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GPA Ethical Decision-Making Best Practices for Grant Professionals

This **Grant Professionals Association (GPA) Ethical Decision-Making Best Practices** document has been created for grant professionals to have a clear and distinct path to make ethical decisions that reduce the risk for ourselves, our organizations, and our clients. To understand ethics, it is first important that a grant professional differentiate ethics from morals.

Morals are the principles on which one's judgments of right and wrong are based. **Ethics** are principles of right conduct. The main difference is that morals are more abstract, subjective, and often personal or religion-based, while ethics are more practical, conceived as shared principles promoting fairness in social and business interactions.¹

This GPA document is based on the latest research, best practices, and evidence-based theories currently available pertaining to ethical decision-making. Identifying and evaluating an ethical dilemma is the most critical aspect of ethical decision-making. Understanding the ethical dilemma provides the framework and justification for the application of [best practice decision-making] (Barnett & Johnson, 2010; Carson, 2013; Remley & Herlihy, 2016). The identification and evaluation of an ethical dilemma draw from the application of the GPA Code of Ethics to a dilemma. Remember to consider your own organization's or personal framework for ethical decision-making, if one exists. If you do not have a decision-making plan, consider spending time on creating a plan that can be utilized for grant ethics. As Dwight Eisenhower said, "Plans are nothing, planning is everything."

I. IDENTIFY the Ethical Dilemma

Do you have all the relevant facts about this dilemma? Write down what is known, what is not known, what needs to be learned, and if you have enough information to make a decision. If you've gathered all the information, proceed to II - Evaluate. If not, do more research to gather the missing facts. Consider that ethical dilemmas often arise from competing needs. What needs are competing in this situation? Who are the individuals/groups with a stake in the decision? ... Is the decision going to be damaging or negatively impact someone or some group? What are the options for acting?²

¹ The ETHICS Model: Comprehensive, Ethical Decision Making; Thomson J. Ling and Jessica M. Hauck, 2016, <https://grammarist.com/usage/ethics-morals/>

² A Framework for Ethical Decision Making; Markkula Center for Applied Ethics at Santa Clara University. Primary contributors include Manuel Velasquez, Dennis Moberg, Michael J. Meyer, Thomas Shanks, Margaret R. McLean, David DeCosse, Claire André, Kirk O. Hanson, Irina Raicu, and Jonathan Kwan. It was last revised on November 5, 2021.



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Ask the appropriate questions of the involved stakeholders for the missing information. Once all the facts are known, ask questions such as:

- A. Does this dilemma violate any state, federal, or local regulations or laws?
- B. Does this dilemma violate the GPA Code of Ethics?
- C. Does this dilemma put the organization/client at risk in any way?

II. EVALUATE the options by asking the following questions²:

- Which option best respects the rights of all who have a stake? (The Rights Lens)
- Which option treats people fairly, giving them each what they are due? (The Justice Lens)
- Which option will produce the most good and do the least harm for as many stakeholders as possible? (The Utilitarian Lens)
- Which option best serves the community as a whole, not just some members? (The Common Good Lens)
- Which option leads me to act as the sort of person I want to be? (The Virtue Lens)
- Which option appropriately takes into account the relationships, concerns, and feelings of all stakeholders? (The Care Ethics Lens)

This step involves considering literature, regulations, and law that pertains to the dilemma and combining them with analysis from the other steps.¹

III. Think Ahead

After identifying an ethical dilemma, think ahead to the various outcomes of each possible course of action. This involves evaluating each option independently to determine all foreseeable repercussions, both positive and negative. By doing so and analyzing all repercussions, [the grant professional] can weigh the support or lack of support for each option.¹ Review the options and their consequences, in relation to your values (honesty, courage, good judgment, self-discipline, responsibility, respect for self and others)³

Consultation is recommended due to the sensitive nature of ethical dilemmas. Reach out to a peer, mentor or post a question to the peer community of grant professionals on GPAs' GrantZone with the possibility of posting anonymously, which can be found here:

<https://grantzone.grantprofessionals.org/home>

³ Six Steps of Health Decision Making, Mentoring for Success



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Ask yourself: “If someone came to me with this dilemma, what would I say?”

IV. Implement your Decision

Once you have completed due diligence for the resolution of the ethical dilemma, effectively communicate the ethical course of action. This decision should be in alignment with evidence gathered during all previous steps¹ and demonstrate that a decision-making process was utilized. Best practices recommend putting your action in writing in order to solidify your decision and have a record; this could be done with a quick email or notation in your grant files.

V. Measure your Outcome

Review the outcomes of your decision-making process; debrief with a peer, colleague, or mentor to assess the full impact of each step, not just the result.

What if you cannot resolve the ethical dilemma? Please refer to the [GPA website](#) for the **Inquiry Regarding the GPA Code of Ethics** process. Remember, as one of our GPA Members, Dave Tinker says, ***“Just because it is legal, doesn’t mean it is ethical”***



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GPA Ethical Decision-Making Best Practices				
IDENTIFY	EVALUATE	THINK AHEAD	IMPLEMENT DECISION	MEASURE OUTCOME
<p>A. Does this dilemma violate any state, federal, or local regulations or laws?</p> <p>B. Does this dilemma violate the GPA Code of Ethics?</p> <p>C. Does this dilemma put the organization/client at risk in any way?</p>	<p>A. Which option best respects the rights of all who have a stake? (The Rights Lens)</p> <p>B. Which option treats people fairly, giving them each what they are due? (The Justice Lens)</p> <p>C. Which option will produce the most good and do the least harm for as many stakeholders as possible? (The Utilitarian Lens)</p> <p>D. Which option best serves the community as a whole, not just some members? (The Common Good Lens)</p> <p>E. Which option leads me to act as the sort of person I want to be? (The Virtue Lens)</p> <p>F. Which option appropriately takes into account the relationships, concerns, and feelings of all stakeholders? (The Care Ethics Lens)</p>	<p>A. Evaluate each option independently to determine all foreseeable repercussions, both positive and negative.</p> <p>B. Analyze all repercussions to weigh the support or lack of support for each option.</p> <p>C. Review the options and their consequences, in relation to your values (honesty, courage, good judgment, self-discipline, responsibility, respect for self and others)</p>	<p>Effectively communicate the ethical course of action</p>	<p>Review the outcomes of your decision process; debrief with a peer, colleague, or mentor to assess the full impact of each step, not just the result.</p>
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No