



AMERICAN ASSOCIATION  
*of* GEOGRAPHERS

# **Professional Conduct Policy and Procedures**

2020

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## Executive Summary

The American Association of Geographers (AAG) is a nonprofit scientific and educational society founded in 1904. For over 100 years, the AAG has contributed to the advancement of geography. Its members from nearly 100 countries share interest in the theory, methods, and practice of geography, which they cultivate through the AAG meetings (national and regional), scholarly journals, the volunteer work of its Specialty and Affinity Groups, the service of its committees and the elected governing Council.

As a scientific organization, the AAG recognizes that scientific integrity and ethics are fundamental to advancement. Science cannot flourish without the respectful and equitable treatment of all those engaged in the scientific community. The AAG Professional Conduct Policy has been revised to include a new code of conduct that broadens the definition of professional misconduct to include discrimination, sexual harassment, and bullying to the extent that conduct relates to AAG activities or the professional role of an AAG member. The revised Policy identifies standards for professional behavior and outlines processes for reporting and addressing violations.

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### **AAG Professional Conduct Policy**

*Note: expanded beyond events-only focus*

The American Association of Geographers advocates a positive culture of inclusion and respect for the dignity of each individual. AAG members should exhibit appropriate professional conduct in their interactions with all individuals whom they encounter in connection with their professional roles, including colleagues, students, researchers, support staff, grantors, administrators, and others in the academic or research community. Non-members of AAG involved in AAG activities must also exhibit professional conduct in connection with those activities. AAG expects members, event attendees, and others involved in AAG activities to adhere to professional conduct expectations. Inappropriate professional behaviors include but are not limited to:

- Discrimination against or harassment on the basis of an individual's race, age, religion, creed, color, ancestry, citizenship, national or ethnic origin, disability, military or veteran status, sex, gender identity or expression, sexual orientation, or any other classification protected by applicable local, state or federal law.
- Physical contact that is uninvited and, in the situation, inappropriate, and unwelcome or coercive sexual attention;
- Intimidation, stalking, abusive or threatening behavior, or bullying;
- Retaliation against individuals who raise conduct concerns.

AAG reserves the right to assess whether an individual's behavior is consistent with these conduct expectations and, based on that assessment, the right to bestow, deny, revoke or limit participation in AAG-sponsored activities (e.g., meeting attendance, publication in AAG journals, recognition, and service on committees or in AAG leadership roles) or eligibility for membership or honors. Any action taken against an individual for violation of this policy shall be in accordance with AAG policies and procedures and other governing documents. This policy also applies to AAG members, AAG staff, event attendees, speakers, exhibitors, or event venue staff at any AAG-sponsored conference or meeting as well as AAG-sponsored social events.

## I. Background

Professional ideas and information are exchanged most effectively at the AAG Annual Meeting, other AAG events, in AAG journals, and online discussion fora in an atmosphere free of discrimination or harassment and characterized by courtesy and respect. To that end, the AAG expects all individuals who become AAG members or who serve as AAG staff to conduct themselves in a manner that is honorable, ethical, and professional. Similarly, the AAG expects all individuals who attend the national conference or who participate in other AAG-sponsored events to conduct themselves in a manner that establishes an atmosphere free from discriminatory practices. All AAG staff, AAG members and all participants at AAG-sponsored events are expected to treat others with respect and consideration, follow venue rules, and alert staff or security when they have knowledge of dangerous situations, violations of the Event Conduct Policy, or individuals in distress. The purpose of this policy is three-fold: to foster a positive, harassment-free environment; to offer support for targets of harassment, and to provide for accountability and disciplinary action for violations of the policy. This Professional Conduct Policy applies to all AAG staff, members, attendees and participants at any AAG-sponsored event, including online venues, and at AAG-sponsored meeting social events. All who are employed by the AAG, all who join as AAG members, all who register to participate, attend, speak at, or exhibit at an AAG event agree to comply with this Policy.

