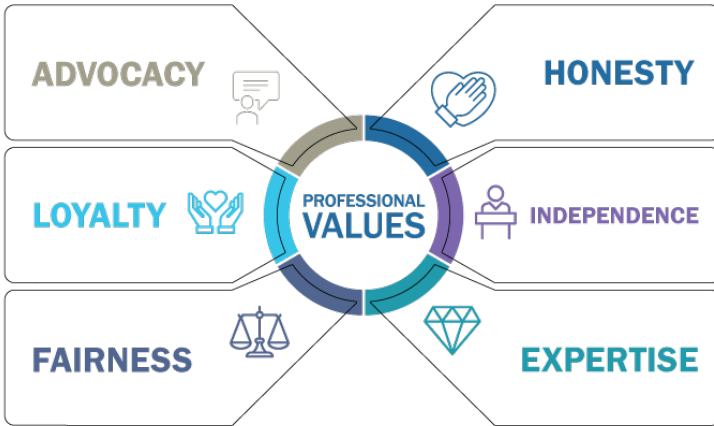


PRSA

Board of Ethics and
Professional Standards
2021 Handbook

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The Board of Ethics and Professional Standards (BEPS) Chair’s primary responsibility is to direct BEPS members as inspirational and educational resources providing ethical counsel and advocating for the day-to-day application of the PRSA Code of Ethics within the field of public relations. This includes developing topical material and providing multimedia forums to help guide ethical discussions within PRSA Chapters, with individual members and the public at large. As needed, the BEPS chair and members may, as the occasion warrants, make recommendations to the PRSA Board of Directors to refine the organization’s standards for the ethical practice of public relations and to foster the highest level of professional standards within the profession and PRSA at large.

The BEPS chair is appointed by the chair of the PRSA Board. The chair may serve a maximum of three consecutive one-year terms.

BEPS Shall:

- Help counsel the PRSA Board regarding the Code of Ethics and direct the development and implementation of educational programs regarding the Code of Ethics for members and communications professionals at large.
- Develop annual “Ethics Month” educational programs for the month of September.
- Develop ICON/Leadership Rally annual educational presentations.
- Develop Ethics Standard Advisories (ESAs) and Position Papers as needed.
- Oversee work groups as established by BEPS, facilitating discussion, developing relevant ethics material and promoting thought leadership.
- Lead the development of ethics materials available to members via the PRSA website and other mediums.
- Identify key issues that require BEPS discussion and thought leadership.

Knowledge, Skills and Abilities

- Understand BEPS’ mission to educate and inspire members to practice public relations ethically.
- Have extensive knowledge of the Code of Ethics and its application in the day-to-day practice of public relations.
- Understand the distinction between public relations ethics and general business ethics, governance ethics, legal constraints, etc.
- Familiarity with BEPS’ ethics-related resources housed on the PRSA website.
- Learn BEPS’ history, the 2000 revision of the Code of Ethics and the shift in the mission to focus on education and inspiration.



To be a member of the Board of Ethics and Professional Standards (BEPS), a member must be Accredited (APR or APR+M), have 10 years of experience in the practice of public relations and a desire to promote, enhance, and engage members of PRSA in the PRSA Code of Ethics. Each BEPS member must embrace the mission of BEPS to inspire and educate.

Each BEPS member shall serve a three-year term, with a maximum of two consecutive terms at the discretion of the BEPS chair, who will evaluate needs associated with overall areas of expertise and broad geographic representation. Any member who misses three or more consecutive monthly BEPS meetings without requesting to be excused for a stated reason will automatically forfeit his/her seat on BEPS and will be replaced.

BEPS Member Shall:

- Be an active member by choosing to work on two of six work groups established by the BEPS chair:
 - Ethics Month
 - Ethical Standard Advisories (ESAs)
 - Chapter Ethics Officers Outreach Program
 - BEPS@prsa.org
 - BEPS Communications Coordinator
 - ICON/Leadership Rally
- Attend regular monthly and special meetings.
- Support the integration of the practice of the Code of Ethics at all levels of PRSA, to include but not limited to, PRSSA, Chapters, Districts, Professional Interest Sections, the College of Fellow and the PRSA Board of Directors.
- Participate in the opportunity to write blogs, “Ethics Moments,” ESAs, etc. as directed by the BEPS chair.
- Actively support the development of ethical materials to be shared with the various segments of PRSA through multiple media platforms.

