

Development of the 2015 American Geosciences Institute Guidelines for Ethical Professional Conduct: History, Context, and Intended Use

David Mogk and Maeve Boland, April 2015

History and Charge to the Committee: In 1999, the American Geosciences Institute (AGI) facilitated the development of Guidelines for Ethical Professional Conduct on behalf of its member societies. In September 2013, AGI hosted a Leadership Forum on Ethics and the Geosciences where the attendees drafted a Consensus Statement on Ethics in the Geosciences, based on a proposal from the Geological Society of America and The Geological Society of London. This statement was approved by 27 member societies who agreed to:

- Promote informed understanding of the role of ethics in the geosciences
- Raise standards of professional practice among our memberships
- Develop and promote a Common Code of Ethics for geoscientists

In response to the expressed commitment, AGI again assumed a leadership role in developing a Common Code of Ethics on behalf of its member societies.

Process: All societies that signed the Consensus Statement were invited to nominate a member to an *ad hoc* AGI committee charged with developing a Common Code of Ethics. Twelve nominations were received, and the committee was established in May 2014 (members and their societies are identified in the Table 1). Five conference calls were convened, and numerous drafts of the document were circulated and revised by the committee between June and October 2014. The committee reviewed the existing AGI Guidelines for Ethical Professional Conduct (1999), the current ethics policies adopted by numerous geoscience scientific and professional societies, and identified the common, overarching principles articulated in these policies. In-depth discussions (via e-mail and in teleconferences) considered the breadth and scope of topics covered, with careful attention to the intent, implications, and nuances of the approved text. The committee prepared a draft revision of the Guidelines for Ethical Professional Conduct, which was presented at the Joint AGI/GSA Societies Meeting in Vancouver on October 20, 2014. The draft was then circulated to all of AGI's member societies, with a request for comments and suggested revisions. By the closing date of February 20, 2015, AGI had received feedback from 25 member societies.

The committee reconvened in March 2015 to review the comments from member societies. Following two conference calls and extensive email correspondence, the committee revised the draft Guidelines to include a new introductory statement and two additional items, and they improved the phrasing of several sections of the document. The committee voted unanimously to accept the revised document on April 6, 2015.

AGI's Executive Committee reviewed the revised AGI Guidelines for Ethical Professional Conduct and voted unanimously to adopt the Guidelines as submitted by the committee. The final electronic vote to approve the revised Guidelines was received on April 13, 2015.

The Guidelines will be presented to member societies at the Member Society Council Meeting on June 1, 2015, with an invitation to member societies to endorse the Guidelines by September 30, 2015.

Guiding Principles: The Guidelines for Ethical Professional Conduct have been developed as an aspirational document to set high ethical standards for professional geoscientists. AGI offers these guidelines as a useful reference for its member societies. The specific points in these guidelines are written in general terms to convey ethical standards and expectations, a) in the daily professional work of geoscientists, and b) as members of a professional scientific community. Personal and professional responsibilities are emphasized. They do not mandate ethical behavioral norms or expectations, nor do they prescribe remedies or consequences. The member societies of AGI are invited to adopt these guidelines to the degree appropriate to their missions. These guidelines are not binding on any AGI member organization or its members.

Intended use of these Guidelines: The **Guidelines for Ethical Professional Conduct** serve as a framework to identify the ethical principles that should inform the professional conduct of geoscientists. They serve as a reference point for AGI’s member societies as they review and revise their own codes of ethics, or develop new codes of ethics. The overarching goal is to establish a universal set of ethical expectations to be practiced by geoscientists from among the diverse disciplines embraced by the geosciences. This is particularly important as geoscientists engage increasingly in multi-, inter-, and trans-disciplinary work in investigating and reporting on the complex Earth system. This framework is also important to set a standard for ethical conduct in the pre-professional training of young geoscientists in all the geoscience disciplines.

Table 1: Members of the *ad hoc* 2014-15 AGI Ethics Committee

Name	Affiliation	Society
Dave Mogk (Chair)	Montana State University	NAGT
David Abbott	Consultant	AIPG
Robert Finkelman	UT, Dallas	IMGA
Joe Gillman	Missouri State Geologist	AASG
Linda Gundersen	USGS (Emeritus)	AGU
Denise Hills	Alabama Geol. Survey	AWG
Murray Hitzman	Colorado School of Mines	SEG
Edmund Nickless	Executive Secretary, GSL	GSL
Lee Phillips	UNC, Greensboro	CUR
Monica Ramirez	Front Range CC	AWG
Robert Tepel	Retired	AEG
Douglas Walker	University of Kansas	GSA