

Code of Ethics for Institutional Research

Approved by the CIRPA-ACPRI Board on April 16, 2012

PREAMBLE

The Code of Ethics of the Canadian Institutional Research and Planning Association was adopted and adapted from the Code of Ethics of the Association of Institutional Research. The Code is purposed to provide members of the Association with some broad ethical statements with which to guide their professional lives and to identify relevant considerations when ethical uncertainties arise. It also provides a means for individuals new to the profession to learn about

In many institutions the institutional researcher is viewed as the “guardian of truth” or the “conscience” of the institution. This is an extra burden for institutional researchers, and this Code provides some guidance to practitioners who bear that burden. Along with the other professional standards, this Code defines a normative expectation for institutional researchers in their work. At the same time, the Code provides the foundation for institutional research as a profession.

The application of this Code requires good judgment and common sense, and its use in any given case may depend upon the presence or absence of shared values, institutional politics, the individuals involved, and the level of the potential threat posed by a specific ethical lapse. There is no licensure process within institutional research, there is no court to determine guilt, and there are few absolutes. Thus the shades of gray highlighted in this Code need to be reviewed and applied carefully lest they be seen either as powerless or as all-powerful, neither of which is appropriate.

Although it provides standards, the Code does not provide a set of rules. Reasonable differences of opinion can and do exist with respect to interpretation, and specific application must take into account the context of a given behavior. A code of ethics cannot guarantee ethical behavior or resolve all disputes. Rather it merely sets forth standards to which professionals aspire and against which their actions can be judged (both by themselves and others). Ethical behavior should result from a personal commitment to engage in ethical practice and an attempt to act always in a manner that assures integrity. All members of CIRPA should pledge to maintain their own competence by continually evaluating their research for scientific accuracy, by conducting themselves in accord with the ethical standards expressed in this Code, and by remembering that their ultimate goal is to contribute positively to the field of postsecondary education.

Finally, this Code is a living document that must change and be shaped as the practice of institutional research continues to evolve and develop.

SECTION I - COMPETENCE

I (a) Claims of Competence. The institutional researcher shall not, in job application, resume, or the ordinary conduct of affairs, claim or imply a degree of competency he/she does not possess.

I (b) Acceptance of Assignments. The institutional researcher shall not accept assignments requiring competencies he/she does not have and for which he/she cannot effectively rely upon the assistance of colleagues, unless the supervisor has been adequately apprised or unless he/she would acquire the necessary competence prior to doing the research. Institutional researchers should use methodologies or techniques that are new to them only after appropriate study, training, consultation, and supervision from people who are competent in those methodologies or techniques.

I (c) Training of Subordinates. The institutional researcher shall provide subordinates with opportunities for professional growth and development.

I (d) Professional Continuing Education. The institutional researcher has the responsibility to develop his/her own professional skills, knowledge, and performance and to keep abreast of changes in the field.

SECTION II - PRACTICE

II (a) Objectivity.

i) Unbiased Attitude. The institutional researcher shall approach all assignments with an unbiased attitude and strive to gather evidence fairly and accurately.

ii) Conflicts of Interest. The institutional researcher should be particularly sensitive to avoid personal conflicts of interest when performing services.

II (b) Use of Accepted Technical Standards. The institutional researcher shall conduct all tasks in accordance with accepted technical standards.

II (c) Initial Discussions. Before an assignment is begun, the institutional researcher shall clarify with the sponsor and/or major users the purposes, expectations, strategies, and limitations of the research.

i) Special care shall be taken to recommend research techniques and designs that are appropriate to the purposes of the project.

ii) Special care shall be taken to advise the sponsor and/or major users, both at the design phase and, should the occasion arise, at any time during the execution of the project, if there is reason to believe that the strategy under consideration is likely to fail or to yield substantially unreliable results.

II (d) Identification of Responsibility. The institutional researcher shall accept responsibility for the competent execution of all assignments which he/she, or a subordinate, undertakes, and shall display individual and/or office authorship, as appropriate, on all such reports.

II (e) Quality of Secondary Data. The institutional researcher shall exercise reasonable care to ensure the accuracy of data gathered by other individuals, groups, offices, or agencies on which he/she relies, and shall document the sources and quality of such data.

II (f) Reports. The institutional researcher shall ensure that all reports of projects are complete; are clearly written in language understandable to decision-makers; fully distinguish among assumptions, speculations, findings, and judgments; employ appropriate statistics and graphics; adequately describe the limitations of the project, of the analytical method, and of the findings;

iv) Appraisal of Implications. The institutional researcher shall apprise institutional authorities of the implications and potentially binding obligations of any promise to respondents regarding confidentiality and shall obtain consent from such authorities where necessary.

SECTION IV -

