

## **Committee Guidelines – Handling Potential Ethical Issues During Selection Process**

### **Purpose**

The Geological Society of America (GSA) has several committees that make recommendations to Council on which candidates should be elected to leadership positions (as officers, councilors, or committee members) or granted honors and awards. The purpose of these guidelines is to help committee members understand how to handle potential ethical issues that may arise in the course of their work.

### **Applicability**

These guidelines apply to the following GSA committees: Membership & Fellowship Committee, Nominations Committee, GSA Foundation Nominating Committee, and all individual awards committees that recommend candidates for particular awards.

### **Guidelines**

GSA is committed to using a fair and consistent process to select qualified candidates for leadership positions, honors, and awards. The individuals we select for these roles represent the best of our profession, and GSA expects them to meet commonly held standards of professional ethics and scientific integrity, including GSA's [Code of Ethics & Professional Conduct](#) and related policies, including the [Policy & Procedures for Handling Potential Ethical Violations](#).

Committee members who vet candidates for leadership positions, honors, and awards play a critical role in upholding GSA's high ethical standards, while making sure the selection process is fair to all affected parties. The following sections explain:

- A. ***GSA's Policy & Procedures for Handling Potential Ethical Violations;***
- B. ***Guidelines for Handling Ethics Issues During Committee Work & Deliberations;***

#### **A. GSA's Policy & Procedures for Handling Potential Ethical Violations**

GSA takes alleged ethical violations seriously and is committed to investigating them as promptly, thoroughly, and fairly as possible. When violations are found, the Society is committed to taking appropriate corrective action.

To uphold these commitments, in May 2019, Council adopted the **Policy & Procedures for Handling Potential Ethical Violations (the "Policy")** as the only rules for processing possible violations of the Code of Ethics. As stated in the Policy, "[t]his Policy is designed to encourage all Members' compliance with the GSA Code of Ethics. In addition to protecting the interests of GSA, the GSA Code of Ethics and this Policy are "designed to protect Members through the use of reasonable due process procedures against patently false, malicious, or groundless accusations."

As explained below, the Policy may come into play when committees are evaluating candidates for leadership positions, honors, and awards. Therefore, we have set forth the following guidelines to assist committee members.

## B. Guidelines – Handling Ethics Issues During Committee Work & Deliberations

Each committee involved in vetting candidates for leadership positions, honors, and awards should limit its discussion to matters relating to the legitimate criteria GSA has established for such roles.

1. Sometimes committee members may have reason to believe that a candidate has engaged in ethical misconduct as a result of an internet search, a rumor, or information spread “through the grapevine.” It is not appropriate to share or discuss this type of information during the committee’s work and deliberations.
2. Instead, all good faith ethics concerns about a candidate should be reported to GSA’s Ethics & Compliance Office to determine whether to file a [Complaint](#).
3. We recommend that committees follow these guidelines upon learning of a potential ethics violation in the course of their work or deliberations:
  - a. If a committee member has a good faith reason to believe that a candidate has engaged in ethical misconduct or may be under investigation for such behavior, the committee member should promptly notify the committee chair;
  - b. Once notified, the committee chair should immediately notify GSA’s Ethics & Compliance Office at [ethics@geosociety.com](mailto:ethics@geosociety.com). This notice will enable GSA to determine whether to file a Complaint pursuant to the Policy;
  - c. If a Complaint is filed, GSA’s Ethics Committee may decide that the committee should temporarily suspend its consideration of the candidate pending the outcome of an investigation. In such a case, GSA’s Executive Director will
    - Ensure that the committee is notified as soon as possible with a directive to stop its consideration of the candidate in question.
    - Notify the applicable Director Advisor or Staff Liaison for administrative support and guidance on communicating with committee members and nominators about the candidate’s status. (Such communications will balance the need to share pertinent information on a need-to-know basis while safeguarding the nominee’s interest in confidentiality.)
  - d. If GSA later finds insufficient evidence to support a finding that a violation has occurred, the Society strongly encourages affected committees to resume their consideration of the nominee as soon as practicable. Committees have the discretion to carry over their consideration of such candidates to the following year’s review cycle.

**Who to Contact**

Please contact Nan Stout, Ethics & Compliance Officer, with any questions about this policy. She can be reached at [nstout@geosociety.org](mailto:nstout@geosociety.org) and 303-357-1012.