The Code of Professional Ethics and Practices

We—the members of the American Association for Public Opinion Research (AAPOR) and its affiliated chapters—subscribe ~~t~~to the principles expressed in this document, the AAPOR Code of Professional Ethics and Practices (“the Code”). Our goals are to support sound and ethical practice in the conduct of public opinion and survey research and promote the informed and appropriate use of research results.

The Code is based ~~in~~on fundamental ethical principles that apply to the conduct of research regardless of an individual’s membership in AAPOR or any other organization. Adherence to the principles and actions set out in the Code is expected of all public opinion and survey researchers.

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As AAPOR members, we pledge to maintain the highest standards of scientific competence, integrity, accountability, and transparency in designing, conducting, analyzing, and reporting our work, and in our interactions with participants (sometimes referred to as respondents or subjects), clients, and the users of our research. We pledge to act in accordance with principles of basic human rights in research. We further pledge to reject all tasks or assignments that would require activities inconsistent with the principles of this Code.

The Code sets the standard for the ethical conduct of public opinion and survey research at the time of publication.

Recommendations on best practices for research design, conduct, analysis, and reporting are beyond the scope of the Code but may be published separately by AAPOR Executive Council.

Definitions of Terms Used in the Code

1. “Public opinion~~ and~~, survey research, and surveying” refers to the systematic collection and analysis of information from or about individuals, groups, or organizations concerning their behaviors, cognitions, attitudes, or other characteristics. It encompasses both quantitative and qualitative research methods, traditional or emerging.

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~~2. “Participants” refers to individuals~~ 2. Public opinion research “participants” are human beings whose behaviors, cognitions, attitudes, or other characteristics are measured and analyzed. Participants can include individuals representing groups or organizations, and individuals such as minors or those unable to consent directly, for whom a parent, legal guardian, or other proxy

Commented [KJ3]: Language was added to clarify that survey responses were provided by human participants rather than generated by artificial intelligence. As AI-generated content becomes more prevalent, explicitly noting the source of responses helps ensure transparency regarding the methodology and the authenticity of the data collected.

makes participation decisions or provides information. Generated responses or data that are generated, inferred or modeled through artificial intelligence (e.g., silicon samples, digital twins, synthetic samples) are not research “participants.” Cases created in this manner and included in a purported study of public opinion must be identified as having been created through artificial intelligence.

Commented [KJ4]: Same justification as above.

3. “Poll,” “polling,” “survey,” and “surveying” and other similar terms imply that the primary source of data are from human respondents. These terms should not be used to describe data created through artificial intelligence.

Commented [KJ5]: Same comment as above.

4. “Personally identifiable information” refers to (i) measurements, records, or other data that can be used alone or in combination to distinguish or trace an individual’s identity and (ii) any other information that is linkable to an individual (e.g., employment information, medical history, academic records).

I. Principles of Professional Responsibility in Our Research

A. Responsibilities to Participants

1. We will avoid practices or methods that may harm, endanger, humiliate, or unnecessarily mislead participants and potential participants.

2. We will not misrepresent the purpose of our research or conduct other activities (such as sales, fundraising, or political campaigning) under the guise of conducting research.

3. ~~We~~We respect prospective participants’ autonomy in their decision to participate and recognize that participation in our research is voluntary except where specified by regulation or law. Participants may freely decide, without coercion, whether to participate in the research, whether to withdraw, and whether to answer any question or item presented to them.

Commented [KJ6]: Additional language for clarity.

Commented [KJ7]: Same as above comment.

4. We will make no false or misleading claims as to a study’s sponsorship or purpose and will provide truthful answers to participants’ questions about the research. If disclosure of certain information about the research could endanger or cause harm to ~~persons~~people, could bias responses, or does not serve research objectives, it is sufficient to indicate, in response to participants' questions about the research, that some information cannot be revealed.

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5. We recognize the critical importance of protecting the rights of minors and other vulnerable individuals when obtaining participation decisions and conducting our research.

6. We will act in accordance with laws, regulations, and the rules of data owners (providers of research or administrative records previously collected for other purposes) governing the collection, use, and disclosure of information, including data collected or supported using artificial intelligence, obtained from or about individuals, groups, or organizations.

Commented [KJ9]: Language added for AI inclusion.

B. Responsibilities When Collecting Personally Identifiable Information

1. We recognize the right of participants to be provided with honest and forthright information about how personally identifiable information that we collect from them will be used.

