Role of the AFP Ethics Committee

The Ethics Committee is a vehicle through which AFP promotes responsible and ethical behavior by its members and those holding AFP certification, volunteer professionals and the public. Simply stated, the Ethics Committee’s work is focused on helping members apply the AFP Code of Ethical Principles and Standards of Professional Practice to their everyday professional lives.

The Committee’s work is divided into three areas:

- Education
- Advice and Counsel
- Enforcement

Education

The Committee believes strongly that its primary role should not be to act as a policeman. Rather, it should be to assist the membership and the philanthropic community with education about ethical values and the processes one needs to go through in order to apply these values to the practice of fund raising, enabling members to work with their institutions and colleagues to facilitate a richer relationship between donors, not-for-profit organizations, and the fundraising profession.

The Committee has done several things toward this end. In 1995 it published the Guidelines to the Standards of Professional Practice. Based upon member feedback, the Committee has recently revised the Guidelines, providing requested clarification and guidance.

As part of each International Conference since 1996, the Committee has designed and participated in multiple interactive workshops on the ethical decision-making process. These have been well evaluated and are being continued.

From time to time Committee members are available to speak about fundraising ethics at chapter meetings and conferences. Additionally, the Committee addresses issues of specific concern through study subcommittees and special reports, and the information gathered helps in the committee's deliberations.

This Ethics Leadership Guide is another effort of the Committee to provide educational service. It is being offered to help in planning meetings around the ethical decision-
making process. We invite comments about the guide and suggestions for how to improve it in the future.

**Advice and Counsel**

The majority of the Committee's work is advice and counsel, responding to questions asked by members. The Committee encourages members to submit questions, drafts of policies, or plans for fundraising practice for which there could be a concern about compliance with the Code.

*Examples:*

*A member's organization wanted to develop a performance-based compensation plan in accordance with AFP's Professional Standards. The committee reviewed an initial plan and returned it with comment; a second plan was then submitted, which the committee believed to be within Standards No. 16-18.*

*A board member shared with the development director a brochure about a new fundraising opportunity. Upon examination, the member had doubts about the information presented in the brochure and whether it met the Code. The committee reviewed the material, shared the member's doubts, and offered some counsel on how to work with the board member.*

Questions for the Ethics Committee should be submitted to the AFP President and CEO via telephone, fax, email, or U.S. mail.

**Enforcement**

Anyone may lodge an ethics query or file a complaint alleging violation of the Code against a member of AFP or a person holding an AFP-sanctioned credential if there is question about compliance with the Code.

**Ethics Query**

An ethics query may be posed to inquire whether a practice warrants filing a complaint alleging a violation of the AFP Code and to request Ethics Committee assistance to resolve an issue or practice of concern without invoking the formal Code enforcement process. It may be lodged via a confidential letter or memorandum to the Office of the AFP President and CEO identifying the person against whom the ethics query is lodged and describing the incident or practice that is of concern.

Ethical queries are presented to the Committee without identification of either party. The Committee, on a very confidential basis and without identifying the complainant, works
with the individual against whom the complaint has been made to resolve the matter in an
effort to prevent the necessity of initiating the enforcement process. Should the matter not
be resolved, then a complaint may be filed.

**Complaint**

A complaint is a request to invoke the Code enforcement process. It is filed by
completing and signing a complaint form from AFP and sending the completed form
confidentially to the Office of the AFP President and CEO. When a complaint has been
filed against an AFP member or a person holding an AFP-sanctioned credential, the
Ethics Committee follows a strictly prescribed procedure of fact-finding and hearings to
enforce the Code of Ethical Principles.

During this process, confidentiality of the parties is assured, although both parties are
identified to each other. Only if a decision is reached to remove membership or an AFP-
sanctioned credential is there public identification of the person being charged.

The enforcement process has been approved by the AFP Board of Directors and is
available to anyone who wishes it. All chapter presidents have a copy in their Chapter
Leadership Manual.

In recent years the Committee has revoked membership in AFP, with recommendation to
the Certification Board for removal of the CFRE credential. In these cases the
Certification Board has removed the CFRE credential.

**Examples:**

*Concern was expressed about a member's possible conflict of interest because the
member was working for two organizations, both of which, to the complainant, seemed to
be receiving undue benefit as a result of the member’s involvement. The committee wrote
to the member, who had not thought about this possible complication, and the member
agreed to change the way of work so as to avoid this perception.*

*A member was charged by law enforcement officers for mishandling donor monies. Once
legal action was completed and the member was found guilty, the Ethics Committee
worked through the enforcement process, removed membership status, and requested
removal of the CFRE.*

Although the Committee meets only twice a year, it is able to accomplish its work
between meetings by telephone conferences and through the office of AFP’s President
and CEO.
Example:

An employer of a member discussed changing the member’s compensation package to a base salary plus a percentage of the funds raised. The member requested help in explaining why AFP opposes this form of compensation. The International Headquarters Office was able to provide immediate consultation and a packet of information, which proved useful to the member, who was successful in getting this proposal changed.

The work of the Ethics Committee is completely confidential. All calls to the International Headquarters Office related to ethical concerns are directed only to the AFP President and CEO’s office. No conversations are shared outside of the committee, and all correspondence is kept locked. The committee encourages your questions, comments, and requests. Please address them to the President and CEO.