

AAEA ASSOCIATE AND PARTNER MEMBERS CODE OF ETHICS

(revised 2018 to conform to membership category changes of 8/7/2018)

Preamble

AAEA, The Agricultural Communicators Network, Associate and Partner Member Code of Ethics 2018

- Professional Values
- Principles of Conduct
- Commitment and Compliance

This Code applies to AAEA Associate and Partner Members. The Code is designed to be a guide for Associate and Partner Members as they carry out their ethical responsibilities associated with their profession. This document is designed to anticipate and accommodate, by precedent, ethical challenges that may arise. The scenarios outlined in the Code provision are actual examples of misconduct. More will be added as experience with the Code occurs.

The AAEA is committed to ethical practices. The level of public trust AAEA members seek, as we serve the public good, means we have taken on a special obligation to operate ethically.

The value of member reputation depends upon the ethical conduct of everyone affiliated with the AAEA. Each of us sets an example for each other - as well as other professionals - by our pursuit of excellence with powerful standards of performance, professionalism, and ethical conduct.

Ethical practice is the most important obligation of an AAEA member. We view the Associate and Partner Members Code of Ethics as a model for other professions, organizations, and professionals.

AAEA Associate and Partner Members *Statement of Professional Values*

This statement presents the core values of Associate and Partner Members and, more broadly, of the public relations/agricultural marketing communications profession. These values provide the foundation for the Member Code of Ethics and set the industry standard for the professional practice of public relations, media relations, marketing communications and related job responsibilities of our diversified membership. These values are the fundamental beliefs that guide our behaviors and decision-making processes. We believe our professional values are vital to the integrity of the agricultural communications profession as a whole.

ADVOCACY

We serve the best interests of our employers, clients, organizations and the agricultural communications industry as a whole by acting as responsible advocates for those we represent. We provide a voice in the marketplace of ideas, facts, and viewpoints to aid in providing information to our respective audiences.

HONESTY

We adhere to the highest standards of accuracy and truth in advancing the interests of those we represent and in communicating with our agricultural audiences and the public at large.

EXPERTISE

We acquire, and responsibly use, specialized knowledge and experience. In conjunction with the AAEA, we advance the profession through continued professional development, research, and education. We build mutual understanding, credibility, and relationships among a wide array of institutions and audiences.

INDEPENDENCE

We provide objective counsel and dedicated, ethical service to those we represent. We are accountable to our employers, constituents, customers and the public for our actions.

LOYALTY

We are faithful to those we represent, while honoring our obligation to serve our employers, our industry and the agricultural community.

FAIRNESS

We deal fairly with clients, employers, competitors, peers, vendors, the media, and the general public. We respect all opinions and support the right of free expression.

AAEA Associate and Partner *Code Provisions*

FREE FLOW OF INFORMATION

Core Principle: Protecting and advancing the free flow of accurate and truthful information is essential to serving our agricultural audiences, constituents and the public interest and contributing to informed decision making in a democratic society.

Intent

To maintain the integrity of relationships with the media, government officials, and the public.

To aid informed decision-making.

Guidelines

A member shall:

- Preserve the integrity of the communications process.
- Be honest and accurate in all communications.
- Act promptly to correct erroneous communications for which the AAEA Associate and Partner Members or his/her client or organization is responsible.
- Preserve the free flow of unprejudiced information when giving or receiving gifts by ensuring that gifts are nominal, legal, and infrequent.

COMPETITION

Core Principle: Promoting healthy and fair competition among professionals preserves an ethical climate while fostering a robust business environment.

Intent

To promote respect and fair competition among Associate and Partner Members, their organizations and related agricultural marketing communications professionals.

Guidelines

A member shall:

- Follow ethical hiring practices designed to respect free and open competition without deliberately undermining a competitor.
- Preserve intellectual property rights in the marketplace.

Examples of Improper Conduct Under This Provision:

A member employed by a “client organization” shares helpful information with an organization that is competing with others for the company’s business.

A member spreads malicious and unfounded rumors about a competitor in order to alienate the competitor’s clients and employees in a ploy to recruit people and business.

