

MCAA Code of conduct

Preamble

Members of the Marie Curie Alumni Association aim at having a positive impact in research and inspire sustainable research practices. To have such an impact, they should reflect on the responsible and sustainable character of their own behavior within the Association. This Code of ethics expresses the conduct deemed desirable in the association.

The Code is designed to inspire adequate behavior of all members, including members of the board and others in leadership roles. Additionally, the Code serves as a basis for remediation when violations occur. The Code includes general principles that govern the Association, which are formulated as statements of responsibility, based on the understanding that good faith, fairness, solidarity, compliance with European and National laws, as well as to academics' statutes, respect between members, and colleagues, as well as towards the community and Institutions, transparency in research, dignity, decorum, professional good repute and honorable conduct are the primary duties that must always drive members' behaviours.

Section 1 outlines fundamental ethical principles that form the basis for the remainder of the Code. Section 2 addresses additional, more specific considerations of responsibility. Section 3 guides individuals who have a leadership role within the Association (Board member, Chair of a working group, Chair of a chapter, or taskforce). Commitment to ethical conduct is required of every MCAA member, and principles involving compliance with the Code are given in Section 4.

Each article (expressed in numbers) lays out norms that MCAA members must comply with. Below each article follows a description of guiding principles that aims to enable members to interpret the articles. When they refer to these descriptions, members must apply general criteria of reasonability and balance with regard to the general values at stake.

Section 1 – General ethical principles

A member of the MCAA must:

1.1 Contribute to society and to human well-being through the diffusion of positive research practices

This principle, which concerns the quality of life of all people, affirms an obligation of MCAA members, both individually and collectively, to use their skills for the benefit of society, its members, and the environment surrounding them, anytime they organise an action on behalf of the MCAA. An essential aim of MCAA members is to maximize the positive impact that research can have in society. Another aim is to minimize negative consequences of working in research including threats to health, safety, personal security, and privacy. When the interests of multiple groups conflict, the needs of those less advantaged should be given increased attention and priority unless this does not cause unreasonable issues or undermines the actions of the Association. However, members must always balance the different positions and, in case, be able to properly justify their decisions upon reasonable criteria.

MCAA members must consider whether the results of their efforts will respect diversity, will be used in socially responsible ways, will meet social needs, and will be broadly accessible. Members are free to decide on the topics they want to tackle with the MCAA, as long as they respect the procedures set by the executive committee concerning the use of the MCAA resources and name.

In addition to a safe social environment, human well-being requires a safe natural environment. Therefore, MCAA members should promote environmental sustainability both locally and globally to the extent reasonably allowed by their means and their Institutions.

1.2 Avoid harm

MCAA members must avoid intentional harm, i.e. they must consider the different ways in which their actions can be harmful for the Association and individual members. Examples of harm include but are not limited to unjustified physical or mental injury, unjustified destruction or disclosure of information, or unjustified damage to reputation, intellectual property and damages caused by inexcusable negligence.

It is worth considering that well-intended or mandatory actions may lead to harm. MCAA members must carefully think of the potential consequences of their actions. They have an obligation to mitigate those consequences as much as possible. When members have a dilemma that implies that their action will have harmful consequences for someone, they need to base their choice on the values defended by the association: among others respect, transparency, well-being. For instance, if member A must refuse member B an opportunity, then member A needs to be transparent in why the decision is such, communicate it respectfully, and indicate other opportunities to facilitate the involvement of member B in the association whenever possible.

To minimize the possibility of indirectly or unintentionally harming others, MCAA members should follow generally accepted best practices unless there is a compelling ethical reason to do otherwise.

A member has an additional duty to report to the ethics committee any evidence or severe suspicion of activities or behaviors that might result in harm (see Section 4). However, capricious or misguided reporting of risks can itself be harmful. Before reporting risks, a member should carefully assess relevant aspects of the situation. If there is the possibility, the member who aims to report harmful activities should ask in the first place whoever is performing these activities to interrupt them and to explain their reasons.

