



## Contents

Introduction.....	2
About Action for the Civil Society.....	2
Core Principles.....	2
Purpose of the Code.....	3
Policy coverage.....	3
Responsibilities .....	4
Responsibilities to the Organization.....	4
Responsibilities to Colleagues.....	4
Responsibilities to Beneficiaries and Stakeholders.....	4
Prohibited Conduct.....	5
Conflict of Interest.....	5
Reporting Violation s.....	6
Compliance and Disciplinary Actions .....	6
Acknowledgement and Commitment.....	7

## Introduction

At Action for the Civil Society (AFCS), we are committed to upholding the highest standards of ethics, integrity, and professionalism in all our activities. This Code of Conduct and Ethics sets out the principles and behaviors expected from all individuals associated with our organization, including employees, volunteers, board members, consultants, and collaborators. This Code applies to all AFCS activities, including workshops, seminars, trainings, and other initiatives. By following this Code, we ensure a culture of respect, accountability, and excellence, enabling us to make a meaningful and positive impact in the lives of those we serve.

Important Note: Action for the Civil Society's, Code of Conduct & Ethics applies from 18/12/2024 (18th of December 2024).

## About Action for the Civil Society

Action for the Civil Society, a non-governmental organization based in Athens, Greece, is dedicated to empowering youth and supporting underserved communities. With expertise in non-formal education, the organization addresses critical topics such as youth development, sustainability, inclusion, human rights, mental and physical health, and the responsible use of digital tools. Since its inception, the organization has worked to foster positive social change and cultural understanding by collaborating with NGOs and international institutions.

## Core Principles

AFCS operates on the foundation of key principles that guide all actions and decisions. These principles are essential in maintaining the integrity and impact of our work and ensuring that our interactions and operations align with our mission and values.

- **Integrity:** Acting with honesty and transparency in all dealings related to the organization. Integrity means consistently doing what is right, even when it may be challenging. This principle fosters trust among beneficiaries, partners, and colleagues and ensures that the organization's reputation remains strong.
- **Respect:** Treating everyone with dignity, fairness, and cultural sensitivity, regardless of their background, identity, or circumstances. Respect also entails listening to others, valuing diverse perspectives, and fostering an inclusive environment where all voices are heard and appreciated.
- **Accountability:** Taking responsibility for one's actions, decisions, and the impact they have on others. This includes being answerable to beneficiaries, stakeholders, and the organization for all tasks and commitments. Accountability ensures that AFCS's operations remain transparent and that individuals uphold their commitments.
- **Excellence:** Striving for the highest quality in all tasks, projects, and interactions. This principle encourages continuous improvement, innovation, and dedication to achieving the best possible outcomes for those we serve. Excellence reflects a commitment to professionalism and a proactive approach to addressing challenges.

- **Collaboration:** Fostering teamwork, cooperation, and mutual support across all levels of the organization. Collaboration involves sharing knowledge, resources, and ideas to achieve shared goals and create a positive impact. By working together, AFCS strengthens its ability to serve communities effectively and efficiently.

## **Purpose of the Code**

The Code of Conduct and Ethics serves multiple critical purposes, ensuring that all members of AFCS understand their responsibilities and act in ways that uphold the values and objectives of the organization. It provides clear guidance on acceptable behavior and ethical practices for all members, fostering a shared understanding of what it means to act with integrity and respect.

This Code also aims to promote inclusivity, professionalism, and accountability across all organizational activities. By clearly articulating the standards expected of staff, volunteers, and stakeholders, the Code helps to create a harmonious working environment where collaboration and mutual respect are prioritized. These principles ensure that everyone involved in AFCS activities feels valued and supported in their efforts.

Additionally, the Code safeguards the reputation of AFCS by preventing unethical behavior or misconduct. Through the implementation of clear policies and procedures, the organization demonstrates its commitment to transparency and integrity, reinforcing trust with beneficiaries, partners, and the wider community. Finally, the Code ensures compliance with applicable laws, internal policies, and best practices, aligning AFCS with the highest ethical and legal standards.

