

Ensuring a safe and equitable workspace: The importance and feasibility of a Code of Conduct, along with clear policies regarding authorship and team membership

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Executive Summary: We discuss how a Code of Conduct-type policy can foster a safer and more equitable environment within mission teams and research groups, as well as professional societies and conferences/meetings. Such a policy is highly complementary to other common Rules of the Road-type policies for NASA and NSF-funded science endeavors, and can be instrumental in creating a more inclusive culture. **Eight recommendations are provided to increase effectiveness of Code of Conduct-type policies and improve adoption of best practices within the science community.** This work is based on evaluation of many existing policies in the Planetary Science & Astrobiology communities as well as consultation of social science literature.

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1. Overview & Main Messages

This white paper was prompted by the move, in recent years, for an increasing number of conferences/meetings and teams to add a “Code of Conduct” (CoC) as part of their policy documents, containing guidance and/or expectations for member/attendee behavior [1-2]. Generally, these statements are written with an aim to foster a safer and more equitable environment by protecting the physical, mental, and emotional safety of all participants. This shift towards including consideration of the general culture (and how that culture is affected by social norms of, and power dynamics between, participants) within team or event planning became somewhat more formalized for the planetary science community in May 2019, when the NASA Science Mission Directorate (SMD) Director, Dr. Thomas Zurbuchen, introduced a requirement that all SMD-funded conferences have a CoC [3-5, Box 1]. However, while a CoC has become a more common consideration for conferences, an understanding of what makes an effective policy is less commonly shared within the Planetary Science and Astrobiology communities (and some policies lack critical elements). Additionally, we do not yet find most other research endeavors (such as mission teams) to incorporate such policies.

[Box 1.](#) “Everyone related to NASA science, including awardees associated with this program element, should report harassment claims in accordance with the NASA Policy Statement on Antidiscrimination in NASA Conducted or Funded Program, Activities, and Institutions signed by Administrator Bridenstine ...”

“An event’s diversity and inclusion policies and practices should make clear that everyone is welcome within NASA Science and strive to create an environment that is free of harassment and discrimination. **Organizers of events must have a specific policy, code of conduct or meeting ground rules provided in advance and available during the event for all participants.** In the proposal include a brief overview of the meeting conduct principles or policies and identify a responsible person(s).”

-- Quoted from ROSES-2020 “Topical Workshops, Symposia, and Conferences” E.2, Section 4.6 [5], with **emphasis** added

Thus, with this white paper, we aim to compile information about CoC aims and structure so as to begin to normalize expectations and content within the Planetary Science and Astrobiology communities. Such policies are critical within the ongoing movement towards enabling a more diverse group of people to contribute to scientific research. Additionally, we will comment on complementary policies that are more commonly (at this time) included in Mission Team Rules of the Road (RotR) documents – specifically, policies about team membership and publication authorship. Co-author Randall Smith had reviewed these previously (with focus on astronomical missions) and found that many of the aims of such policies and recommendations for their effective definition and use are similar.

For all of these policies, the aim is to standardize and make transparent expectations with regards to role, financial/logistical support, scientific contributions, and safety so that all team members are able to have their personal needs and capabilities taken into consideration without the need for large/extra advocacy (i.e., “special treatment”). This improves inclusivity and accessibility for all, but especially for those with lower power due to not “fitting the norm” (where the “norm” is defined by the dominant group and is often shaped by past experiences/limits of personal imagination). **To enable inclusion of a more diverse community, we should aim for the creation of universally¹ accessible, safe, and equitable situations.**

¹ This terminology originates in architecture: “Universal design” is the design of buildings, products or environments to make them accessible to all people, regardless of age, disability or other factors. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Universal_design

2. Historical Context: Shifts in Culture & Expectations/Best Practices

Cultural practices regularly adapt to changes in societal and scientific community expectations. For example, over the last couple of decades, it has become common practice for planetary science mission teams to have a RotR document, including guidance on team membership, data sharing, and publication policies.

