



american
institute for
conservation

**Preserving Cultural
Heritage**

Member Designation Working Group Essential Competencies Subgroup

2021 Essential Competencies for Professional Members

Section 1: Purpose and Scope

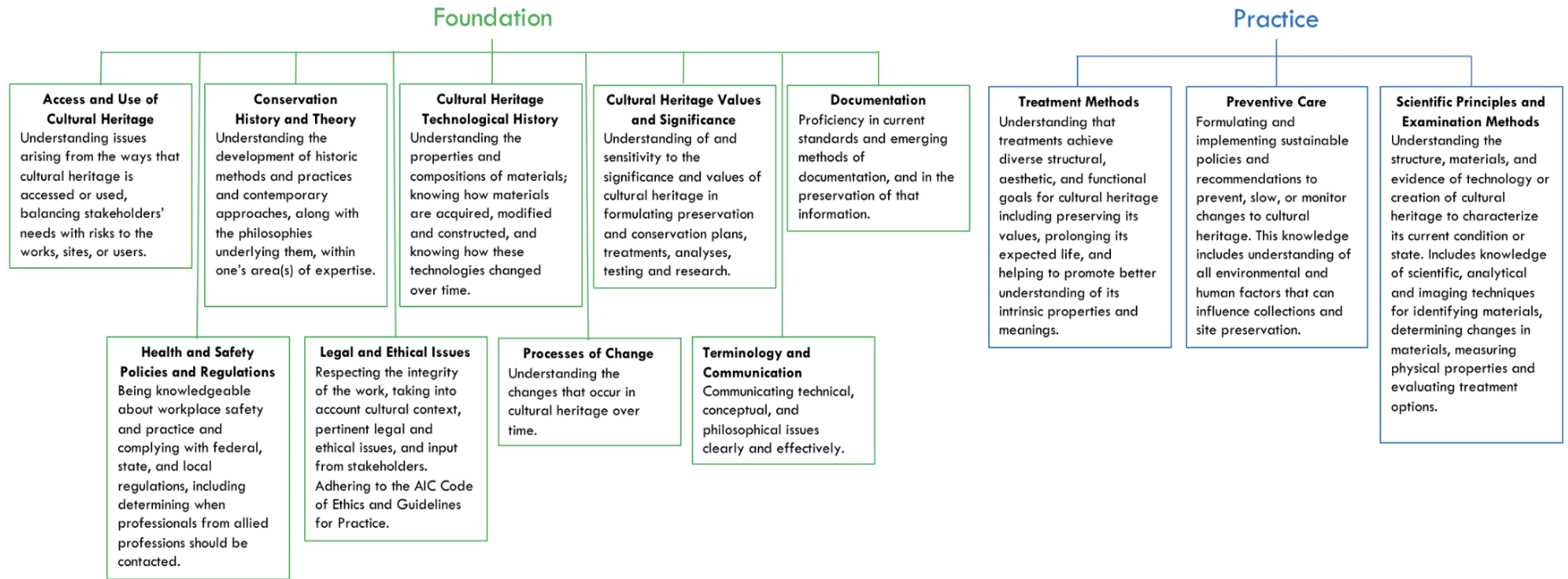
The 2021 Essential Competencies provide an outline of the basic competencies that define an AIC Professional Member. The Qualifications Task Force and the Collections Care Task Force authored the original texts [Defining the Conservator: Essential Competencies](#) and [Requisite Competencies for Conservation Technicians and Collection Care Specialists](#), which were approved by the AIC Board in 2003 and 2005, respectively. As the field of conservation has evolved and changed, so has the membership of AIC.

The twelve essential competencies named in the 2003 document were used to frame this revision, which aims to be more inclusive of AIC's diverse membership. This document, prepared during 2019 through 2021, is a combination and revision of the two previous versions, with language adjusted throughout so that the competencies encompass the varied roles now represented within the field of conservation and the AIC membership. The two major changes in this document are adding Legal and Ethical Issues as a separate competency and combining Scientific Principles and Examination Methods.

Twelve competencies for AIC Professional Members are outlined in the diagram below; nine are foundation competencies and three are practice competencies. While the foundation competencies are more broadly shared among all members, the practice competencies are more specific to different skill sets and expertise. The three columns delineated in the practice competencies correspond to the three application pathways for the peer-reviewed Professional Member designation. The professional member pathways are equal, not hierarchical, and may be independent of job title and training path.

This Essential Competencies document serves (1) to communicate to external professionals and the general public the knowledge, skills, and abilities of professionals involved in the field of cultural heritage stewardship; and (2) to outline competencies from which to evaluate AIC members who apply for Professional Membership designation. Professional Members are also expected to abide by the AIC Code of Ethics and Guidelines for Practice.

