

Texas Psychological Association Policies & Procedures Manual Excerpt

VI. Public Communication

TPA, the primary professional association for psychologists in Texas, advocates for psychology as a science, a profession, and a means of promoting human welfare, guided by high standards of professional ethics. Within its efforts to protect, promote, and defend the professional practice of psychology in Texas, TPA may from time to time be asked to respond to a variety of social and public interest issues that affect the well-being and mental health of Texans. TPA's response may be to (a) take a public position, (b) present empirically based information or education relevant to the issue, or (c) not respond.

The BOT recognizes that TPA members hold diverse opinions about various social issues, and that some issues are potentially controversial and divisive. The Board also recognizes that psychology may have valuable input to further the public discourse on such issues and to potentially enhance the wellbeing of Texans. The decision whether to take a public position on a potentially controversial public interest or social issue will be made by the BOT on a case-by-case basis and this decision may be completed through electronic vote. The resultant public position should be informed by careful analysis of the American Psychological Association Ethics Code and empirical, psychological knowledge.

The following categorization framework will guide TPA in determining prudent and professionally responsible means of addressing potentially controversial public interest or social issues:

CATEGORY I

If the issue clearly involves human rights, is substantially supported by empirical psychological research, and is relatively non-controversial, the BOT will respond to the issue by either taking a public position and/or presenting empirically based information/education relevant to the issue. The manner of response will be decided by TPA Board vote after a period for discussion/deliberation, with a simple majority deciding.

CATEGORY II

If the issue may involve human rights and may evoke more controversy (e.g., reproductive rights) and is still important to the practice of psychology in Texas, the BOT will vote whether or not to respond, with a simple majority deciding. The time frame for this vote will be determined on a case-by-case basis. If the decision is to respond, the Board will deliberate and vote by the same method as to whether to make a public statement or to simply provide empirically based information/education relevant to the issue. If the decision is to not respond, then the BOT will make no response at all. If the issue is considered a Category II issue, then the Board will decide, in a timely manner, which of the three responses under Category II to make.

CATEGORY III

If the BOT decides an issue is clearly unrelated to psychology, there will be no public response from the Board and no education or information will be provided.

EXEMPTION

In response to an event that is potentially highly distressing to the public (e.g., natural disaster, war, terrorism, violence, national crisis, etc.), the BOT may provide a position-neutral statement of concern and consolation with relevant information and resources to help the public.

PREPARATION, REVIEW, AND REVISION

Any TPA Member(s) may submit a draft of a public communication or a request to collaborate on a public communication. The TPA Member(s) may submit the request or draft to the executive director or any member of the BOT or the EC. Public communication drafts should include:

1. A brief description of the problem or issue.
2. A succinct but comprehensive summary of the relevant empirical basis, including peer-reviewed scientific references, for the statement.
3. The proposed language of the public communication itself.

The draft will be reviewed by the EC and may be referred to an appropriate subcommittee or task force for substantive review (e.g. the Science Committee, Social Justice Task Force), if indicated. Time sensitive Category I communications may be expedited via immediate EC review followed by a BOT vote. The BOT shall be responsible for deciding when and in what form such a public comment on policy should be made, and this decision may be completed through electronic vote.

The BOT is encouraged to consider the following questions when reviewing public communication drafts:

1. Does the need for a public position address definitional issues of established ethics or professional standards or guidelines? If so, the question is most appropriately addressed by APA, with possible endorsement by TPA.
2. Is there a substantial empirical knowledge base to support a position on the issue?
3. Does our current empirical knowledge base support a clear and meaningful contribution to the public discourse?
4. Does a public position promote the profession of psychology balanced with benefit to the public?
5. Does a public position conflict with positions of APA or with the APA ethical principles or code of conduct?
6. Does formulating a response require a disproportionate use of our time and resources?
7. Does providing psychological knowledge inform the public discourse without TPA taking a particular position on the issue, i.e., serve an educational function rather than an authoritative attempt to resolve the issue?
8. Could taking a public position in this matter have a detrimental effect on our work with the legislature?
9. Could taking a public position in this matter have a detrimental effect on psychologists', or a sub-set of psychologists', ability to practice psychology in Texas?
10. Would a response demonstrably support the science and practice of psychology and/or those served by the profession?
11. Would a response primarily support a political agenda that is tangential to the profession of psychology and psychological scientific research?
12. Would not responding have an inordinately detrimental effect on the public?
13. Does this issue affect Texas psychologists?

The BOT will exercise final authority regarding recommendations and subsequent action or non-action regarding an issue. If the BOT decides to respond to an issue in any way, the BOT will communicate this decision to the membership and to the Local Area Societies (LASs).

EXEMPTION

The Legislative Committee is exempted from this policy but will consider these same questions when making decisions about legislative bills.