

1. The Goals of the Initiative

The ultimate goal of the Transparency Initiative is to advance the science and reputation of survey research. The Initiative's subsidiary goals are:

- to gain routine disclosure of methodological information from participating survey organizations,
- to provide professional education on survey documentation and disclosure practice,
- to provide a public repository for disclosed information, and
- to educate survey sponsors and the public on the value of transparency.

Openness is fundamental to scientific inquiry. The Transparency Initiative is designed to encourage openness in survey research so that the field can advance. Openness is also fundamental to credibility. The Initiative is designed to enhance the credibility of the profession by encouraging disclosure of methodological information and educating the public on how to use it.

2. The Benefits of Membership in the Transparency Initiative

In the Transparency Initiative, AAPOR puts its reputation behind participating survey organizations. We declare that participants are open in the way they conduct their research, and we honor them for this practice. Further, we actively publicize our support. We expect that participants will use our approval to promote themselves to prospective clients, news organizations that report on surveys, and other important audiences. Because of AAPOR's good reputation and the fact that the Transparency Initiative is unique, we anticipate that participants will benefit in the commercial marketplace and in the marketplace of ideas. Clients will learn, if they do not currently know, that their publicly released reports will have enhanced credibility if they are based on transparent research methods. The media will learn that participation in the Transparency Initiative is an important indicator of whether to pay attention to a survey organization's reports.

3. The Requirements of Membership

Membership in the TI entails a commitment to the principles and practices of the TI, specifically an organizational pledge to conform to the AAPOR Code of Professional Ethics and Practices regarding disclosure, Section III. Conformance entails public disclosure of the required elements at the time of public release of a report, or private disclosure to a client at the time of the delivery of a report and/or data to a client. All of the required elements do not have to be included in a publicly-released report, but may be contained in a publicly-available companion document or website to which the report can refer. Conformance also confers an obligation to deposit methodological information in the TI archive, an online publicly accessible database.

Membership is open to any survey organization or consultant, whether individuals within the organization are AAPOR members or not. It is possible for a TI member to be a part of an organization rather than the entire organization (e.g., the "market research unit of TK Corporation" rather than "TK Corporation").

4. Administrative Structure

The TI will be administered by an ad-hoc committee (the “TI coordinating committee”) that reports to the Standards committee. The AAPOR president, in consultation with the Standards chair, will appoint the chair of the coordinating committee, who, in consultation with the AAPOR president, is empowered to appoint additional committee members from the AAPOR membership for two [or three] year terms. It is recommended that the committee have approximately 12 members in addition to the chair and that consideration be given to ensuring representation on the committee from the major sectors of the broader AAPOR membership.

The chair will serve a three [or two] year term. After the appointment of the first chair, it is likely that future chairs will have been committee members. When the committee is first established, some members will be appointed for shorter terms to allow for the development of a rotation of membership going forward.

It may also be advisable for a member of council, perhaps the vice president or a councilor at large, to be a member of the committee.

Until the full structure and procedures of the TI have been approved by council, the administration of the TI will continue to be directed by the TI Steering Committee, consisting of the AAPOR vice president as chair, along with the chairs and associates of the Standards Committee, the Communications Committee, and the Membership and Chapter Relations Committee.

Once the TI is operational, the TI coordinating committee will be responsible, for recruiting, reviewing and qualifying new members of the TI, coordinating with Communications and Membership & Chapter Relations for outreach and education efforts, for the ongoing maintenance of the TI section of the AAPOR website and for monitoring and compliance reviews (described below).

5. Disclosure Standards and Methods

The disclosure standards for the Transparency Initiative are the same as those listed in the AAPOR Code. Good professional practice imposes the obligation upon all survey and public opinion researchers to disclose certain essential information about how the research was conducted. When conducting publicly released research studies, full and complete disclosure to the public is best made at the time results are released, although some information may not be immediately available. When undertaking work for a private client, the same essential information should be made available to the client when the client is provided with the results. The information should be in a form or format that clients can, in turn, include with their public release of results of the study, should they choose to make a public release.

<i>PROVISIONS IN THE AAPOR CODE</i>	<i>INTERPRETATION AND EXAMPLES</i>
A. We shall include the following items in any report of research results or make them available immediately upon release of that report.	