AIC ESSENTIAL COMPETENCIES



Section 2: Foundation Competencies: Descriptions

COMPETENCY	ALL PROFESSIONAL MEMBERS
<p>Access and Use of Cultural Heritage Understanding issues arising from the ways that cultural heritage is accessed or used, balancing stakeholders' needs with risks to the works, sites, or users.</p>	<p>AIC Professional Members facilitate access to cultural heritage by ensuring safe practices and providing recommendations for (or acknowledging limitations of) culturally appropriate treatment, protection, and future care. Principles of diversity, equity, access, and inclusion should be foremost when formulating recommendations.</p>
<p>Conservation History and Theory Understanding the development of historic conservation methods and practices and contemporary approaches, along with the philosophies underlying them, within one's area(s) of expertise.</p>	<p>AIC Professional Members make decisions guided by the knowledge of how and why current practices have evolved. This knowledge provides a foundation for professionals to continue to adapt, grow, and innovate to meet emerging needs in cultural heritage preservation.</p>
<p>Cultural Heritage Technological History Understanding the properties and compositions of materials; knowing how materials are acquired, modified, and constructed; and knowing how these technologies changed over time.</p>	<p>AIC Professional Members use knowledge of the attributes and construction of cultural heritage to determine scientific, collection care, and conservation approaches. This includes the ability to identify the intrinsic properties of the materials that constitute a work, how materials fit together, how they function structurally, and their history.</p>

Foundation Competencies: Descriptions (*continued*)

COMPETENCY	ALL PROFESSIONAL MEMBERS
<p align="center">Cultural Heritage Values and Significance</p> <p>Understanding of and sensitivity to the significance and values of cultural heritage in formulating preservation and conservation plans, treatments, analyses, testing, and research.</p>	<p>AIC Professional Members employ this understanding when formulating preservation and conservation plans, and in vetting and reviewing conservation treatment proposals, plans for analyses, testing, and research. Conservation and preservation activities are carried out with cultural sensitivity and an understanding that cultural context (values/ guidelines) will guide decisions.</p>
<p align="center">Documentation</p> <p>Proficiency in current standards and emerging methods of documentation, and in the preservation of that information.</p>	<p>AIC Professional Members create and use information documenting cultural heritage conditions, prior use, previous interventions, proposed treatment, treatment, and ongoing care. Records of examination, treatment, analysis, and collections and site care inform interpretation, use, and future care.</p>
<p align="center">Health and Safety Policies and Regulations</p> <p>Being knowledgeable about workplace safety and practice and complying with federal, state, and local regulations, including determining when professionals from allied professions should be contacted.</p>	<p>AIC Professional Members use this knowledge to ensure control measures for hazardous materials, identify appropriate safety equipment and operating procedures, and employ safe practices and hazard communication to reduce health and safety risks to humans and the environment.</p>
<p align="center">Legal and Ethical Issues</p> <p>Respecting the integrity of cultural heritage, taking into account cultural context, pertinent legal and ethical issues, and input from stakeholders. Adhering to the AIC Code of Ethics and Guidelines for Practice.</p>	<p>AIC Professional Members follow all laws applicable to their work and use the AIC Code of Ethics and Guidelines for Practice to guide them in developing and executing preservation, scientific, and conservation projects.</p>

Foundation Competencies: Descriptions (*continued*)

COMPETENCY	ALL PROFESSIONAL MEMBERS
<p>Process of Change Understanding the changes that occur in cultural heritage over time.</p>	<p>AIC Professional Members recognize and understand that chemical, physical, technological, and biological processes, as well as use, deliberate change, or alteration by a hand other than that of the maker(s) can affect the conceptual and material aspects of cultural heritage. They use this knowledge to assess materials and conditions, manage the changes, determine when (or whether) to formulate actions, and select materials to preserve cultural heritage.</p>
<p>Terminology and Communication Communicating technical, conceptual, and philosophical issues clearly and effectively.</p>	<p>AIC Professional Members communicate with cultural heritage stakeholders as part of collaboration, service, and advocacy. They translate cultural heritage terminology and philosophical precepts into language that allows those outside the field to understand their findings, observations, interpretations, interventions, and rationales.</p>

