

**A CODE OF ETHICS
FOR
SOCIAL PERFORMANCE
PROFESSIONALS**

A Code of Ethics for **Social Performance Professionals**

This Code of Ethics, developed by a Working Group of the Social Practice Forum, guides professionals who advise organisations and development projects on their interactions with local communities and wider society, particularly in relation to social performance.

The field of Social Performance practice is fundamentally concerned with organisations and projects avoiding harm, respecting rights, building trusting relationships, and contributing to equitable conditions that enable both host communities and organisations to achieve their development aspirations. As Social Performance professionals, we serve multiple stakeholders: our employing organisations, affected communities, broader society, and future generations. Within these complex relationships, our ethical duty is to guide, influence and advise towards achieving these positive social performance outcomes.

The people-centred nature of our work presents unique challenges. We operate in complex social environments where, even with the best intentions, our judgment can be influenced by organisational pressures, cultural contexts, time constraints, and other situational factors. These pressures can cause well-intentioned professionals to either overlook important ethical considerations, lose sight of the broader implications of their choices, or remain silent when action is needed. Both action and inaction can have significant ethical implications in our work.

This Code provides 10 ethical principles designed to help us maintain awareness of how different pressures and contexts affect our decisions and responsibilities to act. It creates space for reflection and discussion of challenging situations, helps us consider multiple perspectives and implications of both our actions and silence, and keeps us alert to warning signs when ethical considerations might be overlooked. The Code supports us in maintaining high ethical standards while emphasising that ethical practice requires both appropriate action and the courage to speak up when necessary.

These principles are fundamental to sound social practice and the credibility of our maturing profession. They guide professional judgment across all activities, including research, stakeholder engagement, advisory services, and program implementation.

Principles guiding ethical practice for **Social Performance Professionals**



We uphold these **fundamental principles** in our professional practice:

1.RESPECT FOR HUMAN RIGHTS AND DIGNITY

We respect fundamental human rights and the inherent dignity of all people. We do so by treating all stakeholders with respect, proactively considering the human rights implications of our work, and ensuring our work supports the realisation of human rights for all affected parties.

2.PROFESSIONAL INDEPENDENCE AND INTEGRITY

We maintain professional objectivity and independence and exercise sound professional judgment by transparently acknowledging and managing conflicts of interest, resisting inappropriate pressures that could compromise ethical principles, and upholding the reputation of the profession by modelling and encouraging ethical behaviour in every situation.

3.CULTURAL SENSITIVITY

We shape our work to local contexts, recognising cultural differences, and community customs and protocols while upholding human rights. This involves demonstrating cultural self-awareness and avoiding divisive strategies that could undermine community cohesion, ensuring that our actions support collaboration and mutual understanding.

4.COMMUNITY OWNERSHIP AND EMPOWERMENT

We promote community participation in decision-making and implementation by building local capacity for participation and respect for local knowledge, while supporting genuine partnerships with communities to enable them to take an active role in shaping outcomes that affect their lives.

5.MULTI-STAKEHOLDER ACCOUNTABILITY

We recognise and balance our responsibilities to multiple stakeholders, including affected communities, employing organisations, broader society, and future generations. This compels us to ensure that our actions and decisions are transparent, inclusive, and guided by a commitment to fairness. Fairness means fostering relationships that are equitable, respectful, and strive toward just outcomes for all stakeholders, especially those who are vulnerable or marginalised. We seek to understand and address the needs and concerns of all stakeholders, provide clear justifications for decisions, document processes, and establish channels for feedback and raising concerns.

6.PROVIDING COMPETENT PROFESSIONAL SERVICES

We practice within the limits of our competence by seeking guidance when necessary and continuously developing our professional knowledge and skills to enhance our expertise. Maintaining professional competence means using valid and evidence-based methodologies, fully disclosing our methods, limitations, potential biases and sources of knowledge generation, ensuring accurate recording and representation of data, and avoiding deception or misrepresentation. We adapt approaches based on feedback and lessons learned, strive to stay informed about emerging issues and best practices, support peer learning and mentoring, and contribute to the advancement of the profession through knowledge sharing and collaboration.

7.INFORMED CONSENT AND PARTICIPATION

We ensure voluntary participation in research and consultation based on adequate information about purpose, risks, and benefits by recommending and designing consent processes adapted to local contexts and cultural norms, aiming to enable inclusive participation across different community groups. We promote approaches that facilitate meaningful and informed engagement for all stakeholders.

8.TRANSPARENCY AND INFORMATION ACCESS

We are transparent about our role, the purpose of our activities, and our professional obligations. This includes advocating for appropriate disclosure of relevant information to stakeholders and recommending effective ways to make information accessible, understandable, and timely. In our own work, we document our processes clearly and promote transparent decision-making practices, while encouraging organisations we work with to do the same.

9. CONFIDENTIALITY AND PRIVACY

We maintain strict confidentiality of personal information and protect the anonymity of participants unless they explicitly agree to be identified. This recognises that communities and individuals own their data and have the right to control how it is used. We seek to clearly define and agree upon data usage limitations with stakeholders before collection, ensure secure storage and management of sensitive data, and respect stakeholders' rights to access, modify, or withdraw their information. We take extra care with information that could cause harm if disclosed.

10. VIGILANCE AND THE AVOIDANCE OF HARM

We recognise that pressures, deadlines, and complex situations can narrow our perspective and affect our judgment. We commit to maintaining broad awareness of the ethical implications of our professional decisions and advice, in service of avoiding negative impacts on individuals, communities, and the environment. When we see that our work could be, or is being, used in harmful ways by others, we raise concerns, document risks, and recommend measures to mitigate potential impacts, even when the decisions are beyond our control. This involves creating safe spaces for raising concerns and challenging assumptions, developing our recommendations and actions considering stakeholder lenses, and documenting and sharing lessons learned from ethical challenges to improve future practice.

Credits & Acknowledgements

Compiled by:

This Code of Ethics was compiled by a **Social Practice Forum (SPF) Working Group** made up of the following members (in alphabetical order):

Ana Maria Esteves, David Reyes, Ian Thomson, and Kathryn Tomlinson.

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