

Code of Professional Practice for Library and Information Professionals

This Code applies the ethical principles to the different groups and interests to which CILIP members must relate. The Code also makes some additional points with regard to professional behaviour. The principles and values will differ in their relative importance according to context.

A: Personal responsibilities

People who work in the information profession have personal responsibilities which go beyond those immediately implied by their contract with their employers or clients. Members should therefore:

1. Strive to attain and continue to develop the highest personal standard of professional knowledge and competence.
2. Ensure they are competent in those branches of professional practice in which qualifications and/or experience entitle them to engage by keeping abreast of developments in their areas of expertise.
3. Claim expertise in areas of library and information work or in other disciplines only where their skills and knowledge are adequate.
4. Refrain from any behaviour in the course of their work which might bring the information profession into disrepute.

B: Responsibilities to information and its users

The behaviour of professionals who work with information should be guided by a regard for the interests and needs of information users. People working in the information profession also need to be conscious that they have responsibility for a growing heritage of information and data, irrespective of format. This includes works of the imagination as well as factual data. Members should therefore:

1. Ensure that information users are aware of the scope and remit of the service being provided.
2. Make the process of providing information, and the standards and procedures governing that process, as clear and open as possible.
3. Avoid inappropriate bias or value judgements in the provision of services.
4. Protect the confidentiality of all matters relating to information users,

including their enquiries, any services to be provided, and any aspects of the users' personal circumstances or business.

5. Carry out and use research involving users (e.g. surveys of needs) in a responsible manner, ensuring that best practice is followed as set out in law or in codes of conduct recommended by research organisations (e.g. universities) or professional bodies.

6. Deal fairly with the competing needs of information users, and resolve conflicting priorities with due regard for the urgency and importance of the matters being considered.

7. Deal promptly and fairly with any complaints from information users, and keep them informed about progress in the handling of their complaints.

8. Ensure that the information systems and services for which they are responsible are the most effective, within the resources available, in meeting the needs of users.

9. Ensure that the materials to which they provide access are those which are most appropriate to the needs of legitimate users of the service.

10. Defend the legitimate needs and interests of information users, while upholding the moral and legal rights of the creators and distributors of intellectual property.

11. Respect the integrity of information sources, and cite sources used, as appropriate.

12. Show an appropriate concern for the future information needs of society through the long term preservation and conservation of materials as required, as well as an understanding of proper records management.

C: Responsibilities to colleagues and the information community

The personal conduct of information professionals at work should promote the profession in the best possible manner at all times. Members should therefore:

1. Act in ways that promote the profession positively, both to their colleagues and to the public at large.

2. Afford respect and understanding to other colleagues, including those in other professions, and acknowledge their ideas, contributions and work, wherever and whenever appropriate.

3. Refer to colleagues in a professional manner and not discredit or criticise their work unreasonably or inappropriately.

4. When working in an independent capacity, conduct their business in a

professional manner that respects the legitimate rights and interests of others.

5. Encourage colleagues, especially those for whom they have a line-management responsibility, to maintain and enhance their professional knowledge and competence.
6. Ensure that any member of staff to whom a task is delegated has the knowledge and skills necessary to undertake that task effectively and efficiently.
7. Share, where possible, results of research and development projects they have been involved in to help encourage best practice across the profession and enable colleagues to improve the services they provide.
8. Refrain from ascribing views to, or speaking on behalf of, CILIP, unless specifically authorised to do so.
9. Report significant breaches of this Code to the appropriate authorities.¹

D: Responsibilities to society

One of the distinguishing features of professions is that their knowledge and skills are at the service of society at large, and do not simply serve the interests of the immediate customer. Members should therefore:

1. Consider the public good, both in general and as it refers to particular vulnerable groups, as well as the immediate claims arising from their employment and their professional duties.
2. Promote equitable access for all members of society to public domain information of all kinds and in all formats.
3. Promote the necessary skills and knowledge amongst users to become effective independent learners and researchers.
4. Strive to achieve an appropriate balance within the law between demands from information users, the need to respect confidentiality, the terms of their employment, the public good and the responsibilities outlined in this Code.
5. Encourage and promote wider knowledge and acceptance of, and wider compliance with, this Code, both among colleagues in the information professions and more widely among those whom we serve.

E: Responsibilities as employees

Members who are employed have duties that go beyond the immediate terms of their employment contract. On occasion these may conflict with the immediate demands of their employer but be in the broader interest of the public and possibly the employer themselves.² Members should therefore:

1. Develop a knowledge and understanding of the organisation in which they work and use their skills and expertise to promote the legitimate aims and objectives of their employer.
2. Avoid engaging in unethical practices during their work and bring to the attention of their employer any concerns they may have concerning the ethics or legality of specific decisions, actions or behaviour at work.

CILIP, 2004, amended 2012.

¹ The appropriate authority will vary depending on the context of the case. It may be CILIP, the employer, a regulatory body or an officer managing the 'whistle-blowing' procedure or some other body. It is not possible to be prescriptive.

² It is recognised that sometimes Members, acting as a representative of employers, have to make decisions that may impact adversely on levels of service or the employment of staff. This is not in itself unethical behaviour but there might be circumstances in which it could be – the lawfulness of the action or the way it is managed, for instance.