Publication policies, especially including data rights, were developed first. The NASA sounding rockets of the '60s and '70s were PI-driven, with strictly proprietary data rights. The launch of the International Ultraviolet Explorer in 1978 [6] presented the astronomical community with the first 'guest observer' facility, requiring rethinking about data rights and analysis tools. With the Great Observatories planned, NASA realized it was necessary to study the best practices for the operation and data management policies for such missions, resulting in the Squibb & Cheung report [7]. By 1990, even missions in development, such as COBE, had begun to develop formal publications policies. As of 2020, all that the policies from operating planetary mission teams (that the white paper's authors were aware) have publication policies/data-sharing policies in their RotR-type document (*Appendix 1*).

CoC-type policies became more common within businesses in the latter part of the last century, as explicit statements explaining a company's values and ethics (and related organizational practices and perceived social responsibilities) to the public. Evaluation of such policies soon showed that their use to define an ethical environment and their effectiveness required more than a public statement and "intent"; such a code needed to be (1) connected with day-to-day employee behaviors/practices (at all levels, including management), (2) easily reference-able by employees, and (3) include reporting and enforcement mechanisms (Doig & Wilson, 1998). (As described in *Section 3*, we make similar recommendations for CoC-type policies for science endeavors.)

At present, the science community increasingly commonly sees (and agrees to follow) CoC policies within conferences and professional societies (e.g., *Appendix 1*). However, such policies are valuable for all group research endeavors and are complementary to existing common RotR policies. At present, authors of this white paper found only one mission team with a CoC (in their RotR) that provides guidance for behavior at Mission Team/Project Science Group meetings and general interactions amongst team members (*Appendix 1*). RotR documents are already commonplace and thus logical documents in which to include a CoC.

Recommendation 1: A Code of Conduct-type policy should be a standard documentation of expected behaviors within any organized group endeavor, providing for transparency, common language/expectations, and avenues for enforcement. For research endeavors (e.g., a mission team), a Code of Conduct can be incorporated into a Rules of the Road-type document that also covers definitions such as team membership/roles and other expectations of behavior, such as behaviors related to publication authorship and public outreach/media communications.

3. Recommendations for an Effective Code of Conduct

While many examples of CoC (or anti-harassment statements or other policy statements of this sort) for conferences or meetings can be found online (examples in *Appendix 1*) and the overarching messages are usually along consistent lines (e.g., "we seek to create a safe and productive environment for participants"), the written policies vary in what further information they include, in how they ask participants to commit to following the policy, and in how policy information is advertised [8-10]. However, these factors can greatly impact the efficacy of such a policy. Furthermore, while all of the CoC policies that the authors looked at included at least a vague statement about expected behavior and what would not be tolerated, only some included a clear and easy-to-use reporting mechanism. Most troubling was that many lacked an explanation of potential consequences, and such a statement is needed to enable enforcement of the policy.

Recommendation 2: A Code of Conduct should contain at least these four parts [11]:

- **Statement of unacceptable behavior**
- **Explanation of how the policy will be enforced**
- **Clear instructions about how and to whom to make an incident report**
- **Training and reference materials for organizers, staff, and volunteers on how to respond to incident reports.**

For the first point, it is important for the policy to state more than “be nice to/respectful of each other” as, despite typical intention for good behavior, people may inadvertently engage in exclusionary acts. Providing examples of unacceptable behavior (such as those listed in [12]) prompts people to think more broadly about what could create discomfort or offense, as well as make it clear that certain behaviors—no matter how intended—are not acceptable. Furthermore, it also may be useful to include a statement about appropriate or expected behavior, such as engaging in dialog respectful of different cultures (helping with racial/ethnic, cultural, and national diversity) or providing avenues of communication beyond real-time dialogue (helping those who need to think before speaking to contribute as much as those who speak in order to think—sometime referred to as introverts and extroverts).

For the second point, explanation of potential consequences adds weight to the policy. It is important to have gradations in the enforcement mechanism: only having “soft” consequences (such as a “don’t do it again” conversation) can lead to a sense of futility, and only having “hard” consequences (such as ejecting someone from a conference or team) can lead to people only reporting unambiguously severe issues. Additionally, should inappropriate or harmful behavior occur, leadership needs the authority to enforce consequences. Conference organizers and mission team leadership often expressed that a barrier for explicit establishment of potential consequences was concern about liability (see **Rec. 3**). Such concerns are further complicated if group members are from different institutions, each with their own rules regarding harassment and other expectations in behavior. The enforcement policy should include recognition that policies for the team(s), institution(s), and individual role(s) may interact (and ideally include explanation for how such overlaps will be resolved).

