Registered Archaeologist - FAQ

The RPA recognizes that not all career archaeologists have obtained an advanced degree (MA or PhD) in archaeology, anthropology or a closely related field, and instead have terminated their education at the BA level. Archaeologists practicing full-time in our profession should have the opportunity to register and to demonstrate to employers, clients, and the broader profession that they adhere to the Code of Conduct and Standards for Research Performance, whether or not they have an advanced degree. The Registered Archaeologist (RA) Category is designed to make our professional standards inclusive of those who meet the requirements for registration, but who have not completed an advanced degree. The following FAQ is designed to provide some basic answers for those considering applying to become an RA and for those who may be asked to serve as a sponsor for a RA applicant.

How is a Registered Archaeologist (RA) different from a Registered Professional Archaeologist (RPA)?

The new RA category is for archaeologists who are dedicated to a professional career in archaeology and do not have an advanced degree. RAs must follow the Register’s Code of Conduct and Standards of Research Performance and are bound by the RPA’s Grievance Procedure.

Who qualifies to be an RA?

Qualified applicants must have a bachelor’s degree in Archaeology, Anthropology, or a closely related field, along with at least two years (24 months) of full-time professional experience. Applicants with an advanced degree who qualify to become an RPA may not apply to become a RA.

How much does it cost to apply to be an RA?

The application fee for RA ($35) is waived for applications received in 2020. Annual dues are $50 if the applicant is a member of one or more of RPA’s sponsoring organizations, $65 if the applicant is a member of an RPA affiliated society, or $99 per year otherwise.
How do I find an RPA to sponsor my application?

As an RA applicant, you will likely find that you already know an RPA who is familiar with your work experience and ethical commitment. You can reach out to your professional network, and/or use the RPA look-up tool to confirm that your sponsor is an active registrant in the RPA Directory.

Someone asked me to sponsor them to be an RA. What does this mean?

To qualify as a sponsor for an RA application, you must be a current RPA registrant in good standing. By sponsoring the applicant, you confirm that you are familiar with the applicant’s work history, the quality of their work, and their commitment to ethical professional practice. You should not agree to sponsor an application for someone you do not know and with whose’s work you are unfamiliar. Beyond the initial sponsorship, there are no ongoing commitments by agreeing to be an RPA sponsor, and the RA is a fully independent member of the RPA.

Are RAs subject to the Register’s Grievance Process?

Yes - The Register has a grievance process to enforce our Code and Standards. The process is also intended to protect registrants who follow the Code and Standards from potentially damaging, frivolous, or irrelevant claims of misconduct. The grievance process is a way to keep archaeologists accountable for doing work they are qualified to do in an ethical manner. Agreeing to abide by the Code and Standards demonstrates to employers and clients that you hold yourself to a high ethical standard.

What if someone files a grievance against me?

Anyone can file a grievance against a registrant for a violation of the Code and Standards, including your peers, staff, employer, tribal members, or anyone else. It is important that you always conduct yourself and your work in an ethical manner. If a grievance is filed against you, the Grievance Coordinator will review the claim and investigate whether there is cause to move the grievance forward. For more information, review the RPA Grievance Procedure.

Will RAs also be expected to participate in Continuing Professional Development?

Yes. RAs will need to demonstrate a consistent commitment to continuing professional development and document their activities annually beginning in 2021.
What counts as “Continuing Professional Development”?  

Many activities that archaeologists are already engaged in will count towards the continuing professional development hours required for all RAs and RPAs, including but not limited to: attending a public talk, presenting at a conference, listening to a webinar, engaging in public outreach, publishing academic or popular science articles, taking a Register-certified Continuing Professional Education Course, auditing or enrolling in college seminars, and more. The goal of this requirement is to ensure that Register archaeologists are active and engaged in their field.

How will professional development hours be logged?  

Beginning in 2021, RAs and RPAs will be able to self-report their professional development hours through the RPANet web portal.

What counts towards the two years of professional experience for an RA? Why doesn’t a field school count?  

Two years of supervised experience can include employment, internships, laboratory work, or fieldwork. The RA applicant, for example, might be working as a paid archaeologist, or might be a undergraduate student volunteering in their university archaeology lab, or might be an early career graduate student overseeing field school students. Not counted towards the two-year requirement are any courses, including field school, taken for credit towards the applicant’s degree.

What if I haven’t written a BA/BS thesis? What other types of reports are acceptable?  

Not all university programs offer a thesis option at the bachelor’s level, and some MA programs also have non-thesis options. However, the Register requires evidence that an RA has done research-based written work in the field of archaeology, either during their undergraduate studies or in their two years of work experience. Ideally, the applicant will demonstrate an ability to pose and answer an archaeological research question through a thesis, senior paper, or capstone project, but authorship of field reports, in whole or in part (e.g., a technical section, background context research), is also acceptable.

I read the RPA Code of Conduct, and Standards of Research Performance. I am not in charge of many of the requirements for the Standards of Research Performance - does this mean I’m responsible when anything on a project I work on goes wrong?
There are many levels of responsibility on any archaeological project. Principal Investigators and Project Directors have the greatest responsibility and oversight for a project, but all members of a project—field technicians, field supervisors, crew chiefs, teaching assistants, or laboratory staff can and should conduct themselves in a way that is not counter to the Code and Standards.

**Are there any changes to being an RPA now that there are RAs?**

There are no changes to RPA as a result of the new registration category. The Register encourages current RPA registrants join us in welcoming new RAs and supporting their commitment to abide by the Code and Standards and raise the professional profile of our discipline.

**Once I'm an RA what does this mean for professional recognition? Can I put ‘RA’ after my name?**

Once your application to become an RA is approved, you may begin referring to yourself as a “Registered Archaeologist” and use the postnominal “RA” after your name on business cards, email signatures, CVs, etc. However, if your registration lapses at any time, you must immediately cease presenting yourself as or using the title “Registered Archaeologist” or “RA.”

**Can I stand in the elections for RPA?**

The Board is recommending that a new position on the RPA Board of Directors be created to ensure representation of RA registrants in the future work and policy of the Register. For all other non-board positions within the Register, RAs may stand for election on a board or committee and are encouraged to do so. The Register relies on volunteer efforts from registrants, and involvement on boards and committees is the best way to be part of the conversations that contribute to the organization’s future.

**After reading all the requirements and FAQs about RA and RPA, I’m still unsure if I qualify, or for which designation I qualify. What do I do now?**

Contact the RPA Registrar before applying to discuss your application further – registrar@rpanet.org.