PROVISIONS IN THE AAPOR CODE	INTERPRETATION AND EXAMPLES
1. Who sponsored the research study, who conducted it, and who funded it, including, to the extent known, all original funding sources.	This is a critical element of transparency, but it is recognized that the requirement may be problematic in certain unusual circumstances, especially for international surveys where disclosure of sponsorship may pose a danger to organizations.
2. The exact wording and presentation of questions and responses whose results are reported.	Many organizations break a given survey into multiple reports. It's not reasonable to expect organizations to disclose an entire questionnaire including items that have yet to be reported on. Nonetheless, we know that question order often exerts as strong or stronger influence on responses than question wording itself. Therefore it is important that organizations work to avoid obvious sources of response bias stemming from question context, and also make consumers aware if such context effects are likely. (This is also relevant to element B.1 below.) If questions have been rotated or randomized, this should be noted.
3. A definition of the population under study, its geographic location, and a description of the sampling frame used to identify this population. If the sampling frame was provided by a third party, the supplier shall be named. If no frame or list was utilized, this shall be indicated.	For example, a typical national telephone survey might specify the population as all U.S. adults, or all U.S. registered voters, or residents of Cook County, IL. The sampling frame for a telephone survey might be described as "landline and cell phone numbers in the lower 48 states of the continental U.S., obtained from [name of sample vendor]." Studies using address based samples should specify whether the Delivery Sequence File was used and what vendor provided the sample.
4. A description of the sample design, giving a clear indication of the method by which the respondents were selected (or self-selected) and recruited, along with any quotas or additional sample selection criteria applied within the survey instrument or post-fielding. The description of the sampling frame and sample design should include sufficient detail to determine whether the respondents were selected using probability or non-probability methods.	Information about sample designs would include such critical details as whether a sample involved clustering or not or whether telephone samples were list-assisted. Within-household respondent select methods should be disclosed (e.g., last birthday method, Kish grid, youngest male/oldest female at home). Non-probability methods (e.g., snowball or other chain referral sampling, volunteers), should be described in sufficient detail that readers can understand the general mechanism employed.)

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<p>5. Sample sizes and a discussion of the precision of the findings, including estimates of sampling error for probability samples and a description of the variables used in any weighting or estimating procedures. The discussion of the precision of the findings should state whether or not the reported margins of sampling error or statistical analyses have been adjusted for the design effect due to clustering and weighting, if any.</p>	<p>Recognizing that no single margin of error or sample size is appropriate for all estimates in a typical survey report, the TI encourages organizations to provide additional detail where feasible, including sample sizes and margin of errors (MOEs) for frequently used subgroups (e.g., demographic groups, form splits or registered voters). Similarly, design effects will differ across subgroups, though this will be reflected in the reported MOEs if those are based on effective sample sizes. More generally, reports should make it clear whether design effects were considered in the computation of MOEs and statistical significance. A general description of weighting variables and procedures may be adequate for most purposes (e.g., “data are weighted on sex, race, age, education and region, using an iterative sample weighting program that simultaneously balances the distributions of all variables, matching them to the most recently available population parameters from the Current Population Survey”).</p>
<p>6. Which results are based on parts of the sample, rather than on the total sample, and the size of such parts.</p>	<p>This can typically be accomplished in the survey questionnaire or topline (questionnaire annotated with marginal results) by indicating any form splits or filters that reduce the sample size for a given item and the size of the resulting sample for these items. Where analyses exclude cases because of missing data, that fact should be noted.</p>
<p>7. Method and dates of data collection.</p>	<p>What mode(s) of data collection were used (e.g., telephone, mail, web and/or face-to-face)? What were the inclusive dates of fielding?</p>
<p>B. We shall make the following items available within 30 days of any request for such materials.</p>	<p>Transparency Initiative participants <u>should consider membership to constitute a “standing request” for the elements in sections B and C.</u> Participants should make all appropriate items available as soon as possible after release of data or reporting to clients. However, for organizations that produce multiple studies using a similar methodology repeatedly, conformance with the TI for many of the items can be accomplished with a standard statement of methodology. A given study need only reference the standard statement, in addition to providing study-specific items.</p>
<p>1. Preceding interviewer or respondent instructions and any preceding questions or instructions that might reasonably be expected to influence responses to the reported results.</p>	<p>Once all of the data from a survey has been publicly released, the organization should be able to provide a full questionnaire upon request, including interviewer and respondent instructions. See note in A.2 above.</p>

