

ESA Ethical Guidelines
(Last updated October 21, 2022)

Background: The proposition for ESA Ethical Guidelines was first drafted by the 2020 ESA ad-hoc committee for ethics that comprises David Cooper, Laura Gee, Ben Greiner, Andrej Svorenčik, and Marie Claire Villeva. It has been improved by the comments and suggestions made by the members of the Executive Committee in May 2021 and discussed during the ESA Global Virtual meetings in July 2021. It was then revised by the 2021 committee, consisting of Catherine Eckel, Ben Greiner, Laura Gee and Andrej Svorenčik. It was approved by the Executive Board in July 2022.

These Guidelines are partly inspired by the Codes of Conduct of other associations (including AEA, EEA, AFA, AREUEA), which were consulted during development.

Proposition for ESA Ethical Guidelines

I. Preamble

The Economic Science Association (ESA) is a professional organization devoted to using controlled experiments to learn about economic behavior. Its purpose is to advance, enhance, and further economics as an observational science through the use of laboratory and field methods of observation and data collection under the control and responsibility of the research investigator, and the development of economic theory and statistical or econometric methods based on such direct observations and data. The ESA seeks to foster replicable, clearly documented, empirical work in all subdisciplines of economics, thereby recognizing the important tasks of data creation, data quality evaluation and empirical description, as well as theory development and testing.

This document sets ethical guidelines of professional conduct in economic research promoted by the ESA. The Guidelines provide a set of principles that guide good practice in research and are applicable in international environments. Specifically, behavior consistent with these guidelines is a necessary condition for participation in any activities sponsored by the ESA, being a member of and holding any official position in the ESA (e.g., officers, members of the executive committee, or editors and members of editorial boards of *Experimental Economics* and the *Journal of the Economic Science Association*), or publishing in any journal affiliated with the ESA. We hope that members of the ESA will follow these guidelines even when not engaged directly with the ESA.

The ESA is committed to guaranteeing an inclusive and safe working environment, and to ensuring fair treatment of its members and participants, regardless of their gender, age, ethnicity, race, sexual orientation, religious affiliation, disability status, national origin, geographic location, or any criteria unrelated to scientific matters, in all the instances in which ESA is directly involved and has jurisdiction (ESA governance bodies, ESA conferences, workshops labelled by ESA, journals of the society). The ESA encourages the open exchange of ideas. The guidelines are intended to foster a positive academic culture, with full access and participation in discussions of all of its members, and to reflect the norms and values of the association.

The ESA expects scientific and professional integrity from its members in all instances and in particular, when engaging in communication, evaluation and publication of research.

The local organizers of events labelled by ESA and attendees are expected to encourage the dissemination of knowledge through a free exchange of scientific ideas without any prejudice.

ESA creates a position of Ethics Officer who will regularly report to the Executive Committee. This Ethics Officer is either a current member of the EC or a past ESA Officer.

II. Ethics in experimental research

Responsibility

Researchers are responsible for their ethical conduct and compliance with the regulations of their jurisdiction, including obtaining IRB approval for their procedures when legally mandated.

Honest research practices

Data fabrication and falsification are unacceptable. Data fabrication is defined as making up data and research findings that do not exist, or the use of data that was not obtained through the purported methods. Data falsification is defined as an intentional unreported omission or alteration of data in order to change conclusions or support false research findings.

All researchers in the ESA community have an obligation to be open and transparent about their research practices. This includes disclosure of all key steps in data collection and analysis, and disclosure of hypotheses added after data analysis has begun.

Replicability

ESA recommends that all programs and data sources of a published paper should be made immediately and fully accessible, for example by being placed in a permanent public repository to facilitate secondary analysis and replication. Providing these materials is a requisite for all papers published in the journals of the association unless prior approval is given by the editor. A Readme file presenting the programs and data sources should facilitate the replication of the study by any other researcher. For older studies and data, this behavior is required where practicable.

Researchers should provide reasonable assistance when receiving private requests regarding the accessibility of their data and programs in the interest of replicating their studies.

ESA encourages researchers to conduct and report replications of articles published in its journals, and facilitates the dissemination of such replication attempts.

Deception

Researchers should be truthful in their statements to study participants and avoid deception if at all possible. Studies involving participant deception by omission (*i.e.*, participants are intentionally not told key information) or deception by commission (*i.e.*, participants are actively told untruths) require appropriate oversight, which may include stricter standards, based on the researcher's jurisdiction and academic discipline.

Researchers may contact the editors of the journals of the association with questions about the conditions under which studies involving deception will be considered for publication in association journals.

We are aware that standards differ across academic fields. Papers presented at ESA conferences should conform to the ethical guidelines of the author's academic discipline.

