Summary of Changes to the AAPOR Code of Ethics

April 2026

Overview

The proposed revisions to the Code of Professional Ethics and Practices are intended to modernize the Code, strengthen transparency, and clarify expectations for ethical research conduct—particularly considering rapid changes in data collection methods and the growing use of artificial intelligence (AI). Many edits are clarifying or editorial in nature, while others introduce new or expanded disclosure and responsibility requirements. The committee attempted to limit the overall number of changes for membership while at the same time recognizing the need to update the Code to reflect new technologies impacting our industry.

Going forward, the Code will no longer be reviewed on a fixed five-year cycle; instead, it will be evaluated on a more frequent and responsive basis to keep pace with the rapidly evolving role of artificial intelligence in public opinion and survey research.

Below is a high-level summary of the substantive changes being proposed, organized by theme rather than by section number.

Clear Distinction Between Human Participants and AI-Generated Data

The proposed changes clarify that terms such as participants, poll, survey and surveying are used to describe data collected from human participants. New language:

- Explicitly states that AI-generated, inferred, or modeled data (e.g., synthetic samples, digital twins, silicon samples) are not research participants.
- Requires that any AI-generated cases included in a study be clearly identified as such.
- Clarifies that terms such as *poll*, *survey*, and *surveying* should not be used to describe AI-generated data alone.

Expanded Ethical Responsibilities Related to Artificial Intelligence

Across multiple sections, the Code now explicitly acknowledges AI as a tool that can affect ethical obligations. Proposed additions:

- Extend existing responsibilities (such as compliance with laws and protection of privacy) to include data collected, processed, or supported using AI.
- Emphasize that AI can heighten risks of re-identification, even for data that have been de-identified.

Stronger and More Explicit Disclosure Standards

The largest set of changes appears in the Standards for Disclosure, which have been expanded to reduce ambiguity and improve transparency.

Clearer Expectations About What Must Be Disclosed

Researchers would now be expected to:

- Make disclosure information easy to locate, without requiring readers to search across multiple documents or links.

AI-Specific Disclosure Requirements

When AI is used for data collection or processing, researchers would be required to disclose:

- Whether AI was used for data collection or data processing.
- What data collection or data processing tasks AI performed (e.g., interviewing, coding, generating responses, cleaning data).
- What human oversight or validation was in place.

More Detailed and Consistent Sample and Recruitment Disclosure

The proposed revisions expand and clarify requirements for describing how samples are generated and recruited, including:

- Explicit identification of probability samples, non-probability samples, AI-generated responses, or combinations of these.
- Clear descriptions of sampling frames, lists, panels, and recruitment methods across modern research contexts.
- New requirements to explain how artificially generated samples were created.

Clearer Reporting of Sample Size, Precision, and Limitations

Several changes clarify and strengthen expectations around reporting uncertainty and limitations:

- Explicit reporting of the number of human responses underlying estimates.
- Updated requirements for reporting measures of precision non-probability samples.
- A required general statement acknowledging limitations of the design, including limitations introduced by AI tools.

Expanded Disclosure for Panels

New items are added to the list of materials that must be made available upon request, including:

- Details about panel recruitment, maintenance, and life cycle for both probability and non-probability panels.