

SWCC ETHICS COMMITTEE ROLE, FUNCTION AND MEMBERSHIP

CONSTITUTIONAL MANDATE

Article 5.4.2 of the SWCC Constitution calls for the establishment of a permanent (ethics) committee to:

“... implement SWCC’s core mission of cultivating excellence in science writing and science journalism and to uphold the organization’s code of ethical conduct. This committee is open to all members, as well as outside parties with an interest in issues of science communication. This committee’s mandate features an open forum on all matters surrounding the landscape of science journalism and ethics, with a key responsibility for bringing matters to the attention of the Board of Directors for immediate action.”

ADVISORY ROLE OF THE COMMITTEE

The ethics committee acts in an open, advisory role as a resource to the board and the membership of the SWCC. To activate this resource, the board or any member may request that the committee respond to a question that relates to an ethical matter or to the association’s conduct in pursuit of its mission and goals. The committee’s role is to provide timely analysis and recommendations in response to the question, seeking additional information and expertise outside of the SWCC as required. While the committee should strive for consensus where possible, the result need not be unanimous and the committee may respond with a range of views and recommendations. The committee’s responses should reference the association’s statement of values as a guiding document and, where applicable, seek to establish and clarify general principles of conduct for the membership. The committee should be mindful of individual members’ privacy in the course of its work.

KNOWLEDGE GENERATION

In addition to responding to questions from the board and membership of the SWCC, the ethics committee can undertake research and respond to ethical questions that the committee deems important to the SWCC for its operations, and to strengthen its public role as an advocate of science literacy in Canada.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT ROLE OF THE COMMITTEE

In addition to its advisory role, the committee should seek to promote and support ethical practices among the association’s membership and across the profession through training and discussion.

REPORTING AND ACCESS

The committee should report on its work and findings on a regular basis to the board. Committee findings and recommendations should be available to all members and reviewed, presented at the

annual general meeting at the end of the committee's term and archived for future reference on behalf of the membership.

SELF-REVIEW

During each term, the ethics committee should review the association's guiding documents, including those that pertain to the ethics committee's composition and function. If the committee recommends changes to the documents those recommendations should be presented at the annual general meeting at the end of the committee's term.

COMPOSITION OF THE COMMITTEE

To best represent the range of experiences and expertise within the organization on matters related to (and not limited to) conflict of interest, transparency, independence, scientific integrity, sponsorship, ethical conduct with respect to clients and services and the association's public messaging, as well as to ensure broad access to the committee's deliberations, the committee should include:

- at least one board member (chair)
- at least one journalist/editor at a Canadian media organization
- at least one scientist/researcher at a Canadian academic institution
- at least one freelance/self-employed science writer
- at least one institutional communications specialist
- at least one member of the SWCC who is not a board member

The committee must include a minimum of four people but need not be limited to that number. Apart from where specified, committee members need not be SWCC members if representative expertise is not available within the organization during the committee's term.

TERM OF THE COMMITTEE

The board will select a chair of the committee at the beginning of each board term and the committee subsequently formed by the chair to function until the next general meeting.