## II. PROFESSIONAL CONDUCT

All AAG members are expected to aspire and adhere to the following standards of behavior:

### a. Principles

- Integrity, and honesty in all aspects of research and professional behavior*
- Personal accountability in one's conduct*
- Professional courtesy, equity, and fairness in working with others*
- Freedom to responsibly pursue science without interference or coercion*
- Unselfish cooperation in research and*
- Legal compliance in all aspects of research, including intellectual property*

### b. Responsibilities

- 1. Integrity:** AAG Members will act with honesty in the interest of the advancement of science, take full responsibility for the trustworthiness of their research and its dissemination, and treat others with courtesy, equity, and fairness.
- 2. Adherence to Law and Regulations:** AAG Members will be aware of and adhere to laws and regulations related to the professional conduct of research; to the AAG policy on publications, peer review, scientific integrity; and to professional ethics, law and policy related to discrimination, harassment, and bullying.
- 3. Responsibility:** Members will take responsibility for the integrity of their contributions to all publications, funding applications, reports, and other representations of their research and work.

- 4. Acknowledgement:** Members will acknowledge the names and roles of those who made significant contributions to their work or research (such as ideas and scientific discussion).
- 5. Peer Review:** Members will adhere to AAG peer review policy and provide fair, impartial, prompt, and rigorous evaluations and will respect confidentiality when reviewing others' work. Members will welcome constructive criticism and be responsive to peer review.
- 6. Conflict of Interest:** Members will disclose financial, personal, professional, and other conflicts of interest that could compromise the trustworthiness of their work on AAG committees, publications, research proposals, meeting presentations, and public communications as well as in all AAG honors and awards activities.
- 7. Public Communication:** Members, when representing AAG, will limit professional comments to their areas of scholarly expertise when engaged in public discussions about the application and importance of research findings and will clearly distinguish professional comments from their opinions based on personal views.
- 8. Environment:** AAG members are responsible for creating and upholding a safe, open, and professional environment for learning, conducting, and communicating science with integrity, respect, fairness, trustworthiness, and transparency at all organizational levels and in all scientific endeavors.
- 9. Misconduct:** AAG members will not engage in harassment, bullying, and prohibited behavior (see Section II.C for detail).

**c. Harassment, Bullying, and Prohibited Behavior**

AAG prohibits any form of harassment, sexual or in other forms, at AAG events or in interactions by AAG members with individuals whom they encounter in connection with their professional roles, as set forth in its Professional Conduct Policy (see inset on p.2).

Accordingly, some behaviors are specifically prohibited, whether directed at other members, AAG staff, event attendees, speakers, exhibitors, event venue staff, colleagues, students, and others in connection with AAG activities or an AAG member's professional role. The prohibitions in this policy do not apply to purely private interactions, even between AAG members, if unconnected to AAG activities or to the professional roles of the individuals.

Unacceptable behaviors include:

- Physical or verbal intimidation, including threats, stalking, or unwelcome following;
- Any conduct that is harassing, abusive, discriminatory, or intentionally demeaning of a person by any attendees at the event and related event activities;
- Personal attacks or other behavior during disagreements or in discussions;
- Offensive verbal comments related to gender, sexual orientation, race, religion, national origin, gender identity, or disability;

- Inappropriate use of nudity and/or sexual images in public spaces (including presentation slides);
- [Harassing or intimidating photography or recording](#)
- Sustained disruption of talks or other events; and
- Unwelcome physical contact or sexual attention, including unwelcome sexual flirtations, advances, or propositions; unwelcome verbal comments or physical actions of a sexual nature; sexually degrading words used to describe an individual; an unwelcome display of sexually suggestive objects or pictures; sexually explicit jokes; and offensive, unwanted physical contact such as patting, pinching, grabbing, groping, or constant brushing against another's body.

Member conduct that violates AAG's [Event Conduct Policy](#) may also be considered a violation of this policy to the extent it violates the prohibitions in this policy.

### **III. AAG Process for Investigating Complaints Under this Policy**

Allegations of misconduct may be submitted to the AAG when the alleged action is directly connected to a program operated under the direction of the AAG, including its publications, presentations, meetings and events, or to the extent that conduct relates to the professional role of an AAG member.

