

Code of Ethics & Operational Standards

Basic ethical principles that Cooperation Canada and its Member Organizations must accept and promote.

A tradition of mutual responsibility for ethical practice

Cooperation Canada (formerly known as the Canadian Council for International Cooperation) is proud to be one of the first networks of civil society organizations in the world to adopt a code of ethics that included a collective statement of “Principles of International Cooperation” and a “Code of Conduct.” The Code of Ethics demonstrated Cooperation Canada Members’ organizational commitment to ethical practice when it became the organization’s peer accountability framework in 1995. A further decade of experience and reflection resulted in a revised Code of Ethics in 2004 that incorporated sections on working in partnership with southern civil society organizations. In 2009, the code was once again updated and is now known as the Code of Ethics and Operational Standards. This document more clearly outlines the ethical principles that Cooperation Canada and its Member Organizations must accept and promote. A set of operational standards, which includes a compliance procedure, guides practices.

The review undertaken in 2019-2020 was designed to update the Code of Ethics and Operational Standards to take into account new developments in international cooperation practice during the past decade and to integrate key principles related to Cooperation Canada’s Leaders Pledge on Preventing and Addressing Sexual Misconduct. These updates have also clarified the compliance process – putting the onus on Member Organizations to view the Code of Ethics and Operational Standards as an opportunity for organizational learning and continuous improvement.

Adherence to this comprehensive Code of Ethics and Operational Standards is one way that Member Organizations demonstrate publicly their commitment to operate ethically and responsibly. Membership also provides tremendous opportunities to learn from peer organizations and deepen and improve Member Organizations’ practice of international cooperation.

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CODE OF ETHICS

C1. PREAMBLE

C1.1 The Code of Ethics sets out the basic ethical principles that Cooperation Canada and its Member Organizations must accept and promote.

C1.2 For Cooperation Canada, international cooperation is a social, cultural, economic and political process that leads to the fulfillment of fundamental human rights. These rights have been enshrined in the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights and subsequent core treaties and instruments, including but not limited to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

C1.3 International cooperation must give primacy to fulfilling the rights, needs and aspirations of the world's poorest and most marginalized peoples; it must promote the peaceful management of conflict; and it must safeguard the health, diversity and resilience of the natural environment. International cooperation should also protect the safety, dignity and human rights and fundamental freedoms of all migrants, regardless of their migratory status, and at all times. The Sustainable Development Goals provide a global framework to end poverty and hunger everywhere; to combat inequalities within and among countries; to build peaceful, just and inclusive societies; to protect human rights and promote gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls; and to ensure the lasting protection of the planet and its natural resources.

C1.4 While recognizing that the primary responsibility for the protection and promotion of human rights rests with governments, Cooperation Canada and its Member Organizations support the fulfillment of these rights through their international cooperation and advocacy activities.

C1.5 As part of Canadian civil society, Cooperation Canada and its Member Organizations promote and support the advancement of a flourishing civil society in Canada and abroad. The strengthening of people's organizations, voluntary agencies and other socially beneficial institutions is integral to the practice of international cooperation.

C1.6 Based on Cooperation Canada's collective experience, establishing and strengthening relations with civil society organization on the basis of partnership is key to achieving international cooperation outcomes.

C1.7 Since Cooperation Canada and its Member Organizations influence the public perception of the international cooperation community, they share a significant responsibility to act in ways that enhance public trust in their activities.

C1.8 Member Organizations recognize a duty of care to all the people with whom we work and the need to act to address the power imbalances inherent in our work.

C2. GENERAL PRINCIPLES

C2.1 Human Rights – In all of their activities, Cooperation Canada and its Member Organizations should respect and promote the human rights and dignity of all people.

C2.2 Accountability – Cooperation Canada and its Member Organizations should be accountable to their international partners, to their staff, to their donors, to the Canadian public and to each other for their contributions to international cooperation and their stewardship of resources.

C2.3 Transparency – Cooperation Canada and its Member Organizations should communicate freely and accurately with their partners, donors, the public and each other.

