

México Indígena

[Home](#)

[Methods](#)

[Oaxaca study area](#)

[Huasteca study area](#)

[Bowman Concept and Program](#)

[MORE ABOUT THE BOWMAN EXPEDITIONS AND MÉXICO INDÍGENA:](#)

[INTRODUCTION](#)

[BACKGROUND](#)

[PROBLEMATIC, FOCUS, AND OBJECTIVES](#)

The American Geographical Society

Developing Guidelines for Ethical Conduct of Foreign Field Research

Since 1851, the American Geographical Society (AGS) has sponsored or led countless expeditions to foreign lands for exploration and field research in physical and human geography. An unspoken set of ethical principles continuously has governed our conduct.

Today, global issues regarding sovereignty, human security, environmental stewardship, material wellbeing, social equity, and cultural respect (often collectively subsumed under terms such as sustainability or human flourishing) demand a new era of foreign field research, hearkening back to a past when the United States relied heavily on knowledge created by geographers and other scholars conducting field research abroad. To promote the resurgence of geographic expeditions and ennoble their purpose, we hereby formalize our foreign field research ethic.

The AGS is committed to improving foreign policy and international relations through improved understanding of foreign lands and peoples.

Of paramount concern is that AGS-sponsored research be accomplished by scholars conducting research for the public good with complete intellectual freedom and independence.

The AGS also holds paramount the personal safety and professional honor of students and scholars who travel and explore under its auspices and the in-country associates with whom they travel or communicate.

The purpose of this document is to set forth ethical guidelines that address and enable these three complementary propositions for all AGS ventures, but the guidelines stand on their own merit. It is our fervent hope that all scholarly foreign field research, no matter who sponsors or leads it, will adhere to the standards and traditions of academic integrity that our guidelines reflect.

A. AGS expeditions will be led by qualified scholars from within the academic community. AGS lead researchers will, with rare exception, be scholars associated with degree-granting colleges or universities and subject to the standards and practices of ethical research as understood by their academic institutions and disciplinary communities.

B. In the course of AGS-sponsored expeditions, no university, scholar, or student will be tasked to gather data or information by anyone other than the lead scholar, or his or her designate. Also to be avoided and countered is the actual or apparent tasking from outside the confines of the academic team as comprehended by the lead scholar.

C. The lead scholar of each expedition will arrange in advance for the safety and well-being of all traveling participants in an AGS-sponsored expedition. The specific measures to be taken and policies to be followed in regard to the physical safety of participants will vary from expedition to expedition, but they will be agreed-upon in writing between the lead researcher and the AGS before any foreign travel is begun.

D. Each lead scholar of an AGS-sponsored expedition will prepare and execute a plan to further the intellectual and professional development of each participating scholar and student.

E. No information will be acquired through deception or misrepresentation.

F. Expedition leaders and staff are forbidden from falsely identifying themselves or their institutions while conducting AGS sponsored research or engaged in travel associated with such research.

G. Original sources of funding for AGS-sponsored expeditions will be made publicly transparent. The only exceptions will be private, civilian donors who wish to remain anonymous.

H. Expedition leaders, staff, and students will not be embedded in military units while conducting AGS-sponsored research or engaged in travel associated with such research.

I. All information gathered abroad must be unclassified. It must not have been formally designated by the United States or host government as sensitive to national security, as a hindrance to formal judicial processes, or as private data the release of which is unlawful. The information must not be a state or civil secret. On occasion, information may, after its acquisition, be identified by a national government as a state or civil secret. In such rare instances, disposition of the information will be determined by the lead scholar and AGS in accordance with applicable laws.

J. All results of AGS-sponsored expeditions including data, information, reports, articles, and web sites, if released to anyone outside the immediate research team, must be made freely available to everyone, including United States Government agencies, host countries, other academic researchers, and the public. If requested, a brief period of academic proprietorship (one year maximum) may be approved on a case by case basis.

K. On return, each lead scholar will submit to the AGS a comprehensive report regarding the administrative conduct of the expedition, methods, key findings, and lessons learned.

L. All analytical results will be unclassified.

M. Each lead scholar and many other participants will publish key findings in scholarly journals, popular media, and web sites. Authors have final authority over and responsibility for the contents and conclusions of their documents.

