



WAPOR CODE OF PROFESSIONAL ETHICS AND PRACTICES

Adopted September 17, 2021



I. PREFACE

- A.** WAPOR last updated its Code of Professional Ethics and Practices (hereafter the Code) in 2011 and the world of research, particularly public opinion research, has seen huge changes in the technology of data collection, public participation in research, growing concerns about the privacy of personal data, the operating environment for political polling in many countries, the rise of new tools such as on-line panels, and the utilization of survey results by a wide variety of media and other outlets.

- B.** WAPOR has updated the Code to keep pace with these changes and provide standards to our members. We have reviewed the recently updated Code of Ethics of AAPOR (American Association of Public Opinion Research, 2021) and the International Code of ICC/ESOMAR (2016). We believe that the 2021 WAPOR Code is consistent with the professional standards of our sister organizations while taking into account the concerns of WAPOR members, many of whom conduct research of a scholarly nature.

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II. INTRODUCTION

- A.** The World Association for Public Opinion Research (WAPOR), and its affiliated regional chapters, in fulfilling its main objective to advance the use of science in the field of public opinion research and in recognition of its obligations to the public, hereby prescribes principles of ethical practices for the guidance of its members, and a framework of professional and ethical standards that should be acceptable to sponsors of scientific research and to the public at large.
- B.** The WAPOR Ethics Code applies to all types of subject-based research, including but not limited to active and passive (observational) data collection, quantitative and qualitative methods; data mining and a blend of data types including, but not limited to, CAPI, CATI and CAWI. The ethics standards apply regardless of what devices or tools are used for data collection.
- C.** In an increasingly complex world, social and economic planning is increasingly dependent upon public opinion reliably studied. The general public is the source of much of this information. Consequently, members of WAPOR acknowledge their obligations to protect the public from misrepresentation and exploitation in the name of research. At the same time, WAPOR affirms the interdependence of free expression of opinion and the researcher's freedom to conduct public opinion research for both scholarly and commercial purposes.
- D.** Members of WAPOR recognize their obligations both to the profession they practice and to those who provide support for this practice to adhere to these basic standards of scientific investigation and reporting.
- E.** The Code defines professional ethics and practices in the field of public opinion research. Adherence to this Code is deemed necessary to maintain confidence that researchers in this field are bound by a set of sound and basic principles based on experience gained over many years and across many countries.

- F.** While WAPOR membership does not guarantee adherence to the Code or a certain level of research quality, all WAPOR members have committed to following the Code in all aspects of conducting research and publishing results.

- G.** As part of its commitment to professionalism and ethical behavior in all aspects of research, WAPOR will continue to conduct workshops on these issues (via webinars and sessions at the annual/regional meetings), will continue to reach out to the press and social media in countries with members to inform the press and social media about changes in research, evolving standards of reporting and protecting the privacy of respondents, and will continue to provide other guidelines on survey reporting.

III. DEFINITIONS

- A. Researchers** are defined as the individuals, companies and organizations who have operational responsibility for study design, data collection, data processing, analysis, and distribution.
- B. Research Subjects** are the sources of research data. They are also referred to as respondents, participants, research data subjects and with other terms. Research subjects generally participate on a voluntary basis although for many projects they do receive compensation. The payment of compensation does not change the responsibilities of the researcher to the research subject.
- C. Personally Identifiable Information (PII)** includes but is not necessarily limited to information about the Research Subject: name, physical addresses (home, work, postal), telephone numbers (landline and mobile), email address(es), social media accounts, data from messaging apps (such as WhatsApp), GPS data which can identify an individual or a household, photos, audio and video recordings and government-issued identification numbers.
- D. Sponsors/Clients** may include individuals, for-profit companies, foundations, governments, and international organizations, including but not limited to NGOs. These individuals and organizations shall follow the WAPOR Ethics Code if they are commissioning research with WAPOR members.
- E. The Press** includes individuals and organizations who may present public opinion data in print media (paper or electronic versions) and in various broadcast media. WAPOR's Ethics Code applies to the use and publication by the Press of data collected by WAPOR members.
- F. Social media** are platforms that support users in mutual communication and interactive exchange of information and media content between individuals and groups via digital channels, in particular blogs, forums, communities and social networks. Social media or areas of it are classified as 'open' or 'closed'.

