

# Conflict Resolution in SDSS

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The fostering of an inclusive environment takes a lot of work. It starts with small, everyday actions of courtesy and respect to establish trust so participants in our community feel safe in the spaces that we share. Uncivil actions can cause harm and confusion that eat away at the trust required for an inclusive space.

Collaborating is not always easy. This document was generated when our collaboration was working together during a global pandemic, that made collaboration even more challenging. It is during such difficult times that it is most important that we follow the guidelines from the [COINS Best Practices](#): agency, sensibility, intelligence, personal space, history, and trust.

## SDSS Organizational Structures

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SDSS has formal structures within the Collaboration for addressing concerns:

- **Ombuds** -- these are individuals who represent the general interest of the collaboration and are, often, the first-line resource when a situation develops. As a neutral third party, the Ombuds do not advocate for the project or for either party in a dispute. When a request for services is received, the Ombuds will work with each party to identify appropriate alternatives that address the conflict and to achieve a mutually satisfactory resolution.
- **Code of Conduct** in [SDSS-IV](#) and [SDSS-V](#) -- the formal document that describes expected conduct, defines a Committee to evaluate complaints, defines specific procedures through which offenses are investigated. The Code of Conduct Committee is the only body that can recommend sanctions to the Advisory Council.
- **Collaboration Councils** in [SDSS-IV](#) and [SDSS-V](#) -- a committee composed of representatives from each institution with three or more participating faculty and one At-Large Member for institutions with less than three members; this structure creates necessary local access point for issues relating to the collaboration's data sharing and publication policies.
- **Management Committees** in [SDSS-IV](#) and [SDSS-V](#) -- a group of all major survey component and operations leads. Members of this group are also available to discuss situations that arise in collaboration work.
- **The Committee on INclusiveness in SDSS** -- a committee that acts to monitor climate, make recommendations to leadership, and provide practical advice for the collaboration.

Each of these groups take on a specific role within the collaboration: the **Ombuds** connect directly with individuals and situations, the **Code of Conduct Committee** evaluates and decides upon reported violations of the Code of Conduct, the **Collaboration Council** ensures there are points of contact, the **Management Committee** connects leadership from all stages of operations and project work, and **COINS** tries to evaluate the overall survey climate, make recommendations, and provide broader guidance and resources. These groups complement each other in how they address conflict and promote broad inclusiveness across our multi-institutional collaboration. Within an institution, the local human resource department, or equivalent administrative group, is also often the appropriate resource for many institution-level matters.

COINS wants to reinforce that these resources are for all collaboration members: scientists, engineers, and staff, and for all career stages: students, term-employees, and permanent staff or faculty.

- If you have any concerns, no matter how small, you can always reach out to the Ombuds: [ombuds@sdss.org](mailto:ombuds@sdss.org)
- If you want to report behavior that you believe violates the expectations in the [Code of Conduct](#), please submit a complaint following the specific instructions in the [Code of Conduct](#).
- Members of the Management Council and the Collaboration Council are also committed to supporting collaboration members.
- If you want to talk about how we can make a more inclusive environment, please reach out to COINS ([coins@sdss.org](mailto:coins@sdss.org)) or any COINS member you feel comfortable talking with. The COINS email list is closed and is only visible to COINS members.

We encourage all supervisors to reach out to their teams and make sure these pathways for raising, addressing, and preventing concerns are clear.

## Best Practices

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Frequently, we only think about inclusiveness when there is something wrong, but regularly considering the climate of our respective spaces is a good practice. Here are some day-to-day actions for building and restoring an inclusive environment that can happen both locally, in our departments or research groups, and within the collaboration committees, working groups, and other structures:

- **Recognize:** that we, ourselves, are not the only judge of our behavior. The perceptions of that behavior by others are important. Intention does not override impact. We also need to be cognizant of our own limits and breaking points, as well as those of the people around us.
- **Speak Up:** If you feel comfortable speaking up in an exchange that feels uncomfortable, do so. We advise to address the situation or the position being taken, rather than a person to avoid direct confrontation. If you don't feel comfortable, try to take a moment to examine why.
- **Reach Out:** When you witness an exchange that makes you uncomfortable, reach out to the person involved to tell them you noticed something amiss. This can be as simple as a "hey, I don't think that was okay" either in person or digitally. Such simple acts carry much more weight than it may seem when someone really needs the reinforcement.
- **Make Space:** It can be hard for individuals to speak out, so we need to intentionally make space for them. Provide a few minutes in meetings to just check-in with your team. Pay attention to who speaks up naturally and perhaps encourage them to also intentionally make space for others to speak.
- **Be Aware of Power Dynamics:** There are many reasons why someone will choose to not report behavior to the structures we have in place. It can often have to do with our positions relative to each other in different situations. Power imbalances shift in different situations and, thus, are not always as clear-cut as relative leadership position, age, or career stage. It is important to examine situations in these lights.
- **Openness and Honesty:** A powerful means to demonstrate respect is to act with openness and honesty. Showing respect builds trust. Trust is a key element of an inclusive space.

In presenting the results of [American Physical Society \(APS\) climate survey](#), Monica Plisch, Director of Education and Diversity at APS, is quoted: **Perception does matter. Negative perceptions can affect work — using brain bandwidth to worry can impact job-creativity and impede innovation.**

Being proactive in making an inclusive climate is a vital component of our working environments.

## Resources (all links go to public pages):

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- Ombuds email (-IV and -V): [ombuds@sdss.org](mailto:ombuds@sdss.org)
- COINS email: [coins@sdss.org](mailto:coins@sdss.org)
- Collaboration Council Public Webpage: includes list of Collaboration Council members for [SDSS-IV](#) and [SDSS-V](#).
- Management Committee: includes list of leadership positions as well as members of the MC for [SDSS-IV](#) and [SDSS-V](#)
- [COINS Public Webpage](#): Summary of COINS activities in SDSS-IV and a compiled set of documents, guidelines, and resources.
- Code of Conduct for [SDSS-IV](#) and [SDSS-V](#): Defines the expected behavior of collaboration members and the process through which violations are addressed.
- [COINS Best Practices](#): Provides more practical guidance for interactions within SDSS.
- [COINS Telecon Recommendations](#): Practical advice for having inclusive teleconferencing
- Publication Policy in [SDSS-IV](#) and [SDSS-V](#): Formal rules regarding publications in SDSS.
- [COINS Community Resource Repository](#): Open overleaf document started in June 2020 with resources for many axes of inclusiveness.
- [APS Climate Survey](#): Short article discussing the results of the American Physical Society Climate Survey as part of the larger STEM Inclusion Study.