



# ASAP Code of Conduct and Professional Ethics

AMERICAN SOCIETY OF  
ADAPTATION PROFESSIONALS

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[www.adaptationprofessionals.org](http://www.adaptationprofessionals.org)

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## Introduction

ASAP is a professional society that connects and supports climate change adaptation and climate resilience professionals to advance innovation in the field. ASAP members build the resilience and adaptive capacity of communities, ecosystems, and economies to climate impacts. ASAP promotes approaches to preparedness, prevention, resilience building and adaptation that address whole systems; consider potential trade-offs and synergies; take a long-term perspective; apply promising practices; and use the best available science and knowledge of past, current, and future conditions. ASAP encourages and supports co-production of knowledge and adaptation processes that are just, inclusive, transparent and accessible to all concerned and potentially impacted. ASAP members bring to adaptation and resilience the highest professional and ethical standards, and provide advice on adaptation and resilience.

ASAP members are committed to recognizing injustice, ensuring fairness in decision making, ensuring equitable distribution of adaptation costs and benefits, and centering the needs and experiences of people and communities on the frontlines of climate change in their work. People and communities on the frontlines of climate change are those that experience the consequences of climate change first and worst. They include people who are both highly exposed to climate risks because of the places they live and have fewer resources, capacity, safety nets, or political power to respond to those risks because of widespread discrimination, promoted by histories of colonialism, white supremacy, domination of nature, and economic exploitation. They include Black people, Indigeonous Peoples, people of color, people with low incomes and from low income backgrounds as well as other individuals and communities such as immigrants, those at-risk of displacement, old and young people, people experiencing homelessness, outdoor workers, incarcerated people, renters, people with disabilities, and chronically ill or hospitalized people.

ASAP has adopted the following guidelines for professional conduct and ethical practice (“guidelines”) to enhance the benefits of the climate adaptation and related professional fields to humanity and the living systems upon which we all depend, to uphold the dignity and honor of the climate change adaptation and climate resilience profession, and to provide guidance for individual members, organizational members, and members in association with other professions. By participating in ASAP, members agree to abide by these guidelines, as well as any existing codes of ethics per their other professional societies, and are invited to participate in discourse to periodically revise the guidelines.

This document was originally developed in 2017 by a group of ASAP members. It was revised by ASAP members and staff in 2021 to integrate Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (JEDI) concepts and language following the adoption of ASAP’s JEDI Statement in April 2020 and to better compliment ASAP’s Living Guide to the Principles of Climate Change Adaptation.

## Values and Beliefs

Adaptation professionals are responsible to act on the basis of values in addition to knowledge. Knowledge is not morally neutral and often demands action. In many instances, action is required in the absence of all the information one would like (i.e. in an uncertain situation). In other instances, the fundamental value and dignity of each human being, and collective rights of indigenous communities, demands specific policies even if calculations say that implementing them is not optimally efficient or cost effective. In both of these situations, values inform the application of information or the action in the absence of information. The following represent the foundational values and beliefs that the American Society of Adaptation Professionals, and its members, hold:

- Climate change is a real and serious danger to all sectors and systems. Its root causes must be addressed.
- Adaptation and resilience build stronger, more prepared regions, ecosystems, communities, economies, neighborhoods, and households by increasing awareness of vulnerability and risk, building capacity for proactive action, and investing in the safety and success of present and future generations. Adaptation is, and will continue to be, a critical tool for ensuring that physical and social infrastructure and assets continue to function and have the opportunity to thrive, despite increasing changes in climate.
- The natural world has intrinsic value and many human cultures, particularly Indigenous cultures, take responsibility for its care. The natural world also provides countless essential services for the safety, nourishment, stability, and physical and emotional health of humans. Climate change puts these natural systems and services at risk. Adaptation and resilience must fundamentally serve the interests and health of the natural world, both because of its intrinsic value and because these interests also serve those of human health, security, and overall well-being.
- Due to the very nature of climate change and the likely inconsistency between future conditions and historical precedent, the dependable solutions of the past may be obsolete. Adaptive decision making, creativity, innovation and transformative problem solving are essential tenets of work that aims to address new and changing climate conditions.
- Individuals and communities on the frontlines of climate change hold expertise and resilience that should be centered in adaptation processes and decisions. Specifically, indigenous peoples hold Traditional Ecological Knowledge that is a critical to our full understanding of climate change impacts and effective adaptation measures.
- Science is a critical foundation for our climate adaptation knowledge. The scientific method provides a relatively objective means of identifying the factors necessary for climate adaptation in society, and for evaluating policies and programs to protect and promote climate adaptation and resilience.
- Grave injustices of the past, which have been allowed to perpetuate today, have created an unjust and inequitable society. Climate change exacerbates these inequities, as those who are the least responsible for climate change are often the most impacted. Widespread discrimination, promoted by histories of colonialism, white supremacy, domination of nature, and economic exploitation have created systems that inhibit otherwise capable communities and ecosystems from thriving.