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<p>2. Any relevant stimuli, such as visual or sensory exhibits or show cards.</p>	<p>Surveys often ask respondents to answer questions regarding audio and/or video materials or after having first been shown to them. Show cards are also commonly used in face-to-face surveys to visually display response options and other information. For web surveys, screenshots of each page – including all questions, gateway or entry page, and additional instruction or help screens – should also be available (with notation about the browser version and screen size used to create them). It is important that these materials be disclosed so that the full context within which respondents were asked to answer questions can be understood.</p>
<p>3. A description of the sampling frame’s coverage of the target population.</p>	<p>The spirit of this element is to disclose any potential biases in coverage, as well as the percentage of the population covered. For some studies, it may not be possible to calculate a precise estimate of coverage, especially where the exact size of the population is unknown.</p>
<p>4. The methods used to recruit the panel, if the sample was drawn from a pre-recruited panel or pool of respondents.</p>	<p>For surveys based on panels, detailed information about how the panel was created, the methods originally used to recruit the panel, and the method of selecting respondents from the panel should all be disclosed. It is insufficient to describe respondents as simply being part of a panel.</p>
<p>5. Details about the sample design, including eligibility for participation, screening procedures, the nature of any oversamples, and compensation/incentives offered (if any).</p>	<p>The intent of this requirement is to encourage full disclosure of all relevant aspects of the sample design and recruitment process in order to provide a complete description of the procedures employed. Where the sample is being screened (e.g., for likely voters or for demographic characteristics), the specific questions used to qualify respondents should be disclosed. However, while disclosure of specific algorithms or models that employ these screening questions is encouraged, it is understood that some organizations regard this information as proprietary, and thus disclosure is not mandatory. For stratified and disproportionate samples, the variables used in stratification should be noted and the nature of how the sample was allocated among the strata should be described.</p>
<p>6. Summaries of the disposition of study-specific sample records so that response rates for probability samples and participation rates for non-probability samples can be computed.</p>	<p>It is acceptable to report response rates based on AAPOR codes in lieu of disposition codes (see 8C below), but if reporting the latter, AAPOR standard dispositions should be used whenever possible. (We still need to provide additional guidance on what should be provided for non-probability samples.)</p>
<p>7. Sources of weighting parameters and method by which weights are applied.</p>	<p>It is sufficient to disclose the variables employed for weighting purposes and the benchmarks (e.g., 2010 Census estimates) being used as well as a description of the methods used. Details of the specific formulas employed, while welcome, are not required.</p>

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8. Procedures undertaken to verify data. Where applicable, methods of interviewer training, supervision, and monitoring shall also be disclosed.	The purpose of this element is to encourage full disclosure of the quality control procedures employed to validate data collection activities. For organizations that employ standard procedures for most of its surveys, this information can be included in a general methodology document and referred to in the report from a specific survey.
C. If response rates are reported, response rates should be computed according to AAPOR Standard Definitions.	The most recent version of the Standard Definitions document, always available at www.aapor.org , should be consulted when estimating these rates. As part of the TI, AAPOR will work to develop training materials and examples to help organizations accurately code dispositions and compute response rates.
D. If the results reported are based on multiple samples or multiple modes, the preceding items shall be disclosed for each.	Mixed-mode studies should strive to provide as much information covered in the preceding items for each mode as is possible. At a minimum, the number of interviews collected from each sample or via each mode should be disclosed. When respondents are given a choice of modes it might not be possible to estimate response rates separately for each mode in a mixed mode survey.
E. If any of our work becomes the subject of a formal investigation of an alleged violation of this Code, undertaken with the approval of the AAPOR Executive Council, we shall provide additional information on the research study in such detail that a fellow researcher would be able to conduct a professional evaluation of the study.	

One recurring question regarding compliance pertains to the status of survey work in process, where no agreement had been made with a client to make the required information public as part of the TI. Such studies might be released after an organization joins the TI, but may be contractually unable to provide all of the required disclosure elements because of the prior agreement with the client. A policy for such cases needs to be developed.

