

Ethics Code Task Force (ECTF) Meeting Summary – November 13-14, 2020

The Ethics Code Task Force (ECTF) met November 13-14, 2020 to continue its work on revising the APA Ethics Code.

Review of Feedback to Principles: As a beginning point for the meeting, the ECTF members reviewed the recent feedback received from various boards, committees, divisions, and other external groups on an initial set of draft Principles. During the review of the over 274 comments received, plus additional lengthy comment documents submitted, members noted that a list of ten (10) themes seem to be reflected and consistent in the comments received. During its discussion, members noted that while there were consistent comments among the themes, there were also opposing comments for the same areas. The themes discussed did not represent an exhaustive list, as all written responses were considered. However, the themes represented some of the overarching structural issues that the ECTF must reconsider, as well as an initial means to organize thinking. Examples of the themes included:

- Perceived redundancies among the proposed principles of Human Rights, Social Justice, and Respect for the Welfare of Persons and Peoples
- Reconsider the concept of autonomy
- The intersection of professional and private behaviors
- The inclusion of the environment in an ethics code
- Terminology
- Adding language such as “systems”

Discussion of Topic Areas for Possible Standards: During the November 2020 meeting, the ECTF also began an extensive discussion on topic areas that may result in sections for standards. The ECTF is taking a measured and thoughtful approach to standards sections, including first addressing the broader questions and reviewing other documents such as the Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing, International Test Commission documents, international ethics documents, and APA’s population and skills-area guidelines. Topic areas were being considered within multiple work setting areas. Amongst the topic areas discussed were the following: a) assessment, b) competence, c) confidentiality, d) informed consent, e) professional responsibility, f) relationship with the public, g) psychotherapy, intervention, and consultation.

Virtual meetings on 11/13/2020:

During the last hour of each day’s meeting, ECTF members met virtually with liaisons from various groups: 12-16 liaisons representing various boards, committees, divisions, and external groups joined on each day of the meeting. The virtual meetings began with a reminder of the charge to the ECTF from the APA Ethics Committee and the Board of Directors. In addition, liaisons were also reminded that the ECTF has developed a draft of an introduction that will eventually be sent out for comment, as well as a definition of terms, a decision-making model, and an explanatory statement that will link each standards section to each principle.

The Chair and Vice Chair of the ECTF also reviewed with the liaisons the day’s discussions held by the ECTF members. Specifically, these discussions centered on the feedback received from the various groups related to the draft Principles, and the topic areas that the ECTF members discussed which may result in sections for standards. Group liaisons offered additional feedback and questions during these discussions, and liaisons were encouraged to provide comments throughout the development of the code. Liaisons were reminded that there would be many opportunities for providing feedback on revisions to the Code.