



“Good Character” Requirements for CPA Members and Affiliates

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Note: The Ethics Corner article in the Winter 2015 issue of Psynopsis provided an overview of the updates to CPA's Rules and Procedures for Dealing with Reports and Complaints of Unethical Behaviour, but focused on procedures regarding complaints. The current article focuses on updates to the Rules and Procedures regarding “good character” requirements for CPA membership or affiliateship.

Public trust in a discipline is very important. In the Preamble of the *Canadian Code of Ethics for Psychologists*, it is stated that every discipline that has relatively autonomous control over its entry requirements, training, practices, and development of knowledge does so only within the context of a contract with society.

This social contract is based on attitudes of mutual respect and trust, with society granting support for the autonomy of a discipline in exchange for a commitment by the discipline to do everything it can to assure that its members act ethically in conducting the affairs of the discipline . . . (CPA, 2000)

One of the major ways each discipline has assured ethical behaviour, especially since the mid-20th Century, is by developing a code of ethics for its members, along with methods for (a) promoting the code's ethical principles and values, (b) developing methods for monitoring adherence, and (c) taking corrective action when needed. A second major way is by ensuring that only persons of “good character” enter or formally associate with the discipline and by developing practices and procedures related to assessing good character. Although good character may be seen by many as a somewhat old-fashioned concept, in the past two decades references to it and formal procedures for assessing it (beyond asking for personal references) have become increasingly common in bodies representing various disciplines, whether those bodies are regulatory or voluntary in nature.ⁱ ⁱⁱ This increase in attention to character reflects the belief that good character is indicative of the level of judgment and ethical sensitivity required to understand and uphold a discipline's ethical principles and values and, therefore, helps to protect the public and maintain trust.ⁱⁱⁱ

The Canadian Psychological Association is no exception. Although its 1990 *Rules and Procedures for Dealing with Ethical Complaints* briefly mentions the possibility of consultation of the Committee on Ethics when an applicant had “been judged guilty of previous ethical violations” or “suspected of providing false information,” no formal procedures were specified. The 2014 revision of the *Rules and Procedures*, however, contains specific formalized procedures for such situations, based on CPA practices that had evolved since 1990 as well as a review of the practices of similar organizations and the literature.

One of the most frequently used indicators of good character in psychology (as well as other disciplines) has been whether

an individual has been disciplined by a statutory tribunal or professional body, or convicted of a serious legal offence for which a pardon has not been granted. In the 2014 revision of CPA's *Rules and Procedures* (now called *Rules and Procedures for Dealing with Reports and Complaints of Unethical Behaviour*), the inclusion on the member/affiliate initial application form of questions related to such events at any time in the applicant's history has been made into a formal procedure, as well as their inclusion (but regarding only the previous year) on member/affiliate application forms for renewal (to be introduced in 2015). A “serious legal offence” is defined in the *Rules and Procedures* as one that typically involves an infraction of the Criminal Code of Canada or related statutes and has resulted in a peace bond, a fine of \$5000 or more, or any period of post-conviction probation or imprisonment.

If an applicant for initial or renewal of any type of membership or affiliateship states that he or she has been disciplined or convicted, it does not mean that he or she will automatically be denied membership or affiliateship. Rather, it sets a number of steps in motion. The application is forwarded to the Chair of the Committee on Ethics, who establishes a Review Subcommittee consisting of the Chair and a minimum of two other Committee members. It also usually will include contacting the applicant or other sources for further information.

Possible recommendations resulting from the review include granting the application, denying it, or granting it with conditions pending the completion of an existing or planned external adjudication or review process. In determining its recommendations, the current Review Subcommittee has identified several factors for consideration, including: (a) the seriousness of the behaviour(s); (b) the number of sanctions or convictions; (c) the time that has elapsed since the last sanction or conviction; (d) whether the terms of the sanction or sentence have been completed; (e) other efforts the individual has undertaken to ensure the behaviour does not re-occur; (f) the individual's openness with respect to the relevant information needed for the review; (g) any other factors the Subcommittee believes might help determine whether the individual currently has the level of personal judgment and ethical sensitivity needed to understand and uphold the values of the Association as reflected in the *Canadian Code of Ethics for Psychologists*.

Once the review process is complete, the recommendation is forwarded to CPA's Chief Executive Officer, who makes the final decision and ensures that the individual is informed of the decision in writing. Except as required or justified by law, all information related to the review is treated as confidential.

For more detail, a copy of the new *Rules and Procedures* can be downloaded from the “Ethics” page on the CPA website.

Invitation: Please feel free to send your comments about this article or any ideas you have regarding topics for future Ethics Corner articles to ethicscttee@cpa.ca.

For a complete list of references, please go to www.cpa.ca/psynopsis