1.3 Act in good faith: be honest and trustworthy; act transparently as well as with solidarity

Honesty is an essential component of trustworthiness. A member should be able to communicate honestly on any risks or limitations of a project undertaken for the association. Transparent communication is expected within chapters and working groups, towards all members, and towards external stakeholders. Making deliberately false or misleading claims, fabricating or falsifying data, offering or accepting bribes, misappropriation of MCAA financial resources and other dishonest or unfair conduct are violations of the Code.

While MCAA is run by volunteers who can undertake tasks outside of their initial areas of expertise for the sake of their own personal development, members should be honest about their qualifications, and about any limitations in their competence and availability to complete a task. Members should be forthright about any circumstances that may lead to either actual or potential conflicts of interest or otherwise tend to undermine the independence of their judgment. Furthermore, commitments should be honored. Members must also act in solidarity with other MCAA members and Marie Curie fellows (who may not be members), in order to promote cooperation, support and mutual help.

MCAA members should not speak on behalf of the organization unless authorized to do so.

1.4 Be fair and take action not to discriminate.

The values of equality, tolerance, respect for others, and justice govern this principle. Fairness requires that even careful decision processes provide some avenue for redress of grievances.

MCAA members with leadership positions in working groups or chapters should foster fair participation of all people, including those of underrepresented groups. Prejudicial discrimination on the basis of age, color, disability, ethnicity, family status, gender identity, labor union membership, military status, nationality, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation, or any other inappropriate factor is an explicit violation of the Code. Harassment, including sexual harassment, bullying, and other abuses of power and authority, is a form of discrimination that, amongst other harms, limits fair access to the virtual and physical spaces where such harassment takes place.

Members should address any conflict within the association fairly, i.e. by allowing others to respond to any claim made towards them. Members should refrain from public disclosure of conflict, before a conflict resolution procedure has been concluded.

1.5 Respect the work required to produce new ideas, inventions, creative works, and computing artifacts.

Developing new ideas, inventions, creative works, and research artifacts creates value for society, and those who expend this effort should expect to gain value from their work. Members should therefore credit the creators of ideas, inventions, work, while acknowledging MCAA for its support at the same time.

Both custom and the law recognize that some exceptions to a creator's control of a work are necessary for the common good. Members should not unduly oppose reasonable uses of their intellectual works. Efforts to help others by contributing time and energy to projects that help society illustrate a positive aspect of this principle. Such efforts include free resources and work put into the public domain. Members should not claim private ownership of work that they or others have shared as public resources.

1.6 Respect privacy and data protection regulations and policies.

Members will comply with the European and national legislations on Privacy and Data Protection as well as with the policies and guidelines applicable to the activities they perform within the Association.

Members must avoid disclosing, communicating or disseminating internal information of the Association as well as members' private information unless specifically authorised or unless the information has been already disclosed publicly by a person or entity that has the right to do so. Personal information of members communicated via MSCA internal meetings or online/offline communication tools does not imply public disclosure. Members who aim to divulge information that involve private information should always inform those affected in advance and seek their consensus. In general, disclosure of information should be assessed adopting the general principles and the criteria of no-harm.

1.7 Honor confidentiality.

Members are often entrusted with confidential information. They should protect confidentiality except in cases where it is evidence of the violation of the applicable law and jurisdiction, of organizational regulations, or of the Code, or receive authorization to communicate or disseminate the information. In these cases, the nature or contents of that information should not be disclosed except to appropriate authorities. A member should consider thoughtfully whether such disclosures are consistent with the Code. In any case, members must always check under their responsibility that the information shared is not covered by any form of trade secrets, non-disclosure agreements or intellectual property and, in this case, they must seek in advance for the legitimate authorisation to disclose it.

2. PROFESSIONAL RESPONSIBILITIES.

MCAA members must ...

2.1 Strive to achieve high quality in both the processes and products of professional work and to return to the community the results of their actions, through accessible pieces of works and dissemination.

