

Request for Information

The Creation and Division of Wealth and the Long-term Consequences of Inequality: Views from Archaeology

Precis: The [Coalition for Archaeological Synthesis](http://archsynth.org) (CfAS) seeks applications from researchers in archaeology and allied disciplines who are interested in participating in a collaborative synthetic research project on social inequality. This NSF-funded effort (recommended for funding in May 2021) will advance synthetic understandings of relationships between inequality and other dimensions of human social dynamics as they are revealed by the archaeological record. The project will be pursued by a *working group* of 10 researchers who have expertise in the study of social inequality and who have and are willing to share data and expertise pertinent to the topic for areas in which we seek coverage (see Research Areas and Data Types Sought, below). The working group, led by Tim Kohler and Amy Bogaard, will expand and develop the approach presented in Kohler et al. (2017) and Kohler and Smith (2018). A more complete summary of the research strategy may be found in the Project Summary from the successful NSF Grant application attached at the end of this RFI

Deadline for receipt of letters of interest: July 23, 2021

Participants to be selected: 5 (who will join five others already selected: Shadreck Chirikure, Tim Kerig, Scott Ortman, Bogaard, and Kohler)

Contact: Questions concerning this Request for Information should be sent to Scott Ortman, Director, Center for Collaborative Synthesis in Archaeology (CCSA), at scott.ortman@colorado.edu.

Background

Established in 2017, the Coalition for Archaeological Synthesis advances synthetic research using the working group model pioneered by the [National Center for Ecological Analysis and Synthesis](http://nceas.org) (NCEAS). Although new to archaeology, the NCEAS model of research has been a powerful driver for advancing interdisciplinary scientific research in other fields (Carpenter et al. 2009; Hackett et al. 2008). The rationale behind and the vision of the Coalition is articulated in two papers (Altschul et al. 2017, 2018) available on the [CfAS website](http://archsynth.org) (<http://archsynth.org>). As the project is intended to put into practice the collaborative research model laid out in those papers, RFI applicants are strongly encouraged to consult them.

Letters of interest submitted in response to this Request for Information will be used by CfAS to identify working group participants for a working group effort extending from the fall 2021 into the fall of 2024, with in-person meetings in Oxford, UK tentatively scheduled for November 2021 and in Boulder Colorado in fall 2022. Travel, lodging, and related meeting costs of the participants selected for the workshop will be paid through an NSF award to CU-Boulder's CCSA.

A research stipend of \$6500 will be provided to each participant to assist in data compilation and cleaning. No additional field or laboratory work will be funded.

Research Areas and Data Types Sought

In selecting researchers, we will prioritize expertise and access to existing data from areas such as Japan, South Asia, South America, and Eastern North America that have been lightly represented in prior work, and from areas able to present a continuous, long and well dated sequence of data. Regions that have been relatively well represented in earlier work on this topic (including the US Southwest and Mesoamerica) will be a lower priority, unless they can offer long and well-dated sequences not previously analyzed from the perspectives we are advancing.

Participating researchers *must* have (or be able to develop) systematic data on house size and, ideally, household storage capacities for their area. It is important for chronology to be well controlled. The existence of high-quality contextual data for the sites, including reliable site and regional population estimates, well excavated assemblages of artifacts, well understood subsistence regimes, and data related to changing levels of violence is advantageous. A longer list of data to be tabulated will be developed at the initial meeting; we do not want to completely prejudge the sorts of data that researchers will advance from their specific areas as relevant to studying relative wealth and degree of prosperity and well being.

Application Submission, Evaluation, and Award

Application Submission:

Applications to participate in this working group must be submitted electronically to Meg.Quiat@colorado.edu, by **July 23 at 5PM MST (GMT-7)**. Letters of Interest shall be submitted in a **single** PDF or Microsoft Word document using an 11 point or larger font size, with pages having 1" margins.

Who May Submit Applications:

Letters of Interest can be submitted by any researcher with experience and having the rights to existing data, including house-size data, relevant to social inequality. All researchers regardless of nationality are eligible; we are committed to diversity and professional development and strongly encourage participation by junior and historically underrepresented researchers, heritage management professionals as well as academics, and by individuals from developing countries and indigenous communities. Ability to engage in scholarly discussions in English (orally and in writing) is required. By the end of the project, source and synthesized data products must be made available, open access, through a recognized digital repository. Those submitting applications must commit to make available, open access, those portions of their data that end up being employed by the working group, and to attend an initial meeting of the Working Group in Oxford tentatively scheduled for November 19-21, 2021.

Application Sections

Each application must consist of a 2-page letter of interest and a 2-page curriculum vitae.

Letter of Interest. A 2-page letter of interest demonstrates the applicant's relevant experience, describes their interest and past engagement in the study of inequality and explains how they would contribute to the working group efforts. The applicant will outline the data set(s) that they would contribute to the working group. Willingness and ability to engage in collaborative, interdisciplinary research and to integrate diverse data sources should be emphasized.

Curriculum Vitae. A 2-page summary curriculum vitae is required. No other information (such as hyperlinks to outside material) will be considered. The US National Science Foundation's biosketch format is preferred but not required.

Review and Selection Process

Applications meeting the requirements set out above will be evaluated by a CfAS Review Committee that will evaluate applications on the extent to which they convey convincing arguments for making a contribution to this collaborative research effort. In addition to obtaining the desired areal and temporal coverage in archaeological data, the Review Committee will be charged with ensuring that the working-group membership as a whole has substantial diversity along as many dimensions as possible, including gender, professional status, nationality, and intellectual orientation. The Review Committee will recommend the five individuals to participate in the working group. Final decisions on working-group membership will rest with PIs Kohler and Bogaard. Participant selections are expected within 4 weeks of the application deadline.