For the third point, it is important that the document contains clear instructions on how every community member to whom the document applies can make an incident report for behaviors that appear to violate the CoC. Multiple paths for incident reporting, including anonymously, are critical to ensure there is more than one arbiter.

For the fourth point, it is important that those responding to incident reports be trained so as to respond with appropriate empathy/sensitivity and lack of bias (i.e., trauma informed response training). The aims are to (1) not increase harm/difficulties for the reporter (who may be a victim of discrimination, harassment, or assault), (2) to gather needed information so as to provide assistance and, if needed, pull in appropriate support, and (3) to not further complicate the situation. Such training could potentially be provided by NASA/NSF or a person’s institution (e.g., through HR).

Recommendation 3: NASA and NSF should establish template Code of Conduct language and structure for projects and missions that they support. This template should include the reporting mechanisms, potential consequences/enforcement mechanisms, and liability that would be borne by NASA and NSF.

Recommendation 4: Such template language and content would serve as a useful starting place for Code of Conduct-type policies that would be required for all NASA- and NSF-supported endeavors. This template language should also be shared with NASA contractors, such as LPI and SSERVI, who commonly set up meeting and group websites for NASA-supported Planetary Science and Astrobiology endeavors.

While CoC-type policies are currently often used for conferences/meetings and professional societies, such policies are useful for all group endeavors. We encourage NASA,

NSF, and the general community to use CoC-type policies for all group research endeavors, including *but not limited to* research groups, mission teams, studies, workshops/meetings/conferences, research groups, REU and intern programs, observing runs, and field studies.

While it is unlikely that one CoC will suit all purposes, having a template that NASA and NSF would stand behind would ensure that the community understands and includes all the needed elements, and would help navigate different institution policies and handle institutional concerns about liability. Having a common template would also minimize disparities between projects. Having such a policy written down for any group research endeavor allows for transparency and enables new members to be easily trained on proper conduct when joining the group. And, as noted above, having such a policy can be especially helpful for multi-institution efforts where it may not be clear which institution(s)'s policies take precedence. This is especially effective if enforcement of the team policy is given authority through the funding agency. This template CoC policy should be regularly reviewed and, in particular, ensure current best practices are followed (see **Rec. 7**).

Recommendation 5: The Code of Conduct should consider inclusion of specific language concerning race, ethnicity, gender identity (including non-binary), sexual orientation, ability, religion/spirituality, nationality, socioeconomic status, age, and intersectionality.

It is important that a CoC be explicit about the members of the community that it serves. It is common practice to include a list of identities which are protected against discrimination and harassment and this list should include the following marginalized identities: race, ethnicity, gender identity (including non-binary), sexual orientation, ability, religion/spirituality, nationality, socioeconomic status and age. Including intersectionality within this list also acknowledges the compounding discrimination that those with two or more of these identities experience. Previous studies have shown lesser participation in the space sciences by individuals with one or more of these identities and more experiences of identity-related challenges/harm [13-17], making such explicit protection central to any initiative that promotes equity, diversity, inclusion, and accessibility (EDIA), including a CoC [8,9].

Recommendation 6: The Code of Conduct should require periodic and explicit agreement from all group members, be easily accessible for later reference/reminders, and be publicly posted.

For a CoC policy to be effective, it is critical to generate awareness, understanding, and buy-in from all team members. Requiring explicit agreement from all group members is one way to achieve this. Explicit agreement upon entry to the group is the minimal requirement. Periodically re-requiring agreement ensures that team members remember the content/location of the policy and also helps keep the policy up-to-date (see **Rec. 7**). Such explicit re-agreement is especially important for long endeavors, such as mission teams.

