

Code of Ethics & Professional Conduct

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1. Introduction

1.1 Vision and Purpose

The Geological Society of America Inc. (“GSA” or the “Society”) promotes the geosciences in many ways, ranging from organizing scientific meetings to publishing scientific journals and books and bestowing medals and awards. GSA’s vision is to be the premier geological society supporting the global community in scientific discovery, communication, and the application of geoscience knowledge. To achieve this vision, it is imperative that we adhere to the highest ethical standards in all of our professional activities.

The purpose of the Code of Ethics & Professional Conduct (the “Code”) is to foster a culture of integrity and excellence through our work as a Society and in furtherance of GSA’s tax-exempt charitable, educational, and scientific purposes.

In adopting the Code, GSA also underscores the importance of making ethical decisions in service to the sciences, humankind, and in stewardship of Earth. GSA is a signatory to the American Geosciences Institute (“AGI”) [Guidelines for Ethical Professional Conduct](#) (the “Guidelines”). GSA encourages all GSA Members and Awardees to apply the spirit of the Guidelines in carrying out our professional activities as geoscientists and members of the professional and scientific community.

1.2 Persons to Whom the Code Applies

This Code applies to GSA Members and Awardees as defined in the GSA Amended and Restated Bylaws as currently in effect and as may be amended in the future (the “Bylaws”). GSA Members include Honorary Fellows, Fellows, Members, or Affiliates (each a “Member” and collectively, the “Members”). Pursuant to the Bylaws, all Members must comply with this Code as a condition of GSA Membership and all Awardees must comply with this Code as a condition of receiving and remaining eligible to retain awards.

1.3 Relationship between the Code and Other GSA Policies

As the umbrella policy for ethics at GSA, this Code is supported by detailed policies referred to below. To access these policies, click on the hyperlinks or go to GSA’s website, navigate to the “About” tab, and then click on “Ethics.”

- [Conflicts of Interest Policy](#)
- [Ethical Guidelines for Publication](#)
- [Events Code of Conduct](#)
- [Enforcement Policy & Procedures – Code of Ethics](#)
- [Whistleblower Policy](#)

Each of the above policies may apply to individuals in different roles. For example, some policies apply to employees, non-GSA members, and/or elected GSA leaders. Check each policy to see which groups they cover.

1.4 Policies Related to GSA Events and Publications

Two of GSA’s primary activities include organizing scientific meetings and conferences and publishing scientific journals and books. Anyone who participates in these activities—whether they are Members or non-members—must adhere to the policies and guidelines GSA has established to ensure professionalism, respect, and fairness in carrying out these activities. For scientific meetings and events, please refer to GSA’s [Events Code of Conduct](#). For GSA books and journals, please refer to GSA’s [Ethical Guidelines for Publication](#).

1.5 Aspirational and Mandatory Conduct—Consequences of Non-Compliance

Some sections of this Code include both aspirational and mandatory standards of conduct that guide and govern our behavior whether we are in academic settings, laboratories, field or research sites, governmental labs and institutions, industry facilities, meetings, and/or any other professional settings. The aspirational standards embody GSA’s values. Though generally not enforceable, these aspirational standards emphasize the conduct we strive to uphold as Members and/or Awardees. The mandatory standards are firm requirements. Any Member and/or Awardee found to have violated the mandatory standards will be in violation of this Code and may be subject to disciplinary or remedial action pursuant to Section 6 below in accordance with GSA’s Bylaws and GSA’s Enforcement Policy & Procedures – Code of Ethics.

In addition to the aspirational and mandatory standards included in this Code, we all have a duty to comply with the law and avoid any behavior that would be prejudicial to the Society's interests. We also have a responsibility to adhere to all policies, rules, and permitting requirements that apply to our professional activities.

It is critical to note that while GSA may describe a particular standard as "aspirational," a Member and/or Awardee may be required to comply with such standard by a third party, such as an employer, university, or other institution.

1.6 Filing an Enforcement Request/Contacting GSA about Ethics Matters

If you want GSA to consider enforcing the Code of Ethics against a Member and/or Awardee, you must notify GSA in writing using this [Enforcement Request Form](#). Please refer to GSA's [Enforcement Policy & Procedures – Code of Ethics](#) and GSA's [Ethics Homepage](#) for further information. Questions about ethics matters also may be directed to GSA via email at ethics@geosociety.org.

