



Association for Applied and Clinical Sociology: Ethical Standards for Sociological Practitioners

PREAMBLE

We, the members of the Association for Applied and Clinical Sociology, as sociological practitioners, applied, clinical, and engaged public sociologists are committed to increasing the knowledge of social behavior and to using this knowledge to promote human welfare and to address issues of social importance. While pursuing these endeavors, we make every effort to protect the welfare of any individual, group, or organization we study or assist. We use our skills only for purposes consistent with these values and do not knowingly permit their misuse by others. While demanding for ourselves freedom of inquiry and communication, sociological practitioners accept the responsibility this freedom requires: competence, objectivity in the application of skills and concern for the best interests of clients, colleagues, and society in general.

PRINCIPLE 1. Competence

The maintenance of high standards of professional competence is a responsibility shared by all sociological practitioners. We only provide services, use techniques, or offer opinions that meet recognized professional standards and fall within the scope of our knowledge and training. We maintain our knowledge of current scientific practices and professional information related to the services we render. Consequently, we recognize and embrace the need for continuing our education, professional development, and creative problem solving. We endorse the peer review of our work, whether in professional journals, conferences, or other outlets.

a. As practitioners, we refrain from undertaking activities in which our personal circumstances are likely to lead to biased outcomes, inadequate professional services, or harm to a client or others. If we become aware of problems while engaged in such activity, we seek competent professional assistance to determine whether we should suspend, terminate, or limit the scope of our professional and/or scientific activities.

b. As teachers or trainers, we perform our duties with careful preparation. Our instruction is accurate, current, and scholarly, both in content and pedagogical approach.

PRINCIPLE 2. Responsibility

In our commitment to the understanding of human behavior, sociological practitioners value objectivity and integrity. In providing services, we seek to maintain the highest standards of our

profession, accept responsibility for the consequences of our work, and make every effort to ensure that our services are used appropriately. In particular, sociological practitioners are committed to avoid any act or suggestion that would support discrimination against any identifiable group, including race/ethnicity, national origin, religion, gender/gender identity, sexual orientation, disability/health conditions, age, marital status or parental status.

a. As researchers, sociological practitioners accept the ultimate responsibility for recommending and selecting appropriate topics and methods of research. We plan our research in ways to minimize the possibility that our findings will be misleading. We provide thorough discussion of the limitations of our data and alternative explanations, especially where our work touches on social and/or organizational policy. In publishing reports of our work, we do not suppress conflicting data.

b. As researchers, sociological practitioners seek to establish clear expectations for sharing and utilizing research data with other persons, professionals, organizations, or agencies. We avoid dual relationships, whether political or monetary, which may limit objectivity or increase the possibility of bias so that interference with data, human participants, and social milieu is kept to a minimum.

c. As sociological practitioners, we know that we bear a heavy responsibility because our recommendations and professional actions may alter the lives of others. We recognize that we must not do harm to those we serve or to our research subjects. We are alert to personal, social, organizational, financial, or political situations or pressures that might lead to the misuse of our influence.

d. As teachers or trainers, we recognize our primary obligation to help others acquire knowledge and skill. We maintain high standards of scholarship and objectivity by presenting information fully and accurately.

e. As employees of an institution or agency, we have the responsibility of remaining alert to, and attempting to moderate, institutional pressures that may distort reports of sociological findings or impede their proper use.

f. As employers or supervisors, we provide useful and timely evaluations to employees, trainees, students, and to others whom we supervise.

PRINCIPLE 3. The Welfare of Research Subjects, Clients, and Students

Sociological practitioners respect the integrity and protect the welfare of the people and groups with whom we work. We adopt US federal guidelines regarding the protection of human subjects as a minimum ethical standard. We inform all participants as to the purpose and nature of our evaluation, treatment, educational or training activities, and we freely acknowledge that clients, students or participants in research have a choice of whether or not to participate or to continue to participate once an activity has begun.

a. We are continually cognizant of our inherently powerful position with regard to research participants, clients, and students. We make every effort to avoid the types of relationships with

clients or others that might compromise our professional judgment or objectivity. Also, where the demands of an organization go beyond reasonable conditions of employment, sociological practitioners recognize possible conflicts of interest. When such conflicts occur, we clarify the nature of the conflict and inform all parties of the nature and direction of the loyalties and responsibilities involved.

b. When acting as a supervisor, trainer, researcher, or employer, sociological practitioners provide others with confidentiality, due process, informed consent, and protection from physical and mental harm.

c. Sociological practitioners who find that their services are being used by clients or employers in ways that are not beneficial to participants, employees, or significant others should make their observations known to the parties involved and should propose modifications or termination of the activity.

