologists, and other anthropologists working in the public interest—on a continuing basis.

wide range of AAA sections, AAA leadership, and representatives of the Consortium of Practicing and Applied Anthropology Programs (COPAA)<sup>2</sup> for consideration in tenure cases and promotion to associate and full professor.

Scholarship, as employed in this document, consists of the production and dissemination of new knowledge. Practicing, applied, engaged, and public anthropologists often produce reports, media, or other products in addition to traditional peer-reviewed journal and book publications. Such products become part of anthropologists' curricula vitae and promotion and tenure dossiers. Career coherence and consistency is an important component of the faculty narrative. It is important that initial appointment letters for practicing, applied, engaged, and public anthropologists recognize the non-traditional forms of scholarship and activities that will count towards scholarly output in a faculty member's annual evaluations, promotion and tenure. Department and university committees for promotion and tenure are tasked with judging the scholarly quality of these nontraditional academic products, and their academic contributions to research, teaching, and service.

Scholarly products in the public realm of anthropology are often co-authored, are frequently interdisciplinary or multidisciplinary, and are often published outside of the home discipline. Tangible products might include any combination of the following:

- Written Documents: Books; articles; book chapters; encyclopedia entries; annual reports; research and technical reports; program evaluation reports; newspaper and magazine articles; policy briefings and white papers.
- Teaching-Related: Curricular development; service learning projects; study abroad programs; educational programming; training programs.
- Community Consultation: Consultation with descendant communities; agency presentations; conference and forum participation; expert witnessing; strategic and marketing plans; community ethnographies.
- Organizational Consultation: Consultation with organizations on specific issues related to organizational culture, workforce efficiency, cross-cultural communication, usability analysis, quality assurance, and workplace design.
- Other Scholarly Venues: Museum exhibitions; museum catalogues; documentary videos.
- Other Media: internet web pages and website content; data sets and archived documents; systems and marketing campaigns; advertisements.
- Funding: contracts and internal and external grants.

---

<sup>2</sup> In 2008, COPAA produced a document on "Promoting Applied Scholarship for Tenure and Promotion" (Sunil Khanna, Nancy Romero-Daza, Sherylyn Briller, and Linda A. Bennett, 2008) available on both the COPAA ([www.copaa.info](http://www.copaa.info)) and the AAA websites [http://www.aaanet.org/cs\\_upload/resources/departments/26869\\_1.pdf](http://www.aaanet.org/cs_upload/resources/departments/26869_1.pdf).

Scholarship in the realm of practicing, applied, and public interest anthropology often produces a unique combination of tangible and intangible products. Intangible scholarship must also have tangible documentation in a candidate's curriculum vitae and promotion and tenure dossier. The application of such intangible products to tenure and promotion considerations should be documented by the faculty member through thorough accounting of the trajectories of such projects; letters of evaluation from community partners that specify possible positive impact upon the community; constructive relationships with the community; advancement of new initiatives; and letters of evaluation by other anthropologists who have worked on similar kinds of initiatives. Identifying appropriate external peer reviewers who are knowledgeable about the nature of practicing, applied, public interest, and engaged anthropology is crucial to the evaluation of impact of such scholarship.

The following examples illustrate projects that combine tangible and intangible products within the genre of practicing, applied, public interest, and engaged anthropology:

*(1) Applied medical anthropologists are often involved in assessing the ability of health care providers and administrators to factor in cultural variation and health disparities among their clients as they deliver services. Conducting such evaluations requires extensive planning, teamwork and peer review. Typically, the final report is in the form of a written technical report, which may be accompanied by a presentation and/or audiovisual material delivered to the organization's leadership team or committee. While such an applied engagement may or may not result in an article published in a peer-reviewed journal, the presentation and report may undergo considerable scrutiny and peer-review at various levels within the organization. Applied anthropologists engaged in such activities should carefully document their work delineating and highlighting the "internal" peer review process and tangible and intangible outcomes.*

*(2) Museum-based anthropologists often work closely with Native American communities on the research, consultation, and reporting necessary for legal compliance with the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA), and for work that can lead to the repatriation of human remains or cultural objects. The myriad of scholarly products that result from such collaborations include cultural affiliation studies, notices in the Federal Register, ethnographic documentation of museum collections, written records of consultation, and cultural resource management reports. Intangible results of such work may include improving general understandings of collections, improving intercommunity relationships on a longstanding basis, lawfully completing specific projects (e.g., building construction), and the training of service providers and decision makers.*

*(3) Applied linguistic anthropologists involved in studies of intangible heritage and language revitalization are often involved in a variety of scholarly interactions with native communities and might work toward the development of lexicons, dictionaries,*

*teaching materials, primary and secondary school curricula, and cultural heritage databases for indigenous groups. Typically this work involves intense collaboration with members of native communities.*

*(4) Archaeologists often conduct research involving the location, significance or research potential of sites. Such substantive work may be necessarily restricted in its distribution to protect the location and integrity of the sites themselves. Reports produced by archaeologists involved in cultural resource management projects may be limited in distribution or unavailable due to restrictions imposed by the funding agency. At the same time, these reports can reflect substantive scholarship and have a significant impact by minimizing or mitigating damage to extant cultural resources.*

The eclectic nature of these scholarly products and processes raises the issue of how they are to be evaluated in terms of contributions to the discipline of anthropology and to the broader community. Traditionally, evaluation in promotion and tenure cases is completed by academic colleagues who review tangible products. The AAA recommends that departmental and college T&P committees review their existing guidelines in light of points made within this document. Further, the AAA suggests that position descriptions incorporate language that specifies the importance of applied/engaged work for purposes of tenure and promotion. Additionally, the AAA recommends broadening the scope of external reviewers to include expert evaluation from community or organizational partners, who can evaluate process, relationships, and outcomes.