## Principles and Guidelines

### Perform quality work

- Contextualize adaptation research, policies, practices, communication, and actions to the appropriate issues, location, and scale. Design strategies to adjust over spatial and temporal scales, and account for variability and extremes. Assess localized outcomes of adaptation actions.
- Think in systems to avoid harm and maladaptation and maximize benefits. Consider how problems, actions, and solutions relevant to one component in a system can trigger changes in the other components. Holistically consider the multitude of intersecting risks that social and ecological systems face. This includes risks derived from both climate and non-climate hazards. Evaluate adaptation strategies to determine their positive and negative impacts to other systems, scales, and sectors and minimize disproportionate impacts to some at the benefit of other regions, generations, social groups, or systems.
- Whenever possible, use projected future conditions, rather than averages over time, when planning for social, economic, ecological and other impacts, and in assessing prospective risk and vulnerability. Incorporate the full range of possible climate outcomes in assessments and plans, including highly uncertain events, acknowledging that conditions are becoming increasingly dynamic.
- Apply best practices for designing and managing programs, initiatives, projects, and plans, such as establishing needed financial and human capacity, establishing shared goals and expectations with stakeholders, and monitoring and evaluating the work.
- Effectively communicate and engage with all those impacted by your work, particularly residents affected by climate impacts or adaptation actions.

### Advance Knowledge

Members should:

- Advance the development of, and respect for, our profession by contributing to the knowledge and capability of the adaptation field as a whole, improving techniques and refining approaches in both science and practice, openly sharing practices, policies and lessons learned, ensuring solutions are relevant to community needs, and increasing public understanding of climate adaptation activities.
- Examine the applicability of adaptation theories, methods, research and practice to the facts and analysis of each particular situation and not accept the applicability of a standard solution without first establishing its appropriateness to the circumstances.
- Understand and make the relevant person(s) aware of the potential consequences of actions when giving advice.
- Provide timely, adequate, clear, and accurate information on planning, preparedness, mitigation, and adaptation issues and/or practice to all affected persons and decision makers, as practicable.
- Look beyond one's professional expertise to the concerns of society, and acknowledge both the strengths and limitations of technology and practice.
- Share knowledge and collaborate with colleagues across a broad range of disciplines to promote systems thinking and amplify best practices for mitigating and adaptation to climate change.
- Endeavor to keep abreast of relevant scientific and technical developments through a combination of continued education, training, and learning through practical experience and mentoring.

## Center justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion

Members should uphold the ASAP Justice, Equity, Diversity, And Inclusion Statement by working to:

- Understand systemic injustice and oppression and the resulting barriers to adaptation. Address injustices at their core whenever possible to remove these barriers and create the conditions needed for individuals, communities, and systems to be able to adapt.
- Ensure that the costs of adapting to climate change and the benefits of adaptation actions are equitably distributed. This means paying particular attention to individuals and groups on the frontlines of climate change, those disproportionately affected by climate impacts, and historic inequities in the distribution of benefits.
- Engage and interact fairly and evenhandedly with all participants in planning, preparedness, mitigation, and adaptation processes.
- Not discriminating on the basis of race, religion, gender, national origin, age, disability, or sexual orientation in the profession.
- Increasing opportunities for members of underrepresented groups to become adaptation professionals and help them advance in the profession.
- Ensuring that all potentially affected people and groups have the opportunity to have a meaningful impact on the development of plans and programs that may affect them, particularly those who lack formal organization or influence.
- Seek social justice by working to expand choice and opportunity for all persons, recognizing a special responsibility to plan for the needs of people on the frontlines of climate change and to address racial and economic integration discrimination and marginalization.
- In adaptation analysis, assessment, planning, and implementation, conscientiously consider the specific impacts on, and needs of, communities that are geographically isolated or underserved or under-resourced due to histories of colonialism, white supremacy, domination of nature, or economic exploitation.

## Consider the environment, sustainability, and obligations to the present and future

Members should:

- Respect, protect and improve the environment, and quality of life within it, and preserve the cultural heritage of civilizations and societies. Safeguard the health, well-being, safety, and existence of all people affected by your adaptation work. Explicitly address the needs of ecological systems, including fish, wildlife, and plants, in adaptation strategies. Assess all actions to ensure that they protect or enhance the capacity of communities and ecosystems to sustain function over time.
- Endeavor to be an innovative, systems thinker in the pursuit of long-term goals of environmental, social, and economic sustainability.
- Support and promote sustainable actions and challenge unsustainable actions.
- Have respect for the future, recognizing that change is inevitable, and retain an open mind, driven by the need to create a more adapted and resilient future.
- Respect future generations by recognizing that they will be more affected by what we do than by what we say.
- Do the utmost to set a good example and participate wholeheartedly in the wider community's efforts to inform and empower future adaptation professionals.