C2.4 Fairness – Cooperation Canada and its Member Organizations should practise and promote equity and justice in all their activities.

C2.5 Cooperation – Cooperation Canada and its Member Organizations should cooperate with each other in order to promote Canadian involvement in international cooperation.

C2.6 Sustainability – In all of their activities, Cooperation Canada and its Member Organizations should take appropriate measures to promote environmental sustainability.

C2.7 Protection – Cooperation Canada and its Member Organizations are committed to creating safe and respectful workplaces and programs that promote gender equality and are free from gender-based violence, including by addressing and responding to all abuse of power, holding people to account, and protecting the vulnerable. Cooperation Canada and its Member Organizations will take action to respond to all concerns and complaints about sexual exploitation and abuse and child abuse involving recipient populations, employees and related personnel.

C3. ORGANIZATIONAL PRINCIPLES

Cooperation Canada and its Member Organizations should ensure that these General Principles are incorporated into their structure, governance and operations.

C4. INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION PRINCIPLES

International Cooperation should foster and promote the full realization of human rights, gender equality and fundamental freedoms. To reach this goal, international cooperation should:

C4.1 Satisfy basic human needs;

C4.2 Be people-centred in both its purposes and the distribution of its benefits;

C4.3 Address the root causes, and not merely the symptoms, of global inequality;

C4.4 Promote social justice through the equitable distribution of power, wealth and access to resources;

C4.5 Enable underrepresented, poor, oppressed and marginalized people to organize and improve their situation;

C4.6 Advance gender equality and reflect the concerns, perspectives and experience of women and enable women to realize their full rights;

C4.7 Foster sustainable development taking into account the Sustainable Development Goals;

C4.8 Respect indigenous peoples and their rights to self-determination and to sovereignty over their own territories;

C4.9 Respect the cultural and spiritual integrity of all peoples;

C4.10 Ensure the full participation of individuals and groups that have experienced exclusion and marginalization;

C4.11 Protect the planet from degradation, including through sustainable consumption and production, sustainably managing its natural resources and taking urgent action on climate change, so that it can support the needs of the present and future generations¹;

C4.12 Recognize the hazards of militarism and promote peaceful solutions to international, national or local conflict; and

C4.13 Promote a global movement that links shared interests and issues.

¹ <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/post2015/transformingourworld>

C5. PARTNERSHIP PRINCIPLES

Building on the International Cooperation Principles in Section C4, Cooperation Canada and its Member Organizations are committed to the following additional principles applying to partnerships²:

C5.1 Partnerships should be vehicles for long-term accompaniment that support the right of peoples to determine and carry out activities that further their own options, through their civil society organizations;

C5.2 Partnerships should advance and exemplify the full realization of human rights and fundamental freedoms, social justice, equitable distribution of global wealth and environmental sustainability;

C5.3 Partnerships should be built on shared visions and goals for society which imply mutual support and solidarity beyond the implementation of specific programs and projects;

C5.4 Partnerships should be formed in a spirit of inclusiveness that respects and promotes the value of diversity;

C5.5 Partnerships should embody equity. Acknowledging that inequalities often exist as a result of power dynamics, especially in funding relations, partners should strive for equitable partnerships;

C5.6 Partnerships should be dynamic relationships built on respect and honesty, in which partners strive for better understanding and appreciation of one another;

C5.7 Partners should be transparent and accountable to one another;

C5.8 Partners should respect one another's autonomy and constraints and strive to foster a climate of mutual trust in all their partnership activities; and

C5.9 Partners should endeavour to learn from one another and facilitate the sharing of knowledge.

² These “partnership principles” have been articulated to guide relationships between Cooperation Canada Member Organizations and other civil society organizations – often in the Global South – where a mutual agreement has been established committing each Organization to a set of agreed principles and actions over an extended period of time. While these principles may not apply to all other types of relationships that Cooperation Canada members enter, they can also be a helpful guide such relationships, including engagement with governments and the private sector.