Human subjects protection and vulnerable populations

Subjects in the experiments must be treated with dignity. Protection of subjects takes priority over the convenience of researchers. ESA members are expected to follow the ethical principles laid out in the [Belmont Report](#):

(1) Respect for Persons: Participants should be treated as autonomous agents, that is, as individuals capable of deliberation about personal goals and able to act on the basis of this deliberation. In

standard experiments, the principle is that participants should undertake activities of their own free will with awareness of potential risks and benefits. An exception is field experiments in which individuals are unaware that they participate in an experiment. Individuals who are not fully capable of self-determination due to circumstances such as (but not limited to) illness, mental disability, or circumstances that severely restrict their liberty must be afforded special protection because, due to their vulnerability, they may not be able to give a fully informed consent. Such protection may include measures such as having consent provided by legal guardians, use of assent scripts in addition to formal consent documents, and withdrawal of participants who exhibit signs of distress.

(2) **Beneficence:** Researchers are obligated to secure the well-being of subjects. Researchers should attempt to maximize the benefits and minimize the costs associated with participation.

(3) **Justice:** As much as is feasible, participants should be treated equally. Among other things, this implies that recruiting strategies should not limit participation by certain groups unless this is an essential feature of the design. Likewise, participants should be treated with the same dignity and beneficence, irrespective of their gender, age, ethnicity, sexual orientation, race, religious affiliation, disability status, national origin, or any criteria unrelated to scientific matters.

Conflicts of interest and credits

All conflicts of interest, whether financial or otherwise, should be avoided where possible and fully disclosed when circulating and publishing a paper.

Any sources of funding for the research reported in a paper and all credit for a study (co-investigators, research assistants, funding institutions, authors of useful comments) should be fully acknowledged.

Payment of participants

Experiments often provide monetary incentives to the participants related to their actions and, possibly, the actions of other participants, and the realization of chance events such as coin flips, die rolls, and computer-generated random numbers. Participants should receive clear information about how their compensation will be determined. Researchers must adhere to all laws in this respect, including tax laws. Payment should not be used for the purpose of coercion or to induce individuals to take risky or harmful actions. For payment to vulnerable populations or for controversial payment practices, the researcher should seek appropriate advice and approval from the relevant institutions, such as an Institutional Review Board or ethics board, and as requested by the scholar's own institution.

Data protection

Researchers shall fully comply with data protection laws and directives in their jurisdiction.

Participants in an experiment should not be identifiable in a dataset made available by the researcher, nor in any publication. Publications should comply with the data protection legislation.

The storage and sharing of data should comply with the laws and directives in the researchers' jurisdiction as well as any agreements with funding agencies, IRBs or the subjects. Researchers should de-identify data when possible, and should take all possible measures to protect participant confidentiality.

III. Ethics in scientific review, publication, and communication

Fair treatment

Editors of the ESA journals must guarantee a high-quality and fair evaluation process of the submitted manuscripts, without prejudice or favoritism.

Editors, reviewers and authors must be respectful in communications and reports. Disrespectful reviewers' reports, as judged by the editors, should be returned to the reviewer for revision or be discarded without being sent out to the authors.

Confidentiality

Agreements regarding confidentiality and anonymity should be respected.

Reviewers must not use the unpublished materials they are invited to evaluate for their own interest, nor delay or bias their report to their own advantage.

Conflict of interest

Editors, co-editors and associate editors shall recuse themselves from papers involving current colleagues and graduate students at the same institution regardless of the department; current coauthors and coauthors of papers published less than 2 years ago; students that they supervised if it has not been at least 5 years since the end of the supervision; or family members or co-residents.

The same recusal is expected from solicited reviewers who should inform the editor about close personal or professional relationships with the authors of a paper which may create a conflict of interest.

Conflicts of interests, especially related to external funding, should be disclosed in public communication.

Communication

In public appearances aimed at disseminating scientific knowledge, members shall be guided by the expertise with which they carry out research, development, innovation or pedagogical activities, distinguishing between expert opinion and personal opinion.

Members should be aware of the possible misuse or misinterpretation of their expert opinions, expertise and influence. If misuse occurs, members should take steps to correct or minimize the impact.

IV. Promotion of diversity and condemnation of unacceptable behavior

Board membership and events

The ESA promotes fair treatment in the composition of its Board, the ad-hoc committees it commissions, and the appointment of co-editors and editorial board members of the journals of the society, most notably in terms of gender and geographical representation. The ESA requires that the local organizers of ESA conferences and workshops co-funded by the association comply with this diversity principle, notably in the choice of keynote lecturers.

Proper and improper behavior

The ESA condemns harassment, abuse of power and all forms of discrimination based on gender, ethnicity, race, sexual orientation, religious affiliation, age, national origin, disability status, or any criteria unrelated to scientific matters. It does not tolerate them from the authorities of the association, from its members or from anyone attending its conferences and workshops or engaged in the publication process in the journals of the society.

As defined by the [American Economic Association](#), unacceptable behavior includes, but is not limited to:

- solicitation of emotional or physical intimacy despite expressions or indications that it is unwelcome;
- solicitation of emotional or physical intimacy accompanied by real or implied threat of personal or professional harm;
- intentionally intimidating, threatening, harassing, or abusive actions or remarks (both spoken and in other media);
- prejudicial actions or comments that undermine the principles of equal opportunity, fair treatment, or free academic exchange.