#### **a. Scope and Purpose**

AAG recognizes that an allegation of misconduct does not constitute proof of misconduct. AAG recognizes that an allegation does, however, bear the potential to damage professional credibility and cast doubt on the entire career of an accused party. For that reason, the complainant and the accused party must maintain the confidentiality of their submissions to AAG and AAG's communications with them about the matter during the pendency of the proceedings, and, when practicable in connection with its investigation, AAG staff and the Standing Committee will treat the submissions as confidential until a ruling on the merits by the Standing Committee and/or Council has been made, at which point confidentiality may or may not be preserved, depending on the case and the findings. Neither the complainant nor the accused party are prohibited from discussing with others the events that gave rise to the complaint, however.

This process is intended to determine whether a violation of the Code of Conduct Policy has occurred and if so, to decide on appropriate sanctions.

#### **b. Authorized Entities**

The AAG Council has appointed the members of the AAG Executive Committee (i.e., President, Vice President, Past President, Secretary, Treasurer and Executive Director) to serve as the members of the Standing Committee on Disciplinary and Eligibility Matters for AAG Members. The Executive Director is an ex officio member of the Standing Committee. The Standing Committee is charged with investigating all complaints referred to it by the Executive Director that relate to violations by Association members of the Standing Rules on Professional Conduct, violations of other Association policies or Standing Rules, or that otherwise allege dishonorable, unethical, or unprofessional conduct by an Association member in relation to the Association or its activities, or to the professional role of the Association member. The Committee may also determine that a prospective member who has engaged in conduct in

connection with the prospective member's professional role that is contrary to the values of AAG, as reflected in its policies and Standing Rules, is ineligible for membership, based on a referral from the Executive Director. A determination by the Standing Committee that any such allegation is supported by the evidence shall warrant disciplinary action against a member as determined in the discretion of the Standing Committee, which may include but is not limited to suspension or temporary or permanent revocation of the membership and eligibility for membership in the Association of the subject of the complaint or restrictions on the member's privileges and rights as a member, including temporary or permanent loss of eligibility to attend future AAG Annual Meetings or to hold leadership or Committee roles with AAG. With respect to prospective members, the Standing Committee may find the prospective member temporarily or permanently ineligible for membership.

The Standing Committee shall establish procedures for review of and decision on such matters that provide to the subject notice of the nature of the allegations and an opportunity to respond in writing. A member or prospective member who is the subject of an adverse finding may appeal to the Council a decision by the Standing Committee to impose a disciplinary revocation of membership or finding of temporary or permanent ineligibility for membership, by notifying the AAG Executive Director in writing within 30 days of being informed of the sanctions by the Standing Committee. If a decision of the Standing Committee is appealed, the Council will review the written record related to the matter and affirm, modify, or reverse the imposition of sanctions based on that review. Additional material that was available to the subject of the sanction but was not submitted to the Standing Committee will not be included in the record on appeal.

### c. Reporting a Complaint or Allegation

Formal complaints or allegations regarding violations by Association members of the Standing Rules on Professional Conduct, violations of other Association policies or Standing Rules, or that otherwise allege dishonorable, unethical, or unprofessional conduct by an Association member in relation to the Association or its activities, or to the professional role of the Association member must be submitted in writing to the AAG Executive Director Gary M. Langham, [glangham@aag.org](mailto:glangham@aag.org) or Director of Operations Candida Mannozi, [cmannozi@aag.org](mailto:cmannozi@aag.org) tel. 202-234-1450.

Complaints made under the [Event Conduct Policy](#) may be made orally to the Onsite Advocate or the Offsite Ombudsperson, but no action will be taken by AAG under this Professional Conduct Policy unless the complaint is also submitted in writing.

The Onsite Advocate is available to AAG meeting attendees and AAG members to provide advocacy-based counseling (safety planning, support, resource referral), stress management, and wellness resource navigation. Services will not include clinical mental health services (diagnosis, treatment planning, or psychiatric referral). Advocacy will be confidential and no records beyond a count of number of individuals served will be maintained. The Advocate will be available to consult with attendees about their institutional practices responding to harassment and general wellness needs. Consulting with the Advocate will not result in any further action by the AAG, unless a formal complaint is submitted to the AAG. However, as a Licensed Social Worker, the Advocate is bound to mandatory reporting requirements which would include unreported child abuse, unreported abuse of a vulnerable adult, an immediate threat of suicide, or a direct threat to a third party

## i. Filing a complaint or allegation

Formal complaints or allegations must be signed by the complainant and must include the following information:

1. The name of the person(s) submitting the complaint and the name and any other identifying detail (affiliation, etc.) of the person(s) alleged to have committed the violation.
2. A description of the event, including the date and circumstances of the alleged violation.
3. A statement explaining any relevant prior interactions or professional or personal relationship that the person filing has with the person(s) named in the complaint.
4. It is advisable for anyone submitting a complaint or allegation to keep notes on the names of potential witnesses.