Section 3: Practice Competencies: Descriptions

COMPETENCY	APPLICATION PATHWAYS		
	TREATMENT	PREVENTIVE CARE	SCIENTIFIC PRINCIPLES, ANALYSIS, AND EXAMINATION
<p>Treatment Methods Understanding that treatments achieve diverse structural, aesthetic, and functional goals for cultural heritage including preserving its values, prolonging its expected life, and helping to promote better understanding of its intrinsic properties and meanings.</p>	<p>AIC Professional Members applying in this pathway carry out interventions guided by investigation, research, experience, and consultation with stakeholders. Conservation treatment may involve physical, chemical, or technological alteration of the work, while maintaining respect for the integrity of the work or site.</p>	<p>AIC Professional Members applying in this pathway work closely with colleagues to ensure treatment strategies are consistent with broader preservation and collections care goals.</p>	<p>AIC Professional Members applying in this pathway are aware of various treatment methods used historically and currently and understand their effects on cultural heritage. They work with colleagues to develop treatments, understanding the long-term impacts on the treated materials.</p>
<p>Preventive Care Formulating and implementing sustainable policies and recommendations to prevent, slow, or monitor changes to cultural heritage. This knowledge includes understanding of all environmental and human factors that can influence collections and site preservation.</p>	<p>AIC Professional Members applying in this pathway understand the approaches and methods used to prevent or mitigate the deterioration of cultural heritage. They employ risk assessment and mitigation to minimize deterioration and manage risks to cultural heritage.</p>	<p>AIC Professional Members applying in this pathway have an in-depth understanding of the approaches and methods used to prevent or mitigate the deterioration of works of cultural heritage in storage, on exhibit, in transit, or in use. They use this knowledge together with risk assessment and mitigation to develop and implement preventive care programs.</p>	<p>AIC Professional Members applying in this pathway are familiar with techniques, equipment, and resources that can assist in managing environmental factors; and play a key role in researching, developing, and recommending methods and actions to protect cultural heritage from damaging situations.</p>

Practice Competencies: Descriptions (*continued*)

COMPETENCY	APPLICATION PATHWAYS		
	TREATMENT	PREVENTIVE CARE	SCIENTIFIC PRINCIPLES, ANALYSIS, AND EXAMINATION
<p>Scientific Principles and Examination Methods Understanding the structure, materials, and evidence of technology or creation of cultural heritage to characterize its current condition or state. Includes knowledge of scientific, analytical, and imaging techniques for identifying materials, determining changes in materials, measuring physical properties, and evaluating treatment options.</p>	<p>AIC Professional Members applying in this pathway use appropriate tools and techniques to examine works, and know how, and when, to employ analytical testing to obtain information relevant to technical investigation and preservation decisions. They understand when consultation with specialized experts is necessary.</p>	<p>AIC Professional Members applying in this pathway maintain a generalized knowledge of the structure, materials, and evidence of technology or manufacture of cultural heritage to characterize its current condition or state. They maintain a working knowledge of scientific methods that influence preservation decisions and seek assistance from specialized experts as necessary.</p>	<p>AIC Professional Members applying in this pathway understand scientific principles and how they apply to conservation, including how to access and use scientific literature and how to assess the validity of published research in conservation and allied fields. They employ scientific, analytical, and examination techniques for characterizing and identifying materials and/or determining changes in these materials and/or environments.</p>

Essential Competencies Subgroup Members

This document was written by the Membership Designation Working Group (MDWG) Essential Competencies Subgroups led by MDWG members Jessica Walthew, Laura Hartz Stanton, and Catherine Matsen.

Treatment

Jessica Walthew, Conservator, Cooper Hewitt, Smithsonian Design Museum
Luca Ackerman, Owner, J. Luca Ackerman Photograph Conservation
Sarah Casto, Assistant Conservator, George Eastman Museum
Kate Lewis, Chief Conservator, Museum of Modern Art
Eve Mayberger, Assistant Conservator, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston
Nina Owczarek, Objects Conservator and Assistant Professor, University of Delaware
Laura Panadero, Photograph Conservator, National Gallery of Art
Nancie Ravenel, Objects Conservator, Shelburne Museum
Kerith Koss Schragger, Founder and Principal Conservator, The Found Object Art Conservation
Nina Roth-Wells, Conservator, Nina A. Roth-Wells LLC

Preventive Care

Laura Hartz Stanton, Executive Director, Conservation Center for Art and Historic Artifacts
John Robinette, Registrar, Collections Manager and Advisor, JT Robinette Art and Artifacts Collection Management
Becky Kaczowski, Preventive Conservator, Smithsonian Museum Conservation Institute
Eliza Gilligan, Principal, Lenz & Lenz Antiquarian Books
Samantha Snell, Collections Management Specialist, Smithsonian Institution, National Collections Program

Scientific Principles, Analysis and Examination

Catherine Matsen, Scientist, Winterthur Museum, Garden & Library
Jocelyn Alcantara-Garcia, Conservation Scientist and Associate Professor, University of Delaware
Charlotte Seifen Ameringer, Paintings Conservator, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston
Vincent Beltran, Assistant Scientist, J. Paul Getty Trust
Susan Buck, Conservator and Paint Analyst, Susan L. Buck, Ph.D.
Molly McGath, Associate Research Scientist, Mariners' Museum and Park
Renee Stein, Conservator and Lecturer, Michael C. Carlos Museum of Emory University
Kristin Wustholz, Associate Professor, Department of Chemistry, College of William & Mary