While it is most vital that the policy be easily referenced/accessed by the team members, publicly publishing the CoC (and other policies in the RotR) has many benefits beyond ensuring a high-level of transparency/accessibility:

- A policy that seems to establish a welcoming culture will be appealing to more and more diverse people, who then may become interested in entering that group.
- Public sharing of these policy documents enables generation of a more common understanding and culture across the science community, enabling all policies to arc towards more inclusivity and accessibility as best practices are noted and shared.
- Within NASA and NSF, research efforts are funded by taxpayers. Public sharing of group policies would be consistent with other transparency policies regarding government-sponsored work. In the case of grants and awards with federal funding, having a public CoC might make it easier to hold folks accountable should the offender be higher in the power dynamic of the team or general community.

- Public sharing also challenges the proprietary view of internal group structure and practices – these safety and equity concerns are not institution-specific, and the science done by the research group (including how that science is done) is not separate from the broader planetary science and astrobiology communities.

Recommendation 7: A group’s Code of Conduct should be regularly reviewed to ensure it still provides clear guidance and brings equity and safety for all participants in common group settings/scenarios, and incorporates current best practices.

Recommendation 8: To aid evaluation of a NASA- or NSF-supported activity or group’s Code of Conduct (and other policies), NASA and NSF should provide standardized ways and tools for determining if the group’s workspaces and practices are safe and equitable.

As situations change (e.g., the movement of all meetings to virtual settings in 2020) and cultural expectations change within the broader society as well as the science community, it is important that a group’s policies remain relevant. Such reviews also enable current best practices to be incorporated, as well as evaluation of how effective existing wording and expectations have been at encouraging the desired behaviors within the group. (Within regular reviews, there is also a good opportunity to renew team members’ familiarity and explicit agreement with the policies – see **Rec. 6.**)

While we recommend a full review and evaluation of the CoC policy on regular cycles, public (or at least within-team) sharing of anonymized/aggregated incidence reports following key, large events (such as a conference or team meeting) can (1) help with interim evaluation of the effectiveness of the policy, and (2) demonstrate in a clear manner that the policy is being enforced. For example, at a conference, this can take the form of the number of harassment complaints made and (at a high-level) explaining what came of them, including consequences. Such reports need to be in bulk/aggregate due to privacy concerns.

With similar motivations as those of **Recommendation 3**, we encourage NASA and NSF to provide standardized tools for evaluation of a group’s CoC policy (including, but not limited to, demographic and workplace health surveys). Providing such tools would, again, ease the burden on the community for coming up with evaluation metrics and would minimize disparities between projects. Additionally, for at least long lasting and large efforts (such as mission teams), we recommend use of a “team of EDIA experts”² for independent evaluation. Furthermore, such an evaluation could be wrapped into existing regular evaluation processes, such as the Senior Review process³ for operating mission teams.

The authors of this white paper debated recommending that continued financial support of a science endeavor should be tied to improved equity, diversity, inclusion, and accessibility. While generally there was agreement that this could encourage increased consideration of these important issues (see **Rec. 2** – enforcement is key to the effectiveness of any policy), there also was concern that such a linkage might encourage people to hide issues. Evaluations of a team’s CoC and how effective it is, and how such evaluations may be tied to support decisions, should incentivize the recognition/addressment of issues and continued improvement of the policy and team culture/practices.

²To find EDIA experts: there are a number of Planetary Science & Astrobiology community members and organizations (such as the cross-AG EDI Working Group and DPS Professional Climate and Culture Subcommittee) who can recommend social scientists who study relevant areas and/or are familiar with science communities and activities.

³We emphasize that evaluation of a mission team’s policies should **not** be added to the responsibilities of the typical Senior Review board as they have enough to do and are generally not experts in relevant areas.

References: [1] Baker, 2015, The Chronicle of Higher Education. [2] Schneider et al., 14 March 2018, AGI Geoscience Currents 125. [3] Email from Zurbuchen, 17 May 2019, posted to Spaceref. [4] Zurbuchen, 5 June 2019, National Colloquium, recorded presentation (slide 99). [5] ROSES-2020 “Topical Workshops, Symposia, and Conferences” E.2. [6] Boggess et al., 1978, *Nature* **275**: 372-377. [7] Squibb & Cheung, 1988, *ESOC* **28**: 489-496. [8] Foxx et al., 2019, *Proc. NAS* **116**(30): 14931-36. [9] Tai Udovicic et al., 2019, Women in Space 2019 Conference, Abstract. [10] Diniaga et al., 2020, LPSC, [Ab. 2482/e-poster](#). [11] <https://www.ashedryden.com/blog/codes-of-conduct-101-faq#coc101whatis> (dated 10 Feb 2014; accessed Dec. 2019). [12] Bennett et al., 2020, PS&A DS white paper. [13] Rathbun, J.A. (2017). *Nature Astronomy*, 1, 0148. [14] Rivera-Valentín et al., 2020, PS&A DS white paper. [15] Clancy et al., 2017, *JGR: Planets* **122**: 1610-1623. [16] Richey et al., 2020, *Bull. AAS* **51**(4). [17] Howard, 2000, *Annu. Rev. Sociol.*, 26: 367-93.