2. We recognize the importance of preventing unintended disclosure of personally identifiable information. We will act in accordance with all relevant best practices, laws, regulations, and data owner rules governing the handling and storage of such information. We will restrict access to identifiers and destroy them as soon as they are no longer required, in accordance with relevant laws, regulations, and data owner rules.

3. We will not disclose any information that could be used, including through the use of artificial intelligence, alone or in combination with other reasonably available information, to identify participants with their data, without participant permission.

Commented [KJ10]: Language added to educate/remind members that use of AI heightens risks to non-disclosure.

Note to members: There was considerable debate about this item because advances in AI and large-scale data scraping increase the risk of re-identification. Even datasets that have been de-identified can be potentially cross-referenced with other data sources and reconstructed in ways that reveal respondent identities. Council was torn on *what* to say about this. In this environment, can we, as members, pledge to protect respondents when de-identified data is shared beyond the research team? If not, what is appropriate language for this item? Council is open to suggestions beyond the added language.

4. When disclosing personally identifiable data for purposes other than the current research, we will relay to data users any conditions of their use specified in the participant permission we have obtained.

5. We understand that the use of our research results in a legal proceeding does not relieve us of our ethical obligation to protect participant privacy and keep confidential all personally identifiable data, except where participants have permitted disclosure.

C. Responsibilities to Clients or Sponsors

1. ~~—~~When undertaking work for a client, we will 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.

2. ~~—~~We will inform those (partners, co-investigators, sponsors, and clients) for whom we conduct publicly released research studies about AAPOR’s Standards for Disclosure in Section III of the Code~~,~~ and provide information on what should be disclosed in their releases.

3.~~—~~ We will be mindful of the limitations of our expertise and capacity to conduct various types of research and will accept only those research assignments that we can reasonably expect to accomplish within these limitations.

D. Responsibilities to the Public

1. We will disclose to the public the methods and procedures used to obtain our own publicly disseminated research results in accordance with Section III of the Code.

2. We will correct any errors in our own work that come to our attention which could influence interpretation of the results. We will make good faith efforts to identify and issue corrective statements to all parties who were presented with the factual misrepresentation or distortions. If such factual misrepresentations or distortions were made publicly, we will correct them in a public forum that is as similar as possible to original data dissemination.

3. We will correct factual misrepresentations or distortions of our data or analysis, including those made by our research partners, co-investigators, sponsors, or clients. We will make good faith efforts to identify and 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 will correct them in a public forum that is as similar as possible to the original data dissemination. We also recognize that differences of opinion in the interpretation of analysis are not necessarily factual misrepresentations or distortions and will exercise professional judgment in handling disclosure of such differences of opinion.

Commented [KJ11]: Trivial edit for clarity.

E. Responsibilities to the Profession

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

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

Commented [KJ12]: Trivial edit

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

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

1. We will recommend and employ only those tools and methods of analysis that, in our professional judgment, are fit for the purpose of the research questions.

2. We will not knowingly select research tools and methods of analysis that yield misleading conclusions.

3. We will not knowingly make interpretations of research results that are inconsistent with the data available, nor will we tacitly permit such interpretations. We will ensure that any findings we report, either privately or for public release, are a balanced and accurate portrayal of research results.

4. We will not knowingly imply that interpretations are accorded greater confidence than the data warrant. When we generalize from samples to make statements about populations, we will only make claims of precision and applicability to broader populations that are warranted by the sampling frames and other methods employed.

5. We will not engage in data fabrication or falsification.

6. We will accurately describe and attribute research from other sources that we cite in our work, including ~~its~~ methodology, content, comparability, and source.

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

III. Standards for Disclosure

Broadly defined, research on public opinion can be conducted using a variety of quantitative and qualitative methodologies, depending on the research questions to be addressed and available resources. Accordingly, good professional practice imposes the obligation upon all public opinion and survey researchers to disclose sufficient information about how the research was conducted to allow for independent review and verification of research claims, regardless of the methodology used in the research. Full and complete disclosure for items listed in Section A will be made at the time results are released, either publicly or to a research client, as the case may be. As detailed below, the items listed in Section B, if not immediately available, will be released within 30 days of any request for such materials. If the results reported are based on multiple samples or multiple modes, the preceding items (as applicable) will be disclosed for each.

~~A. Items for Immediate Disclosure~~

A. Items for Immediate Disclosure: Disclose all information below, including listing items that were not present (e.g., if compensation was not offered to respondents, state that explicitly). Researchers will make reasonable effort to ensure information is readily accessible without requiring the reader to navigate multiple sources or links.