## **Policy coverage**

The Code of Conduct and Ethics applies comprehensively to all activities, programs, and initiatives organized or facilitated by Action for the Civil Society (AFCS). This includes, but is not limited to, workshops, training sessions, educational programs, community events, recreational activities, and digital or virtual engagements. AFCS recognizes that all individuals, including staff, volunteers, and participants, may face ethical and operational challenges across various settings. Therefore, this Code provides clear guidelines to ensure ethical conduct, safety, and well-being in every context. Whether activities occur on-site, off-site, or online, the organization remains fully committed to upholding the highest standards of professionalism and ethical behavior.

The Code is binding for all individuals and groups directly or indirectly involved in AFCS activities. This includes full-time and part-time employees, volunteers, interns, consultants, and external collaborators who contribute to the organization's programs. It also extends to participants, visitors, guardians, and partners who engage with the organization. By ensuring that everyone involved understands their responsibilities and obligations under this Code, AFCS creates a unified and consistent approach to ethical behavior and accountability.

The scope of this Code encompasses specific expectations for interactions, behaviors, and responsibilities during various activities. For example, ethical guidelines and protocols are strictly enforced in spaces where AFCS conducts its work, such as:

- **Workshops and training programs:** Promoting respectful and professional environments where all participants feel valued and supported.
- **Recreational and community activities:** Ensuring safety, inclusivity, and appropriate supervision to foster trust and engagement.
- **Outreach events and collaborative programs:** Maintaining transparency and professionalism in all interactions with stakeholders and partners.
- **Virtual engagements and online platforms:** Implementing responsible communication practices to prevent cyberbullying, exploitation, or other harmful behavior.

Additionally, this Code covers all AFCS-led partnerships, collaborations, and external engagements. The organization works closely with partners to ensure that shared values and ethical standards are upheld consistently. By implementing this approach, AFCS ensures that ethical conduct and accountability are integrated across every program and activity, fostering a culture of respect, responsibility, and trust.

This Code applies to:

- **Paid and volunteer staff** (collectively referred to as “staff”);
- **Individuals participating in AFCS programs**, including children and young people;
- **Visitors**, including parents, guardians, family members, and project partners.

Action for the Civil Society expects all individuals involved in its activities to adhere to the policies and procedures outlined in this Code. Breaches of this Code will be addressed promptly and in accordance with organizational protocols, with oversight provided by designated officers or committees as appropriate.

## Responsibilities

AFCS expects all its employees, volunteers, and collaborators to embrace specific responsibilities to uphold the organization’s values.

### Responsibilities to the Organization

Every individual associated with AFCS must act in the best interest of the organization by:

- Safeguarding the reputation and resources of AFCS;
- Following all organizational policies, procedures, and guidelines;
- Avoiding situations that present a conflict of interest and promptly disclosing any potential conflicts;
- Representing AFCS in a professional and ethical manner across all interactions, including digital platforms.

### Responsibilities to Colleagues

Building a positive and inclusive working environment is essential. This includes:

- Maintaining mutual respect and supporting one another;
- Contributing to an environment free from discrimination, harassment, or bullying;
- Sharing knowledge, resources, and feedback to enhance team performance.

### Responsibilities to Beneficiaries and Stakeholders

AFCS prioritizes the well-being of its beneficiaries and stakeholders. Staff and volunteers must:

- Protect the rights, dignity, and privacy of all beneficiaries, especially children and vulnerable groups;
- Provide programs and services with care, integrity, and cultural awareness;
- Handle personal and sensitive information confidentially and securely.

## Prohibited Conduct

AFCS strictly prohibits any actions or behaviors that undermine its mission or harm its stakeholders. Examples of prohibited conduct include:

- **Harassment or Exploitation:** Engaging in any form of harassment, abuse, or exploitation, whether physical, verbal, or emotional. This includes behavior that creates a hostile or intimidating environment.
- **Misuse of Resources:** Using organizational resources, funds, or assets for personal gain or unauthorized purposes. Misappropriation of organizational property is considered a serious violation.
- **Discrimination:** Treating individuals unfairly based on race, gender, religion, age, disability, or other protected characteristics. AFCS fosters an inclusive and equitable environment for all.
- **Fraudulent or Dishonest Activities:** Engaging in fraud, deception, or activities that misrepresent AFCS's mission or operations. This includes falsifying records or providing false information.
- **Violation of Policies or Laws:** Acting in ways that contravene organizational policies, local laws, or international regulations.