None of these restrictions are intended to stifle the open exchange and discussion of ideas; instead we aim to ensure that all members of the association are able to participate fully in such discussion.

V. The Pledge and Vetting of Officers

Statement of The Pledge

When becoming a member of ESA or when renewing membership on the ESA website, individuals will have to sign a pledge.

“I pledge to fully comply with all Ethical Guidelines of the Economic Science Association. I pledge to treat others, and members of the ESA in particular, with all due respect, to avoid abuse or harassment, especially on the basis of gender, age, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, national origin, disability status, or religious background, and to conduct ethical research in a manner that respects the rights of participants and adheres to high standards of integrity and transparency in reporting research methods, procedures and reporting of results.

I further acknowledge that the ESA may deny me membership, editorial or executive board positions or attendance at ESA conferences or events if I violate this pledge.”

Vetting board members

When inviting a new ESA Officer, a new mentor, a new Editor or Editorial Board member at *Experimental Economics* or the *Journal of the Economic Science Association*, the email invitation will include vetting questions to make sure that these new Officers/Mentors/Editors/Editorial Board members did not misbehave in the past and commit to comply with the ESA ethical guidelines (*See Appendix*). They will also have to sign the previous pledge (even if they have already renewed membership of the ESA).

VI. Resolution of ethical conflicts and enforcement

Reporting misconduct:

Scientific misconduct should be reported via the procedures indicated by the relevant institutional review boards and academic institutions. Misconduct should be reported to the producing institution, in case of conflicts in the production process, or to the employing institution, in all other cases.

Contact points:

When members of ESA become aware of professional misconduct, harassment, discrimination or any form of unacceptable behavior in the context of events or activities organized or endorsed by the ESA (such as conferences and workshops, social events, journal review or publication), they may report to any ESA points of contact. Contact points are the members of the ESA Executive Committee and ESA mentors, as well as the ESA Ethics Officer.

These contact points will help the complainant navigate the process of recording complaints and any further steps the complainant might want to pursue, such as contacting the American Economic Association Ombudsperson or equivalent instance in other regions of the world.

Contact points shall report to the ESA Ethics Officer, who shall keep track of the complaints brought to the ESA. The Ethics Officer shall produce statistics for the ESA Executive Committee every two years.

Actions and penalties

The Executive Committee reserves the right to take action against individuals who may have violated the ESA ethical guidelines. Individuals who are the target of complaints will be given notice and an opportunity to be heard prior to any action being taken by the ESA. If a complaint is determined to be founded, and it is established (by a preponderance of the evidence) that the incriminated person behaved in an unethical manner, the Executive Committee has the option to terminate membership, along with any official function within the association (editor or member of the board of the ESA journals, Executive Committee member, mentor). Individuals affected by these decisions may appeal the action of the ESA and ask that it be withdrawn. (*Specific procedural guidelines for hearings, actions, reconciliation, etc. to be developed in consultation with our legal team.*)

Appendix - Vetting questions for new Officers, mentors, and members of the editorial boards of Experimental Economics and the Journal of the Economic Science Association

(These vetting questions are inspired by some of those asked by the AEA to its new Officers).

Dear Professor XXX,

You have been invited to serve as XXX.

The Economic Science Association has approved Ethical Guidelines (see <http://www.xxx>) whose purpose is to create an equal opportunity and fair professional environment. To support the credibility of these commitments, its officers, mentors, editors and members of the editorial boards of the journals associated with ESA must commit to conform to these principles.

Accordingly, we invite you to consider the questions below. I also attach a pdf document (*to be developed*), and I request that you fill out your answers to the questions, sign and return to me in a timely manner. For confidentiality and security of data, your response will be stored in a secure format and location for the duration of your term as XXX, and it will be disclosed only to the Officers of the association and to the extent necessary to carry out the core business of the ESA. In case of affirmative answer to the first two questions or a refusal to sign the pledge, I will share the information, together with any additional information you would like to share, with the President of the Economic Science Association, and a decision will be made on whether our invitation to serve as (relevant office) is maintained or not.

You may elaborate on your yes/no answers verbally or in writing if you choose to.

1. I attest that there has never been any formal complaint for workplace misconduct or sexual harassment made against me (in the last X years) that was upheld by an employer, an administrative agency, a regulatory or ethics body, a professional association or organization, for workplace misconduct or accusations of sexual harassment. Agree/disagree
2. I attest that I am not currently under investigation for accusations of workplace misconduct or sexual harassment. Agree/disagree
3. "I pledge to fully comply with all Ethical Guidelines of the Economic Science Association. I pledge to treat others, and members of the ESA in particular, with all due respect, to avoid abuse or harassment, especially on the basis of gender, age, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation or religious background, and to conduct ethical research in a manner that respects the rights of participants and adheres to high standards of integrity and transparency in reporting research methods, procedures and reporting of results.

I further acknowledge that the ESA may deny me membership, editorial or executive board positions or attendance at ESA conferences or events if I violate this pledge." (Signature or I prefer not to sign.)

Thank you for your cooperation in this process.

Kind regards, XXX, ESA Ethics Officer