Commented [KJ13]: Language added to require researchers to identify both actions taken and actions not taken. This ensures transparency and prevents ambiguity by allowing readers to determine whether an activity was intentionally not performed or simply not addressed in the documentation. The last sentence was added to remind researchers to make methodological disclosure easily found/accessed by readers.

1. Data Collection Strategy: Describe the data collection strategies employed (e.g. surveys, focus groups, content analyses, AI-assisted interviewing).

Commented [KJ14]: Language added to include AI.

2. Who Sponsored the Research and Who Conducted It. Name the sponsor of the research and the party(ies) who~~-~~ conducted it. If the original source of funding is different ~~than~~from the sponsor, this source will also be disclosed.

Commented [KJ15]: Trivial edit

3. Measurement Tools/Instruments. Measurement tools include questionnaires with survey questions and response options, show cards, vignettes, or scripts used to guide discussions or interviews. The exact wording and presentation of any measurement tool from which results are reported as well as any preceding contextual information that might reasonably be expected to influence responses to the reported results and instructions to respondents or interviewers should be included. Also included are scripts used to guide discussions and semi-structured interviews~~ and any~~, including interviews conducted using AI. Any instructions to researchers, interviewers, moderators, chatbots, and participants in the research~~.~~ must also be disclosed. Content analyses and ethnographic research will provide the scheme or guide used to categorize the data; researchers will also disclose if no formal scheme was used.

Commented [KJ16]: Language added to educate/remind members to include AI tools/instruments.

4. Population Under Study. Survey and public opinion research can be conducted with many different populations including, but not limited to, the general public, voters, people working in particular sectors, blog postings, news broadcasts, an elected official's social media feed. Researchers will be specific about the decision rules used to define the population when describing the study population, including location, age, other social or demographic characteristics (e.g., persons who access the internet), time (e.g., immigrants entering the US between 2015 and 2019). Content analyses will also include the unit of analysis (e.g., news article, social media post~~) and~~), the source of the data (e.g., Twitter, Lexis-Nexis~~).~~), and whether artificial intelligence was used to assist with the selection, coding, and/or analysis of content.

Commented [KJ17]: Language added to remind/educate members that AI use needs to be disclosed.

5. Method Used to Generate and Recruit the Sample. The description of the methods of sampling includes the sample design and methods used to contact or recruit research participants or collect units of analysis, including the use of AI-generated samples. Disclose all the following, include noting if information is missing because the data collection organization did not provide the information.

Commented [KJ18]: Language added to ensure researchers disclose any available information about sample sources and data collection methods—including the use of AI—and, when details are not available because a data collection vendor did not release proprietary information, researchers must state that the information was not provided by the data collection center. This requirement applies to all sample-related information, not just AI use.

a. Explicitly state whether the sample comes from a frame selected using a probability-based methodology (meaning selecting potential participants with a known non-zero probability from a known frame~~) or~~), if the sample was selected using non-probability methods (potential participants from opt-in, volunteer, or other sources~~).~~), if the sample was AI-generated, or if the sample was combined from multiple of these type of frames.

~~Probability-based sample~~b. Sample specification should include a description of the sampling frame(s), list(s), or method(s). For example, list samples, address-based samples, telephone samples, social media, river sampling, snowball sampling, respondent-driven sampling, online panels and consolidators. A description of the lists, websites, social media, or other sources for the non-probability sample should be provided.

~~i.~~ If a frame, list, or panel is used, the description should include the name of the supplier of the sample or list and nature of the list (e.g., ABS, registered voters in the state of Texas in 2018, pre-recruited panel or pool).

c. Probability based sample specification should include additional information in the description of the sampling frame(s), list(s), or method(s).

~~i.~~ If a frame, list, or panel is used, the description should include the coverage of the population, including describing any segment of the target population that is not covered by the design.

d. For surveys, focus groups, or other forms of interviews, provide a clear indication of the method(s) by which participants were contacted, selected, recruited, intercepted, or otherwise contacted or encountered, along with any eligibility requirements and/or oversampling.

e. Describe any use of quotas.

f. Include the geographic location of data collection activities for any in-person research.

g. For content analysis, detail the criteria or decision rules used to include or exclude elements of content and any approaches used to sample content. If a census of the target population of content was used, that will be explicitly stated.

h. For AI-generated samples (e.g., silicon samples digital twins, synthetic samples), describe how the samples were generated.

i. Explicitly state whether compensation/incentives were or were not provided to participants. Provide details of any strategies used to help gain cooperation (e.g., advance contact, letters and scripts, compensation or incentives, refusal conversion contacts) whether for participation in a survey, group, panel, or for participation in a particular research project. Describe any compensation/incentives provided to research subjects and the method of delivery (debit card, gift card, cash).