1.7 Glossary

A glossary is included in [Appendix A](#) at the end of the Code. For convenience, the terms included in the glossary are highlighted throughout this document in bold text.

2. Taking Responsibility: Mandatory GSA Member and Awardee Responsibilities

GSA provides professional growth opportunities for earth scientists at all levels of expertise and from all sectors. We each have a responsibility to act with professionalism and integrity—regardless of our career level or job title. This means creating an organization and culture of inclusivity, equity, safety, and respect where all Members and/or Awardees have an equal opportunity to participate, contribute, be appropriately credited, and succeed in their careers. The following mandatory standards apply to all of us:

- We will comply with the Code and related policies;
- We will cooperate to the best of our ability if asked to take part in an investigation of an allegation of a Code violation;
- We will not represent ourselves as a spokesperson for the Society without express authorization by the President and Executive Director of GSA;
- We self-certify that we are not on the [OFAC sanctioned list](#), as determined and provided by the Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) of the U.S. Department of the Treasury, which administers and enforces economic trade and sanctions based on US foreign policy and national security, and with which GSA fully complies.

3. Promoting a Culture of Scientific and Research Integrity

GSA is committed to promoting a culture of scientific and research integrity across the geosciences.

3.1 Aspirational Standards

- We will maintain the highest standards of intellectual and personal honesty. We will avoid bias in reporting the products of our work;
- We will take responsibility for our actions and contributions in all phases of our research. We will follow accepted practices and, to the extent possible, we will conduct research that is replicable and reproducible; produce research records that are clear, transparent, and verifiable; distinguish observations from interpretations; and report uncertainties in research results in the context of complex natural systems. We will responsibly conduct sampling activities in our research to preserve Earth's geoh heritage for future generations;
- We will give full and proper credit to the creativity, ideas, contributions, and work performed by colleagues, subordinates, and students. We will cooperate with other researchers whenever possible to ensure rapid interchange and dissemination of knowledge in the geosciences;
- We will contribute to training and mentoring future geoscientists as opportunities permit to sustain the future of the geoscience profession;
- We will seek to demonstrate the relevance and importance of the geosciences to the general public and to future generations. We will strive to communicate our knowledge about Earth to protect the environment and provide appropriate stewardship of natural resources. To the extent we communicate with the public on these topics, we will do so with care and precision; and
- We will protect confidential and proprietary data entrusted to us in our professional capacity.

3.2 Mandatory Standards

- We do not engage in [research misconduct](#), including [fabrication](#), [falsification](#), or [plagiarism](#); and
- We will take all reasonable steps necessary to ensure safety in the laboratory, field, and other professional settings. We will notify the appropriate authorities of any violations or incidents that appear to create a threat to public health and safety.

4. Promoting a Culture of Respect, Fairness, and Inclusivity

GSA is committed to promoting a culture of respect, fairness, and inclusivity across the geosciences in furtherance of its purposes to advance the geosciences. GSA does not tolerate discrimination or harassment based on [Protected Characteristics](#), which include race, ethnicity, color, national origin, ancestry, sex, creed, religion, age, genetic information, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, disability, veteran status, marital status, medical condition, pregnancy, education, class, political affiliation, parental status. All people deserve to work in a safe, supportive, respectful, inclusive, and welcoming environment that encourages diverse points of view and backgrounds in order to engage in open and honest communication.

4.1 Aspirational Standards

- We listen to others' points of view, seek to understand them, and conduct ourselves in a professional manner even when it is not reciprocated;

- We exemplify high standards in science, teaching, management, and interactions with others, particularly when we are in a position of power or privilege, serving in roles that may include professors, research supervisors, managers in government or industry labs or facilities, or any other senior geoscientist positions;
- We treat students and subordinates respectfully, without exploitation, and provide a safe, supportive environment to encourage learning and professional development;
- We strive to promote diversity among conveners and presenters when organizing panels, keynotes, and other invitational sessions; and
- If we choose to drink alcohol or use other legal intoxicants in any professional settings, we will do so responsibly without compromising our ability to act professionally.

4.2 Mandatory Standards

- We use legitimate, unbiased criteria when making decisions and taking actions that affect the work, educational, and/or professional opportunities of students, colleagues, and other professional contacts;
- We do not [discriminate](#) against, [harass](#), [sexually harass](#), [bully](#), or engage in [retaliation](#) against others in our professional activities.