Knowledge, Skills and Abilities

- Understand BEPS’ mission to educate and inspire members to practice public relations ethically.
- Have knowledge of PRSA’s Code of Ethics and its application to the day-to-day practice of public relations.
- Understand the distinction of public relations ethics vs. general business ethics, governance ethics, legal constraints, etc.
- Familiarity with BEPS ethics-related resources housed on the PRSA website.
- Learn BEPS’s history, the 2000 revision of the Code of Ethics and the shift in the mission to focus on education and inspiration.



PRSA Chapter Ethics Officer Position Description

Goal

Promote and inspire the highest levels of ethical behavior and performance among PRSA members.

Duties

- Seek education, training and guidance from PRSA's Board of Ethics and Professional Standards (BEPS) and PRSA.
- Provide ethics education and consultation to local Board and Chapter members throughout the year.
- Stimulate and encourage PRSA Chapter members to seek guidance and clarification when they have questions about ethical principles, practices and standards of conduct in their day-to-day practice.
- Consult with BEPS before providing ethics consultation to Chapter members. Consult with the PRSA Communications Department before making statements to the media.
- Develop, coordinate and promote at least one professional development program each year during PRSA's Ethics Month in September and encourage Chapter members to participate in Ethics Month activities such as the free PRSA webinars.
- Assist your local Accreditation Chair by providing the ethics curriculum for the Accreditation exam.
- Serve a minimum one-year term. (A two-year term is preferred).

Ethics Officer Support

- BEPS and PRSA will provide the Ethics Officer with a position description, case studies, programming ideas, articles and other ethics materials for use in ongoing Chapter education and training.
- BEPS will assist and educate the Ethics Officer via regular meetings, ethics training at the PRSA International Conference and Leadership Rally, and articles in *Strategies & Tactics* and *PRsay*. In addition, a BEPS liaison will be available to provide ethics consultation and support to the Ethics Officer as needed.

Qualifications*

- A PRSA member in good standing.
- Accredited in Public Relations (APR or APR+M).
- Demonstrated honesty and excellence in the professional practice of public relations.
- Visibility and respect from Chapter membership.

** In those cases where APRs are unable, unwilling or unavailable to serve, a senior member, in good standing of the Chapter, could serve as Chapter Ethics Officer. The Chair of BEPS or a BEPS member that the Chair delegates has the authority to make an exception to the APR qualification. Email beps@prsa.org to find the name of the BEPS representative for your District, or if your Chapter is having difficulty finding an appropriate Ethics Officer who meets these qualifications. Temporary exceptions will be considered until your Chapter is able to meet these qualifications.*



How to Integrate Ethics Into Your Chapter/Section/District Every Day

1. Open each membership/Board meeting with an “Ethics Moment” from the PRSA Code of Ethics – or include them in the Chapter newsletter and on social media (#PRethics).
2. Review one ethics resource from the PRSA website at each meeting.
3. Call to action: Ask members to present ethics case studies/dilemmas (without using real names). Pick the five best and develop a panel discussion for Ethics Month in September.
4. Have your Chapter Ethics Officer keynote a luncheon or write a newsletter article on “What it takes to be a PRSA Ethics Officer and why I volunteered for the job.”
5. Consider inviting senior membership to form an Ethics Committee to support the Chapter Ethics Officer. The Ethics Committee could:
 - Develop a speakers bureau on ethics issues from membership and the business community.
 - Assist in answering ethics questions sent to the website from members.
6. Ask members to submit examples of “Ethics Every Day” and post on Chapter/District/Section website and on social media for discussion at monthly meetings.
7. Ask a professor from a local college/university to speak on the importance of ethics.
8. Learn and live the Code of Ethics every day.
9. Set ethics goals as part of your strategic plan and be accountable.
 - Update objectives and programming every year.
10. Invite PRSSA Chapters to attend your September Ethics Month program or volunteer to speak at one of their meetings.



PRSA and the Code of Ethics: A Historical Timeline

1947

PRSA is created by combining the American Council on Public Relations and the National Association of Public Relations Council.

1950

On December 4, PRSA adopts its first “Code of Ethics,” saying that a sincere effort to implement the spirit of its principles “will assure professional conduct of credit to the profession and honest service to clients and employers.”

1954

PRSA revises the original Code, amending its bylaws to include provisions for enforcing PRSA’s new standards of performance. As described at the time, strong emphasis is placed on public relations being a profession with standards of practice.