6. The Archiving Mechanism

The issue of archiving remains unsettled. The existence of a central archive for disclosed methodological information was a key component in the initial conception of the TI, and clearly would have many benefits for the survey research community and its audiences. But the creation and maintenance of the archive will require significant effort and resources both on the part of AAPOR and the TI members. Achieving an affordable and workable system will require a balancing of many considerations.

An archive within an open-source, widely available database such as the Dataverse Network would give broad reach to the TI and facilitate methodological research. If there is no central repository, the oversight committee will have to examine many sources and multiple forms of reporting in order to judge whether a TI member is in compliance or not. It may be difficult in at least some cases for AAPOR to decide whether provisions of the TI have been met or not. There will be follow-up needed to clarify information housed by participating organizations. There will be a lack of comparability of the information, leading to the need to standardize it post hoc, if possible. The archive and the standardization it requires would give AAPOR a means to check off when organizations are in compliance. When the information hits the archive, the organization is officially counted.

Even with an archive, however, the sampling for monitoring and review may need to be external to the archive, for example using a member's website, to ensure that required methodological information about all publicly released surveys have been deposited in the archive. We will have to decide whether failure to archive the methodological information for a release constitutes a violation, even if a public release itself contains all of the required disclosure information.

We are in ongoing discussions with the Odum Institute at UNC about establishing a way to deposit disclosure information into the Dataverse. Odum, working with the Roper Center, is interested in hosting the TI material, and is working with on how best to input most of the disclosure elements of the TI into the database. A number of significant issues remain, however, and the cost of modifying the Dataverse input form to accommodate easy updating by TI participants exceeds our available resources.

As an interim step, the TI Steering Committee is considering a recommendation to require participating organizations to notify AAPOR via e-mail, either at the time of release of a study or at a regular time thereafter (e.g., weekly, monthly, quarterly, biannually), with a link to the organization's report or website containing methodological information in a form consistent with the requirements of the TI. If subsequent details are released (e.g, items in Sections B-D of the code), the organization should notify AAPOR of this by e-mail. The details of this requirement have yet to be worked out. Members of the advisory committee suggested that the reporting requirement be considered with great care before implementation. Frequent reporting to AAPOR may not be feasible for many large organizations, and such a requirement has the potential to discourage potential members from joining. Moreover, several members of the advisory committee indicated that changing current website practices or creating new sections of websites might be difficult or impossible, and that requiring organizations to maintain TI-related information on their own websites for an extended period of time would also be problematic, especially if the study-specific information were removed.

7. The Qualification Process

The mechanisms by which we qualify TI members, monitor compliance, and resolve possible non-compliance will contribute to the credibility of the Initiative and will also determine its resource requirements. The TI will employ a process similar to the [Safe Harbor program](#) run by the US Department of Commerce. This program provides a mechanism for US research companies to demonstrate that they comply with [EU Data Protection legislation](#), a requirement to do research in the EU. The program requires applicants to develop and publish a formal privacy policy and to self-certify via letter and on an annual basis that it complies with the seven areas covered by Safe Harbor. It essentially relies on the industry to police itself and assumes that affidavits from senior management

and the critical nature of safe harbor certification for those doing research in the EU are sufficiently compelling to ensure compliance. Complaints can be filed and investigated. If a company is found to be out of compliance then Safe Harbor can be revoked.

Complete information about the TI and the application process for prospective members will be hosted on the AAPOR website. The application process will have the following five steps:

1. Prospective members will be required to submit the TI disclosure agreement signed by an individual empowered to commit the organization to the initiative. The form can be downloaded from the AAPOR website. A draft of the agreement is in the appendix.
2. Prospective members will also be required to prepare and submit a formal disclosure process document or policy statement specifying the organization's procedures for complying with the TI disclosure standards. AAPOR may prepare a model policy that organizations could modify to reflect their own internal operations and procedures. The details for what should be included in this process document remain to be specified.)
3. Prospective members must also submit at least two examples of recent disclosure statements that have been released to the public. If an organization has released more than one type of study (e.g., telephone and internet), they are encouraged to offer an example of each type. Organizations that work primarily as subcontractors and do not themselves generally release data must provide two examples of the disclosure statements they have created for clients. Information that would identify the sponsor of unreleased studies, or other confidential information, can be omitted or modified as needed to ensure confidentiality. (Step 3 raises a chicken-and-egg question for organizations that have not been following the TI's requirements prior to applying for membership. If the expectation of the TI is to have organizations develop mechanisms for compliance and actually report in proper form prior to joining, we should state that explicitly.)
4. Prospective members must also appoint and identify a representative or liaison to the TI, who will coordinate compliance for the organization and be the main point of communication between AAPOR and the member.
5. The full set of application materials will be reviewed by the TI coordinating committee. Fully compliant applicants will be approved for membership expeditiously. The committee will work with initially non-compliant applicants to determine what modifications can bring them into compliance so that membership can be approved.

