

The Code (Revised 5/2010)

We—the members of the American Association for Public Opinion Research and its affiliated chapters—subscribe to the principles expressed in the following Code. Our goals are to support sound and ethical practice in the conduct of survey and public opinion research and in the use of such research for policy- and decision-making in the public and private sectors, as well as to improve public understanding of survey and public opinion research methods and the proper use of those research results.

We pledge ourselves to maintain high standards of scientific competence, integrity, and transparency in conducting, analyzing, and reporting our work; establishing and maintaining relations with survey respondents and our clients; and communicating with those who eventually use the research for decision-making purposes and the general public. We further pledge ourselves to reject all tasks or assignments that would require activities inconsistent with the principles of this Code.

The Code describes the obligations that we believe all research professionals have, regardless of their membership in this Association or any other, to uphold the credibility of survey and public opinion research.

It shall not be the purpose of this Code to pass judgment on the merits of specific research methods. From time to time, the AAPOR Executive Council may issue guidelines and recommendations on best practices with regard to the design, conduct, and reporting of surveys and other forms of public opinion research.

I. Principles of Professional Responsibility in Our Dealings with People

A. Respondents and Prospective Respondents

1. We shall avoid practices or methods that may harm, endanger, humiliate, or seriously mislead survey respondents or prospective respondents.
2. We shall respect respondents' desires, when expressed, not to answer specific survey questions or provide other information to the researcher. We shall be responsive to their questions about how their contact information was secured.
3. Participation in surveys and other forms of public opinion research is voluntary, except for the decennial census and a few other government surveys as specified by law. We shall provide all persons selected for inclusion with a description of the research study sufficient to permit them to make an informed and free decision about their participation. We shall make no false or misleading claims as to a study's sponsorship or purpose, and we shall provide truthful answers to direct questions about the research. If disclosure could substantially bias responses or endanger interviewers, it is sufficient to indicate that some information cannot be revealed or will not be revealed until the study is concluded.
4. We shall not misrepresent our research or conduct other activities (such as sales, fundraising, or political campaigning) under the guise of conducting survey and public opinion research.

5. Unless the respondent explicitly waives confidentiality for specified uses, we shall hold as privileged and confidential all information that could be used, alone or in combination with other reasonably available information, to identify a respondent with his or her responses. We also shall not disclose or use the names of respondents or any other personally-identifying information for non-research purposes unless the respondents grant us permission to do so.

6. We understand that the use of our research results in a legal proceeding does not relieve us of our ethical obligation to keep confidential all respondent-identifying information (unless waived explicitly by the respondent) or lessen the importance of respondent confidentiality.

B. Clients or Sponsors

1. When undertaking work for a private client, we shall hold confidential all proprietary information obtained about the client and about the conduct and findings of the research undertaken for the client, except when the dissemination of the information is expressly authorized by the client, or when disclosure becomes necessary under the terms of Section I-C or III-E of this Code. In the latter case, disclosures shall be limited to information directly bearing on the conduct and findings of the research.

2. We shall be mindful of the limitations of our techniques and capabilities and shall accept only those research assignments that we can reasonably expect to accomplish within these limitations.

C. The Public

1. We shall inform those for whom we conduct publicly released research studies that AAPOR Standards for Disclosure require the release of certain essential information about how the research was conducted, and we shall make all reasonable efforts to encourage clients to subscribe to our standards for such disclosure in their releases.

2. We shall correct any errors in our own work that come to our attention which could influence interpretation of the results, disseminating such corrections to all original recipients of our content.

3. We shall attempt, as practicable, to correct factual misrepresentations or distortions of our data or analysis, including those made by our research partners, co-investigators, sponsors, or clients. We recognize that differences of opinion in analysis are not necessarily factual misrepresentations or distortions. We shall issue corrective statements to all parties who were presented with the factual misrepresentations or distortions, and if such factual misrepresentations or distortions were made publicly, we shall correct them in as commensurate a public forum as is practicably possible.

D. The Profession

1. We recognize our responsibility to the science of survey and public opinion research to disseminate as freely as practicable the ideas and findings that emerge from our research.

2. We can point with pride to our membership in the Association and our adherence to this Code as evidence of our commitment to high standards of ethics in our relations with respondents, our clients or sponsors, the public, and the profession. However, we shall not cite our membership in the Association nor adherence to this Code as evidence of professional competence, because the Association does not so certify any persons or organizations.

II. Principles of Professional Practice in the Conduct of Our Work

A. We shall exercise due care in developing research designs and instruments, and in collecting, processing, and analyzing data, taking all reasonable steps to assure the reliability and validity of results.

1. We shall recommend and employ only those tools and methods of analysis that, in our professional judgment, are well suited to the research problem at hand.
2. We shall not knowingly select research tools and methods of analysis that yield misleading conclusions.
3. We shall not knowingly make interpretations of research results that are inconsistent with the data available, nor shall we tacitly permit such interpretations. We shall ensure that any findings we report, either privately or for public release, are a balanced and accurate portrayal of research results.
4. We shall not knowingly imply that interpretations should be accorded greater confidence than the data actually warrant. When we use samples to make statements about populations, we shall only make claims of precision that are warranted by the sampling frames and methods employed. For example, the reporting of a margin of sampling error based on an opt-in or self-selected volunteer sample is misleading.
5. We shall not knowingly engage in fabrication or falsification.
6. We shall accurately describe survey and public opinion research from other sources that we cite in our work, in terms of its methodology, content, and comparability.

B. We shall describe our methods and findings accurately and in appropriate detail in all research reports, adhering to the standards for disclosure specified in Section III.

III. Standards for Disclosure

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.

A. We shall include the following items in any report of research results or make them available immediately upon release of that report.

1. Who sponsored the research study, who conducted it, and who funded it, including, to the extent known, all original funding sources.
2. The exact wording and presentation of questions and responses whose results are reported.
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.
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.
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.
6. Which results are based on parts of the sample, rather than on the total sample, and the size of such parts.
7. Method and dates of data collection.

B. We shall make the following items available within 30 days of any request for such materials.

1. Preceding interviewer or respondent instructions and any preceding questions or instructions that might reasonably be expected to influence responses to the reported results.
2. Any relevant stimuli, such as visual or sensory exhibits or show cards.
3. A description of the sampling frame's coverage of the target population.
4. The methods used to recruit the panel, if the sample was drawn from a pre-recruited panel or pool of respondents.
5. Details about the sample design, including eligibility for participation, screening procedures, the nature of any oversamples, and compensation/incentives offered (if any).
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.

7. Sources of weighting parameters and method by which weights are applied.

8. Procedures undertaken to verify data. Where applicable, methods of interviewer training, supervision, and monitoring shall also be disclosed.

C. If response rates are reported, response rates should be computed according to AAPOR Standard Definitions.

D. If the results reported are based on multiple samples or multiple modes, the preceding items shall be disclosed for each.

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.