



MARKETING RESEARCH ASSOCIATION, INC.

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Professional Standards – Enforcement And Filing A Complaint

There are three levels of sanctions for violations:

1. Censure, that is, state strong disapproval to a violator, by issuing an official letter of complaint.
2. Suspension of membership for a determined period of time, which would bar the member from normal membership privileges, such as advertising through MRA publications or participation in MRA programs and events.*
3. Expulsion from membership in the Association, making the loss of membership permanent.*

*The names of members who have been suspended or expelled will be published in Alert! for a period of up to one year. All potential MRA members must sign the Code of Marketing Research Standards as a condition of membership. Failure to sign the Code will exclude the company or individual from MRA membership.

The Code is signed by individuals who are members of MRA as either “Individual members” or as part of a “Company membership” as per MRA’s membership category designations. The Committee may sanction a person who is a Company member as an individual, an individual representing a company or the company itself depending upon the type of violation and the circumstances therein.

Complaints of alleged unethical behavior may be filed against an MRA member who is suspected to have violated the Code. **Such charges must be documented in writing and forwarded to MRA's Executive Director.** All related investigations are confidential, and the Professional Standards Committee members, the deliberators in such evaluations, will be reviewed for possible conflict(s) of interest in each case. A company or individual member who is found to be in violation of the Code may appeal the Professional Standards Committee findings to an objective arbitrator. MRA will NOT act on anonymous complaints.

Sanctions will be determined on a case-by-case basis, and will depend on the severity, nature, and number of the violations. Also considered will be whether such violations constitute a pattern that establishes the member to be incapable or unwilling to comply with the Code.

Complaint Filing and Review Procedures

12/18/00

A complaint is filed with MRA Executive Director identifying alleged improper conduct of a specific MRA member, outlining and identifying the specific section of the Code where the alleged violation occurred. The complainant supplies reliable documentation and personal knowledge of the alleged violation. The complaint must be received no later than 60 days from the end of the complainant's involvement in a study or a longer period of time as determined by the Committee after review on a case-by-case basis.

1. Via Certified Mail/signature required, the Executive Director notifies the complainant within 5 business days of receipt of the Alleged Violation Form.
2. The Executive Director immediately forwards the complaint to the Volunteer Chair of the Professional Standards Committee for review.
3. The Volunteer Chair of the Professional Standards reviews the complaint and ascertains if the materials constitute evidence of a violation against the MRA Code. If they do not, the complainant is notified via Certified Mail.



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4. If they do not, the complainant is to be notified by certified letter of the Chair's findings within 30 days and the case is closed.
5. If this is not clear, the Chair calls a meeting of the Committee to determine whether the materials indicate a violation against the Code.
6. The Professional Standards Committee reviews the material and if it is determined not to be a violation, the complainant is to be notified by certified letter of the Committee meeting within 30 days and the case is closed. If the review determines it to be a violation, proceed to Step 7.
7. The Chair of the Professional Standards Committee begins a detailed investigation by notifying the person against which the complaint has been lodged (responding party) of the alleged violation and requests a written response to the allegation within 30 days from date of the Committee's letter to be sent by certified mail with signature required card. A copy is sent to the Executive Director.
8. The Executive Director receives the responding party's response and within 3 business days notifies the responding party in writing of receipt.
9. The Executive Director will forward the response within 3 business days to the to the Chair, Professional Standards Committee and the Committee.
10. The Professional Standards Committee meets as soon as possible, and discusses the complaint and the materials received. This is done to determine the validity and the severity of the complaint. They then determine the next action steps.
11. The Professional Standards Committee notifies the complainant and the responding party by certified letter with signature required card of the Committee's decision, within 5 business days of decision.
12. If either party, complainant or responding party, disputes the decision of the Committee, then the Professional Standards Committee offers the opportunity to have an objective arbitrator hear the complaint and review the materials if no satisfactory resolution can be obtained informally.
13. MRA Executive Director selects the objective arbitrator in coordination with Professional Standards Committee Chair and materials are sent. The Arbitrator reviews the materials and makes a decision. The Arbitrator announces the decision to the Professional Standards Committee and both parties.
14. If the member's membership rights are suspended for a period of time or if the member is expelled from the association the final results are published in the Alert! Newsletter for a period up to one year as determined by the Professional Standards Committee.

Approved 12/00

Revised 7/1/01