The Coalition for Archaeological Synthesis

Modern society is beset on all sides. War, climate, inequality, migration—the list goes on and on. Every day we are offered new potential solutions. Yet, nothing really works; there are no silver bullets. To paraphrase H.L. Mencken: for every complex problem there is an answer that is clear, simple, and wrong. Solving complex problems demands serious scientific research.

We created the Coalition for Archaeological Synthesis to use the science of the past to create a better future. Archaeology, through its study of human processes through deep time, is key to understanding where we come from and how we got here, prerequisites for envisioning a future different from the present. Today's societies may be more technologically sophisticated than those in the past, but many of our problems have been faced, and solved, before. All human groups must provide food and shelter and perpetuate themselves. They confront a myriad of problems that are at once unique to them and common to all. Since the dawn of humanity, humans have solved, or been undone, by these problems in all types of environments and under all forms of society, economy, and polity.

Discerning unique elements from common patterns requires us to apply to human behavior the same scientific rigor that split the atom, put a man on the moon, and mapped the human genome. Humans, however, are not atoms. They do not all react the same nor are their actions immutable. Yet, collective actions form patterns that while invisible to individual actors and immune to discovery using a shallow-time lens, are discernable if probed by the right questions at the right temporal and spatial scales. This approach allows us to capture first, second, and third order changes in socio-environmental processes that may take millennia to unfold. In that endeavor, we are likely to uncover an array of system states that are potentially possible, even if they have not been documented in the historical record, that provide insight for public policy to address societal challenges.

To this end, archaeologists need to identify and better understand the elusive deep time social patterns often invisible at the site or even regional scale. They need to spend less time interpreting project data sets and more time conducting broad comparative analyses that synthesize many data sets, leveraging the billions of dollars the public has invested in preserving the past. Such work involves assembling experts from science, humanities, and traditional knowledge working in collaborative networks creating tools that make these data accessible in interactive forms designed for problem-focused comparative research and devising theories that accommodate big, complicated, and multidisciplinary data sets.

To advance science, we must put in place the conditions that facilitate scientific advancement. The programs of the Coalition for Archaeological Research foster collaborative research by connecting scholars and building research teams best positioned to ask and answer the pressing questions of the day by breaking down institutional, disciplinary, and societal barriers. We recognize that archaeology is poised to make a quantum leap from a science rooted in understanding ancient mysteries to one that uses the past to envision the future. But archaeology, like all sciences, is conservative. Change occurs under the right conditions and if pushed in the right direction. Our mission is to be that push.

The goal of the Coalition is to promote synthetic research on important social science questions whose answers will have policy implications for addressing contemporary social issues. The synthesis efforts will focus on questions for which archaeology's long-term perspective will be crucial and will exploit the enormous amounts of archaeological data that we have collected over the last century.

To accomplish those goals, we seek to leverage the many and varied capacities of our partner organizations, including: professional organizations, CRM firms, academic units, nongovernmental organizations, and archaeological cyberinfrastructure providers (list below). We'd ask you to join us in this effort by joining the Coalition as a partner.
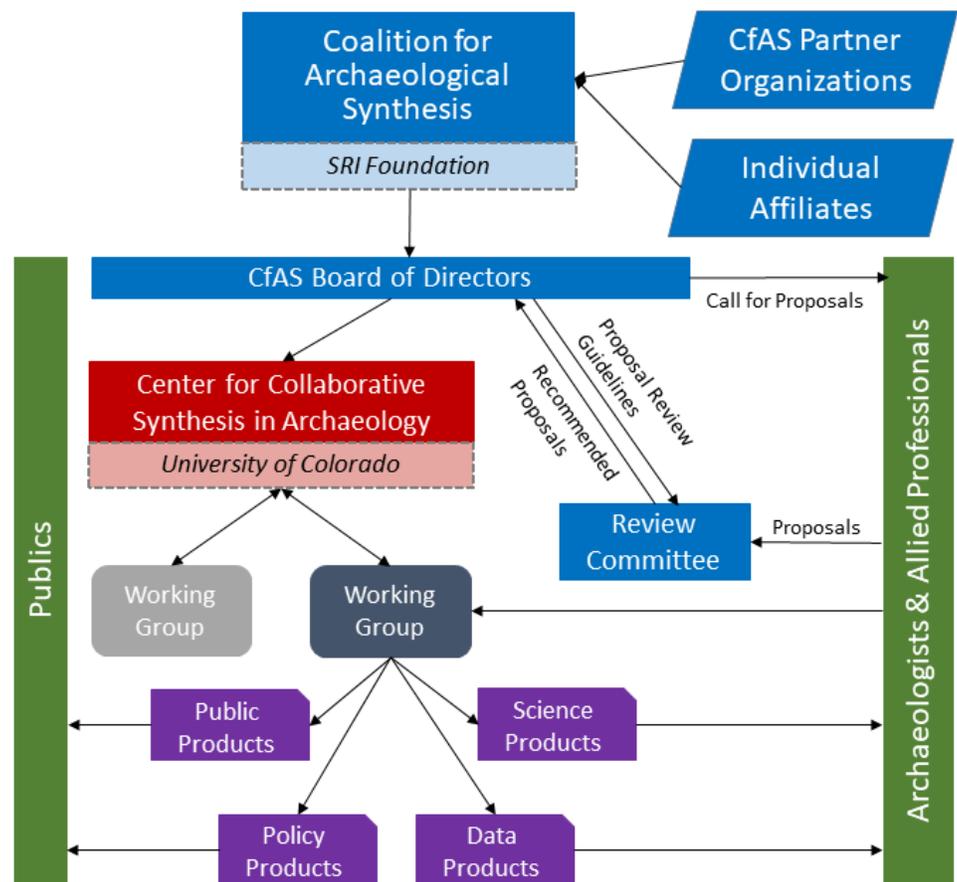
Partner organizations benefit by:

- Being visible as Partners supporting the mission of CfAS on its website,

- Influencing the direction of the Coalition by nominating and voting for members of the CfAS Board of Directors, and

- Receiving notices of all funding opportunities, email bulletins, and annual reports from the Coalition.

Partner organizations are expected to:

- Support the objectives of the Coalition for Archaeological Synthesis,

- Promote and publicize the activities of the Coalition as appropriate,

- Show their commitment to CfAS through payment of $200 dues annually, and

- Encourage sharing of archaeological data by their organization within constraints of the law or imposed by permits, clients, or other funders, subject to a reasonable embargo period after completion of projects.

Finally, we'd urge you, as an individual, to become a CfAS Associate and encourage others in your organization to do the same (it is free). You sign up as a Partner or an Associate on our web site, http://archsynth.org. The web site has more information about the Coalition. A more detailed presentation of our conception of CfAS is given in a brief paper in PNAS and a longer one in Advances in Archaeological Practice.

Partner Organizations
2019-11-15

Professional Organizations
- American Cultural Resources Organization (ACRA)
- Archaeology Division, American Anthropological Association
- Archaeological Institute of America (AIA)
- Chartered Institute for Archaeologists (CIfA)
- European Association of Archaeologists (EAA)
- International Scientific Committee on Archaeological Heritage Management (ICAHM)
- International Council for Archaeozoology (ICAZ)
- PanAfrican Archaeological Association (PAA)
- Society for American Archaeology (SAA)
- Society for Historical Archaeology (SHA)

Cultural Heritage Firms
- Alpine Archaeology, Inc.
- Cultural Heritage Partners
- Cultural Resource Analysts, Inc.
- Desert Archaeology, Inc.
- Far Western Anthropological Research Group
- PaleoWest Archaeology
- Statistical Research, Inc.

Cyberinfrastructure Providers
- Archaeological Data Service (ADS; University of York)
- ARIADNE
- Arizona State University Center for Digital Antiquity
- Network for Computational Modeling in Social & Ecological Sciences (CoMSES Net)
- OCHRE Data Services
- Open Context

Academic Units
- Macquarie University Center for Ancient Cultural Heritage & Environment (CACHE; Sydney)
- Arizona State University Center for Archaeology & Society
- Capital Normal University Center for Public Archaeology (Beijing)
- Cotsen Institute of Archaeology (University of California, Los Angeles)
- Istanbul Technical University Eurasia Institute of Earth Sciences, Department of Ecology and Evolution
- Phoebe A. Hearst Museum of Anthropology (University of California, Berkeley)
- Santa Fe Institute (SFI)
- University at Buffalo Institute for European and Mediterranean Archaeology
- University of Arizona School of Anthropology
- University of Colorado Boulder Department of Anthropology

Non-governmental Organizations
- Amerind Foundation
- Archaeology Southwest
- Center for American Archaeology
- Crow Canyon Archaeological Center
- The Field Museum
- Institute for Field Research (IFR)
- Integrated History & Future of People on Earth (IHOPE)
- School for Advanced Research (SAR)
- SRI Foundation
- Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research