Once an applicant is certified, the TI coordinating committee will:

- a. Inform the applicant in writing using a standard letter signed by the AAPOR President.
- b. Provide the member with the TI logo that the member may display on its website and/or printed documents.
- c. Provide a press release announcing the member's successful application. The member may choose to use this document to announce its membership to the public. AAPOR will post the release on its website and add the organization's name, its TI representative and website url to the TI section of the AAPOR site.

Once a year each member in good standing will be contacted and asked to reconfirm its commitment to the initiative by indicating a willingness to continue abiding by the TI's rules and procedures. An organization will only be required to submit a full application packet once.

8. The Monitoring Process

Compliance will be monitored in two ways: (1) by annual periodic compliance check performed under the auspices of the TI coordinating committee and (2) by the public at large.

The frequency of the compliance check is not yet settled. An annual review was contemplated, but feedback from the advisory committee suggested that a random process might be less burdensome on the TI committee and just as effective as an annual review in motivating compliance. Whatever the frequency, the check will involve a review of the member's website or other public documents to identify public releases over a designated period. In general we expect that this review will involve no more than 5 releases per member. Releases from organizations that conduct and release a large number of surveys each year will be sampled. Releases selected for examination will entail a review of the disclosure statement and a cross-check of the archive to determine if the member is in compliance. A summary of the results of this review will be provided to the TI coordinating committee. If deficiencies in disclosure exist, the TI coordinating committee will contact the member with the results of the review and recommendations for remediation. The TI coordinating committee may also decide to conduct a more extensive review of the member's public releases over the past 12 months to determine whether the case at hand is an exception rather than part of a broader pattern of failures to disclose.

Public complaints about disclosure by any member of the TI will be reviewed, and if deemed to have merit, trigger a compliance review as described in the previous paragraph.

As the TI develops, the number of organizations participating will hopefully grow. As this occurs, the monitoring and review burden on the TI committee may grow too large. One advisory committee suggestion for enhancing the review capabilities of the TI committee would be to create a broader peer review process, recruiting volunteers from the AAPOR membership and randomly assigning reviews through a mechanism similar to the conference abstract review process. The TI committee would oversee this review process and make final judgments about compliance.

However reviews are conducted, the TI committee will work to avoid potential conflicts of interest in the review process, for example by restricting reviewers of a particular organization to members who are not direct competitors of that organization.

9. Handling of Non-Compliance

Given the educational function of the TI, the monitoring process and its handling of non-compliance should be thought of as a process of feedback and adjustment – organizations found to be out of compliance should be given feedback on what's needed to comply and help with doing so. Fixing the problem and an expressed willingness to continue to comply should keep organizations from being removed from the TI. This approach might be adopted for the first year in which an organization is a member.

Once an organization has been a member for one year we assume that its disclosure responsibilities are fully understood and violations of the TI agreement will be seriously pursued. Members found to be out of compliance will be given a 90-day cure notice requiring them to give evidence of having remedied shortcomings in their disclosure process.

- If the TI coordinating committee finds convincing evidence that the member is now compliant, the complaint is closed.
- If the evidence is insufficient the member will be so informed and the cure notice extended another 30 days.
- If the member fails to file evidence of corrective action or after the additional 30 days the member still is out of compliance then membership in the TI will be suspended for a period of one-year. The member will be informed in writing of the suspension, required to remove the TI logo from its website, and its name removed from the TI member list on the AAPOR website. The member may apply for reinstatement after one year using the standard application process.
- Although public sanctions against non-compliant organizations are not contemplated as a routine practice, the TI should reserve the right to publicize non-compliance in particularly egregious cases. For example, the TI membership agreement should include a clause that permits a public sanction in the event that TI membership is suspended and the member refuses to remove the TI logo from its website or publications.

