

DECLARATION ON PROFESSIONAL SERVICES?

What does declaration mean? A statement made by a party to a legal transaction usually not under oath.

DOPTED BY THE ISI COUNCIL, 22 & 23 July 2010, Reykjavik, Iceland

Preamble

The ISI's Declaration on Professional Ethics consists of a statement of Shared Professional Values and a set of Ethical Principles that derive from these values. For the purposes of this document, the definition of who is a statistician goes well beyond those with formal degrees in the field, to include a wide array of creators and users of statistical data and tools. Statisticians work within a variety of economic, cultural, legal and political settings, each of which influences the emphasis and focus of statistical inquiry. They also work within one of several different branches of their discipline, each involving its own techniques and procedures and, possibly, its own ethical approach. Statisticians work in diverse fields such as economics, psychology, sociology, medicine, whose practitioners have ethical conventions that may influence their conduct. Even within the same setting and branch of statistics, individuals may face various situations and constraints in which ethical questions arise.

The aim of this declaration is to enable the statistician's individual ethical judgments and decisions to be informed by shared values and experience, rather than by rigid rules imposed by the profession. The declaration seeks to document widely held principles of the statistics profession and to identify the factors that obstruct their implementation. It recognizes that, the operation of one principle may impede the operation of another, that statisticians – in common with other occupational groups – have competing obligations not all of which can be fulfilled simultaneously. Thus, statisticians will sometimes have to make choices between principles. The declaration does not attempt to resolve these choices or to establish priorities among the principles. Instead it offers a framework within which the conscientious statistician should be able to work comfortably. It is urged that departures from the framework of principles be the result of deliberation rather than of ignorance.

The declaration's first intention is to be informative and descriptive rather than authoritarian or prescriptive. Second, it is designed to be applicable as far as possible to the wide and changing areas of statistical methodology and application. For this reason, its provisions are drawn quite broadly. Third, although the principles are framed so as to have wider application to decisions than to the issues it specifically mentions, the declaration is by no means exhaustive. It is designed in the knowledge that it will require periodic updating and amendment, reflecting on the one hand developments in the generation of information and technical tools utilized by statisticians and, on the other hand, in the uses (and, consequently, misuses) of statistical outputs. Fourth, the values, principles, and the commentaries which follow acknowledge with the general written or unwritten rules or norms, such as compliance with the law or the need for probity. However, the declaration restricts itself insofar as possible to matters of specific concern to statistical inquiry.

Although not explicitly stated, the Principles inherently reflect the obligations and responsibilities of – as well as the resulting conflicts faced by – statisticians to forces and pressures outside of their own performance, namely to and from:

- Society
- Colleagues
- Employers, Clients, and Funders
- Subjects

In carrying out his/her responsibilities, each statistician must be sensitive to the need to ensure that his/her actions are, first, consistent with the best interests of each group and, second, do not favor any group at the expense of any other, or conflict with any of the Principles.

The Principles are followed by short commentaries on the conflicts and difficulties inherent in their application. A link is provided for each ethical principle for those who wish to pursue the issues. Similarly, a limited annotated bibliography is provided after the commentaries for those who wish to pursue the issues or consult more detailed texts.

Shared Professional Values

Our shared professional values are respect, professionalism, truthfulness and integrity.

1. Respect

- We respect the privacy of others and the promises of confidentiality given to them.
- We respect the communities where data is collected and guard against harm coming to them by misuse of the results.
- We should not suppress or improperly detract from the work of others.

2. Professionalism

The value Professionalism implies Responsibility, Competence and Expert Knowledge, and Informed Judgment.

- We work to understand our users' needs.
- We use our statistical knowledge, data, and analyses for the Common Good to serve the society. We strive to collect and analyze data of the highest quality possible.
- We are responsible for the fitness of data and of methods for the purpose at hand.
- We discuss issues objectively and strive to contribute to the resolution of problems. We obey the law and work to change laws we believe impede good statistical practice.
- We are continuously learning both about our own field as well as those to which we apply our methods.
- We develop new methods as appropriate. We do not take assignments in which we have a clear conflict of interest.
- We act responsibly with our employers.

3. Truthfulness and Integrity

By Truthfulness and Integrity, we mean Independence, Objectivity and Transparency.

- We produce statistical results using our science and are not influenced by pressure from politicians or funders.
- We are transparent about the statistical methodologies used and make these methodologies public.
- We strive to produce results that reflect the observed phenomena in an impartial manner.
- We present data and analyses honestly and openly.
- We are accountable for our actions.

- We have respect for intellectual property. As scientists, we pursue promising new ideas and discard those demonstrated to be invalid.
- We work towards the logical coherence and empirical adequacy of our data and conclusions. We value well-established objective criteria of assessment.