## Conflict of Interest

AFCS requires all members to prioritize the organization's mission and objectives over personal interests. Conflicts of interest can arise when personal, financial, or other considerations compromise, or appear to compromise, the individual's judgment or ability to act in the organization's best interest. Specific examples include:

- **Financial Relationships:** Participating in financial transactions with partners or beneficiaries that could create a personal benefit or influence decision-making processes.
- **Gifts and Benefits:** Accepting gifts, hospitality, or other benefits from partners, suppliers, or stakeholders that could be perceived as compromising impartiality.
- **Outside Employment or Roles:** Engaging in external employment, consultancy, or board roles that conflict with the responsibilities and commitments to AFCS.
- **Personal Relationships:** Allowing personal relationships to interfere with professional responsibilities or lead to favoritism.

All potential or actual conflicts must be disclosed to a supervisor, the Ethics Officer, or other designated personnel. The organization will evaluate and address conflicts to ensure transparency and accountability.

## Reporting Violations

AFCS promotes a culture of openness and integrity, ensuring that all members feel comfortable reporting suspected violations of this Code, unethical behavior, or misconduct. Reporting helps maintain accountability and supports the organization's commitment to ethical practices.

- **How to Report:** Any concerns should be reported to a direct supervisor, manager, or the designated Ethics Officer. Reports can be made in person, via email, or through a confidential hotline provided by the organization.
- **Confidentiality:** All reports are handled confidentially to protect the privacy of the reporting individual and any other parties involved. AFCS ensures that sensitive information is disclosed only on a need-to-know basis.
- **Protection Against Retaliation:** Retaliation against individuals who report concerns in good faith is strictly prohibited. AFCS takes immediate action to protect whistleblowers and maintain a safe environment for raising concerns.
- **Investigation Process:** Once a report is made, a formal investigation will be initiated promptly. This process may include interviews, review of documentation, and collaboration with relevant authorities if necessary. The Ethics Officer oversees the investigation and ensures impartiality.
- **Outcome and Follow-Up:** After the investigation, appropriate actions are taken based on the findings. This may include disciplinary measures, policy revisions, or training programs to prevent future occurrences. The reporting individual will be informed of the outcome within the bounds of confidentiality.

## Compliance and Disciplinary Actions

Compliance with this Code is mandatory for all individuals associated with AFCS. Adhering to the standards set forth ensures the integrity and effectiveness of the organization.

- **Non-Compliance:** Failure to comply with the Code or related organizational policies may result in disciplinary measures proportional to the severity of the violation.
- **Disciplinary Measures:** These may include verbal or written warnings, mandatory training, suspension, or termination of employment or volunteer agreements. In severe cases, legal action may be pursued.
- **Preventative Measures:** To minimize non-compliance, AFCS provides regular training, clear communication of policies, and ongoing support to help all members understand and uphold the Code.
- **Documentation:** All disciplinary actions and compliance issues are documented and stored securely. This ensures transparency and allows for consistent application of policies across the organization.
- **Role of Leadership:** The leadership team is responsible for ensuring that compliance is upheld and that all disciplinary actions are fair, consistent, and in line with the organization's values and legal obligations.

## Acknowledgement and Commitment

Every individual governed by this Code is required to formally acknowledge their understanding and acceptance of its principles. This process reinforces the importance of the Code and ensures alignment with AFCS's values.

- **Acknowledgment Form:** Upon joining AFCS, each individual must review the Code and sign an acknowledgment form confirming their commitment to its principles. This applies to employees, volunteers, interns, consultants, and collaborators.
- **Ongoing Commitment:** Regular reminders and training sessions are provided to reinforce the importance of ethical behavior. Updates to the Code are communicated promptly, and re-acknowledgment may be required for significant changes.
- **Cultural Alignment:** By signing the acknowledgment form, individuals affirm their role in fostering a culture of respect, accountability, and excellence. This commitment extends to all activities, whether conducted on-site, off-site, or virtually.
- **Monitoring and Support:** AFCS regularly reviews the implementation of this Code to ensure its effectiveness. Feedback from stakeholders is welcomed and integrated into periodic updates to maintain relevance and applicability.

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