Commented [KJ19]: Language was added to reflect the many ways sample frames, lists, and recruitment methods may be used in modern research. This ensures that disclosure requirements apply consistently across different sampling approaches and that researchers provide clear information regardless of how the sample was obtained.

Commented [KJ20]: Trivial edit

Commented [KJ21]: Language was added to address the growing use of AI-generated samples—such as silicon samples, digital twins, and synthetic samples—and to ensure transparency about how these samples are created. Because these samples are produced through novel rather than traditional sampling frames, additional information is needed so that readers can understand how the sample was generated and evaluate the research appropriately.

Commented [KJ22]: Language was added to address concenrns that when compensation or incentives are not mentioned, readers may interpret the omission in different ways. Because compensation can have important effects on participation—both positive and negative—explicitly stating whether incentives were or were not provided helps avoid ambiguity and ensures greater transparency in how the data were collected.

6. Method(s) and Mode(s) of Data Collection. Include a description of all mode(s) used to contact participants or collect data or information (e.g., CATI, CAPI, ACASI, IVR, mail, Web for survey; paper and pencil, audio or video recording for qualitative research, chatbot, AI voice assistant, etc.) and the language(s) offered or included. For qualitative research such as in-depth interviews and focus groups, also include length of interviews or the focus group session.

7. Dates of Data Collection. Disclose the dates of data collection (e.g., data collection from January 15 through March 10 of 2019). If this is a content analysis or analysis conducted using AI, include the dates of the content analyzed (e.g., social media posts between January 1 and 10, 2019).

8. Numbers of Completed Interviews ~~and Sample Sizes~~ (by sampling frame if more than one frame was used) and (if applicable) Discussion of the Precision of the Results.

a. Provide ~~sample sizes for each mode~~the number of ~~data collection (for surveys include sample sizes for~~human responses from each frame~~, list, or panel used).~~ .

b. For probability sample surveys, report estimates of sampling error (often described as “the margin of error”) and~~-~~ discuss whether~~ or not~~ the reported sampling error or statistical analyses have been adjusted for the design effect due to weighting, clustering, or other factors.

c. Reports of non-probability sample surveys will only provide measures of precision if they are defined and accompanied by a detailed description of how the underlying model was specified, its assumptions validated, and the ~~measure(s) calculated.~~ measure(s) calculated. Otherwise, include a statement that the sample was selected with a non-probability method and measures of precision are not provided and what the resulting impact may be on inference.

d. If content was analyzed using human coders, report the number of coders, whether inter-coder reliability estimates were calculated for any variables, and the resulting estimates.

9. How the Data Were Weighted. Describe how the weights were calculated, including a description of any steps to adjust weights for

Commented [KJ23]: Language added to encompass AI.

Commented [KJ24]: Language was added to clarify disclosure requirements for content analyses and AI-assisted analyses, where the timing of the material analyzed—rather than fieldwork dates—is essential for transparency and proper interpretation of results.

Commented [KJ25]: Edit to existing language to ensure transparency about the number of completed interviews underlying reported estimates, which is essential for evaluating data quality.

Commented [KJ26]: Edits were made to ensure a clear distinction between human respondents and AI generated data.

Commented [KJ27]: Trivial edit

Commented [KJ28]: Language was added to ensure that readers understand both the non-probability nature of the sample and the resulting limitations for statistical inference.

probability of selection into the sample; for eligibility; for nonresponse; and for post-stratification, raking, and/or calibration to population totals. For all steps, describe the variables used and the sources of the weighting parameters.

a. If multiple data sources or frames were used to recruit the sample, describe how the weighting procedures accounted for combining data from multiple sources and what weighting methods were applied.

10. How the Data Were Processed and Procedures to Ensure Data Quality. Describe validity checks, where applicable, including but not limited to whether the researcher added attention checks, logic checks, or excluded respondents who straight-lined or completed the survey under a certain time constraint, any screening of content for evidence that it originated from bots or fabricated profiles, re-contacts to confirm that the interview occurred or to verify respondent's identity or both, and measures to prevent respondents from completing the survey more than once. Any data imputation or other data exclusions or replacement will also be discussed. Researchers will provide information about whether any coding was done by human coders, software, or AI (or a combination thereof); if automated coding was done, name the software~~-~~ or AI platform and specify the parameters or decision rules that were used.