Ethical Principles

1. Pursuing Objectivity

Statisticians should pursue objectivity without fear or favor, only selecting and using methods designed to produce the most accurate results. They should present all findings openly, completely, and in a transparent manner regardless of the outcomes. Statisticians should be particularly sensitive to the need to present findings when they challenge a preferred outcome. The statistician should guard against predictable misinterpretation or misuse. If such misinterpretation or misuse occurs, steps should be taken to inform potential users. Findings should be communicated for the benefit of the widest possible community, yet attempt to ensure no harm to any population group.

2. Clarifying Obligations and Roles

The respective obligations of employer, client, or funder and statistician in regard to their roles and responsibility that might raise ethical issues should be spelled out and fully understood. In providing advice or guidance, statisticians should take care to stay within their area of competence, and seek advice, as appropriate, from others with the relevant expertise.

3. Assessing Alternatives Impartially

Available methods and procedures should be considered and an impartial assessment provided to the employer, client, or funder of the respective merits and limitations of alternatives, along with the proposed method.

4. Conflicting Interests

Statisticians avoid assignments where they have a financial or personal conflict of interest in the outcome of the work. The likely consequences of collecting and disseminating various types of data and the results of their analysis should be considered and explored.

5. Avoiding Preempted Outcomes

Any attempt to establish a predetermined outcome from a proposed statistical inquiry should be rejected, as should contractual conditions contingent upon such a requirement.

6. Guarding Privileged Information

Privileged information is to be kept confidential. This prohibition is not to be extended to statistical methods and procedures utilized to conduct the inquiry or produce published data.

7. Exhibiting Professional

Competence Statisticians shall seek to upgrade their professional knowledge and skills, and shall maintain awareness of technological developments, procedures, and standards which are relevant to their field, and shall encourage others to do the same.

8. Maintaining Confidence in Statistics

In order to promote and preserve the confidence of the public, statisticians should ensure that they accurately and correctly describe their results, including the explanatory power of their data.

It is incumbent upon statisticians to alert potential users of the results to the limits of their reliability and applicability.

9. Exposing and Reviewing Methods and Findings

Adequate information should be provided to the public to permit the methods, procedures, techniques, and findings to be assessed independently.

10. Communicating Ethical Principles

In collaborating with colleagues and others in the same or other disciplines, it is necessary and important to ensure that the ethical principles of all participants are clear, understood, respected, and reflected in the undertaking.

11. Bearing Responsibility for the Integrity of the Discipline

Statisticians are subject to the general moral rules of scientific and scholarly conduct: they should not deceive or knowingly misrepresent or attempt to prevent reporting of misconduct or obstruct the scientific/scholarly research of others.

12. Protecting the Interests of Subjects

Statisticians are obligated to protect subjects, individually and collectively, insofar as possible, against potentially harmful effects of participating. This responsibility is not absolved by consent or by the legal requirement to participate. The intrusive potential of some forms of statistical inquiry requires that they be undertaken only with great care, full justification of need, and notification of those involved. These inquiries should be based, as far as practicable, on the subjects' freely given, informed consent. The identities and records of all subjects or respondents should be kept confidential. Appropriate measures should be utilized to prevent data from being released in a form that would allow a subject's or respondent's identity to be disclosed or inferred.

Background Note

The involvement of the International Statistical Institute in establishing a declaration on professional ethics has extended over the past quarter century. The Bureau of the Institute, in response to representations by members and a proposal by the Institute's Committee on Future Directions, initially established a Committee on a Code of Ethics for Statisticians in 1979, during the 42nd ISI Session in Manila. That Committee[1] prepared a 'code' that was accepted by the Institute during its Centenary Celebration in 1985, with the adoption of the following resolution by the General Assembly of the ISI on 21 August, 1985:

- recognizing that the aim of the Declaration on Professional Ethics for Statisticians is to document shared professional values and experience as a means of providing guidance rather than regulation;
- adopts the Declaration as an affirmation of the membership's concern with these matters and of its resolve to promote knowledge and interest in professional ethics among statisticians worldwide;
- determines to send the Declaration to all members of the ISI and its Sections and to disseminate it, as appropriate, within the statistical profession;
- commends the Committee responsible for developing the Declaration for its thorough, efficient and successful work during the last five years.

With the passage of time, the Institute found itself revisiting the question of the need for an updating of the Declaration. In July 2006, the Executive Committee specifically invited its standing Professional Ethics Committee[2] to revisit the ISI Declaration and, “should the occasion arise, (propose) updates to the ISI Declaration”. This the Committee has now done. A revised document, prepared for a meeting held in Paris, in March 2007, and hosted by INSEE, was followed by an open meeting at the ISI international meetings in Lisbon, in August 2007, at which the results of all these efforts were presented to the participants for their comments and reactions. Although agreement was evident on many points, a number of suggestions for further examination were proposed, which are reflected in the addition of a Section on Shared Professional Values and a reordering and combining of several of the Ethical Principles that derive from these Values. This document is the result of these recent efforts.

In accordance with the spirit and letter of the original resolution, the International Statistical Institute presents this revised and updated Declaration on Professional Ethics, with the continued hope and belief that the new document will assist colleagues throughout the world in the pursuit of their professional goals and responsibilities.