

Organisation Code of Ethics and Conduct

Code of ethics

An organisation code of ethics expresses the overarching principles or ideals which guide an organisation's decisions and actions when conducting operations and service delivery. A code of ethics provides a general understanding of the ethical or moral responsibilities that the governing body, employees and volunteers are expected to meet while working for the organisation. For example, a code of ethics may include the principle of the organisation acting with honesty and transparency.

The organisation's code of ethics also acts as a public commitment to anyone with an interest in the organisation, particularly clients, funders and other stakeholders.

Code of conduct

A code of conduct is a set of rules and guides that describe how people are expected to behave and how to respond under particular circumstances. The code of conduct is the practical application of the code of ethics. Issues commonly addressed in a code of conduct include personal behaviours, conflicts of interest, confidentiality, and bullying.

The code of conduct is more of an internal document than the code of ethics, and it is common for organisations to require governing body members, employees and volunteers to agree to a code of conduct in writing at commencement and throughout their engagement with the organisation.

Implementing a Code of Ethics and Code of Conduct

Participatory development

Developing a code of ethics and code of conduct should include participation and consultation of the governing body, employees and volunteers. The degree of this participation and consultation will depend on the size and structure of the organisation and the desired 'buy in' of those parties.

Communication and understanding

Organisations will need to have ways of making the governing body, employees and volunteers aware of the code of ethics and code of conduct, as well as ensuring they understand and can apply them. Strategies may include:

- Inclusion of the codes in recruitment, induction and orientation practice
- Signed code of conduct agreements
- Make the codes easily accessible in both paper and electronic copy

- Distribute directly to individuals
- Reference in relevant policies and procedures
- Discuss at staff, team, governing body and volunteer meetings
- Provide or facilitate ethics and conduct training
- Discuss and reference in supervision sessions and performance reviews
- Ethical practice leadership from the governing body and senior staff.

Support structures

Support structures will assist in the code of ethics and code of conduct being applied in practice. Such structures include ethics and conduct policies and procedures, employment contracts stipulating adherence to the codes, and processes and tools for identifying and responding to breaches of ethics and conducts

Monitoring

Who is responsible for ensuring the code of ethics and conduct are in place and effective? Whilst it is everyone's responsibility to understand and adhere to the codes, and ultimately the governing body is legally responsible, there needs to be other identified positions and individuals that are accountable for ethical practice oversight. Monitoring activities may include routine feedback seeking on code understanding and how the codes are being applied, reporting on ethical compliance and breach findings, and 'spot checks' on operational decisions made.

Review and improvement

Keep the codes of ethics and conduct current and in line with the organisation's mission, values and strategic intent. If there is significant change to the services being provided, the codes may need to be updated. In addition to scheduled review and update, perhaps every 1-2 years, the codes may need to be improved following a significant ethical incident or breach of the codes.

Where changes are made to a code of ethics and conduct, ensure all parties are informed and understand the updated expectations.