Allegations may be submitted via email (with the subject line: AAG Policy Violation) to: Executive Director Gary M. Langham, [glangham@aag.org](mailto:glangham@aag.org) or Director of Operations Candida Mannozi, [cmannozi@aag.org](mailto:cmannozi@aag.org)

Complaints using the hard-copy form at the end of this document may also be mailed to:

AAG Conduct Policy Violation  
AAG  
P.O. Box 73158  
Washington, DC 20056  
USA

To the extent practical, the complainant should provide details, specific facts and documentation of the allegations. Additionally, the complainant should provide their contact information, including a phone number and email address.

### **The complaint must also include the following statement:**

I authorize AAG to contact me regarding this complaint, if deemed necessary. I authorize AAG to release this complaint and all other supporting material I have provided or may provide in the future to the subject of the complaint, members of AAG's Standing Committee on Disciplinary and Eligibility Matters for AAG Members, the AAG Council, AAG's attorneys and others as deemed appropriate by AAG or as required by law. You may [submit an electronic complaint form](#) or fill out and send the PDF complaint form found at the end of this document.

## ii. Preliminary Investigation

The Director of Operations and Executive Director will review the allegations in the formal written complaint and determine whether the complaint, on its face, alleges a violation of the AAG's policies. AAG has the sole discretion to determine which complaints should be pursued, how they should be pursued, and what action, if any, should be taken. If the alleged violations relate to conduct that occurred outside of AAG events or activities, AAG may, in its sole discretion, defer review of or action on the complaint unless and until the allegations have been investigated by a third party entity with jurisdiction over the actions and greater investigative authority than AAG, such as the member's home institution or a court.

If the determination is that the allegations described in the complaint do not constitute a violation of applicable AAG policies, no further action will be taken and the complainant will be informed of this determination.

If the determination is that the formal written complaint alleges conduct in violation of applicable AAG policies the Executive Director will convene the Standing Committee on Disciplinary and Eligibility Matters for AAG Members and share the complaint with them for investigation. The Executive Director will also forward the complaint to the accused at the address(es) AAG has on file for the accused, unless the Standing Committee determines that consideration of the complaint should be deferred.

The accused may submit a written response to the complaint within 30 days after the date of the Executive Director's notification. The response should be submitted to the Executive Director at [glangham@aag.org](mailto:glangham@aag.org). The Executive Director will forward the response to the Standing Committee.

After filing a complaint with AAG, a complainant may request that AAG provide protections from harassment, discrimination, or bullying at AAG activities. Such actions may include but are not limited to: barring the respondent from a complainant's talk, barring a respondent from an AAG activity, or providing the complainant with an escort during AAG activities. If the complaint goes to a full investigation, AAG may consider further actions (such as providing an escort for AAG activities, or other steps deemed necessary to assure member safety) for harassment-related concerns that fall short of a formal complaint.

In some cases, an allegation may be resolved informally, such as through an apology and assurance that the action will not happen again (especially in cases of the respondent unknowingly causing offense), or it may best be resolved through mediation between the Complainant and the Respondent. The Complainant, or the Chair of the Standing Committee, may make a recommendation for mediation at any time during the investigation process, or as a final resolution after an investigation is completed.

### iii. Procedure for Investigation

- a. After receiving a complaint from the Executive Director, the Standing Committee will review the materials. During this time, the Standing Committee (chaired by the AAG President) may request additional information from the parties and may consult with AAG legal counsel in order to reach its decision. The Standing Committee may consider additional relevant information, including any information that is part of a member's AAG record or information obtained from a third party. If AAG obtains additional information from a third party relevant to consideration of a complaint, that information will be shared with the subject of the complaint and it will be made part of the record. If the alleged violations relate to conduct that occurred outside of AAG events or activities, the Standing Committee may, in its sole discretion, defer review of or action on the complaint unless and until the allegations have been investigated by a third party entity with jurisdiction over the actions and greater investigative authority than AAG. In that event, the Standing Committee will notify the parties of its deferral decision.
- b. The Standing Committee will meet to discuss the complaint and related information and submissions. Unless consideration or action by the Committee has been deferred, the Committee will make a determination, based on the evidence and its credibility determinations, about whether a violation of AAG policies has occurred. If the Committee finds a violation, the Committee will also determine the sanction that will be imposed, in its discretion.

