

**Guidance for Subject Matter Experts
regarding information concerning
illegally obtained or suspected illegally obtained cultural materials**

**Blue Shield International Working Group on
Countering Trafficking of Cultural Materials**

1.0 Academics, scholars, museum, library and archive professionals, and other material cultural heritage subject matter experts (“SMEs”) may become aware of cultural objects, including manuscripts and other text materials, that may be, or are suspected to be, the subject of illegal activity, such as theft, illegal import, or illegal export.

2.0 SMEs may be contacted by law enforcement agencies for assistance in authenticating and identifying such cultural materials. In such cases, SMEs may choose to assist law enforcement in identification and authentication. Whether to do so is a personal choice. However, as a matter of professional and ethical conduct and practice, anyone who is aware of such law enforcement activity, regardless of whether they are assisting law enforcement or not, should maintain confidentiality of the facts and law enforcement actions until any investigation, law enforcement actions, and/or judicial proceedings are concluded.

3.0 Whether SMEs are assisting law enforcement or not, discussing such materials which are under investigation or possible investigation or their possible legal status, whether in an academic publication, any form of social media, a blog, a news story, or semi-popular publication, can disrupt the investigation and may pass on information that may be used by those involved in the trafficking or current handling of these materials to their advantage. For example, stating an opinion as to whether an object was documented before its theft, or when it may have been stolen, or whether the object is authentic may be used as a possible defense against law enforcement actions or judicial processes. Such an opinion might also, inadvertently, put individuals and colleagues in countries of origin in danger. All SMEs are urged to consider the potential impact any writing might have on any legal case and/or on specific colleagues.

4.0 It is therefore a consideration of utmost professional and ethical concern that confidentiality be maintained until any investigation is completed and any legal actions taken, or that may possibly be taken, have been resolved.

5.0 In case of any question, the relevant law enforcement entities involved in an investigation or other action should be contacted to learn the status before any information is released publicly.

6.0 The Working Group on Countering Trafficking of Cultural Materials is open to offering advice on such matters to national committees of the Blue Shield and can be contacted at blueshield.illegaltrafficking@theblueshield.org

The Blue Shield is an independent, impartial, neutral, and not-for-profit international NGO dedicated to the protection of cultural property in the event of armed conflict and following disaster.

See: <https://theblueshield.org/what-we-do/countering-trafficking/>