11. A General Statement Acknowledging Limitations of the Design and Data Collection. All research has limitations and~~-~~ researchers will include a general statement acknowledging the unmeasured error associated with all forms of public opinion research~~.~~, including the limitations of any AI tools used.

12. Disclosure of the use of Artificial Intelligence. Researchers will disclose the use of AI for **data collection or data processing**. If this information is unknown or not available, this should be disclosed. If AI was not used for data collection or data processing, include a statement saying so.

The following must be included in any reporting or methodological summaries if AI was used as part of data collection or processing.

a. Task performed by AI: What AI was used for (e.g. generating responses, interviewing/assisting in interviewing, cleaning data, producing estimates, coding/labeling data, creating reports).
b. Human oversight or validation: At what step(s) the AI output or process was validated by researchers (for example: how the oversight or validation was conducted, or a ~~-~~link to existing validation or platform provider's documentation).

Commented [KJ29]: Language was added to ensure transparency about how estimates were adjusted at each stage of the process. Requiring researchers to describe the variables used and the sources of weighting parameters enables readers to evaluate the fit of the adjustments and their statistical implications.

Commented [KJ30]: Language was added to require transparency about how multiple samples or data sources were combined through weighting, which is necessary for evaluating potential bias and the validity of resulting inferences.

Commented [KJ31]: Language added to include AI use in data quality checks.

Commented [KJ32]: Language was added to explicitly acknowledge that unmeasured error may also arise from the use of AI tools, ensuring transparency about their limitations and preventing overstatement of the certainty or validity of research findings.

Commented [KJ33]: Section 12 was added to advance AAPOR's principle of transparency by requiring clear, affirmative disclosure of whether and how artificial intelligence was used in data collection or processing. By specifying the tasks performed by AI and the presence of human oversight, the language helps readers understand the role of AI in producing the results, assess potential implications for data quality and validity, and avoid misinterpretation or overstatement of findings.

The AAPOR Taskforce on Responsible AI Integration in Survey Research will release a report which provides helpful examples of AI activities and disclosure statements.

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B. Additional Items for Disclosure. After results are reported, we will make the following items available within 30 days of any request for such materials:

1. Procedures for managing the membership, participation, and attrition of the panel, if a pool, panel, or access panel was used~~.~~ as specified below. This should be disclosed for both probability and non-probability surveys relying on recruited panels of participants. If the information is unknown, it must be explicitly stated.

a. Details about panel recruitment (e.g., sample frame, household sample coverage, AAPOR panel recruitment response rate, recruitment efforts, total panel size)

b. Details about panel maintenance (e.g., active panel size, mean invitations a month, recruitment frequency, panel tenure)

c. Other information available about the experience of participation in the panel (e.g., panel book/methodology report available on website)

2. Methods of interviewer or coder training and details of supervision and monitoring of interviewers or human coders. If machine coding was conducted, include description of the machine learning involved in the coding.

3. Details about screening procedures, including any screening for other surveys or data collection that would have made sample or selected members ineligible for the current data collection (e.g., survey, focus group, interview) will be disclosed (e.g., in the case of online surveys if a router was used).

4. Any relevant stimuli, such as visual or sensory exhibits or show cards. In the case of surveys conducted via self-administered computer-assisted interviewing, providing the relevant screen shot(s) is strongly encouraged, though not required.

Commented [KJ34]: Additional requirements in III.B.1 were added to ensure transparency about how panels are recruited, maintained, and sustained over time, as each stage can affect coverage, data quality, and inference. Disclosing recruitment, maintenance, and life-cycle details enables users to evaluate the suitability of a panel for a given research purpose and to interpret results appropriately.

5. 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. If response or cooperation rates are reported, they will be computed according to AAPOR Standard Definitions. If dispositions cannot be provided, explain the reason(s) why they cannot be disclosed, and this will be mentioned as a limitation of the study.

6. The unweighted sample size(s) on which one or more reported subgroup estimates are based.

7. Specifications adequate for replication of indices or statistical modeling included in research reports.

C. Access to Datasets

Reflecting the fundamental goals of transparency and replicability, AAPOR members share the expectation that access to datasets and related documentation will be provided to allow for independent review and verification of research claims upon request. In order to protect the privacy of individual respondents, such datasets will be de-identified to remove variables that can reasonably be expected to identify a respondent. Datasets may be held without release for a period of up to one year after findings are publicly released to allow full opportunity for primary analysis. Those who commission publicly disseminated research have an obligation to disclose the rationale for why eventual public release or access to the datasets is not possible, if that is the case.

D. AAPOR Standards Complaint

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 will 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.