#### iv. Sanctions

Sanctions for a violation of the Professional Conduct Policy may include but are not limited to one or more of the following:

1. Written reprimand or warning.
  2. Removal from volunteer AAG position(s).
  3. Placement of an author or reviewer on an AAG Editors' watch list.
  4. Suspension from publishing in AAG journals for a specific period, including permanently.
  5. Suspension from attending or presenting at AAG-sponsored meetings for a specific period of time or permanently.
  6. Suspension or temporary or permanent revocation of the membership and eligibility for membership in the Association.
  7. Restrictions on the member's privileges and rights as a member, including holding leadership or Committee roles with AAG.
  8. If the offender is a prospective member, the Standing Committee may find the prospective member temporarily or permanently ineligible for membership.
  9. Denial of eligibility for or revocation of AAG honors or awards.
  10. Notification of offender's employer.
- a. The outcome of AAG's review of a complaint may or may not be made public.
  - b. Once the Standing Committee's decision has been reached, the Executive Director or the Director of Operations will notify the involved parties in writing. Any adverse finding against the subject of the complaint will include a statement of the basis for the Standing Committee's decision.
  - c. The subject of the complaint will have the opportunity to appeal a decision of the Standing Committee that suspends, revokes, or denies eligibility for membership, denies eligibility for or revokes an AAG honor or award. Appeals must be submitted in writing to AAG's Executive Director within 30 days of the date of the notification of the adverse decision. Appeals must state with specificity the grounds on which the individual is requesting the appeal and must be signed. If an appeal is not postmarked or emailed within 30 calendar days of the notice of the Standing Committee's decision, the Standing Committee's decision shall constitute the final decision of AAG on the matter and shall not be subject to further review or appeal absent extraordinary circumstances, as determined solely by AAG.
  - d. In the event of an appeal, the AAG Council will review the written record related to the matter and affirm, modify, or reverse the finding of violation and imposition of sanctions based on that review. The review shall be limited to a determination of whether (1) a procedural error contributed to the Standing Committee's decision or (2) the Standing Committee's decision was arbitrary and capricious or was unsupported by the evidence. Additional material that was available to the subject of the sanction but was not submitted to the Standing Committee at the time of its deliberations will not be included in the record on appeal, and no new evidence will be considered after the date of submission of the appeal.



**AAG CONDUCT POLICY VIOLATION**  
**COMPLAINT FORM**

Attn: AAG Conduct Policy Violation  
AAG  
P.O. Box 73158  
Washington, DC 20056  
USA

DATE: .....

1. The name of the person(s) submitting the complaint:

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Contact information of the person(s) submitting the complaint (tel., email):

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2. The name and any other identifying detail (affiliation, etc.) of the person(s) alleged to have committed the violation:

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3. A description of the event, including the date and circumstances of the alleged violation. *(Please feel free to continue description on additional pages)*

4. A statement explaining any relevant prior interactions or professional or personal relationship that the person filing has with the person(s) named in the complaint. *(Please feel free to continue statement on additional pages)*

*(NOTE: It is advisable for anyone submitting a complaint or allegation to keep notes on the names of potential witnesses. To the extent practical, the complainant should provide details, specific facts and documentation of the allegations. Additionally, the complainant should provide their contact information, including a phone number and email address.)*

I hereby authorize AAG to contact me regarding this complaint, if deemed necessary. I authorize AAG to release this complaint and all other supporting material I have provided or may provide in the future to the subject of the complaint, members of AAG's Standing Committee on Disciplinary and Eligibility Matters for AAG Members, the AAG Council, AAG's attorneys and others as deemed appropriate by AAG or as required by law.

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Signature of person(s) submitting the complaint

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