MCAA members should insist on and support high quality work from themselves and from colleagues. The dignity of members, collaborators, and anyone else affected either directly or indirectly by the work should be respected throughout the process. MCAA members participating in a project should communicate in a transparent manner with all those involved. MCAA members should be cognizant of any serious negative consequences affecting any stakeholder that may result from poor quality work and should resist inducements to neglect this responsibility.

2.2 Know and respect existing rules pertaining to professional work.

"Rules" here include local, regional, national, and international laws and regulations, as well as any policies, guidelines, protocols and procedures of the MCAA. Members must abide by these rules unless there is a compelling ethical justification to do otherwise. Rules that are judged unethical according to the general principles must be challenged throughout a precise and motivated claim forwarded in advance to the ethics committee. A rule may be unethical when it has an inadequate moral basis or causes recognizable harm. A member who decides to violate a rule because it is unethical, or for any other reason, must consider potential consequences and accept responsibility for that action.

In case of conflict between this Code and other rules that the member must follow, the member can ask the Ethic Committee for a formal interpretation to guide the behaviour. In case this would not be possible due to the circumstances or the need to act speedily, the member must be able to justify the choice made.

2.3 Act in support of others

MCAA members come from different academic and cultural backgrounds, and often undertake actions that go beyond the scope of their research expertise. Such actions participate in the professional development of each individual. In order to ensure that everyone can develop and to guarantee high and positive impact from MCAA members, it is necessary that members act in solidarity of each other and help each other to grow. For instance, members should give feedback to peers asking for it when they can contribute their expertise. Whenever they need support out of their field of expertise, members should seek and utilize peer and stakeholder review. Members solicited by others should do their best to give feedback when asked to. This is needed to ensure that the work done has as much impact as possible.

2.4 Communicate responsibly about research

MCAA members and researchers in general are in a position of trust, and therefore have a special responsibility to provide objective, credible evaluations and testimony to other organizations and the public. Any limitation to the work conducted within MCAA and any risk associated with a project conducted on behalf or in the scope of MCAA must be clearly communicated. Members are considered ambassadors of the Association's values and therefore must behave accordingly, and according to this code, when their actions or communications represent the MCAA to external audiences or interlocutors.

2.5 Perform work within the scope of the MCAA

MCAA members are expected to conduct work within the association that fits the purpose of the association. Engaging resources for projects must be done responsibly, which implies that the expected impact and feasibility of a project are carefully thought through. When external resources are needed or someone else's competencies are required, members should contact other MCAA members first.

2.6 Foster public awareness and understanding of research practices.

As appropriate to the context and one's abilities, members participate in communication with the public and other scientific communities. These communications with the public should be clear, respectful, and welcoming. Trust in science and need for policy in certain areas are topics that can be brought to the public. Acknowledgement of MCAA support is due when the association is supporting members through a dedicated action mentioned in these communications. Members should respectfully address inaccurate or misleading information related to research.

3. PRINCIPLES APPLYING ESPECIALLY TO PEOPLE RUNNING THE ASSOCIATION

A MCAA member with a leadership role (Board member, Working Group or Chapter chair) must ...

3.1 Ensure that the common good is the central concern during all the actions of the Association.

The common good should always be an explicit consideration when evaluating tasks and projects, at any step of their development. Projects are not undertaken to feed personal interests. Projects are undertaken to benefit society, or MCAA members, or Marie Curie Fellows.

3.2 Consider the well-being of all members.

Board members and other leaders within the MCAA must ensure that they enhance, not degrade, the quality of the work done with the association. They should consider the personal and professional development, psychological well-being, and human dignity of all members. This means giving fair chances to anyone to participate, in line with the abilities of each member.

3.3 Articulate, apply, and support policies and processes that reflect the principles of the Code.

Board members should enable the functioning of an independent Ethics committee. In addition, board members should encourage and reward compliance with the Code, and take appropriate action when the Code is violated. Designing or implementing processes that deliberately or negligently violate, or tend to enable the violation of, the Code's principles is ethically unacceptable.