PRINCIPLE 4. Confidentiality

Safeguarding information about an individual, group, or organization that has been obtained by the sociological practitioner in the course of teaching, practice, or research is a major obligation. Such information is not communicated to others unless certain important conditions are met.

a. Information obtained in confidence is revealed only after the most careful deliberation when there is clear and imminent danger to an individual or to society. If such information is to be revealed, the sociological practitioner should first seek to limit the information to only appropriate professionals or public authorities. Revealing confidential information to the public is only undertaken in extraordinary circumstances.

b. Information obtained through research, clinical, consulting, or evaluation work concerning children, students, employees and others is discussed only for professional purposes. Written and oral reports present only data germane to the purposes of the work, and every effort is made to avoid undue invasion of privacy.

c. Confidential materials may only be used in teaching and writing when the identities of the persons, organizations, or localities involved are adequately disguised and/or protected.

d. Sociological practitioners maintain the confidentiality of professional communications about individuals. Only when all persons involved give their express permission is a confidential professional communication shown to another individual. The sociological practitioner is responsible for informing the client of the limits of confidentiality.

e. Where research data are being made public, the sociological practitioner assumes responsibility for protecting the privacy of the subjects involved.

PRINCIPLE 5. Moral and Legal Standards

As teachers, trainers, consultants, practitioners, and researchers, we remain informed about relevant federal, state, local, and agency regulations and association standards of practice concerning our teaching, and/or the conduct of our practice or our research. We recognize that

these are minimum standards of conduct which we may go beyond in the course of our work. We also strive to be aware of prevailing community standards, and thus of the possible impact upon the quality of professional services provided by conformity to, or deviation from, those standards. We are concerned with developing regulations that best serve the public interest, and in working to change existing regulations that are not beneficial to the interest of the public.

- a. As sociological practitioners, we avoid any action that will violate or diminish the legal, civil, and/or human rights of clients or of others who may be affected by our actions.
- b. As teachers or trainers, sociological practitioners are aware of the diverse backgrounds of students, and, when dealing with possibly offensive topics, treat the material with sensitivity.
- c. As employers and employees, sociological practitioners refuse to participate in any practices that are inconsistent with legal, moral, and ethical standards regarding the treatment of employees or of others.

PRINCIPLE 6. Statements about Social Concerns, Policies, and Programs

Sociological practitioners are often in possession of data or privileged information about critical social issues, policies, programs, laws or regulations. We have an obligation to our clients, our research subjects, and to our profession to maintain confidentiality. However, we also have an obligation to society to use our skills, experience, and knowledge for the benefit of human welfare. When there is conflict between professional participation in social and policy discussions and maintaining confidential or privileged information, identifying information must be removed in order to allow for discussion or presentation without compromise.

On those rare occasions where public silence would have grievous or momentous consequences, we must weigh our obligations to society, especially to its most vulnerable members, against the usual procedures of confidentiality and professional objectivity. We recognize this dilemma, and that balancing these responsibilities must be approached with deliberation and care. However, we recognize it also is essential in adhering to both the need for societal accountability and professionalism. Sociological practitioners who consider the public presentation of privileged information must recognize the threat of such action to all sociologists and to applied practitioners, researchers and clinical professionals in general. The public presentation of privileged information can be interpreted as a fundamental break of professional ethics or as the obligation of the professional to society and/or to those whom society assumes the professional will protect.

- a. Sociological practitioners who consider the public presentation of privileged information should consult with colleagues, the Ethics Committee of the Association, and with the client to discuss such actions, in advance of disclosure. In such discussions, all information should be safeguarded to avoid inappropriate dissemination of information.
- b. In all circumstances, sociological practitioners who speak to the general public accept the obligation to present material fairly and accurately, avoiding misrepresentation through sensationalism, exaggeration or superficiality.

PRINCIPLE 7. Statements about Work and Services

Sociological practitioners represent accurately and realistically our professional qualifications, affiliations and functions, as well as those of the institutions or organizations with which we or our statements may be associated. In public statements about the availability of products and services, providing professional information or opinions, we fully consider the limits and uncertainties of present sociological knowledge and techniques.

a. As a service, the Association may confer the title of Certified Clinical Sociologist (CCS) or Certified Sociological Practitioner (CSP). When the Association certifies a recipient, the AACCS indicates that an experienced professional sociological practitioner has demonstrated before a committee of certified peers competence in the recipient's practice of applied, clinical, or engaged public sociology. The recipient of the CCS/CSP is personally and professionally responsible for upholding the Ethical Standards of the Association.