N. Lead scholars and other members of AGS-sponsored expeditions must comport themselves in a manner that respects cultures in the host country while simultaneously adhering to widely held values of American culture. Their actions must not adversely affect the people or natural environments of host countries. A significant breach of this provision may result in recall of individuals or entire expeditions.

O. Lead scholars, expeditions members, and AGS will protect the confidentiality of any human subjects that may be involved. Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval is required for any activity constituting human subjects research.

To enforce these guidelines, the AGS will exercise unfettered, independent oversight of all projects and expeditions under its

aegis. Partner institutions, especially parent institutions of expedition leaders, will be expected to exercise similar oversight regarding foreign research conducted under formal agreement with AGS. Our commitment to these guidelines will be communicated clearly and in a timely manner to all interested parties. The AGS will establish a Foreign Field Research Advisory Board consisting of established scholars in geography and other appropriate disciplines, including foreign scholars, who will be invited to review and advise on ethical matters regarding AGS-sponsored expeditions.

We invite all professional associations and institutions involved in scholarly foreign field research to review our guidelines, adapt them to their needs, and promulgate similar guidelines of their own.

Jerome E. Dobson
President
Mary Lynne Bird
Executive Director

A clarification: FMSO and *México Indígena*

Because the Foreign Military Studies Office (FMSO) has been one of several sponsors of the first [Bowman Expedition México Indígena](#), there has been some understandable confusion regarding the project's aims.

The FMSO is a small research facility which sponsors open-source academic studies. They give complete freedom to the academic team to develop the research focus and methods. *México Indígena*, like upcoming [Bowman Expeditions](#), does not rely on this one funding source, but rather a range of sources, including several in the host country.

FMSO's goal is to help increase an understanding of the world's cultural terrain, so that the U.S. government may avoid the enormously costly mistakes which it has made due in part to a lack of such understanding. During several periods in U.S. history, academic geographers have had important roles as advisors to government through their own local, place-based research worldwide.

The first Bowman Expedition, *México Indígena*, is led by Peter Herlihy of the University of Kansas. Dr. Herlihy was instrumental in the laborious fieldwork, community organization, and training of indigenous people which allowed the [Emberá and Wounaan of the Darién region of Panama to secure permanent rights to their land](#), and he helped guide similar work in and around the [Río Plátano Biosphere Reserve of Honduras, where indigenous Pech, Sumu, and Miskito communities established official recognition of their natural resource use areas](#) in the face of rapid internal colonial agricultural expansion. All involved with *México Indígena* have benefited from Dr. Herlihy's experience in helping indigenous people defend their own territories by expressing their own culture through maps.

The U.S. and Mexican professors, students, and indigenous participants who make up the *México Indígena* team are now exploring and refining the truly participatory methods to embrace the power of geographic information systems (GIS) technology. As in Panama and Honduras, a key to successfully defending indigenous territorial rights and spatial concepts is to transform each community's sketch maps into standardized maps, while painstakingly preserving every detail of the indigenous people's concept of their geography. The resulting maps show anything the community decides is important for them to locate themselves with GPS -- examples may include indigenous-language place names, local concepts of land tenure, or community-managed natural resource areas. Always, every item in every map is repeatedly verified by the communities through multiple visits by the *México Indígena* team.

Experience has proven that, when communities themselves give the world their understandings of their land, the world is better equipped to respect these alternative understandings. The [PROCEDE](#) program can be seen as an excellent illustration of an attempt to disregard these alternatives. Some Mexican indiegnous communities have rejected the PROCEDE-initiated [property regime](#), and *México Indígena* gives them an opportunity to express the robustness of their local [property regimes](#). Other communities have accepted PROCEDE's initial survey work, but are creatively adapting the legal structure it imposes to suit their own needs. Again, *México Indígena* has pioneered the documenting and analysis of these adaptations in the academic world, as well as providing the tools (training and completed initial maps) for the indigenous communities to strengthen their practices, and to communicate them to government entities and other communities. Without the on-the-ground research which *México Indígena* does, it will be impossible to adequately analyze the impacts of PROCEDE.

The *México Indígena* team is well aware that some people are suspicious of the fact that FMSO is one of its sponsors. We ask only that such potential critics keep an open mind, that they learn a little about what we really do, and that they reconsider their assumption that any action which involves any part of the U.S. government must necessarily be bad. We do appreciate the hard questions which our work generates, and are happy to discuss or debate these questions with anyone who is willing to acknowledge how deeply our respect for indigenous communities permeates everything we do.