OPERATIONAL STANDARDS

S1. PREAMBLE

In order to provide guidance to Cooperation Canada and its Member Organizations on implementing the principles of the Cooperation Canada Code of Ethics, this document outlines standards of practice and compliance procedures.

S2. PARTNERSHIPS

For the purpose of this section, “partnership” refers to relations between Cooperation Canada Member Organizations and civil society organizations – not individuals or governments – where a mutual agreement has been established committing each Organization to a set of agreed principles and actions over an extended period of time. Partnerships with civil society organizations should be established based on the Cooperation Canada Code of Ethics and may be enriched by additional international cooperation principles proposed and agreed upon by common accord.

S2.1 Initiating a partnership

- a) Partnerships shall be based on a sense of common cause built on an understanding of each Organization’s values, beliefs, goals, objectives and constraints.
- b) Partnerships shall be backed by mutually acceptable signed agreements, demonstrating that all parties have negotiated objectives, expectations, roles, responsibilities, and contributions to the partnership.
- c) Agreements between partners shall ensure shared responsibility for attaining the negotiated goals, objectives and stated outcomes.
- d) Ensure that when engaging in partnerships, sub-grant or sub-recipient agreements, these agreements incorporate a commitment to protection against sexual harassment, exploitation and abuse, and a commitment to child protection.

S2. PARTNERSHIPS (cont'd)

S2.2 Maintaining and strengthening a partnership

- a) Strong partnerships include action to address inequalities due to power imbalances. Partners shall identify and attempt to adopt concrete measures to enhance equitable relations.
- b) Partners shall strive to deepen their understanding of one another through transparent sharing of information. The activities relating to the partnership shall be open and accessible to the other parties, while respecting the right of individuals to privacy.
- c) Respect for differences – including cultural, religious, socio-economic and political differences – shall be a hallmark of every partnership.
- d) Partners shall engage in regular and open communications for the general health of the partnership and to ensure that all partners are properly represented, and that no Organization unilaterally speaks on another's behalf.
- e) Organizations shall give credit to their partners' contributions, respect their intellectual property rights, and acknowledge appropriate ownership of products and results arising from partnership initiatives.
- f) Healthy partnerships are strengthened by prompt and constructive responses to differences of opinion that may arise between Organizations. Partners shall proactively agree how conflicts shall be handled.
- g) Partnership agreements shall specify timelines for evaluating whether and how the partnership shall continue.
- h) When a transfer of funds occurs within a partnership, there shall be a negotiated and jointly signed contract within which there are mutually agreed upon reporting requirements to ensure that all parties use international cooperation funds as agreed.
- i) In the event of catastrophic circumstances, such as a major shortfall in funds available within a funding partnership, all parties shall promptly implement a mutually negotiated and agreed upon contingency plan.

S2.3 Ending a partnership

- a) Terms, conditions and appropriate procedures for ending the partnership shall be included in the partnership agreement.
- b) In the event of unforeseen circumstances, all partners shall endeavour to maintain the same standards of conduct when winding down the partnership as were agreed upon for the operations of the partnership.

S3 GOVERNANCE

S3.1 Each Organization shall be governed fairly and responsibly by an independent, active and informed governing body (e.g. Board of Directors).

S3.2 All voting members of the governing body shall serve without compensation, except for reasonable expenses incurred to fulfill their organizational duties.

S3.3 Each Organization shall establish and periodically review a governance framework suitable for fulfilling its mandate. The structure shall enable the Organization to make timely decisions and to meet its responsibilities. The framework shall include an appropriate governance structure and operations; relationship of senior staff and the governing body; and clear decision-making processes.

S3.4 Each Organization will put in place policies and procedures to ensure a safe and respectful work places that promote equality and are free from violence, harassment, exploitation and abuse.

Furthermore, each Organization commits to putting in place specific policies and mechanisms to prevent incidents and respond to allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse, using a trauma-informed approach.

The Organization's governing body shall review and approve the Organization's annual budget, significant policies, key financial transactions, compensation practices, plans and programs, and hold officers, committees and staff accountable for actions taken and results achieved under delegated authority.