3.4 Create opportunities for members of the organization to grow as professionals.

Leaders should ensure that developmental opportunities are available to MCAA members to help them improve their knowledge and professional skills, in the practice of ethics, and in their area of action within the association. These opportunities include the possibility to talk to fellows with the needed knowledge and skills. Members should not be unjustly discriminated against, and projects can be pursued by any member in a cooperative manner as long as the projects fit the aim, priorities, and feasibility criteria of the Association.

3.5 Use the funds of the association for the sole purpose they are allocated for and in respect of and to accomplish the purposes of the association as well as in compliance with the applicable law, in a transparent and accessible manner and avoiding any prejudice to the MCAA as well as undue personal benefits.

Leaders of the MCAA cannot use funds for their own personal motives. Funds must be used to support the activities of the association. Funds must be spent according to criteria of reasonability, proportion and justification. Should the MCAA employ a member or give a contract to a company in which a member is a stakeholder, this process should be transparent and fair and be disclosed in advance as a potential conflict of

interest. MCAA cannot employ a Full Board Member or give a contract to a company in which that Full Board Member is a stakeholder. Expenses and funds allocations must be published at the end of the year in a dedicated section of the Association website. Any other conflict of interest that may arise regarding the use of funds must be disclosed promptly according to the dedicated rules.

3.6 Be transparent in decisions affecting members' own research.

When deciding on granting special funds to members for Micro-Grants or other fundings, the designated evaluators must follow specific criteria of evaluation pre-designed and published in advance and justify their selection. Scores that reflect the criteria may be used and must be accompanied by motivations. The results and the connected motivations must be accessible to those members who applied.

4. COMPLIANCE WITH THE CODE.

A member must..

4.1 Uphold, promote, and respect the principles of the Code.

When the Code enters into force it binds all the current MCAA members and new members entering the association will be subject to the Code as well.

4.2 Consider asking for advice to the Ethics Committee when facing an ethical dilemma

Members who recognize breaches of the Code should take actions to resolve the ethical issues they recognize, including, when reasonable, expressing their concern to the person or persons thought to be violating the Code. They can bring their issue for guidance to the Ethics committee.

4.3 Be cognizant of the procedures triggered when submitting a dilemma or breach of conduct to the Ethics committee

Members can consult the Regulations of the Ethics Committee available on the MCAA website to know about the scope, composition, competencies, and means of the Ethics Committee.

4.4 Propose a motivated solution when asking the Ethics Committee to solve an issue regarding the interpretation of the Code provisions

Members who intend to bring up a dilemma, an issue, a question or however a case according to the principles and rules of the Code, must suggest which kind of solution they consider ethical according to the said principles and rules and justify their outcome. The Ethics Committee will consider the instance within the sole scope of the issue and the motivations as raised and proposed by the member. The Ethics Committee will therefore issue a guiding opinion which can completely or partially accept, reject, rectify or amend the proposed solution. Although the guiding opinion issued by the Ethics Committee is non-binding, the Committee represents the MCAA organ deputed to the interpretation of the Code and, therefore, the member who acts in contrast with a guiding opinion accepts the responsibility of his actions and the connected powers of the MCAA Board to take disciplinary actions.

4.5 Ask the Ethics Committee to give an opinion based on the Code concerning conflicts between members

MCAA Members or Bodies are entitled to ask the Ethics Committee to provide a guiding opinion on any conflict that may arise between members, or between members and bodies that affect the principles and rules

provided by the code. Members who ask the Committee to pronounce on these matters must provide all the necessary information and necessary evidence and specify which principles or rules have been violated and how the conflict should be solved according to the principles and rules of the Code. The Committee will issue a non-binding guiding opinion as per 4.4.

Acknowledgements – This Code has been compiled based on an analysis of other codes in the public domain and based on an analysis of the Status of the Association.

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