5. Avoiding Conflicts of Interest

As Members and/or Awardees, we may be involved in various professional activities on behalf of the Society that could give rise to real or perceived conflicts of interest; i.e., situations where our personal interests or relationships could interfere with our ability to make objective decisions on GSA's behalf. Examples include selecting candidates for leadership or committee roles; evaluating and approving Members and/or Awardees for honors and awards; and/or reviewing proposals, grant applications, or journal articles.

5.1 Aspirational Standards

- We demonstrate transparency in making decisions on behalf of GSA.

5.2 Mandatory Standards

- We proactively disclose any real or perceived conflicts of interest that reasonably could make someone question our judgment, honesty, or objectivity to the appropriate stakeholders.
- We comply with GSA's [Conflict of Interest Policy](#) if we serve as Council members, officers, and/or committee members.

6. Enforcement Policy & Procedures – Code of Ethics

GSA's [Enforcement Policy & Procedures – Code of Ethics](#) set forth the only rules GSA uses for processing possible violations of GSA's Code of Ethics and, where appropriate, determining disciplinary or remedial action. Please refer to this policy for additional information. Inquiries also may be directed to GSA via email at ethics@geosociety.org.

Appendix A: Glossary

1. Bullying means using power or perceived vulnerability to harm, intimidate, coerce, and/or sabotage an individual's professional or academic work or efforts. Bullying may occur in person, in writing, or via any form of electronic communication.

2. Discrimination means treating individuals differently because of **Protected Characteristics**, resulting in unfair treatment and the denial of opportunities in educational, employment, funding, and/or other professional activities.

3. Harassment is a type of discrimination characterized by unwanted, demeaning, disrespectful behavior toward individuals based on **Protected Characteristics**. Harassing behavior ranges from verbal comments, such as epithets and slurs, to visual displays to physical conduct, such as threatening or blocking someone's way.

4. Protected Characteristics refers to factors that are not relevant and must not be considered in making decisions about an individual's competence or qualifications. This includes race, ethnicity, color, national origin, ancestry, sex, creed, religion, age, genetic information, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, disability, veteran status, marital status, medical condition, pregnancy, education, class, political affiliation, and parental status.

5. Research Misconduct. Behavior defined in accordance with the U.S. federal regulations (45 CFR 93.103), which includes:

- **Fabrication**—“making up data or results and recording or reporting them.”
- **Falsification**—“manipulating research materials, equipment, or processes, or changing or omitting data or results such that the research is not accurately represented in the research record.”
- **Plagiarism**—“appropriating another person's ideas, processes, results, or words without giving appropriate credit.” GSA interprets this definition broadly to forbid plagiarism in verbal or written communications.

6. Retaliation means punishing someone for engaging in a legally protected activity. Generally this involves taking adverse action against individuals because they have complained about a legal or policy violation instead of using legitimate, unbiased criteria to make the decision.

7. Sexual Harassment means unwelcome or unsolicited sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, conversations about sexual activities, or other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature.

Appendix B: Process Used to Create this Code of Ethics

The first step in the development of this Code was to understand the ethics and compliance issues facing the geoscience community as well as the values and perspectives of our Members. This was accomplished in various ways, including an Internet survey involving GSA staff, committee members, and Councilors; reviewing GSA position statements; and researching best practices in developing ethics standards in profit and not-for-profit organizations, including other professional societies.

This extensive research culminated in the creation of an outline, which was presented to and approved by the GSA Council in May 2019. At that time, the GSA Council appointed an ad hoc committee to write the Code. The committee consisted of GSA's Ethics & Compliance Officer and seven Members of the Society.

The committee started by writing a draft, which was then circulated to all GSA Members during a one-month comment period. GSA received well over 100 comments. The committee kept a log with every comment and reached a consensus on whether and how to adapt the draft to address Member concerns. At the end of this process, the committee presented a final recommendation to the GSA Council together with the complete Member comment log.

In September 2019, the GSA Council approved this Code, which for the first time in the Society's history sets forth mandatory standards of conduct that may be enforced against our Members who violate them. The Code also includes aspirational standards, which more fully embody GSA's values and make a more enduring statement to our Members, our profession, and the public.

Duly Adopted: September 23, 2019. Updated on January 4, 2023.