Award Information

The award will pay directly for the lodging, and meals during the working group meetings. In addition, it will provide each participant with a research stipend of \$6500 to aid in data compilation and cleaning. If required, it will also cover visa fees and provide letters of invitation. Participants, including international participants, will be reimbursed for reasonable travel expenses. This would include, for example, transportation to and from the origin airport, advance-purchase coach airfare, transportation from the destination airport to the conference facility, and meal expenses (at a standard US General Services Administration rate) during travel. If reimbursement represents a problem, it may be possible to arrange for an advance or for purchase of plane tickets directly

Effect of Submitting a Letter of Interest

By submitting an application in response to this RFI, the applicant acknowledges that applications may be submitted by other applicants and that CfAS is under no legal obligation to select an applicant's letter of interest. Applicants submitting RFI responses further acknowledge that CfAS' decision as to whom to grant an award is final, binding and non-appealable.

References Cited

Altschul, Jeffrey H., Keith W. Kintigh, Terry H. Klein, William H. Doelle, Kelley A. Hays-Gilpin, Sarah A. Herr, Timothy A. Kohler, Barbara J. Mills, Lindsay M. Montgomery, Margaret C. Nelson, Scott G. Ortman, John N. Parker, Matthew A. Peeples, and Jeremy A. Sabloff

2017 Opinion: Fostering synthesis in archaeology to advance science and benefit society. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America* 114(42):10999–11002. [DOI:10.1073/pnas.1715950114](https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1715950114).

2018 Fostering Collaborative Synthetic Research in Archaeology. *Advances in Archaeological Practice* 6(1):19–29. [DOI:10.1017/aap.2017.31](https://doi.org/10.1017/aap.2017.31).

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Hackett, Edward J., John N. Parker, David Conz, Diana Rhoten, and Andrew Parker

2008 Ecology Transformed: The National Center for Ecological Analysis and Synthesis and the Changing Patterns of Ecological Research. *Scientific Collaboration on the Internet*.

Kohler, Timothy A., and Michael E. Smith (editors)

2018 *Ten Thousand Years of Inequality: The Archaeology of Wealth Differences*. University of Arizona Press, Tucson.

Kohler, Timothy A., Michael E. Smith, Amy Bogaard, Gary M. Feinman, Christian E. Peterson, Alleen Betzenhauser, Matthew Pailes, Elizabeth C. Stone, Anna Marie Prentiss, Timothy J. Dennehy, Laura J. Ellyson, Linda M. Nicholas, Ronald K. Faulseit, Amy Styring, Jade Whitlam, Mattia Fochesato, Thomas A. Foor, and Samuel Bowles

2017 Greater post-Neolithic wealth disparities in Eurasia than in North America and Mesoamerica. *Nature* 551(7682):619–622. [DOI:10.1038/nature24646](https://doi.org/10.1038/nature24646).

Project Summary, “The Creation and Division of Wealth and the Long-term Consequences of Inequality: Views from Archaeology”

We propose to advance systematic understandings of the long-term causes and consequences of wealth inequality using a working-group approach that is unusual for archaeology. We have three main objectives. First, we will complement existing information on wealth inequality with data from regions not yet synthesized to provide a more complete description of the processes of wealth differentiation. Comparing these will then allow us to sharpen explanatory models for the rise of wealth inequality. Second, we will develop detailed high-temporal-resolution trajectories of wealth inequality in especially well understood regions to describe its dynamic relationships with political organization, violence, population size, and other key contextual variables. Where possible we will also systematize information on wealth creation, since a given degree of wealth differentiation might be experienced quite differently in a context of general prosperity than in situations of widespread poverty. Third, we will examine the degree of correlation of our main measure of wealth differentials in prehistory—house-size distributions—with household wealth and income in contemporary societies where we can control for potentially confounding factors such as local variation in prices and incomes. When archaeological proxies for key social processes can be shown to reflect the same processes in contemporary societies, it increases the value of archaeological data and interpretations for people today. The project is organized by the Coalition for Archaeological Synthesis (CfAS) and

administered by the University of Colorado Center for Collaborative Synthesis in Archaeology. The project adapts the collaborative, working-group research model pioneered by the National Center for Ecological Analysis and Synthesis to the distinctive nature of archaeology. Thus, this proposal has an unusual dual nature: *we argue for a particular model of research, as well as for a particular research effort.*

Intellectual Merit

The project will test the validity and limitations of house-size distributions as proxies for income or wealth inequality by investigating relationships among these factors in contemporary societies. We will provide a more complete global picture of broad patterns in wealth inequality beginning in the Neolithic that expands on previous syntheses and supports deeper comparative analysis into its evolution. The project will develop finer-grained time series for societies having detailed archaeological evidence, supporting analyses into the dynamics of inequality through time within societies, and its direct and indirect social, economic, and cultural effects.

Broader Impacts

Archaeology's unique ability to examine social processes over the long term will further public understanding and debate about social inequalities today—a fraught topic regularly occupying the front pages of our daily newspapers. The project will develop and examine a unique approach to synthesis via working groups, developed specifically for our discipline, which we predict will support greater participation by women, underrepresented minorities, and cultural resource management professionals, who are often excluded from research though they command substantial amounts of primary data. The large corpus of well documented data on inequality we produce will be deposited in tDAR, enhancing infrastructure for research and education. A popular volume on the prehistory of wealth inequality—informed by this project, but not funded by it—will complement CfAS webpages and professional publications to reach a wide variety of audiences.