1959

PRSA adopts a much broader Code amplifying concepts in the earlier models, including two paragraphs directly related to enforcement. The new provisions require members to serve if called as a witness in an enforcement proceeding and to cooperate with fellow members in upholding and enforcing this Code, and placed more weight on improper activities than on ethical best practices, relying heavily on the phrase “shall not.” Along with the revised Code, PRSA’s bylaws were amended, providing for a national judicial council and panels, which held hearings on alleged violations and made recommendations on courses of action.

1962

PRSA establishes a 9-member Grievance Board, supplementing the judicial panels, to investigate complaints by nonmembers or situations in which there might have been violations but complaints were not filed by members.

1963

PRSA further refines its Code, strengthening the prohibition on conflicts of interest and addressing growing concerns about the use of front groups (third-party organizations formed to advance the undisclosed special interests of clients or employers).

1966

PRSA develops official interpretations of the Code, intended to serve as advisory opinions regarding proper professional conduct in public relations.

1977

The Code comes under scrutiny by the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) as part of an investigation of voluntary codes of trade and professional associations. It considered the Code's restriction on members seeking clients from other members to be a restraint of competition, and required PRSA to remove that language. Other changes include deleting the provision that required members to cooperate with each other in upholding and enforcing the Code.

1983

The Grievance Board created in 1962 is renamed the PRSA Board of Ethics and Professional Standards (BEPS).

1988

The Code is expanded to include several new amendments, including the first to specifically acknowledge a member's dual obligations to client or employer and the democratic process. Concepts related to truthful communication received greater attention, including emphasis on the importance of honesty and integrity, the importance of accuracy and truth, and the avoidance of disseminating false or misleading information.

1999

The PRSA Board of Directors holds an Ethics Summit with BEPS members to discuss the Code and the enforcement process. Following the meeting, the Board authorizes BEPS to develop a new Code.

2000

BEPS presents a new Code of Ethics to PRSA Leadership Assembly delegates, and the Code becomes effective on that day, October 21. As the 2000 Board explained to members, the revision is different in "powerfully important ways." Its emphasis on enforcement was eliminated, with a new focus on "universal values that inspire ethical behavior and performance." In addition, BEPS's mission was substantially altered to focus on education and training, on collaboration with other organizations pursuing similar efforts, and to serve an advisory role to the Board of Directors.

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General Sources: Kathy R. Fitzpatrick (2002) Evolving Standards in Public Relations: A Historical Examination of PRSA's Codes of Ethics, *Journal of Mass Media Ethics*, 17:2, 89-110, DOI: 10.1207/S15327728JMME1702_02

Kathy R. Fitzpatrick (2002) From Enforcement to Education: The Development of PRSA's Member Code of Ethics 2000, *Journal of Mass Media Ethics*, 17:2, 111-135, DOI: 10.1207/S15327728JMME1702_03

Dr. Jessalynn Strauss, "History of the PRSA Code of Ethics," The Arthur W. Page Center.

¹ PRSA Professional Standards for the Practice of Public Relations, adopted Dec. 4, 1950

² [Board of Directors Letter to Membership, October 2000](#)



Application to the Board of Ethics and Professional Standards (BEPS)

Prerequisites to BEPS Service

- APR or APR+M Credential
- 10 years experience in the practice of public relations or communications
- Desire to promote, enhance and engage members of PRSA in the PRSA Code of Ethics

SECTION 1 - PERSONAL INFORMATION

Name: _____

Email: _____

Phone: _____

APR: _____ (date) Fellow, PRSA: _____ (date)

Chapter: _____ State: _____

SECTION 2 - AREAS OF EXPERTISES

List top three areas of industry expertise (i.e. Food and Agriculture, Economic Development, Nonprofit, Government, Education, Legal, Politics, Financial Services, Health Care, Tourism, Transportation, etc.)

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

List three areas of public relations/communications expertise (i.e. Brand/Reputation Management, Strategic Communications Planning, Issues Management, Internal/External Communications, Employee Communications, Crisis Communications, Media Relations, Consumer Product, Social Media, Corporate Communications, etc.)

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

SECTION 3 - PRSA EXPERIENCE

List volunteer positions in PRSA beginning with the most recent.

Title	Time Held	Duties	Accomplishments

SECTION 4 - ACCOMPLISHMENTS

List your top three professional accomplishments.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

In one paragraph, please explain why you would be qualified to join BEPS.

In one paragraph, please explain what you think is the most pressing ethical issue today in the practice of public relations/communications.



Please provide an executive profile (no more than 500 words).

Please provide two letters of recommendation with this application. (Letters of recommendation must be from PRSA members with the APR accreditation and at least one letter from a member of the PRSA College of Fellows)

Attach a resume to the application and forward to beeps@prsa.org.