Appendix 1: Inspection of Existing Policies

The authors of this white paper surveyed many policy documents; some were posted publicly and others were inspected by group members (with permission of the PI). For each, we checked on which types of policies were covered and also checked for alignment with current best practices, such as inclusion of language concerning protection of specific identities (see **Rec. 5**). We share some of them here to (1) show our references, (2) illustrate the range of policies currently in use, and (3) highlight specific alignment with best practices (green-shading). Information shown reflects this white paper authors’ best understanding.

Planetary Mission Teams and Other Research Endeavors							
Document/ Policy (year first shared with team)	Psyche Team Guidelines (2017)	Mars Science Laboratory RotR (2012)	InSight RotR (2013)	Dawn RotR (2009)	Europa Clipper RotR (2016)	Mars 2020 Science Team Guidelines (2020)	
Addresses?	Pub. policy	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
	Authorship guidelines	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
	Membership	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
	CoC	No	No	No	No	Yes	No
	Language about identities (Rec. 5)	None	None	None	None	None	None
Accessible to team/public	Sent to team members	Published as supplemental material to Grotzinger et al., 2012	On internal team website	Emailed to new team members	On internal PSG website	Published with PSP call on NSPIRES & on internal website	
Agreement required?	Explicit upon joining	Explicit upon joining	No	No	Implicit upon joining	Implicit upon joining	
Disciplinary action/reporting resources	No	No	No	No	Yes	No	
Has content been revised (as of 8/2020)	No	Yes (addenda ~2017)	Yes (~annual review)	No	Yes (~annual review)	No	

Professional Societies and Conferences								
Document/ policy	AGU Ethics Policy [website]	AAS/DPS Ethics Policy [website]	USRA/LPI-hosted conf., Statement on Harassment [e.g., LPSC , 9th Mars websites]	GSA Meetings CoC [website]	Imperial College Conf. Policy [website]	Euro- Planet [website]	Space Science in Context, Virtual Conf. CoC [website]	
Addresses?	Pub. policy	Yes	Yes	N/A	Yes	N/A	Yes	N/A
	Authorship guidelines	Yes	Yes	N/A	Yes	N/A	Yes	N/A
	Membership	Yes	Yes	N/A	Yes	N/A	Yes	N/A
	CoC	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
	Language about protection of specific identities* (see <i>Rec. 5</i>)	R, G, SO, D	R, G, SO, D	R, G, SO, D, A, PA, Re	R, G, SO, D, A, PA, Re, B, NO	E, G, SO, D	G, D, Re, SO, A, NO	R, E, G, SO, D, A, Re, BO, NO
Easy to find	Moderate	Yes	Yes	Moderate	Moderate	Yes	Yes	
Explicit agreement	During member renewal/ registration	During membership renewal	During conference registration	During conference registration	During conference registration	No	During conference registration	
Disciplinary action	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	
Reporting resources	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	

*R = race; G = gender/gender identity; SO = sexual orientation; D = disability; A = age; PA = physical appearance; Re = religion/belief; B = body size; NO = national origin; E = ethnicity.

Appendix 2: More useful references

- An example “template” Code of Conduct: <https://confcodeofconduct.com/>.
- A wide collection of Code of Conduct policies: <https://indieweb.org/code-of-conduct-examples>, https://serc.carleton.edu/advancegeo/resources/codes_conduct.html
- Bennett et al., 2020, PS&A DS white paper: The Preventing Harassment in Science Workshop: Summary and Best Practices for Planetary Science and Astrobiology – this workshop included a session on effective Code of Conduct generation.