IV. ETHICAL STANDARDS IN RELATIONS BETWEEN RESEARCHERS AND SPONSORS/CLIENTS

A. RESPONSIBILITIES OF RESEARCHERS

- 1.** The objective study of facts and data, conducted as accurately as permitted by the available resources and techniques, is a guiding principle of all research.
- 2.** The researcher shall be accurate in providing prospective sponsors with information about his/her experience, capacities, and organization.
- 3.** The researcher shall make every reasonable effort to adhere to specifications proposed to and accepted by the sponsor/client. Should the researcher find it necessary to deviate from these specifications, s/he shall obtain the sponsor's/client's prior documented approval.
- 4.** The researcher shall not select tools of data collection or analysis because of the likelihood that they will support a desired conclusion. Every tool shall be selected based on its scientific suitability, recognizing possible constraints of time and budgets in commercial, public sector or scholarly research.
- 5.** The researcher shall in every report and other presentation(s) of the findings distinguish her/his actual data-based conclusions from observations or judgments that may be based on other evidence or personal beliefs and values.
- 6.** Whenever data from a single survey or study are provided for more than one sponsor/client or when data are provided to several sponsors/clients, the researcher shall inform each sponsor/client of this fact.
- 7.** Respondents shall be informed of the sponsor/client of a survey, upon their request, unless the researcher and the sponsor/client believe this would bias responses. In such an instance, and upon a respondent's request, respondents shall be told who the sponsor/client is after the data are gathered.

- 8.** All information and material supplied by the sponsor/client for the research shall remain confidential. It shall only be used in this context and will not be made available to third parties without the sponsor's/client's prior authorization.
- 9.** Without prior authorization of the sponsor/client, no findings from commissioned research shall be disclosed by the researcher except as provided for in Section IV.B.5.
- 10.** Except by mutual consent, data shall not be sold or transferred by either the sponsor or the researcher to parties not involved in the original contract work. If data are transferred by mutual consent, this shall be done in such a manner that respondents remain unidentified.
- 11.** Unless there is agreement between researcher and the sponsor/client to the contrary, the research techniques and methods, such as sampling designs, interviewer instructions, test designs, questionnaire wording, analytical tools etc., used for the study shall remain the researcher's property if s/he has developed them.
- 12.** Unless there is agreement between the researcher and the client/sponsor to the contrary, all data, research documents (such as protocols and questionnaires) or any other material used in the study shall be the property of the researcher. The researcher is, however, required to provide for storage of this material for whatever period is legally mandated or customary in a particular country. This obligation shall be considered fulfilled by storage in a recognized data archive, if necessary, with restricted access.
- 13.** Upon completion of a research study and after the researcher has submitted the final report, the sponsor/client may request, according to previous, mutually agreed upon specifications, a duplicate set of the data, provided that the sponsor bears the reasonable cost of preparation of such duplicates, and that respondents remain unidentified.

B. RESPONSIBILITIES OF SPONSORS/CLIENTS

- 1.** Potential sponsors/clients asking for research proposals and quotations recognize that, in the absence of a fee or other form of payment, such proposals and quotations remain the property of the researcher. WAPOR expects that prospective sponsors/clients shall (a) not use the proposals of one researcher competitively to negotiate a lowering of the price from other researchers, and (b) nor share the researcher's intellectual property, techniques, or recommendations without his/her consent.
- 2.** Reports provided by the researcher are normally for the use of the sponsor/client and his/her agents. The researcher and the sponsor/client shall agree regarding the means of dissemination of the complete or partial results of a research study to other parties or to the public.
- 3.** The sponsor/client and researcher shall conduct themselves in a way to try to ensure that any publication of study results will not be presented, or quoted out of context, or with the distortion of any facts or findings of the study.
- 4.** The researcher will be consulted with regard to the form of publication and is entitled to refuse to grant permission for his/her name to be quoted in connection with the study where s/he considers clause IV.B.3 to have been violated.
- 5.** If the researcher becomes aware of the appearance in public of serious distortions of the research, s/he shall publicly disclose what is required to correct these distortions, including, as appropriate, a statement to the media or other groups, in or before which the distorted findings were presented.

C. RULES OF PRACTICE REGARDING REPORTS AND STUDY RESULTS¹

- 1.** Every report on a study shall contain a complete and accurate description of the following relevant points:
 - a.** The Clients/Sponsors for whom the study was conducted and sources of funding, if different.
 - b.** The Data Collector(s) which conducted the study, and the names of the Data Processor(s) and the Party or Parties supplying the sample(s), if applicable.
 - c.** The purpose of the study.
 - d.** The universe or population to which the results of the study are projected.
 - e.** The method by which the sample was selected and/or recruited, including the type of sampling method (probability, quota, panels, river sampling, etc.), the specific procedures by which it was selected and the actual size of the sample, including descriptions of the recruitment and maintenance of panels.
 - f.** The degree of success in building the sampling frame and carrying out the sample design, including the rate of non-response, how it was calculated, and a comparison of the size and characteristics of the actual and anticipated sample.
 - g.** A description of estimating procedures (if any) and/or weighting procedures used to adjust raw data.
 - h.** The dates, mode(s) and methods of data collection. The total sample size and size of sub-groups if results are separately reported.
 - i.** An e-copy of the full questionnaire in all languages used in field, including instructions to the field team.
 - j.** Which results are based on parts of the sample (for example by filtering), rather than the whole sample.
 - k.** Researcher shall also report any limitations in survey coverage of the target population(s) resulting from a variety of causes including, but not limited to, geography, local conditions, force majeure events, weather, inaccessible buildings, political violence, public health issues, limitations of data collected from social media platforms (such as but not limited to scraping Twitter), and governmental restrictions on opinion surveys.