S3.5 The Organization shall adopt a policy preventing and effectively managing conflict of interest situations.

S3.6 The Organization shall have policies prohibiting discrimination and promoting gender equality and inclusion of disadvantaged groups at all levels of the Organization.

S3.7 The governing body shall periodically reassess the Organization's governing documents and objects, vision, mission, goals, priorities, policies, alignment of resources and effectiveness through consultation and collaborative planning.

S4. ORGANIZATIONAL INTEGRITY

S4.1 The affairs of the Organization shall be conducted with integrity and transparency. The Organization shall make full, open and accurate disclosure to the public of relevant information concerning its goals, programs, finances, activities, results, effectiveness and governance. Exceptions are personnel matters, legal matters, proprietary information, and ethical and legal requirements of personal privacy.

S4.2 The Organization shall ensure that allegations, including but not limited to allegations of sexual harassment, exploitation and abuse are addressed in a timely manner and impartially, respecting the rights of involved parties for confidentiality and disclosure.

S4.3 The Organization shall comply with all applicable federal laws and regulations as well as laws and regulations of provinces or municipalities in which it is based or operates. Each Organization conducting activities outside of Canada shall be aware of foreign laws and regulations governing its activities.

S4.4 The Organization shall oppose and shall not be a participant to any wrongdoing or financial impropriety. It shall take prompt and firm corrective action whenever and wherever wrongdoing of any kind has been committed by any member of its governing body, employee or volunteer.

S5 FINANCES

S5.1 The Organization shall conduct its finances in such a way as to ensure appropriate use of funds and accountability to donors. It shall operate according to a budget approved by its governing body and have sound internal controls and documented financial policies and procedures.

S5.2 The Organization shall ensure that there are sufficient resources for effective administration and appropriate fundraising.

S5.3 The Organization shall have annual audited financial statements and shall make them easily accessible to the public.

S5.4 The Organization shall ensure that it (and, if applicable, its affiliates) manage its funds prudently. Any Organization with available assets for investment shall have and follow an investment policy.

S5.5 Each Organization that is a registered charity shall file its Registered Charity Information Return within six (6) months of its fiscal year end and such returns shall be complete and accurate.

S6. FUNDRAISING AND COMMUNICATIONS TO THE PUBLIC

S6.1 Fundraising solicitations shall be truthful, shall accurately describe the Organization's identity, purpose, programs and need, shall only make claims which the Organization can fulfill, and shall treat donors and potential donors with respect. There shall be no misleading information or images (including material omissions or exaggerations of fact), nor any other communication which would tend to create a false impression or misunderstanding, and no use of high-pressure tactics in soliciting donations.

S6.2 The Organization shall ensure that:

- a) the public is informed of the way the Organization intends to use donated resources;
- b) when members of the public are invited to support a specific project or purpose, they are informed if donations may be reassigned and they are given an explanation of these planned alternative uses;
- c) the public is informed whether those seeking donations are volunteers, employees or hired solicitors of the Organization;
- d) its donors are encouraged to ask questions when making a donation and they are given prompt, truthful and forthright answers; and
- e) its donors receive appropriate acknowledgment but are not publicly identified without their consent.

S6.3 The Organization shall have policies and procedures to ensure that it accepts only those donations which will not compromise its ethics, program focus or other interests.

S6.4 The Organization shall ensure that images and text included in all communications to the public:

- a) respect the dignity and rights of the individuals portrayed and their way of life;
- b) are accurate, balanced, truthful and representative of reality and do not generalize and mask the diversity of situations;
- c) portray local communities as active agents in their own development process and do not fuel prejudice or foster a sense of Northern superiority; and
- d) encourage a sense of interconnectedness and interdependence between the Canadian public and the people shown in the image or discussed in the text.

