

Ethics Code Task Force (ECTF) Meeting Summary – June 4, 2021

The Ethics Code Task Force (ECTF) met June 4, 2021 to continue its work on revising the APA Ethics Code.

Discussion of Topic Areas for Possible Standards: During the June 2021 meeting, the ECTF continued its discussion and review of the possible topic areas that may result in standard sections of the Code. As a reminder, members of the Task Force were assigned and asked to prepare an outline of possible sections of standards agreed to by the Task Force members at previous meetings. The last several meetings have been spent with Task Force members presenting an outline of their assigned sections.

During the June meeting, members discussed and provided input related to the confidentiality section that will be reflected in the standards. There was significant discussion concerning the following terms which will be included in the language used to define the standard of confidentiality: a) confidentiality; b) privacy; and, c) privilege. Several members noted that these terms are used interchangeably throughout the literature, and it was suggested that a definition of these terms be included in the introductory statement that will introduce the standard. In addition, members recommended that the terms be included in the definition section of the Code.

Also, the Task Force presented and discussed additional areas of the section related confidentiality that included the following: a) the ethical responsibilities to each of the parties involved; b) limits and disclosures (and protections?); and, c) processes to ensure confidentiality.

Discussion of the Structure of the Standards: Following the discussion related to the standard section on confidentiality, the Task Force returned to the topic of the structure of the standards, specifically, how to reflect language that might relate to one standard, but which may be included in multiple standards. As an example, the Task Force discussed the standard related to informed consent. The Task Force decided that all language related to the concept of informed consent should be included within the standard section labeled, “Informed Consent.” In addition, the Task Force decided that this concept, which reflected how the structure of the Code will be organized, should apply to all other standard sections of the Code.

Discussion of the Concept of the Responsibility of Psychologists to the Environment: As an additional note, the responsibility of psychologists to the environment and how this concept will be included in the Code was discussed. The Task Force decided that the Chair (Linda Campbell, PhD) and Vice Chair (Mark Leach, PhD), will review the feedback received during the comment period offered by the draft principles (in November 2020) and prepared a draft statement that will be reviewed at one of the next meetings of the Task Force.

Topics for Discussion and Determination: During its past discussions Task Force members developed an ongoing listing of topics for further discussion and specifically how to address these topics within the Code. During the meeting, the Task Force members added the following topic areas for further discussion at future meetings: a) power dynamics; b) “Do NO Harm” concept; c) decision on the need to prioritize the listing of topics to be discussed.

Virtual Open Meeting Sessions – 4:00- 5:00 pm (eastern time) on June 4, 2021: Prior to the ECTF meeting, various groups were invited to appoint one liaison to join a pre-scheduled virtual meeting

discussion of the Task Force. Appointed liaisons were invited to register to participate in the virtual open meeting discussion that occurred from 4:00 – 5:00 pm (eastern time).

Review of the Task Force Meeting Discussions with Liaisons: Following the introduction of the liaisons and Task Force members, Task Force Chair, Linda Campbell, PhD, provided a general review of the work and the issues discussed by Task Force members during its meeting. In addition, various Task Force members provided an outline of the discussions by the Task Force members related to the following: a) standard section on confidentiality; and, b) responsibility of psychologists to the environment. It was noted that the concept of social justice and how this concept will be incorporated into the Code, while originally scheduled for the June meeting, will be discussed at a future meeting of the Task Force. During the virtual meeting, several concerns and questions were raised and discussed by the liaisons which centered on the following: a) the extent the Code should incorporate environmental concerns, b) when and how public comment periods will be provided related to revisions of the Code; c) concerns related to the balance between how general versus how specific the Code will be related to standards of practice; and, d) the need to address specialty areas of practice.