DISCLOSURE OF INFORMATION

Core Principle: Open communication fosters informed decision making in a democratic society.

Intent

To build trust with the public by revealing all information needed for responsible decision making.

Guidelines

A member shall:

- Be honest and accurate in all communications.
- Act promptly to correct erroneous communications for which the member is responsible.
- Investigate the truthfulness and accuracy of information released on behalf of those represented.
- Reveal the sponsors for causes and interests represented.
- Disclose financial interest (such as stock ownership) in their or a client’s organization.
- Avoid deceptive practices.

Examples of Improper Conduct Under this Provision:

Front groups: A member implements “grass roots” campaigns or letter-writing campaigns to legislators on behalf of undisclosed interest groups.

Lying by omission: A member knowingly fails to release financial information, giving a misleading impression of the corporation’s performance.

A member discovers inaccurate information disseminated via a Web site or media kit and does not correct the information.

A member deceives the public by employing people to pose as volunteers to speak at public hearings and participate in “grass roots” campaigns.

SAFEGUARDING CONFIDENCES

Core Principle: Client and employer trust requires appropriate protection of confidential and private information.

Intent

To protect the privacy rights of clients, employers, organizations, and individuals by safeguarding confidential information.

Guidelines

A member shall:

- Safeguard the confidences and privacy rights of present, former, and prospective clients and employees.
- Protect privileged, confidential, or insider information gained from a client or organization.
- Immediately advise an appropriate authority if a member discovers that confidential information is being divulged by an employee of a client company or organization.

Examples of Improper Conduct Under This Provision:

A member changes jobs, takes confidential information, and uses that information in the new position to the detriment of the former employer.

A member intentionally leaks proprietary information to the detriment of some other party.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

Core Principle: Avoiding real, potential or perceived conflicts of interest builds the trust of clients, employers, and the publics.

Intent

To earn trust and mutual respect with clients, media, employers and the public.

To build and maintain trust and objective credibility with the public by avoiding or ending situations that put one’s personal or professional interests in conflict with society’s interests.

Guidelines

A member shall:

- Act in the best interests of the client, company/organization or employer, even subordinating the member's personal interests.
- Avoid actions and circumstances that may appear to compromise good business judgment or create a conflict between personal and professional interests.
- Disclose promptly any existing or potential conflict of interest to affected clients or organizations.
- Encourage clients, employers and customers to determine if a conflict exists after notifying all affected parties.

Examples of Improper Conduct Under This Provision:

The member fails to disclose that he or she has a strong financial interest in a client's chief competitor.

The member represents a "competitor company" or a "conflicting interest" without informing a prospective client.

ENHANCING THE PROFESSION

Core Principle: AAEA Associate and Partner professionals work constantly to strengthen the public's trust in the profession and the agricultural industry.

Intent

To build respect and credibility with agricultural audiences and the public for the profession of public relations and agricultural marketing/organizational communications.

To improve, adapt and expand educational, career and professional practices and opportunities.

Guidelines

A member shall:

- Acknowledge that there is an obligation to protect and enhance the profession.
- Keep informed and educated about practices in the profession to ensure ethical conduct.
- Actively pursue personal professional development.
- Decline representation of clients or organizations that urge or require actions contrary to this Code.
- Accurately define what public relations and marketing communications activities can accomplish.
- Counsel subordinates in proper ethical decision making.
- Require that subordinates adhere to the ethical requirements of the Code.
- Report ethical violations, whether committed by AAEA members or not, to the appropriate authority.

Examples of Improper Conduct Under This Provision:

An AAEA member declares publicly that a product the client or company sells is safe, without disclosing evidence to the contrary.

A member initially assigns some questionable client work to a non-member practitioner to avoid the ethical obligation of AAEA membership.

Conclusion

The Associate and Partner Members AAEA are integral to the agricultural industry and the ag communications profession. They are conduits of reliable information that help producers and other agricultural professionals keep abreast of the agriculture industry and make informed choices about the ideas and tools at their disposal. The role of AAEA Associate and Partner Members is based on trust and high professional standards, affirmed by this Code of Ethics