¹ The requirements are broadly consistent with AAPOR's Transparency Initiative. See https://www.aapor.org/Transparency_Initiative.htm.

- l.** Measures of sampling precision shall be clearly defined and presented.
- m.** Researchers shall provide a description of the precision of the findings including, but not limited to, estimates of sampling error, design effects, calculation of weights, and the impact of (complex) weighting on survey findings.
- n.** After survey results have been reported, published, or otherwise released to the public, researchers should make the following materials available to requestors within 30 days of the request, subject to any legal or contractual limitations. WAPOR also recognizes that some of these methods are proprietary to the researcher and/or the field partner(s) and disclosure may harm their business interests. Of course, all these materials shall be disclosed to the Client(s)/Sponsor(s) of the research.
- o.** Procedures for managing panels (sampling, recruiting, incentives, data retention, re-contacting, replacement due to attrition).
- p.** If applicable, description of how interviewers were trained, supervised, and monitored.
- q.** Description of screening procedures if not already documented in the survey report.
- r.** Visual or other stimuli (show cards, images, recordings).
- s.** Techniques used to gain cooperation of the respondents, including but not limited to incentives, advance contacts and recontacts following an initial refusal.
- t.** Procedures implemented to ensure data quality, using survey software (CAPI, CATI, CAWI) or human interaction (on-site observation, back-checks).
- u.** Researchers shall use the standard AAPOR-WAPOR formulas as described on their websites for the calculation of Contact, Cooperation, Response and Refusal rates.
- v.** Unweighted sample sizes for sub-groups whose results are reported.
- w.** Description of statistical modeling and indices in the research reports that shall be sufficient to support replication testing by independent researchers.
- 2.** Technical terms shall be employed in the report in accordance with their commonly understood scientific usage.

V. ETHICAL STANDARDS IN RELATIONS BETWEEN RESEARCHERS AND RESEARCH SUBJECTS

- A.** To the greatest extent possible within the control of the researcher and the sponsor/client, no research subject, informant, respondents, or other research participants will be adversely affected by (a) his/her answers or (b) the research process itself (such as refusing to participate). The researcher will respect respondent's decisions about their participation in the research and use no methods or techniques by which the informant is put in the position that s/he cannot exercise his/her right to withdraw or refuse his/her answers at any stage of the research.
- B.** Researchers shall respect the legal rights of research subjects for privacy, confidentiality, and data protection. This applies to all types and forms of personally identifiable information that is collected as part of the research process and which may or may not be retained by the researcher for a declared and limited time. Such information is defined in Section III.C.
- C.** No response in a survey or other research finding shall be linked in any way to an identifiable respondent. Respondents shall remain unidentified, except in rare cases, with the respondent's specific permission and provided that such identification is not ruled out by law. The researcher shall take measures to prevent deductive disclosure by the client/sponsor or other researchers who may acquire the data from archives available to the general public.²
- D.** The interview method or any other method employed by the researcher shall never be used as a disguise for other purposes including, but not limited to, marketing, sales solicitation, fundraising or political campaigning.

²<https://www.icpsr.umich.edu/icpsrweb/content/DSDR/disclosure.html>

VI. ETHICAL STANDARDS FOR INTERVIEWERS EMPLOYED BY WAPOR RESEARCHERS

- A.** Research assignments and materials received, as well as all information from research subjects, shall be held in confidence by the interviewer and revealed to no one outside of the research organization which is conducting the study.
- B.** No information gained through a research activity shall be used, directly or indirectly, for the personal gain or advantage of the interviewer.
- C.** The research shall be conducted in strict accordance with study specifications for sampling, administering the questionnaire and interacting with data subjects. No interviewer shall carry out more than one assignment in contact with the same respondents unless this is authorized by the research organization and its clients.
- D.** No outside pressure, political or commercial, shall be used by a research organization to justify violation of this Code.
- E.** Members shall not try to turn to account or put into evidence the fact of their membership in WAPOR as a token of professional competence or adherence to this or any other Code of Ethics. Membership implies no guarantee of qualifications or Code compliance, but it does imply acceptance of the Code by the member.