b. In announcing the availability of services or products, sociological practitioners do not display any affiliations with an organization that falsely imply the sponsorship or certification of that organization. In particular, sociological practitioners do not offer AACCS membership as evidence of qualification.

c. Announcements of training activities give a clear statement of purpose and the nature of the experiences to be provided. The education, training and experience of sociological practitioners sponsoring or providing such activities are appropriately specified.

d. Sociological practitioners conducting research for clients should clarify specific details of a project with the client, preferably in writing, prior to the beginning of the work. Such details might include timelines for key project phases, the nature and timing of deliverables, the proprietary nature of research results, and any related publication rights associated with the project. Similarly, financial arrangements in professional practice are intended to safeguard the interests of clients as well as practitioners. The costs should be clearly discussed with the client and, to the extent possible, agreed upon in advance of billing.

Practitioners are encouraged to carefully review the professional, historical and organizational values of employers with whom they are contracted to do work. When working in contract with an employer, results of a practitioner's work become the property of the employer. Under these conditions the sociological practitioner does not have the right to publicly or professionally make use of the results without the written permission of the employer.

e. Sociological practitioners associated with the development or promotion of books or other items offered for commercial sale make every effort to ensure that announcements and advertisements are presented in a professional, scientifically acceptable, and factually informative manner.

f. As teachers or trainers, sociological practitioners ensure that statements in catalogs and course outlines are accurate. Announcements or brochures describing workshops, seminars or other educational programs must accurately describe the intended audience, eligibility requirements, educational objectives, and nature of the material to be covered, as well as the education,

training, and experience of the individuals presenting the programs. If clinical services or other professional services are offered as an inducement to participation, sociological practitioners make clear the nature of the services as well as the costs and other obligations to be accepted by the participants.

g. Sociological practitioners have an obligation to correct or clarify any misrepresentation of our profession or its members.

PRINCIPLE 8. Relationships with Other Professionals and Institutions

Sociological practitioners understand the areas of competence of related professions and make full use of all the professional, technical, and administrative resources that best serve the interest of clients. The absence of formal relationships with other professionals does not relieve us from the responsibility of securing for our clients the best possible professional service, nor does it relieve us from the responsibility to obtain complementary or alternative assistance as needed by clients. We respect the competence of other professionals, cooperate with members of other professional organizations, and take care that colleagues are not exploited.

a. Sociological practitioners who employ or supervise other professionals and/or professionals in training accept the obligation to facilitate their professional development by providing suitable working conditions and learning opportunities.

b. As employees of organizations providing clinical or applied services, or as independent sociological practitioners serving clients in an organizational context, we seek to support the integrity, reputation, and proprietary rights of the host organization. When it is judged necessary in a client's interest to question the organization's programs or policies, sociological practitioners attempt to affect change by constructive action within the organization.

c. In the pursuit of research, sociological practitioners follow the guidelines of sponsoring agencies, host institutions, and accepted professional guidelines regarding ethical conduct.

d. Sociological practitioners who engage in publication activities, including the compiling and/or editing of the works of others, appropriately credit all material used. Authorship is assigned to all those who have contributed to a publication in proportion to their contributions. Major contributions of a professional character made by several persons to a common project are recognized by joint authorship, with the person making the principle contribution typically identified and listed first. Secondary contributions, whether through professional or other services, are acknowledged in footnotes or in an introductory statement. Acknowledgment of all contributions, unpublished as well as published, that has directly influenced the research or writing is mandatory.

VIOLATIONS. Procedures Governing Alleged Violations of Ethical Standards

When a member of the Association for Applied and Clinical Sociology is alleged to violate any of the aforementioned ethical standards, members who know first-hand of such activities should, if possible, attempt to informally rectify the situation. Failing an informal solution, the person(s) involved should bring such activities to the attention of the Chair of the Ethics Committee. The

Ethics Committee will consider the matter and the Chair will forward a recommendation to the Executive Board of the Association for disposition. Complaints must be received within twelve (12) months of the alleged violation.

If a member of the Association believes that she or he has been sanctioned by an employer or client because he or she was required to perform in a manner that violates any of the principles of this Code, that member can request a review by bringing the situation to the attention of the Chair of the Ethics Committee. The Ethics Committee will consider the matter and the Chair of the Ethics Committee will forward a recommendation to the Executive Board of the Association for disposition.

AMENDMENTS TO THE CODE OF ETHICS

Amendments to this document are made following the same procedures used to amend the bylaws of the Association.

Note: The current document is a revised version of the *Sociological Practice Association: Ethical Standards of Sociological Practitioners*, adopted 1982, revised 1985, 1987, and 1999.