10. Communications.

The TI is a critical element of AAPOR's mission to educate its members, the wider survey research community and the consumers of survey research. Accordingly, the TI should be thought of as an ongoing means for teaching members and survey organizations how to be transparent regarding their methods. It is also a vehicle for ongoing educational efforts for journalists and other consumers of our research.

The Communications and Membership and Chapter Relations Committees will have the primary responsibility for developing and undertaking these educational activities. These will take place in three phases: first, as the TI is being formalized, second, alongside the official roll-out and third, after the TI is in place.

In phase No. 1, regular progress updates about the initiative will be sent to membership, and posted on the AAPOR.org website. Some organizations already advertise their participation in the TI; we need to maintain and build on this momentum. Ultimately, the TI lives or dies on "buy-in," which we can foster with regular updates. Clarifying the feedback procedures is part of this piece. In addition, in this pre-launch period, Communications will work with Council to develop the participant recognition system. Membership and Chapter Relations, in consultation with the Standards Committee, will develop materials for members and participants in the TI to help them create effective disclosure documentation.

Phase No. 2 is the official launch of the TI. When the TI goes live, a series of fact sheets will be published, including a "how to participate" guidelines, and "do's and don'ts of how to interpret TI data." The consumer-focused usage guide will be aimed at all poll consumers, not exclusively at journalists.

Once the TI is up and running, phase No. 3 kicks in, where Communications oversees the fact sheets, builds out answers to FAQs and administers the recognition mechanism. Membership and Chapter Relations will oversee an ongoing program documents, videos or other materials to assist participants in their efforts to comply with the TI.

APPENDIX

AAPOR Transparency Initiative Member Agreement

Overview

A survey organization is transparent when it discloses essential information about its methodology in any public release of survey results or private report to clients.

The AAPOR Code of Professional Ethics and Practice applies to individuals engaged in survey research. AAPOR's Transparency Initiative extends the basic disclosure requirements of the Code to survey organizations. Whether disclosure is public or private, conformance with AAPOR's Disclosure Standards entails making available in the report or release of survey results all of the methodological elements identified in the minimum disclosure requirements of the AAPOR Code of Professional Ethics and Practice.

Requirements of Membership in the Transparency Initiative

AAPOR's minimum disclosure standards are as follows:

- Name of the survey sponsor
- Name of the organization that conducted the survey
- The exact wording of the questions being released, including any preceding instructions or explanations to either the respondent or the interviewer that might reasonably be expected to affect the response
- A definition of the population under study. What population is the survey designed to represent?
- A description of the sampling frame used to represent this population. An explanation of how the respondents to the survey were selected
- An explanation of any eligibility criteria or screening procedures
- The total sample size (in each frame if more than one was used)
- The method(s) or mode(s) of data collection.
- The dates and location of data collection
- The response rate as calculated according to AAPOR standard definitions, or at a minimum, a sample disposition report so that response rates can be calculated
- Estimates of sampling error (for probability samples)
- A description of how the data were weighted (or a statement that they were not weighted), and any estimating procedures used to produce the final results
- If the survey reports findings based on parts of the sample rather than the total sample, then the size of the subgroups reported should be disclosed

All members of AAPOR's Transparency Initiative must agree to (1) provide the relevant information from the Code in any public report; or (2) request relevant information from this list from the fieldwork subcontractor if the organization itself does not collect the survey data; and/or (3) provide the relevant information from the code to the study's PI or sponsor when the organization participates as a fieldwork contractor.

Organizations that collect survey data who subscribe to these standards will in addition educate clients on the need for this information and will follow practices that make relevant items of information from the code available to clients on request. Client organizations that subscribe to these standards will

require organizations that collect data for their research to follow practices that make relevant items of information from the code available.

The items listed above are the minimum reporting standards for organizations wishing to be in compliance with the Transparency Initiative. Additional items are listed in sections IIIB-E of the Code of Professional Ethics and Practice and all participating organizations are encouraged to adhere to the spirit of the Transparency Initiative by also disclosing this information at the time of release to the extent that it is practical to do so, and in any event in as soon as feasible.

I hereby certify that my organization adheres to the principles and standards described above.

Organization Name:

Name and Title:

Signature:

Date: