


ETHICAL STANDARDS GUIDELINE: CODE OF ETHICS & INTEGRITY IN PUBLIC RELATIONS

	SUMMARY ETHICAL STANDARDS GUIDELINE CODE OF ETHICS & INTEGRITY IN PUBLIC RELATIONS	
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CODE OF ETHICS AND INTEGRITY IN PUBLIC RELATIONS

A. INTRODUCTION

1. ABOUT PRCA MALAYSIA

The Public Relations and Communications Association of Malaysia (PRCA Malaysia), established in 1999, is the leading independent, non-profit organization representing nearly 500 PR and communications professionals nationwide. Its diverse membership unites in-house practitioners, consultants, and independent experts, fostering industry cohesion.

As digital communications and social media redefine PR's scope, PRCA Malaysia champions innovation, professionalism, and ethical excellence. Flagship initiatives like the Malaysia PR Awards (MPRA) and Malaysia PR Summit (MPRS) celebrate achievements and cultivate future talent.

The recently launched Rules of Ethics and Integrity in Public Relations reinforce PRCA Malaysia's commitment to transparency and accountability, offering a framework for ethical practice.

By advancing standards and nurturing a new generation of professionals, PRCA Malaysia positions itself as the trusted voice of PR, driving the industry forward with purpose, credibility, and excellence.

2. IMPORTANCE OF ETHICS AND PRCA MALAYSIA'S ROLE

Ethics are fundamental to public relations, ensuring trust, credibility, and accountability. PR professionals shape public perceptions and influence decisions, making ethical practice a moral imperative. Guided by independence, respect, accountability, and truth, every communication and relationship must reflect honesty and integrity. Providing accurate, balanced information empowers the public to make informed decisions and fosters transparency, trust, and credibility.

PRCA Malaysia champions professionalism and ethical standards in PR. Its Code of Ethics & Integrity (CCE&I) offers a robust framework for navigating ethical dilemmas, drawing from real-world examples to guide decision-making. The CCE&I emphasizes rigorous accountability, urging members to consistently apply their expertise within ethical boundaries while setting an example for the industry.

Ethical PR demands loyalty to clients, companies, and the public, balancing these responsibilities with diligence and critical thinking. Professionals must

communicate accurate, well-rounded perspectives to maintain public trust, reinforcing their credibility and integrity.

By embracing the CCE&I, PRCA Malaysia ensures its members uphold the dignity of the profession. Ethical storytelling and responsible practices are essential for sustaining trust and excellence, setting benchmarks for PR locally and globally. Ethics are not just ideals but the foundation for navigating today's complex communication landscape.

B. OBJECTIVES OF THE CODE OF CONDUCT: ETHICS & INTEGRITY

The Code of Conduct: Ethics & Integrity (CCE&I) by PRCA Malaysia sets ethical standards and fosters professionalism in Malaysia's public relations industry. More than rules, it serves as a proactive guide to navigate challenges, uphold integrity, and build trust, advancing the profession. Its core objectives are:

- 1. Establishing Standards for Ethical Behaviour:** The CCE&I provides actionable guidelines for members, ensuring alignment with Malaysia's Constitution, relevant laws, and cultural values. It fosters consistency in ethical decision-making and professional conduct.
- 2. Promoting Trust and Credibility:** Trust underpins public relations. The Code reinforces transparency and integrity, preventing irregularities and maintaining trust with stakeholders, enhancing the profession's credibility.
- 3. Fostering Accountability and Responsibility:** With clear responsibilities and control measures, the Code ensures accountability. Members are encouraged to implement risk management, confidential reporting, and ethical resolution frameworks.
- 4. Elevating the Public Relations Profession:** By aligning with global best practices while respecting local values, the CCE&I elevates PR's reputation as a vital contributor to Malaysia's socio-economic growth.

This framework cements PRCA Malaysia's commitment to ethical excellence and professional integrity.

C. THE CODE OF CONDUCT: ETHICS AND INTEGRITY

PRCA Malaysia is committed to upholding the highest standards of ethics and integrity among its members. This Code of Conduct establishes the principles guiding PRCA members' interactions with fellow members and other public relations practitioners. It aims to foster professionalism, mutual respect, and collaborative relationships, ensuring a robust and ethical PR industry. By adhering to these guidelines, PRCA members contribute to the industry's

credibility, safeguard the public interest, and uphold the values of transparency, accountability, and respect. These standards ensure a harmonious professional environment, promoting and advancing the PR industry.

I. PART 1: GENERAL CODES

1. FREE FLOW OF INFORMATION

The free flow of accurate, truthful information principle ensures that communication serves the public interest, fosters trust, and facilitates informed decision-making. Among members of PRCA and fellow PR practitioners, maintaining transparent and honest information exchange strengthens professional integrity, promotes collaboration, and safeguards the credibility of the industry.

Guidelines:

- i. ***Fairness and Honesty:*** Deal fairly and honestly with fellow members, clients or employers / employees past or present and with the general public.
- ii. ***Promote Truthful Communication:*** Ensure all information shared with fellow members and practitioners is honest, accurate, and verifiable.
- iii. ***Correct Inaccuracies:*** Immediately rectify any incorrect or misleading information for which they are responsible.
- iv. ***Respect Professional Boundaries:*** Refrain from sharing confidential or proprietary information without prior consent.
- v. ***Practice Responsible Gifting:*** When providing or receiving gifts, ensure they are nominal, legal, infrequent, and do not compromise impartiality or the accuracy of information.
- vi. ***Foster Collaboration:*** Share information in a way that supports collective professional growth and respects the contributions of peers.
- vii. ***Avoid Misinformation:*** Abstain from disseminating rumours, unverified claims, or malicious content that could harm reputations or the profession.
- viii. ***Accountability:*** Practitioners should take responsibility for their communication to uphold trust.

2. DISCLOSURE OF INFORMATION

The Disclosure of Information code underscores the importance of transparency and truthfulness in professional communications, particularly within the democratic fabric of society. This code covers informed decision-making, cultivates public trust, and upholds the integrity of the PR profession, ensuring that practitioners act as ethical stewards of information

Guidelines:

- i. **Truthfulness and Accuracy:** Ensure all communications are truthful, factual, accurate, and free of distortion.
- ii. **Correction of Errors:** Promptly rectify any misleading or erroneous communication they have issued. Take reasonable steps to correct inaccurate information disseminated through websites, media kits, or third parties.
- iii. **Fact Verification:** Investigate the factuality and accuracy of information released on behalf of clients or represented parties.
- iv. **Financial Disclosure:** Transparently declare any financial interest, such as stock ownership, in a client's company.
- v. **Deceptive Practices:** Refrain from deceptive or misleading practices in professional activities.
- vi. **Public Interest:** Ensure all professional activities align with the public interest and ethical standards.
- vii. **Fairness and Honesty:** A member shall at all times deal fairly and honestly with fellow members, clients or employers / employees past or present and with the general public.

3. COMPETITION

Ethical competition is vital for maintaining professionalism, fostering innovation, and upholding the reputation of the PR industry, ensuring that members conduct themselves with integrity, respect, and fairness.

Guidelines:

- i. **Fair Hiring Practices:** Respect competitors by avoiding unethical recruitment practices such as poaching or offering false incentives to attract their talent.
- ii. **Free and Open Competition:** Encourage a vibrant marketplace by respecting free and open competition
- iii. **Respect for Intellectual Property:** Respect competitors' intellectual property and refrain from unauthorised use. Acknowledge and protect proprietary rights, ensuring no unauthorised use of a competitor's creative work, ideas, or strategies.
- iv. **Avoid Malicious Behaviour:** Refrain from spreading unfounded rumours, making defamatory statements, or engaging in unethical practices intended to harm the reputation or business of competitors.
- v. **Transparent Proposals:** Compete fairly by offering transparent, honest, and value-driven proposals that highlight quality service over underhanded tactics.

4. MUTUAL RESPECT AND COLLABORATION

Upholding mutual respect and fostering collaboration between PRCA members and practitioners strengthen the profession's integrity and

enhance its collective success. This code ensures a supportive industry culture that values diverse perspectives, fair treatment, and cooperation.

Guidelines:

- i. Respect Diverse Perspectives:** Communicate courteously, avoiding abusive language or condescending behaviour. Encourage open dialogue and acknowledge differing views without resorting to dismissive or confrontational behaviour. Value inclusivity in thought and approach.
- ii. Foster Collaboration:** Proactively engage in partnerships and share knowledge or insights to advance the industry collectively. Build relationships rooted in mutual benefit and trust.
- iii. Fair Acknowledgment:** Credit the contributions of fellow practitioners, particularly in joint projects or collaborative initiatives. Avoid claiming undue credit or failing to recognise the efforts of others.
- iv. Maintain Professional Boundaries:** Respect professional boundaries and the intellectual contributions of peers. Engage with peers professionally, refraining from overstepping boundaries or exploiting relationships for personal gain.
- v. Address Disagreements Constructively:** refraining from personal attacks or unethical tactics.
- vi. Encourage Industry Advancement:** Support the professional development of peers by sharing expertise and advocating for ethical practices that benefit the PR community as a whole.

5. SAFEGUARDING CONFIDENTIALITY AND TRUST

The Safeguarding Confidentiality and Trust code highlights the critical role of protecting sensitive client, organisational, and stakeholder information in public relations, safeguarding professional integrity.

Guidelines:

- i. Confidentiality:** Do not disclose confidential information unless legally mandated or authorised. Protect current, former, and prospective clients' and employees' confidences and privacy rights.
- ii. Transparency:** Clarify confidentiality expectations in contracts and collaborations.
- iii. Integrity:** Avoid using privileged information for personal or competitive gain.
- iv. Appropriate Action:** If a member discovers that confidential information is being divulged by an employee of a client company or organisation, notify take the appropriate action, including notifying an appropriate authority immediately.

6. ADVOCACY AND REPRESENTATION

This code serves to guide PR professionals in fulfilling their roles as ethical advocates, trusted advisors, and responsible stewards of public trust. By adhering to these principles, practitioners ensure that their efforts contribute positively to the reputation and integrity of the profession.

Guidelines:

- i. **Ethical Representation:** Advocate for clients with honesty and accuracy, avoiding misleading or manipulative tactics. Disclose affiliations, sponsorships, or conflicts of interest that may influence advocacy efforts.
- ii. **Respect for Industry Standards:** Uphold PRCA's values by maintaining transparency and promoting ethical practices during advocacy campaigns. Avoid representing clients or causes that conflict with PRCA's Code of Ethics and the public interest.
- iii. **Balance Interests:** Represent client objectives effectively without compromising the broader interests of society or the PR industry. Prioritise responsible messaging that aligns with sustainability, diversity, equity, and inclusivity goals.
- iv. **Accountability:** Take responsibility for the impact of advocacy efforts, ensuring that communication aligns with facts and ethical principles. Regularly review advocacy strategies to uphold integrity and avoid unintended harm.

7. HONESTY, FAIRNESS, AND TRANSPARENCY

By ensuring Honesty, Fairness, and Transparency, truthful communication, equitable practices, and openness in all dealings, this code fosters credibility, strengthens professional relationships, and upholds the integrity of the PR industry.

Guidelines:

- i. **Truthfulness and Accuracy:** Provide truthful, factual, accurate, and verifiable information in all professional communications. Ensure all communications, whether verbal, written, or digital, present facts accurately and are not designed to mislead or manipulate.
- ii. **Misleading Claims:** Avoid exaggeration, misrepresentation, or omitting or withholding pertinent information or material facts that could mislead stakeholders. Avoid sensationalism or misrepresentation in promoting clients or campaigns.
- iii. **Fair Treatment:** Treat all practitioners fairly, respecting differences in perspectives and expertise.
- iv. **Fair Practices:** Ensure fair practices when competing for clients or opportunities.

- v. **Fair Competition:** Respect ethical boundaries when competing for clients, avoiding unethical tactics such as spreading false information about competitors. Refrain from practices that exploit or undermine fellow practitioners.
- vi. **Transparency:** Clearly disclose any affiliations, sponsorships, or conflicts of interest when representing clients or projects. Share pertinent information openly with clients, colleagues, and stakeholders unless restricted by confidentiality agreements.
- vii. **Respect for Diversity:** Treat all practitioners with fairness and respect, valuing diverse perspectives, expertise, and contributions.
- viii. **Accountability:** Take ownership of professional actions and admit to any errors promptly to maintain trust and credibility.

8. MISREPRESENTATION AND FALSE CLAIMS

The Misrepresentation and False Claims code underscores the importance of honesty, integrity, and transparency in public relations practices.

Guidelines

- i. **Truthful Representation of Capabilities:** Clearly define areas of expertise based on actual experience and avoid claiming proficiency in areas where there is little or no expertise.
- ii. **Avoid Guarantees:** Refrain from guaranteeing specific results, such as guaranteed media coverage or predefined audience engagement, as outcomes depend on multiple variables outside the practitioner's control.
- iii. **Substantiated Expertise:** Support any claims of expertise with verifiable credentials, relevant case studies, or previous work experience.
- iv. **Realistic Commitments:** Set realistic expectations with clients regarding timelines, deliverables, and potential outcomes. Avoid overstating capabilities to secure contracts.
- v. **Transparent Communication:** Disclose any limitations in delivering certain services upfront and avoid exaggeration in pitches or proposals.
- vi. **Avoid Misleading Marketing:** Ensure that all promotional material, including websites and presentations, accurately reflect the organisation's capabilities.
- vii. **Professional References:** Provide truthful references and avoid manipulating testimonials or case studies to mislead prospective clients.
- viii. **Ongoing Review:** Regularly evaluate marketing materials and communication to ensure they accurately represent the current scope of expertise and offerings.

9. CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The Conflicts of Interest code is a cornerstone of professional integrity. By proactively addressing conflicts, practitioners safeguard the credibility of their work and the reputation of the public relations profession.

Guidelines

PRCA members shall:

- i. **Prioritise Client Interests:** Always act in the client or employer's best interest, setting aside personal gains.
- ii. **Avoid Compromising Situations:** Steer clear of activities that could impair professional judgment or create even the appearance of a conflict.
- iii. **Confidentiality Assurance:** Protect sensitive client information from being shared with competitors or other conflicting parties.
- iv. **Transparent Disclosure:** Inform all relevant parties immediately about any existing or potential conflicts of interest.
- v. **Encourage Resolution:** Enable clients or employers to evaluate and address potential conflicts in an informed manner.

10. MEASUREMENT AND EVALUATION OF PR EFFECTIVENESS

Grounded in the Barcelona Principles, this code establishes a framework for transparent, consistent, and meaningful evaluation, fostering credibility, accountability, and trust within the PR industry.

Guidelines

- i. **Set Measurable Goals:** Define clear, measurable objectives for all PR campaigns, aligning them with broader organisational outcomes.
- ii. **Focus on Outcomes, Not Outputs:** Evaluate campaigns based on changes in awareness, attitudes, behaviours, or organisational performance rather than superficial metrics like media mentions.
- iii. **Employ Mixed Methods:** Use both qualitative (e.g., sentiment analysis, stakeholder feedback) and quantitative (e.g., engagement rates, conversions) approaches for comprehensive measurement.
- iv. **Reject AVEs:** Avoid using Advertising Value Equivalents as a metric, as they fail to reflect the true value of PR.
- v. **Integrate Social Media:** Measure social media metrics like engagement and sentiment alongside traditional media, ensuring consistency across platforms.
- vi. **Ensure Transparency:** Document methodologies, data sources, and findings to ensure transparency and replicability.
- vii. **Evaluate ESG and Ethical Practices:** Incorporate sustainability and ethical considerations into evaluation criteria, aligning with organisational values.

- viii. **Regular Reviews:** Continuously assess and refine measurement frameworks to stay relevant and effective.

11. ENHANCING THE PROFESSION

The Enhancing the Profession code underlines the responsibility of PRCA members to uphold and advance the integrity, trust, and credibility of public relations.

Guidelines

- i. Act with integrity, competence, diligence, and respect in all professional interactions.
- ii. Place professional integrity and client interests, above personal gain.
- iii. Ensure content crafted is original and free of plagiarism.
- iv. Stay informed and pursue continuous professional development.
- v. Encourage ethical practices among colleagues and subordinates.
- vi. Refuse to represent clients demanding unethical actions.
- vii. Define achievable outcomes for PR activities, ensuring transparency with clients.
- viii. Report unethical and illegal practices to appropriate authorities.

II. PART 2: THE MEDIA AND MEDIA RELATIONS

Ethical media relations build trust, uphold professional integrity, and ensure that accurate and balanced information reaches the public. These standards are essential for fostering collaborative, transparent, and respectful relationships between PR practitioners and media professionals, safeguarding the credibility of the profession and the organisations represented.

1. TRANSPARENCY IN MEDIA RELATIONS

Building trust between practitioners and media professionals ensures the accurate dissemination of information to the public. Transparent dealings foster credibility, protect professional integrity, and enhance reputation.

Guidelines

- i. Disclose all relevant affiliations, sponsorships, or potential conflicts of interest when interacting with media professionals.
- ii. Provide accurate, factual, and verifiable information in all communications.
- iii. Avoid exaggeration, misrepresentation, or withholding material facts.
- iv. Clarify embargoed or confidential information with media representatives before disclosure.
- v. Maintain openness by responding promptly and truthfully to media queries, ensuring no delays compromise credibility.

- vi. Respect journalists' deadlines by providing timely responses and resources.
- vii. Avoid offering gifts, incentives, or favours that might influence impartial reporting.
- viii. Share regular updates with media contacts to build rapport and trust.
- ix. Clearly distinguish between fact and opinion in all communication.
- x. Use plain and accessible language to ensure clarity in all press releases and statements.

2. RESPECT FOR MEDIA FREEDOM

By upholding journalistic integrity and freedom of expression, PR practitioners foster trust, transparency, and mutual respect, ensuring that the public receives unbiased, factual information.

Guidelines

- i. **Maintain Editorial Independence:** Do not attempt to influence media professionals to compromise their editorial judgment and respect the editorial policies and deadlines of media outlets.
- ii. **Transparency in Communication:** Clearly disclose the purpose of providing information, including sponsorships or affiliations and label advertorials or sponsored content explicitly as such to maintain clarity.
- iii. **Professional Integrity:** Avoid confrontational behaviour or undue criticism of media professionals, even in the event of perceived negative coverage and offer constructive feedback respectfully when discussing inaccuracies.
- iv. **Fair Access to Information:** Ensure equitable access to press releases, events, and interviews for media representatives across diverse outlets.
- v. **No Coercion:** Avoid threats, bribes, or other means to compel favourable coverage and maintain a collaborative approach, even when disagreements arise.
- vi. **Crisis Communication Collaboration:** In crisis scenarios, provide timely and accurate updates without attempting to shape narratives through manipulation.
- vii. **Open Communication:** Ensure open communication channels to address media inquiries promptly.

3. ACCURACY AND FAIRNESS IN INFORMATION SHARING

Accurate and fair communication with the media ensures the public receives reliable information, preserving trust in both the media and the PR profession.

Guidelines

- i. **Data Validation:** Verify all data, facts, and figures and sources of information to ensure they are credible, reliable, and up-to-date, before sharing with media.
- ii. **Fact-Checking Protocols:** Establish proper fact-checking process for all media materials. Collaborate with internal and external stakeholders to confirm data before dissemination.
- iii. **Clarification Procedures:** Offer proactive clarifications if journalists or the public misinterpret shared information. Maintain a clear channel for follow-up questions from the media.
- iv. **Equal Opportunity:** Provide equal opportunities for media representatives to access information.
- v. **Context and Intent:** Clarify context and intent to avoid misinterpretation.
- vi. **Balanced Representation:** Present all sides of an issue when applicable, avoiding favouritism or bias and ensure information aligns with ethical standards and avoids sensationalism.
- vii. **Timely Updates:** Regularly update media with accurate information to address emerging developments or correct errors.
- viii. **Accessible Information:** Share content in a clear, concise, and accessible manner, catering to diverse media audiences. Avoid overly technical language or jargon that could lead to misinterpretation.
- ix. **Avoid Conflict of Interest:** Refrain from tailoring information to suit the vested interests of specific parties or sponsors.

4. CONFIDENTIALITY IN MEDIA INTERACTIONS

Managing Confidentiality is fundamental in protecting sensitive and proprietary information entrusted on PR practitioners, ensuring the trust of clients, stakeholders, and media professionals.

Guidelines

- i. **Identification and Labelling:** Clearly label all confidential materials with appropriate markings, such as “Embargoed” or “For Internal Use Only.” Specify disclosure conditions and timeframes explicitly in media communications.
- ii. **Access Control:** Restrict access to sensitive information to authorised personnel only. Use secure communication platforms and password-protected documents when sharing information.
- iii. **Due Diligence:** Verify the identity and credibility of media representatives before sharing sensitive information. Provide only necessary information that aligns with agreed objectives and confidentiality agreements.
- iv. **Monitoring and Enforcement:** Monitor media content to ensure compliance with embargoes or confidentiality agreements. Address breaches promptly with clear corrective actions and follow-up.

- v. **Education and Training:** Regularly educate teams and stakeholders about the importance of confidentiality in media interactions. Establish and maintain clear protocols for handling sensitive information.
- vi. **Speculation and Unverified Information:** Avoid sharing speculative, incomplete, or unverified information, particularly in crises or evolving situations. Confirm facts with clients and stakeholders before dissemination.

5. ETHICAL MANAGEMENT OF CRISIS COMMUNICATION

Ethical management of crisis communication is vital for protecting public safety, maintaining trust, and ensuring the dissemination of accurate, timely, and responsible information. PR practitioners play a critical role in mitigating the impact of crises by fostering calm, clarity, and transparency while managing media and stakeholder interactions.

Guidelines

- i. **Fact-Based Communication:** Verify all information before release. Avoid speculative or unverifiable claims.
- ii. **Consistency Across Platforms:** Ensure consistent messaging across media, social platforms, and stakeholder channels. Address inaccuracies promptly with factual corrections.
- iii. **Empathy and Clarity:** Communicate with empathy and understanding for those affected by the crisis. Use clear and straightforward language to avoid confusion.
- iv. **Pre-Crisis Preparedness:** Develop and regularly update crisis communication plans. Identify and train designated spokespersons.
- v. **Collaboration with Media and Authorities:** Maintain open lines of communication with media, government agencies, and other relevant authorities. Share verified updates in coordination with these partners.
- vi. **Protecting Stakeholder Interests:** Safeguard sensitive information while ensuring transparency. Avoid prioritising organisational image over public well-being.
- vii. **Post-Crisis Evaluation:** Conduct a post-crisis review to identify lessons learned. Share insights to improve future crisis responses.

III. DEALINGS WITH CLIENTS

Ethical dealings with clients are fundamental to the integrity and success of the public relations profession. PR practitioners, whether consultants or in-house professionals, must foster relationships built on trust, transparency, and mutual respect. Upholding ethical standards in client interactions ensures the credibility of the profession and protects the interests of clients, practitioners, and stakeholders alike.

1. HONESTY AND TRANSPARENCY

Public relations practitioners hold a responsibility to offer honest, fact-based counsel, and complete information to ensure clients are well-informed, even if the advice contradicts their preferences or expectations. This ethical obligation prioritises the client's best interests and safeguards their long-term credibility and reputation.

Guidelines

- i. **Fact Based Counsel, Accuracy and Truthfulness:** Offer advice grounded in research, evidence, and professional expertise, avoiding personal bias or undue influence. Ensure all data, reports, and strategies presented to clients are factual and devoid of exaggeration.
- ii. **Realistic Projections & Transparency:** Set achievable goals and clearly outline risks, limitations, and uncertainties in any proposed strategy or campaign. Clearly explain the potential risks, consequences, and benefits of proposed actions or decisions.
- iii. **Respect for Client Autonomy:** While providing candid counsel, respect the client's right to make the final decision.
- iv. **Follow-Up:** Support the client's final decision with the best possible implementation plan, even if it differs from the practitioner's initial counsel.
- v. **Professional Objectivity:** Maintain neutrality by focusing on the client's goals and values rather than agreeing to requests that may compromise ethical standards.
- vi. **Conflict of Interest Disclosure:** Inform clients promptly of any potential or existing conflicts of interest that could impact professional judgment or project outcomes.
- vii. **Transparency in Challenges:** Share obstacles, setbacks, or potential changes in circumstances with clients proactively, along with proposed solutions.
- viii. **No Overpromising:** Avoid commitments that cannot be realistically met within the scope of available resources and expertise.
- ix. **Documentation:** Ensure all recommendations, including dissenting advice, are well-documented for reference and accountability.
- x. **Open Access:** Allow clients access to necessary documentation, data, and campaign metrics.
- xi. **Ethical Financial Practices:** Clearly communicate pricing structures, additional costs, and payment terms to prevent misunderstandings.
- xii. **Feedback Mechanisms and Regular Updates:** Create and maintain open channels for regular client feedback, fostering an atmosphere of collaboration and trust. Provide consistent updates on the outcomes of decisions, offering adjustments if needed to align with the client's evolving needs.

2. PROTECTING CLIENT CONFIDENTIALITY

This code ensures that PR practitioners maintain the trust of their clients by safeguarding proprietary information, trade secrets, and strategic plans, which are vital to a client's success and reputation.

Guidelines

- i. **Strict Confidentiality:** Treat all client information as confidential unless explicitly authorised for public or internal sharing. Implement need-to-know access protocols within teams.
- ii. **Data Security Measures:** Use encrypted communication tools and secure document-sharing platforms. Regularly update and audit security protocols for both physical and digital data storage.
- iii. **Authorised Disclosure:** Ensure any disclosure is pre-approved by the client and limited to the agreed audience or purpose. Share information only when legally obligated or in the public's interest, with prior client consultation.
- iv. **Training and Awareness:** Conduct regular training for all team members on confidentiality policies and data protection standards. Educate staff on recognising and mitigating potential breaches, including phishing attempts.
- v. **Non-Disclosure Agreements (NDAs):** Develop NDAs for all staff, contractors, and third-party vendors involved in client projects. Include confidentiality clauses in all contracts with specific guidelines for handling sensitive data.
- vi. **Incident Reporting:** Establish clear processes for reporting and addressing confidentiality breaches promptly. Notify the client immediately in the event of any breach, with a clear mitigation plan.

3. FAIR AND ETHICAL BILLING PRACTICES

Transparent financial dealings foster strong, long-lasting professional relationships by ensuring clarity, accountability, and mutual respect in all financial transactions.

Guidelines

- i. **Transparent Contracts:** Clearly define deliverables, timelines, fees, and payment schedules in contracts. Outline any potential additional costs upfront, such as travel expenses or third-party services.
- ii. **Detailed Invoicing:** Provide itemised invoices with clear descriptions of services rendered, corresponding costs, and payment deadlines. Ensure invoices are sent promptly and regularly as agreed.
- iii. **Fair Pricing:** Avoid inflating costs or imposing hidden charges. Offer competitive pricing that reflects market standards while maintaining the quality of services.

- iv. **No Undercutting:** Always maintain a fair and sustainable pricing structure that reflects the value and quality of your services, avoiding fees that undercut competitors solely for short-term gains.
- v. **Ethical Adjustments:** Communicate changes to agreed terms immediately, ensuring client approval before implementing new charges. Where possible, be flexible with payment plans in cases of genuine financial hardship.
- vi. **Professional Record-Keeping:** Maintain accurate records of all financial transactions and agreements for transparency and accountability.
- vii. **Compliance with Legal Standards:** Ensure all billing practices comply with tax regulations and financial laws. Issue proper receipts and maintain documentation for auditing purposes.

4. CONFLICT OF INTEREST MANAGEMENT

This code ensures that PR practitioners can serve their clients' best interests without compromise, fostering transparency and ethical decision-making in all professional engagements.

Guidelines

- i. **Transparent Disclosure:** Immediately disclose to clients any existing or potential conflicts of interest, including financial interests, personal relationships, or affiliations. Inform clients about relationships with competitors or partnerships that may influence professional judgment.
- ii. **Avoid Compromising Situations:** Refrain from accepting assignments that create competing obligations or hinder the ability to act solely in the client's best interest. Decline opportunities that may conflict with a client's objectives or ethical principles.
- iii. **Neutrality in Recommendations:** Provide unbiased advice and recommendations based on merit rather than personal gain or external influence. Avoid steering clients towards services or products from organisations in which the practitioner has a vested interest.
- iv. **Maintain Confidentiality:** Protect client information from being used for personal gain or to benefit conflicting parties.
- v. **Internal Protocols:** Establish a system to identify, review, and address potential conflicts of interest within the organisation. Regularly train staff to recognise and appropriately handle conflict scenarios.
- vi. **Written Agreements:** Include conflict of interest clauses in contracts to address potential issues pre-emptively.

5. COMMITMENT TO PROFESSIONALISM AND ACCOUNTABILITY

By adhering to high ethical standards and taking responsibility for their actions, PR practitioners ensure the consistent delivery of quality services that strengthen client relationships and uphold the reputation of the profession.

Guidelines

- i. **Adherence to Ethical Standards:** Follow industry codes of conduct and best practices to maintain professionalism. Avoid conflicts of interest and disclose potential biases in service delivery.
- ii. **Contractual Commitments:** Honour all contractual obligations, including timelines, deliverables, and service quality. Clearly define expectations, objectives, and responsibilities in agreements.
- iii. **Transparency and Communication:** Provide clients with access to accurate and timely updates on projects. Share comprehensive documentation, metrics, and performance reports.
- iv. **Accountability for Errors:** Acknowledge mistakes promptly and outline corrective actions to address issues. Learn from errors and implement measures to prevent recurrence.
- v. **Professional Development:** Commit to continuous learning to enhance skills and stay updated with industry trends. Encourage ethical and professional growth within teams and organisations.
- vi. **Client Feedback:** Regularly seek and act upon client feedback to ensure services meet expectations. Address concerns proactively and maintain open communication channels.

6. ADVOCACY AND REPRESENTING CLIENTS' BEST INTERESTS

Advocacy lies at the heart of public relations and ensures trust, credibility, and long-term success for both the client and the PR practitioner while fostering public confidence in the industry.

Guidelines

- i. **Honest Advocacy:** Craft and disseminate communication materials that are truthful, accurate, and evidence-based. Ensure all claims, statements, or promises can be substantiated.
- ii. **Avoidance of Unethical Practices:** Refrain from spreading misinformation, engaging in smear campaigns, or using manipulative tactics to undermine competitors or sway public opinion. Reject campaigns or activities that compromise public trust or breach professional ethics.
- iii. **Informed Consent and Transparency:** Keep clients informed about all strategies, risks, and potential outcomes of advocacy efforts.

Secure client consent before implementing any significant changes to agreed-upon plans.

- iv. **Balancing Advocacy with Public Interest:** Advocate for clients in ways that respect and protect public welfare, avoiding harm to individuals, communities, or stakeholders. Address ethical dilemmas by prioritising honesty and integrity, even when client objectives may conflict with public interests.
- v. **Accountability:** Accept responsibility for errors or inaccuracies in campaigns and take corrective measures immediately. Maintain open channels of communication to address client concerns and stakeholder feedback effectively.

IV. PROMOTING DIVERSITY, EQUITABILITY AND INCLUSION

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) are fundamental to fostering an inclusive, fair, and respectful environment within the public relations profession. PR practitioners, whether consultants or in-house professionals, must actively embrace and champion DEI principles in their practices, campaigns, and workplace interactions. By promoting diverse perspectives and equitable opportunities, PR practitioners contribute to a more inclusive and representative industry.

1. COMMITMENT TO REPRESENTATION

This Code ensures that communication strategies genuinely reflect the diverse fabric of society, fostering trust, inclusivity, and authentic connections with audiences. This Code underscores the importance of celebrating and amplifying diverse voices across all campaigns.

Guidelines

- i. **Content Development:** Ensure that all campaigns highlight and celebrate cultural, ethnic, gender, and social diversity.
- ii. **Inclusive Language:** Use language that avoids stereotypes, biases, and cultural appropriation, ensuring respect for all communities.
- iii. **Community Consultation:** Engage with community representatives during the ideation and development phases to ensure authenticity and alignment.
- iv. **Internal Representation:** Foster diversity within PR teams to enhance varied perspectives in communication strategies.
- v. **Training:** Regularly conduct diversity and bias training for team members involved in campaign creation.
- vi. **Feedback Mechanisms:** Establish channels to receive and act on feedback from audiences about representation in campaigns.

2. EQUITABLE ACCESS AND OPPORTUNITIES

Equitable access and opportunities are essential for fostering a fair and inclusive public relations industry that values diversity and empowers all professionals. By creating a level playing field, the industry can unlock the potential of underrepresented talents, driving innovation and progress across all levels of practice.

Guidelines

- i. **Inclusive Recruitment Practices:** Adopt blind CV screening or diverse hiring panels to reduce biases. Actively recruit from underrepresented communities, ensuring outreach extends to diverse talent pools.
- ii. **Mentorship and Training:** Establish mentorship programmes pairing industry veterans with emerging professionals from marginalised backgrounds. Offer DEI-focused career development workshops to empower underrepresented groups.
- iii. **Fair Compensation:** Conduct regular audits to ensure equal pay for equal work, irrespective of gender, ethnicity, or other factors. Develop transparent salary structures to promote trust and accountability.
- iv. **Leadership Development:** Provide leadership training tailored for underrepresented professionals to enhance representation in executive roles. Potentially create sponsorship programmes where senior leaders advocate for diverse talent within the organisation.
- v. **Workplace Inclusivity:** Establish feedback mechanisms to address inequities and enhance inclusion. Provide equitable access to resources and opportunities for professional growth, ensuring fairness in project allocation and career progression.

3. ADVOCACY FOR INCLUSIVE WORKPLACES

An inclusive workplace is essential for fostering innovation, collaboration, and trust within the public relations profession. Advocacy for inclusivity ensures that every team member feels valued, respected, and empowered to contribute their best, ultimately strengthening organisational culture and productivity.

Guidelines

- i. **Leadership Commitment:** Ensure leaders actively champion inclusivity, serving as role models through words and actions.
- ii. **DEI Accountability:** Integrate inclusivity goals into organisational performance metrics and leadership evaluations.
- iii. **Flexible Policies:** Implement inclusive policies, such as flexible work arrangements and accommodations for diverse needs.
- iv. **Bias Reduction:** Regularly assess and address unconscious biases in hiring, promotion, and daily interactions.

- v. **Celebration of Diversity:** Organise events and initiatives that celebrate cultural, gender, and professional diversity.
- vi. **Zero Tolerance:** Enforce a zero-tolerance policy against discrimination, harassment, or exclusionary practices.

4. ETHICAL COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Ethical community engagement ensures that public relations professionals genuinely connect with and represent the communities they serve. It emphasises active listening, collaboration, and inclusivity to foster authentic relationships, build trust, and ensure communication strategies reflect the unique needs and values of diverse audiences.

Guidelines

- i. **Authentic Partnerships:** Build genuine, mutually beneficial relationships with community organisations and leaders.
- ii. **Cultural Sensitivity:** Ensure cultural traditions and norms are respected in all campaigns and communications.
- iii. **Transparency:** Clearly communicate the goals, benefits, and potential impact of campaigns to the community.
- iv. **Informed Consent:** Seek informed consent when featuring community members in campaigns or materials.
- v. **Feedback Mechanisms:** Create accessible platforms for community input and actively integrate feedback into campaigns.
- vi. **Representation:** Avoid tokenism by involving diverse voices at every stage of campaign planning and execution.
- vii. **Ethical Giving:** Ensure any gifts or sponsorships provided to community groups are appropriate and support ethical objectives.

V. RESPECT FOR CULTURE AND RELIGION

Malaysia's multicultural and multireligious population is a source of national pride and unity. Public relations professionals must uphold respect for all cultures and religions while recognising Islam as the official religion. By fostering inclusivity and sensitivity, PR practitioners can create campaigns and communications that resonate with Malaysia's diverse communities and promote harmony.

Respecting culture and religion ensures harmonious coexistence, fosters national unity, and enhances the credibility of PR campaigns. By promoting inclusivity and sensitivity, PR practitioners contribute to a stronger, more cohesive society while ensuring their work resonates authentically with Malaysia's diverse population

1. CULTURAL SENSITIVITY AND INCLUSION

Malaysia's vibrant multicultural and multireligious society is a cornerstone of its identity. PR practitioners have a responsibility to ensure that all communications, campaigns, and events reflect respect for this diversity, fostering understanding and inclusion.

Guidelines

- i. **Respectful Representation:** Avoid stereotypes or inappropriate portrayals of cultural or religious practices.
- ii. **Language and Imagery:** Use inclusive and culturally sensitive language, symbols, and visuals in all materials.
- iii. **Consultation:** Engage cultural and religious leaders for guidance on potentially sensitive content.
- iv. **Diverse Representation:** Ensure campaigns feature balanced representation of Malaysia's cultural and religious groups.
- v. **Training:** Provide cultural sensitivity training for teams to avoid unintentional missteps.
- vi. **Event Considerations:** Plan events respecting local customs, prayer times, and dietary requirements (e.g., halal catering).
- vii. **Feedback Mechanism:** Create avenues for community feedback to address concerns about cultural or religious insensitivity.
- viii. **Balanced Holidays:** Acknowledge and celebrate major cultural and religious holidays to ensure inclusivity.

2. RELIGIOUS RESPECT AND NEUTRALITY

Public relations practitioners play a vital role in fostering mutual respect and understanding across all faiths. Upholding religious respect and neutrality ensures inclusive communications, strengthening harmony and trust.

(a) Guidelines

- i. Recognise and respect Islamic customs, especially during key observances like Ramadan, Hari Raya, and Friday prayers.
- ii. Ensure content is free of bias, stereotypes, or language that could be construed as offensive to any religion.
- iii. Represent all religions authentically and avoid tokenism or favouritism in campaigns and events.
- iv. Provide equal opportunities for participation by all religious groups in activities and communications.
- v. Include religious leaders in discussions and reviews of culturally or religiously sensitive content.
- vi. Schedule PR activities that respect significant religious dates and observances.
- vii. Use inclusive language that fosters understanding, unity, and mutual respect.

- viii. Implement rigorous review processes to ensure all communication materials respect religious sensitivities.

3. EDUCATION AND AWARENESS

Education and awareness about Malaysia's diverse cultural and religious landscape are critical for PR practitioners to navigate the intricacies of creating respectful, inclusive, and impactful communications. By fostering a deeper understanding of cultural and religious nuances, practitioners can avoid unintentional missteps and promote harmony in their messaging and campaigns.

Guidelines

- i. **Training Programs:** Conduct mandatory cultural and religious sensitivity training for all PR team members.
- ii. **Cultural Engagement:** Encourage active participation in festivals, celebrations, and religious events to deepen cultural understanding.
- iii. **Internal Policies:** Develop comprehensive internal guidelines for culturally respectful communication and review periodically.
- iv. **Diverse Representation:** Include representatives from various cultural and religious communities in brainstorming and campaign planning sessions.
- v. **Continuous Learning:** Maintain an updated database of cultural and religious practices to serve as a resource for teams.
- vi. **Consultation:** Engage cultural and religious advisors when creating content for sensitive topics or events.

4. PROMOTING NATIONAL UNITY THROUGH COMMUNICATION

In Malaysia's multicultural and multireligious society, public relations practitioners play a vital role in fostering unity through ethical and inclusive communication. By crafting messages that respect diversity and highlight shared values, PR professionals can strengthen the bonds between communities and contribute to national harmony.

Guidelines

- i. **Unity as a Central Theme:** Incorporate messaging that underscores Malaysia's collective identity while respecting individual cultural expressions.
- ii. **Avoid Divisive Content:** Refrain from using language, imagery, or stereotypes that could alienate any group.
- iii. **Highlight Shared Values:** Showcase common aspirations, such as education, progress, and mutual respect, in campaigns.
- iv. **Engage Key Stakeholders:** Partner with leaders of various cultural and religious groups to ensure inclusivity and sensitivity.

- v. **Support Interfaith Initiatives:** Collaborate with organisations that promote dialogue and understanding between different communities.
- vi. **Educate Through Campaigns:** Create platforms for the public to learn about different cultures and religions, reducing misunderstandings and fostering respect.

VI. DEALINGS WITH THE GOVERNMENT AND PROTOCOLS

Public relations practitioners engaging with government institutions and adhering to official protocols must maintain the highest ethical standards. Effective communication and professionalism in dealings with government representatives ensure trust, mutual respect, and compliance with regulations, while supporting the development of constructive relationships between organisations, governments, and the public.

Ethical dealings with the government and adherence to protocols ensure trust, credibility, and effective collaboration. By upholding these principles, PR practitioners contribute to ethical governance, strengthen professional relationships, and enhance the industry's reputation for integrity and responsibility.

1. ADHERENCE TO LEGAL AND REGULATORY FRAMEWORKS

This code ensures that public relations practitioners operate within the boundaries of the law while engaging with government representatives, safeguarding ethical standards and organisational reputation.

Guidelines

- i. **Legal Awareness:** Continuously educate and update teams on relevant local, state, and national laws affecting interactions with government bodies.
- ii. **Transparency:** Ensure all communications with government agencies are accurate, transparent, and free from misrepresentation.
- iii. **Documentation:** Maintain detailed records of interactions, agreements, and correspondence with government entities.
- iv. **Ethical Representation:** Avoid offering or accepting gifts, favours, or payments that could influence decisions or violate anti-corruption laws.
- v. **Reporting Mechanisms:** Implement systems to report potential breaches of legal or regulatory requirements.
- vi. **Proactive Engagement:** Seek government consultation during the planning stages of campaigns involving public policies or national priorities.
- vii. **Conflict Avoidance:** Refrain from participating in activities that could lead to perceived or actual conflicts of interest.

2. RESPECT FOR PROTOCOLS AND HIERARCHIES

Engaging with government entities requires adherence to established protocols and hierarchies to foster respectful, professional, and effective communication. Following these standards demonstrates respect for the roles and responsibilities of government officials while ensuring smooth and impactful collaboration.

Guidelines

- i. **Identify Hierarchies:** Familiarise yourself with the roles, responsibilities, and ranks of government officials to ensure appropriate points of contact are respected.
- ii. **Communication Channels:** Use official lines of communication and established processes to maintain order and efficiency.
- iii. **Professional Conduct:** Maintain formality and respect in all interactions, whether written, verbal, or digital.
- iv. **Approvals:** Secure necessary approvals before releasing any government-related communication or proceeding with joint initiatives.
- v. **Protocol Adherence:** Follow prescribed procedures during events, meetings, or public engagements involving government representatives.
- vi. **Cultural Sensitivity:** Be mindful of cultural and regional customs that might influence protocol practices.
- vii. **Training and Awareness:** Ensure team members understand and respect the relevant government protocols.

3. TRANSPARENCY AND HONESTY IN COMMUNICATIONS

Public relations practitioners must ensure that all interactions are built on truthfulness, accountability, and openness to foster trust, credibility, and mutual respect, ensuring productive and transparent engagements with government bodies.

Guidelines

- i. Provide full disclosure of all relevant and material information when engaging with government representatives.
- ii. Ensure all communication materials, including proposals, reports, and statements, are truthful, accurate, and verifiable.
- iii. Avoid omissions, exaggerations, or any content that could mislead or misrepresent facts.
- iv. Clearly identify affiliations, sponsorships, or potential conflicts of interest in communications.
- v. Share progress updates and results of collaborations or campaigns promptly and factually.

- vi. Maintain a consistent standard of truthfulness across all levels of government communication, regardless of intent or audience.

4. ETHICAL LOBBYING AND ADVOCACY

Lobbying and advocacy are critical aspects of public relations, serving as tools to influence policies and decisions for the benefit of clients and stakeholders. Ethical lobbying ensures that these efforts are conducted transparently and responsibly, fostering trust between public relations professionals, government representatives, and the public.

Guidelines

- i. **Transparency:** Clearly disclose the purpose, intent, and beneficiaries of lobbying efforts to all stakeholders.
- ii. **Compliance:** Adhere strictly to anti-corruption laws, lobbying regulations, and ethical guidelines.
- iii. **No Incentives:** Avoid offering or accepting gifts, favours, or incentives to secure government support.
- iv. **Factual Representation:** Base all advocacy on accurate, verifiable, and up-to-date information.
- v. **Alignment with Values:** Ensure that all lobbying aligns with the client's values, public interest, and national objectives.
- vi. **Fair Practices:** Refrain from disparaging competitors or engaging in unethical tactics to advance client interests.
- vii. **Responsible Communication:** Communicate in a manner that avoids misinformation, undue pressure, or sensationalism.
- viii. **Ethical Partnerships:** Partner only with organisations that share a commitment to ethical practices and integrity.

5. CONFIDENTIALITY AND DATA SECURITY

In dealings with the government, maintaining confidentiality and ensuring data security are paramount. Public relations practitioners must uphold the highest standards to protect sensitive information and foster trust in professional relationships. This code establishes the principles for safeguarding confidential data and ensuring compliance with legal and ethical standards.

Guidelines

- i. **Secure Information Handling:** Implement robust encryption, password protection, and access controls for storing and sharing sensitive data.
- ii. **Controlled Access:** Limit access to confidential information to authorised personnel only.
- iii. **Consent-Based Disclosure:** Obtain written permission before disclosing or publishing information shared by government bodies.

- iv. **Data Minimisation:** Collect and store only the necessary data to fulfil specific project requirements.
- v. **Compliance:** Adhere to all relevant government data protection regulations and internal policies.
- vi. **Incident Reporting:** Establish procedures to report and address data breaches or confidentiality violations immediately.
- vii. **Third-Party Engagements:** Ensure vendors or third-party collaborators handling government data adhere to strict confidentiality standards.
- viii. **Training:** Conduct regular training sessions for employees on data security protocols and best practices.

6. CONFLICT OF INTEREST MANAGEMENT

Conflict of interest management ensures that PR practitioners act impartially, prioritising transparency and the public interest above personal or organisational gains. This code safeguards the credibility of engagements and fosters trust in relationships with government representatives.

Guidelines

- i. **Early Disclosure:** Identify and declare any potential or perceived conflicts of interest at the earliest opportunity.
- ii. **Prohibition of Bias:** Avoid participating in projects that could create a conflict with government policies or public interests.
- iii. **Transparency in Relationships:** Clearly disclose financial, professional, or familial ties to government entities or representatives.
- iv. **Adopt a Neutral Stance:** Maintain impartiality in all advocacy, lobbying, or communication efforts to prevent undue influence.
- v. **Document Actions:** Keep detailed records of conflict disclosures, mitigation steps, and resolutions for accountability.
- vi. **Third-Party Consultation:** Seek external advice or involve independent reviewers in cases where conflict resolution may be complex.
- vii. **Training and Awareness:** Provide regular training for staff to identify and manage conflicts effectively.
- viii. **Policy Development:** Establish internal guidelines to govern conflict resolution and ensure consistency across engagements.

7. COLLABORATION FOR NATIONAL OBJECTIVES

Public relations practitioners play a pivotal role in fostering constructive partnerships with government entities to achieve national goals and address public needs. This collaboration reinforces societal progress, drives mutual benefits, and highlights the essential role of communication in advancing national priorities and initiatives.

Guidelines

- i. **Alignment with National Priorities:** Ensure campaigns and messaging reflect and support government objectives in areas such as sustainability, healthcare, education, and economic growth.
- ii. **Insight Sharing:** Provide government agencies with industry insights, data, and research to enhance decision-making processes.
- iii. **Ethical Partnerships:** Engage in ethical collaborations that promote transparency, accountability, and mutual respect.
- iv. **Proactive Engagement:** Initiate dialogue with government bodies to identify opportunities for partnership and joint initiatives.
- v. **Public Awareness:** Amplify government-led campaigns or messages that promote public well-being.
- vi. **Compliance:** Ensure all collaborative efforts adhere to legal and ethical standards while respecting government protocols.

VII. PARTICIPATION IN PITCH AND PROPOSALS

Participation in pitches and proposals is key in public relations practice, requiring PR practitioners to adhere to the highest ethical standards. By maintaining fairness, respect for intellectual property, transparency, and honesty, practitioners can foster a competitive yet ethical industry environment. These codes ensure trust, professionalism, and respect in all pitch-related activities. Adhering to ethical standards in pitches and proposals fosters a fair, transparent, and professional PR industry. It ensures trust between practitioners, clients, and competitors while promoting innovation and mutual respect. These principles safeguard the industry's reputation and contribute to its long-term sustainability.

Further, in the highly competitive landscape of pitching and proposals, adhering to principles of fairness ensures a level playing field, promotes mutual respect, and enhances the industry's reputation for integrity and professionalism.

1. FAIR COMPETITION

Fair competition is fundamental to fostering a professional and ethical environment in public relations. Adhering to principles of fairness ensures a level playing field, promotes mutual respect, and enhances the industry's reputation for integrity and professionalism.

Guidelines

- i. **Respect Competitors:** Refrain from making disparaging or misleading comments about competitors or their proposals.
- ii. **Intellectual Property Integrity:** Do not replicate or misuse proprietary ideas or concepts from competitors' pitches.

- iii. **Transparency in Proposals:** Present realistic, verifiable claims and clearly outline deliverables. Openly communicate concerns about dubious invitations with issuing parties, requesting clarification or changes.
- iv. **Prohibit Unethical Influence:** Avoid offering incentives or gifts to secure a competitive advantage.
- v. **Confidentiality:** Protect sensitive information about past pitches, ensuring it is not disclosed or leveraged.
- vi. **Avoid Conflict of Interest:** Disclose relationships or affiliations that could compromise fair competition.
- vii. **Equity in Access:** Provide equal opportunities for access to necessary information or resources during the pitching process.
- viii. **Industry Solidarity:** Practitioners should collaborate to identify and address unfair or unethical tendering practices.
- ix. **Reject Unethical Offers:** Decline participation in tenders with unrealistic deadlines, inadequate transparency, or exploitative conditions.
- x. **Encourage Dialogue:** Work with industry bodies to engage clients and stakeholders in discussions about ethical tendering practices.
- xi. **Promote Ethical Awareness:** Share information about unfair practices to educate members and prevent exploitation.

2. RESPECT FOR INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY: UPHOLDING OWNERSHIP AND CREATIVITY

Respect for intellectual property ensures that the originality and ownership of ideas, concepts, and strategies presented during pitches are safeguarded. It reinforces ethical collaboration and fosters mutual trust between practitioners, clients, and competitors, preserving the integrity of the public relations profession.

Guidelines

- i. **Non-Disclosure Agreements (NDAs):** Always implement NDAs when sharing proprietary information.
- ii. **No Misappropriation:** Avoid repurposing or replicating competitors' ideas, strategies, or designs presented during pitches.
- iii. **Proper Attribution:** Acknowledge and credit all sources of inspiration or collaboratively developed concepts.
- iv. **Seek Permissions:** Obtain explicit written consent before using or adapting intellectual property belonging to others.
- v. **Document Ownership:** Clearly define ownership rights of all intellectual property shared or developed in collaboration.
- vi. **Internal Protocols:** Establish clear internal policies to protect shared intellectual property and manage its use.

3. TRANSPARENCY IN COMMUNICATION

Transparency in communication is critical for fostering trust and credibility during pitches and proposals. By providing honest, accurate, and comprehensive information, PR practitioners can set clear expectations, minimise ambiguities, and establish a foundation for long-term, trustworthy relationships with clients and stakeholders.

Guidelines

- i. **Full Disclosure:** Clearly communicate any potential conflicts of interest, limitations, or dependencies that could affect project outcomes.
- ii. **Realistic Commitments:** Present timelines, budgets, and deliverables that are achievable and grounded in previous experiences.
- iii. **Evidence-Based Claims:** Support all statements with data, case studies, or relevant evidence, ensuring verifiability.
- iv. **Proactive Communication:** Address potential risks and challenges upfront to avoid misunderstandings later.
- v. **Client Engagement:** Provide platforms for clients to ask questions, clarify concerns, and discuss expectations openly.
- vi. **Ethical Marketing:** Avoid using deceptive or inflated claims about capabilities, past successes, or team expertise.

4. HONESTY IN REVEALING POTENTIAL IMPACTS

Transparency is a cornerstone of ethical public relations. Practitioners must provide a balanced view of proposed strategies, openly discussing potential outcomes to foster trust and informed decision-making. This code ensures that pitches and proposals align with professional integrity, building stronger, long-term relationships with clients.

Guidelines

- i. **Comprehensive Analysis:** Include both benefits and challenges in all recommendations, supported by factual data.
- ii. **Risk Disclosure:** Clearly communicate risks, uncertainties, and potential unintended consequences of proposed strategies.
- iii. **Transparency in Limitations:** Acknowledge any constraints or limitations that may affect the success of the proposal.
- iv. **Mitigation Strategies:** Offer actionable plans to address potential risks or challenges.
- v. **Ethical Decision-Making:** Avoid omitting critical information to make proposals more appealing.

5. PROFESSIONAL CONDUCT

Professional conduct ensures that public relations practitioners represent themselves, their organisations, and the profession with integrity during pitches and proposals. By upholding respectful and ethical practices, practitioners contribute to a competitive yet fair environment, fostering trust among clients and peers while safeguarding the credibility of the industry.

Guidelines

- i. **Respectful Communication:** Always engage with clients, competitors, and colleagues courteously and professionally, even in competitive situations.
- ii. **Adherence to Standards:** Follow agreed timelines, formats, and requirements for proposal submissions without deviation.
- iii. **Avoid Conflicts:** Refrain from using undue influence, unethical incentives, or deceptive tactics to secure business opportunities.
- iv. **Transparency:** Clearly disclose relevant affiliations, potential conflicts of interest, or limitations to clients during the pitch process.
- v. **Integrity in Feedback:** Provide honest, constructive feedback when declining or reviewing proposals from peers or subcontractors.
- vi. **Competency Assurance:** Ensure all proposals reflect genuine capabilities and resources, avoiding exaggerated claims or misrepresentation.

VIII. RESPONSIBLE USE OF DIGITAL MEDIA AND AI

The rise of digital media and AI has transformed public relations, offering innovative tools for communication and engagement. However, with these opportunities comes the responsibility to uphold ethical standards, protect user privacy, and promote transparency. PR practitioners must navigate these technologies with integrity, ensuring their use aligns with ethical principles and fosters public trust.

1. ETHICAL CONTENT CREATION

With the increasing use of AI, ensuring that all content reflects truth, transparency, and ethical standards is imperative to build trust and credibility. Ethical content creation safeguards audiences from manipulation and misinformation while upholding the integrity of the profession.

(a) Guidelines

- i. **Accuracy and Verification:** Rigorously fact-check all content before publication, ensuring it is reliable and evidence-based.

- ii. **AI Disclosure:** Clearly disclose when AI is involved in content generation, including chatbots, automated articles, or creative tools.
- iii. **Avoid Manipulative Practices:** Do not use AI or other tools to create deepfakes, misleading visuals, or narratives that distort reality.
- iv. **Cultural Sensitivity:** Ensure content is culturally appropriate and free from biases or stereotypes.
- v. **Fair Representation:** Accurately represent clients, stakeholders, and the issues discussed in the content.
- vi. **Corrections:** Promptly correct any identified inaccuracies or misinformation in published content.
- vii. **Accountability:** Establish clear accountability for content creation, whether AI-generated or human-written.

2. DATA PRIVACY AND PROTECTION

In the digital age, the handling of data has become a foundation of ethical public relations practice. PR practitioners must prioritise the safeguarding of sensitive client and consumer information, ensuring its use aligns with global data protection standards. Ethical data management not only protects stakeholders but also reinforces trust and credibility.

Guidelines

- i. **Data Collection:** Collect only necessary data, clearly explaining its purpose and obtaining informed consent from stakeholders.
- ii. **Data Storage:** Implement robust encryption and cybersecurity measures to secure data against unauthorised access or breaches.
- iii. **Transparency:** Clearly communicate how data will be used, stored, and shared with all relevant parties.
- iv. **Compliance:** Adhere to local and international data privacy regulations, including GDPR (where applicable), PDPA, or equivalent laws.
- v. **Data Sharing:** Share data only with authorised parties and ensure any third-party partners comply with data protection standards.
- vi. **Regular Audits:** Conduct routine checks and audits to ensure data protection practices remain effective and compliant.
- vii. **Incident Management:** Have a robust plan to address and report data breaches promptly and transparently.
- viii. **Education:** Regularly train staff on data privacy laws, ethical data handling practices, and cybersecurity threats.

3. AI TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY

The integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in public relations has revolutionised the industry, enabling efficiency, creativity, and deeper

engagement. However, with these advancements comes the responsibility to use AI ethically and transparently. This code ensures that AI tools are employed with integrity, fostering trust, accountability, and fairness in all communications.

Guidelines

- i. **Disclosure of AI Use:** Clearly label and disclose AI-generated content in all communications to ensure transparency.
- ii. **Avoid Exploitation:** Do not use AI to manipulate, exploit, or mislead audiences, including creating deepfakes or false narratives.
- iii. **Ethical Audits:** Regularly audit AI tools for compliance with ethical and organisational standards.
- iv. **Human Oversight:** Maintain human oversight for critical decisions influenced by AI, ensuring accountability in processes.
- v. **Bias Prevention:** Monitor AI tools to prevent biases in generated content or decision-making algorithms.
- vi. **Data Privacy:** Use AI tools in compliance with privacy laws, ensuring data collected is secure and ethically managed.
- vii. **AI Training:** Provide continuous training for teams to use AI responsibly, focusing on its ethical implications.

4. INCLUSIVE DIGITAL COMMUNICATION

In a diverse digital landscape, inclusive communication ensures that everyone, regardless of their background, abilities, or demographics, has access to information. For PR practitioners, this means creating content and platforms that resonate with and respect diverse audiences, fostering unity and engagement across communities.

Guidelines

- i. **Accessible Formats:** Incorporate alt text for images, subtitles for videos, and screen-reader-friendly content.
- ii. **Culturally Sensitive Language:** Avoid terms, visuals, or messages that may exclude or marginalise any group.
- iii. **Representative Narratives:** Highlight stories and perspectives from underrepresented communities to foster inclusivity.
- iv. **AI Utilisation:** Use AI tools to identify and address accessibility gaps, ensuring content is universally accessible.
- v. **Universal Design:** Ensure websites, apps, and platforms are accessible to individuals with disabilities through features like text resizing, contrast settings, and keyboard navigation.
- vi. **Feedback Loops:** Regularly seek input from diverse audiences to refine communication strategies.
- vii. **Education and Training:** Equip teams with skills and knowledge on inclusivity, ensuring campaigns are both ethical and impactful.

5. COMBATING DIGITAL MISINFORMATION

Public relations professionals must actively combat the spread of false information by promoting accuracy, transparency, and accountability. Upholding these standards reinforces credibility and ensures responsible communication in digital campaigns.

Guidelines

- i. **Fact-Checking:** Thoroughly verify all information before publication, especially during crises.
- ii. **Transparency:** Clearly disclose the source of information in digital campaigns to establish trust.
- iii. **Avoid Amplification:** Do not share, repost, or engage with unverified or speculative content, even when it aligns with a client's narrative.
- iv. **Misinformation Monitoring:** Use AI tools to identify and track potential misinformation related to campaigns or clients.
- v. **Crisis Protocols:** Develop a crisis-specific communication strategy to address misinformation swiftly and accurately.
- vi. **Collaboration:** Partner with trusted fact-checking organisations or media outlets to counter false claims.
- vii. **Educate Stakeholders:** Train internal teams and clients on recognising and managing misinformation effectively.

IX. COMMITMENT TO SUSTAINABILITY AND SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

In an era defined by environmental challenges and social inequalities, public relations practitioners have a unique responsibility to champion sustainability and social responsibility. This commitment aligns with global Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) principles, ensuring that communication strategies not only resonate with stakeholders but also contribute positively to society and the planet. PR professionals, whether consultants or in-house practitioners, must work towards actively integrating these principles into their practices, setting a benchmark for ethical and responsible communication.

Commitment to sustainability and social responsibility is not just a professional obligation but a moral imperative. By integrating these codes into their practices, PR professionals can lead by example, influencing positive change, building trust, and reinforcing the relevance of the industry in addressing global challenges. Together, these guidelines empower the profession to contribute meaningfully to a more equitable, inclusive, and sustainable future.

1. PROMOTING ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP

Environmental stewardship in PR is not just about delivering campaigns; it's about embedding sustainability into the core of communication strategies,

ensuring that every message contributes to the global fight against climate change and resource depletion.

Guidelines

- i. **Transparency:** Ensure all sustainability claims are backed by data and verifiable evidence. Avoid misleading statements or greenwashing.
- ii. **Eco-Conscious Practices:** Minimise the environmental footprint by prioritising digital media, reducing print materials, and adopting eco-friendly event practices.
- iii. **Advocacy and Partnerships:** Collaborate with environmental organisations, NGOs, and vendors committed to sustainable practices.
- iv. **Community Engagement:** Design campaigns that empower communities to participate in sustainability efforts, such as recycling drives or conservation projects.
- v. **Educational Messaging:** Use campaigns to educate stakeholders about the importance of sustainability and actionable steps they can take.
- vi. **Measurement:** Regularly assess the environmental impact of campaigns and implement improvements where necessary.

2. CHAMPIONING SOCIAL EQUITABILITY

In a multicultural and socio-economically diverse nation like Malaysia, championing social equitability transcends inclusion and focuses on creating a level playing field for all communities. Public relations practitioners play a pivotal role in addressing systemic inequalities, fostering understanding, and advocating for fairness through authentic, impactful communications that promote social progress.

Guidelines

- i. **Authenticity:** Represent marginalised communities authentically, steering clear of tokenism or superficial inclusion.
- ii. **Equitability Focus:** Prioritise messaging that advocates for creating equal opportunities and addressing structural inequalities between communities, ensuring fair representation of all races and socio-economic groups.
- iii. **Collaborative Voices:** Engage diverse community leaders, advocacy groups, and stakeholders to co-create inclusive campaigns.
- iv. **Fair Language and Imagery:** Use language, visuals, and narratives that reflect fairness, balance, and sensitivity to socio-economic and cultural differences.
- v. **Challenge Inequities:** Actively counter discriminatory or exclusionary narratives in client messaging and communications.
- vi. **Educational Components:** Integrate messages that educate the public on the importance of social equitability and its role in national development.

3. UPHOLDING GOVERNANCE AND ETHICAL PRACTICES

Upholding governance and ethical practices is fundamental to maintaining the credibility and integrity of the public relations profession. For practitioners, this means embedding transparency, accountability, and fairness into every aspect of their work. By fostering ethical standards, PR professionals ensure that their strategies build trust, safeguard reputation, and support sustainable outcomes.

Guidelines

- i. **Transparency:** Disclose sponsorships, affiliations, or conflicts of interest clearly and proactively.
- ii. **Accuracy:** Ensure all information shared in campaigns or statements is factual, verified, and free from misleading claims.
- iii. **Accountability Systems:** Establish mechanisms to monitor and address unethical behaviours within teams and client activities.
- iv. **Incorporate ESG Standards:** Integrate ESG principles into campaign planning, execution, and evaluation to uphold sustainability and social responsibility.
- v. **Ethical Oversight:** Conduct regular reviews of policies, communications, and partnerships to ensure compliance with governance standards.
- vi. **Whistleblowing Mechanisms:** Create safe channels for reporting unethical practices within organisations or among stakeholders.
- vii. **Client Advocacy:** Guide clients toward ethical practices, refraining from supporting campaigns that contradict governance or ethical principles.

4. ENCOURAGING COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

For PR practitioners, meaningful community involvement ensures campaigns resonate authentically and deliver tangible societal benefits. By empowering communities, PR strategies can achieve long-lasting social impact while strengthening organisational credibility and connection with stakeholders.

Guidelines

- i. **Stakeholder Collaboration:** Actively engage with community leaders, NGOs, and grassroots organisations in campaign development.
- ii. **Two-Way Communication:** Create platforms for open dialogue with community members, encouraging feedback and incorporating their insights into campaign strategies.
- iii. **Highlight Success Stories:** Share inspiring community achievements and their contributions to campaign outcomes, fostering broader participation and goodwill.
- iv. **Cultural Sensitivity:** Ensure campaigns respect local traditions, values, and contexts to maintain cultural alignment.
- v. **Transparency:** Clearly communicate campaign goals, potential impacts, and benefits to communities, building trust through openness.

- vi. **Capacity Building:** Provide training or resources that empower communities to sustain positive outcomes beyond the campaign lifecycle.

5. ADVOCATING FOR TRANSPARENT ESG COMMUNICATION

In an era where environmental, social, and governance (ESG) issues are central to organisational success, transparent communication is essential. PR practitioners play a critical role in ensuring that ESG initiatives are truthfully represented, fostering trust and accountability while positioning organisations as leaders in sustainability and ethical governance.

Guidelines

- i. **Accuracy in ESG Reporting:** Ensure all claims are supported by verifiable data and consistent with actual practices.
- ii. **Balanced Messaging:** Communicate both successes and areas for improvement to provide a comprehensive view of ESG initiatives.
- iii. **Avoid Greenwashing:** Refrain from exaggerating or misrepresenting ESG efforts to mislead stakeholders.
- iv. **Regular Updates:** Keep ESG communication current by aligning with ongoing developments and emerging trends.
- v. **Stakeholder Inclusion:** Engage stakeholders in the ESG journey by incorporating their feedback into communication strategies.
- vi. **Global Alignment:** Reference recognised ESG frameworks such as the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) or the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) to validate communications.
- vii. **Transparency in Metrics:** Clearly define and communicate the metrics used to measure ESG success.

6. EMBEDDING ETHICAL AI IN DIGITAL CAMPAIGNS

The integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) offers immense opportunities to enhance public relations practices. However, its use must align with ethical standards and sustainability objectives to ensure trust, inclusivity, and responsibility. This code provides a framework for embedding ethical AI in PR campaigns, ensuring its application benefits society and upholds professional integrity.

Guidelines

- i. **Bias Prevention:** Implement protocols to identify and eliminate biases in AI-generated content, ensuring fairness and diversity in messaging.
- ii. **Transparency:** Clearly disclose when and how AI tools are used in campaigns to stakeholders and audiences.
- iii. **Data Privacy:** Use AI in compliance with data protection laws, safeguarding user information and preventing unauthorised access or misuse.
- iv. **Regular Audits:** Conduct periodic reviews of AI-driven processes to ensure alignment with ethical and sustainability guidelines.

- v. **Optimisation for Sustainability:** Use AI to improve resource efficiency in digital campaigns, such as reducing energy consumption or unnecessary digital waste.
- vi. **Collaboration with Ethical Partners:** Engage with tech providers who prioritise responsible AI practices and innovation.

X. PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Professional development is essential for maintaining relevance, fostering innovation, and upholding ethical standards. This commitment ensures that practitioners stay informed, adaptable, and capable of addressing modern challenges with integrity and expertise.

A commitment to professional development is essential for sustaining the credibility, relevance, and innovation of the public relations profession. By fostering a culture of continuous learning, ethical awareness, cross-disciplinary expertise, and mentorship, practitioners can adapt to evolving challenges, maintain high standards, and contribute to the growth of the industry.

1. LIFELONG LEARNING

Lifelong learning is the foundation of a thriving public relations profession. In an ever-evolving field shaped by technological advancements, shifting societal norms, and global challenges, PR practitioners must embrace continuous education to maintain relevance, enhance expertise, and uphold ethical standards.

Guidelines

- i. **Active Participation:** Attend workshops, webinars, and industry conferences to gain fresh insights and practical skills.
- ii. **Pursue Advanced Certifications:** Engage in certifications, degrees, or courses tailored to industry advancements, such as digital strategy, ESG, or AI integration.
- iii. **Global Awareness:** Stay informed about global developments in PR, technology, and ethics through industry publications, research, and professional networks.
- iv. **Knowledge Sharing:** Share insights gained from learning experiences with peers, fostering collective growth within the profession.
- v. **Self-Assessment:** Regularly evaluate personal and professional goals to identify areas requiring skill enhancement.

2. STAYING CURRENT ON ETHICAL STANDARDS

Staying current on ethical standards is vital to maintaining public trust and professional credibility. Public relations practitioners must navigate complex challenges, balancing innovation with integrity. This code ensures that professionals uphold the highest ethical principles, fostering accountability and transparency in their practices.

Guidelines

- i. Regularly attend ethics training, workshops, and professional development sessions to stay informed about industry updates.
- ii. Actively engage with resources, including case studies, articles, and webinars, focused on contemporary ethical challenges.
- iii. Familiarise yourself with regional and global ethical standards, such as PRCA and International Association of Business Communicators (IABC) codes.
- iv. Establish ethical decision-making protocols, applying recognised frameworks to assess and address potential issues.
- v. Foster open discussions about ethical practices within teams to encourage a culture of accountability.
- vi. Partner with professional bodies to contribute to the development and dissemination of ethical guidelines.

3. CROSS-DISCIPLINARY EXPERTISE

Cross-disciplinary expertise is critical to staying ahead of industry demands. By exploring related fields such as digital marketing, data analytics, behavioural sciences, and artificial intelligence, PR practitioners can develop holistic strategies that align seamlessly with organisational objectives and broader technological advancements.

Guidelines

- i. **Engage in Cross-Disciplinary Training:** Enrol in specialised courses on AI, data analytics, digital storytelling, behavioural psychology, and emerging technologies.
- ii. **Collaborate Across Fields:** Partner with professionals in marketing, IT, finance, and other sectors to create integrated campaigns.
- iii. **Stay Informed:** Participate in industry events, conferences, and think tanks that examine intersections between PR and related fields.
- iv. **Foster Cross-Functional Dialogue:** Create internal forums for teams across different departments to exchange ideas and develop synergies.
- v. **Adapt Tools and Practices:** Incorporate tools from other disciplines, such as predictive analytics or UX design, into PR workflows.

4. MENTORSHIP AND KNOWLEDGE SHARING

Mentorship and knowledge sharing are fundamental to the growth and sustainability of the public relations profession. By fostering collaborative relationships and exchanging insights, the industry ensures its practitioners remain skilled, ethical, and innovative. Mentorship not only supports individual growth but also strengthens the collective expertise and integrity of the profession.

Guidelines

- i. **Formal Mentorship Programmes:** Establish structured mentorship initiatives within organisations and professional associations to connect seasoned professionals with emerging talent.
- ii. **Knowledge Documentation:** Encourage senior practitioners to document their experiences, challenges, and strategies to build a repository of industry knowledge.
- iii. **Diverse Perspectives:** Include mentors and mentees from diverse backgrounds to encourage broader thinking and innovative problem-solving.
- iv. **Skill Development:** Focus on technical, ethical, and leadership skills during mentorship, preparing mentees for complex industry challenges.
- v. **Industry Collaboration:** Create platforms for sharing best practices through conferences, webinars, and forums, fostering an inclusive exchange of ideas.
- vi. **Recognition:** Recognise and celebrate the contributions of mentors and knowledge sharers to motivate continued participation.

5. ADVOCACY FOR INDUSTRY STANDARDS

Public relations plays a vital role in shaping perceptions, fostering trust, and driving organisational success. Advocating for industry standards ensures that PR is recognised as a strategic function, essential to achieving both societal and organisational goals. This code promotes excellence and raises the profession's profile through collective efforts.

Guidelines

- i. **Active Participation:** Join and contribute to professional associations and industry forums to shape and influence standards.
- ii. **Educational Collaboration:** Work with academic institutions to design curricula that align with the evolving needs of the PR profession.
- iii. **Best Practice Advocacy:** Promote the adoption of ethical and innovative practices across organisations.
- iv. **Strategic Integration:** Encourage the inclusion of PR as a key decision-making function in leadership structures.

- v. **Recognition of Excellence:** Support or establish awards that celebrate exemplary work, fostering a culture of innovation and integrity.
- vi. **Thought Leadership:** Publish research, articles, or insights to advance professional knowledge and visibility.

D. BREACH OF THE CODE

Compliance with PRCA Malaysia's Codes of Ethics and Conduct is divided into **two categories: Compulsory Codes and Voluntary Codes**. The **Compulsory Codes are mandatory for all PRCA Malaysia members and extend to non-members who pledge adherence to these standards**. The **Voluntary Codes**, on the other hand, are **binding only for individuals or organisations who explicitly commit to upholding them through a formal pledge**. Both sets of Codes aim to ensure the highest standards of professionalism, integrity, and accountability in the public relations industry. Any breach of these Codes undermines trust, credibility, and ethical foundations, necessitating swift and decisive action to safeguard the profession's integrity and reputation.

E. CONCLUSION: ETHICS AND INTEGRITY

The approach to ethics in public relations fundamentally shapes how professionals serve their clients, organisations, and the public. This Code of Ethics and Integrity serves as a comprehensive guide, empowering PR practitioners to navigate their responsibilities with transparency, fairness, and accountability. Public Relations is built on fostering trust and creating mutually beneficial relationships in a complex, mixed-motive industry.

Ethical dilemmas are an inherent part of daily practice, and professionals equipped with a deep understanding of ethical principles and decision-making frameworks are better prepared to address these challenges. By committing to continuous ethics training, PR practitioners can uphold the highest standards of integrity, ensuring their actions align with both professional and public interests.

Additionally, the ethical climate of the organisation's professionals represent is critical. Thoughtful consideration of an organisation's values and practices is essential to align personal and professional integrity.

Ultimately, the responsibility lies with every Public Relations professional to embody the principles outlined in this code. Acting with integrity and fostering trust among colleagues, clients, and the public strengthens the credibility of the profession and its vital role within organisational life. By adhering to these standards, PR practitioners ensure that their work not only serves immediate objectives but also contributes to the profession's long-term reputation and societal impact.