In addition to the above requirements of membership, ASAP encourages its members to embrace voluntary public interest or pro-bono activities as a contribution to building the field, such as: public education; engaging with ASAP to connect local, state, tribal, national, and international actions; participating in local public engagement or planning processes; testifying on local, state, tribal, or national adaptation policies; or other activities supporting, or in the pursuit of values as stated in the ASAP code of conduct and professional ethics.

## Operate with integrity

### 1. Scientific integrity

Members should:

- Ensure their practice is consistent with, and responsive to, the best-available science and Traditional Ecological Knowledge about climate change and current knowledge of how it will affect human and natural systems.
- Use the full range of scientific tools, including both quantitative and qualitative methods, community knowledge, Traditional Ecological Knowledge, collaboration among the sciences, and the informed co-production of knowledge.
- Employ sound scientific principles and established scientific methods.
- When given the opportunity to design or implement an adaptation process, make sure they follow a vetted adaptive management process.
- Update policies and shift priorities as new information becomes available.
- Base conclusions on factual evidence, reasonable judgment and professional expertise, and report findings, uncertainty and interpretations fully, accurately, and objectively.
- Take full responsibility for the trustworthiness of their research and practice.

### 2. Ethical integrity

Members should:

- Reflect dignity and honor on their profession with excellence, integrity, fairness and honesty in all aspects of research, professional practice, and communication.
- Exercise impartiality, diligence and objectivity in their professional work, promoting and striving for high standards in adaptation.
- Be personally accountable, unselfish cooperators, and good stewards in the conduct of research and professional practice.
- Take responsibility for the integrity of contributions when sharing data, findings, and new knowledge, including respecting the intellectual property rights of others and giving credit where credit is due.
- Place quality and objectivity of research, practice, applications, and results ahead of personal gain or allegiance to individuals or organizations.
- Undertake professional services only when the member or team is qualified by education, training, or experience in the specific technical areas involved.

### 3. Managing conflicts of interest

Members should:

- Fully disclose financial, personal, professional, and other conflicts of interest that could compromise the trustworthiness of their work.
- Neither offer nor make any payment or gift to a public official with the intent of influencing the official's judgment in connection with an existing or prospective project in which the member is interested.
- Refrain from using confidential information for personal advantage.
- Refrain from engaging in private discussions with decision makers in any manner prohibited by law or by agency rules, procedures, or custom.
- Not use or display the official seal or logo of the ASAP unless duly authorized by the organization.

## 4. Managing legal concerns

Members should:

- Embrace the law governing their professional affairs.
- Conduct research and practice, to the fullest extent possible, in full understanding of all principles, norms, laws, rules, regulations, codes, and customs applicable to the relevant sectors and fields of practice for the adaptation work, including intellectual property.
- In circumstances where decisions or actions violate a law or regulation and/or adversely affect public safety, and the matter cannot be satisfactorily resolved by other means, members shall: (a) advise their employer or client against the decision; (b) refuse to consent to the decision; and, (c) report the decision to the local or other public official charged with the enforcement of the applicable laws and regulations.
- Not engage in conduct involving fraud or wanton disregard of the rights of others.
- When the law does not support policies, practices, or programs that are in alignment with sound climate adaptation practices, work to define and/or communicate why those laws are societally malfeasant.

## Serve the needs of employers and clients

Members should:

- Serve employers and clients competently, in a professional and timely manner, based on independent professional judgment, and exercise unprejudiced and unbiased judgment when performing all professional services.
- Accept the decisions of the client or employer concerning the objectives and nature of professional services performed. If the objectives or the nature of those services runs counter to this Code of Ethics, work respectfully with the client or employer to bring them into compliance.
- Refrain from materially altering the scope or objectives of a project without the employer or client's consent.
- Be truthful, keep clients reasonably informed, and maintain confidentiality in professional communications with clients except when breach is necessary to prevent a clear violation of law, or to prevent a substantial injury to the public.
- Fully and openly advise employer or client as to the likelihood of project success and refrain from making exaggerated or unwarranted claims and statements.
- Expect respect from and give respect to employers and clients for professional knowledge, expertise, and guidance.
- Promote and serve the public interest in personal and professional activities, and in the conduct of professional practice.
- Actively and willingly work to improve societal standards in response to both social and technological change.

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