S6. FUNDRAISING AND COMMUNICATIONS TO THE PUBLIC (cont'd)

S6.5 The Organization shall control all fundraising activities conducted on its behalf. It shall not, directly or indirectly, pay finder's fees, commission or percentage compensation based on contributions. When external fundraisers are used, the Organization shall have a written fundraising contract and shall avoid disproportionate private gain by those external fundraisers.

S6.6 The Organization shall seek the participation of its partners in the formulation of communications to the public.

S6.7 The Organization shall consider the cumulative impact on the public's perception arising from its own communication messages (through images and text) and those of others. The Organization shall ensure that its messages do not undermine the goal of building support for long-term sustainable development.

S6.8 When the Organization carries out an activity that involves both fundraising and programming there shall be appropriate allocation of fundraising and program expenses.

S6.9 The Organization shall make its most recent financial statements, annual report, and a current list of members of its governing body easily accessible to the public (e.g. in a visible and public section of its website).

S7. MANAGEMENT PRACTICES AND HUMAN RESOURCES

Each organization shall:

S7.1 Endeavour to follow sound management and operational practices appropriate to its mission, operations and governance structure;

S7.2 Have clear, well-defined, written policies and procedures relating to its employees and volunteers (including host country nationals and expatriates) and a process for communicating these policies and procedures; and ensure that the policies clearly define and protect the rights of these individuals;

S7.3 Ensure resources are in place to provide a professional and respectful management of all employees and volunteers (including host country nationals and expatriates);

S7.4 Clearly describe and communicate compensation and benefits to each employee, and make financial arrangements to honour its financial commitments and provide employees and volunteers with job descriptions or the equivalent that detail the Organization's expectations of them;

S7.5 Respect the right of employees to organize into unions or associations and bargain collective agreements; and

S7.6 Educate employees and volunteers on the Cooperation Canada Code of Ethics and Operational Standards as well as the policies and codes they put in place to ensure ethical behaviour by employees and volunteers.

S8. ACHIEVING COMPLIANCE

S8.1 Within one year of membership acceptance, a new Member Organization of Cooperation Canada shall submit a completed self-assessment form indicating current status of compliance with the Code of Ethics and Operational Standards. If the organization is unable to comply it will provide an explanation of noncompliance. Any indication of non-compliance with any standard shall be reviewed and a decision made regarding membership by the Cooperation Canada Board of Directors on the advice of the Board's Membership Committee. The completed self-assessment should be approved by the Organization's Board of Directors and signed by the Executive Director/CEO and Board Chair.

S8.2 Each Organization shall re-confirm its compliance every year, as part of the annual membership dues payment process.

S8.3 Each Organization shall inform its employees of its decision to comply with the Code of Ethics and Operational Standards and shall ensure that all employees are provided with a link to the Code and Standards.

S8.4 Upon written request from Cooperation Canada, each Member Organization shall, within the timeframe set out by Cooperation Canada in its request, submit any documents or respond to any questions related to the Cooperation Canada Code of Ethics and/or compliance with the Operational Standards.

S8.5 A Member Organization that has a question or concern about the conduct of another Member Organization relating to the Code of Ethics and/or Operational Standards shall first make an effort to directly discuss it with the Organization in question. If there is not a satisfactory response from the Organization, the issue should be raised with the Cooperation Canada Board Membership Committee who shall inform the Board and may designate 1 or 2 Board Members to engage in dialogue with the Member Organization. The designated Board Members will be mandated to discuss the issue or concern with the Member in order to understand the issue being raised and to explore potential solutions. These discussions will be engaged in good faith by the Board Members in an effort to support the Organization in achieving compliance. However, in the case where a Member Organization fails to demonstrate a commitment to upholding the Code of Ethics and Operational Standards, the Cooperation Canada Board may revoke the membership of a Member Organization. A decision to revoke the membership of an Organization requires a decision by the Board of Directors; the rules of which are defined by Cooperation Canada's Bylaws.



Cooperation Canada brings together and advocates for Canada's international development and humanitarian organizations by convening sector leaders, influencing policy and building capacity. Together, we work with partners both inside and outside Canada to build a world that's fair, safe and sustainable for all.

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